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MANAGERIAL DECISIONS:
A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

by

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Abstract

MANAGERIAL DECISIONS: A DISCURSIVE ANALYSIS

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Decision making activity is at the heart of organisations and, as an essential managerial function, it has been the subject of an immense body of literature. As the majority of research has been undertaken within the disciplines of economics and psychology, studies have tended to emphasise economic rationality as the basis for cognitive reasoning, decision processes and judgement and as the analytic paradigm. However, in the face of new problems, and in times of profound change, conventional forms of thought may be problematic in themselves. This project suggests and assesses a Foucaultian framework as an alternative approach to the study of managerial decision making.

Within a multiple case-study strategy, evidence has been collected from three manufacturing companies in Devon and Cornwall, using a range of qualitative methods; derived from ethnography, historiography, and grounded theory. A major decisional theme emerged in each case study: employee participation, linked to the non-recognition of trade unions; Japanese managerial techniques (Kaizen); and product quality.

A Foucaultian approach to discourse analysis was used to assess the trajectories of systems of management thought; nature and influence of changes in management discourse, and the resulting vacillation in power/knowledge relations within these three organisations. Genealogical assessment of alterations in organisational culture reveals shifts in the power relations which produce and maintain those decision outcomes; which, in their turn, establish and affirm the power relations. Among them are stereotypes that are problematised by non-unionism; the historical possibilities giving rise to the discourse and practices of Kaizen; discursive motifs on quality, and the formation of new discourses.

Comparative archaeology of the various concepts of quality, as apprehended within the study, has identified two major currents of discourse. Neither discourse is inherently advantageous or harmful to an organisation but, where discourses are both present, and in competition, the resulting dichotomy is disorientating for organisational actors and potentially lethal to business performance.

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Author's declaration

During the period of registration for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy the author has been registered for a University award of the Post-graduate Diploma in Social Research. There has been no duplication of material submitted for that award, and no material in this thesis has been offered, in whole or in part, toward the fulfilment of any other award.

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A programme of advanced study was undertaken which included a postgraduate course in social research and attendance at lectures, on strategic and operations management, on the Masters of Business Administration course. Relevant seminars and conferences were attended and work was presented as follows:

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                         History of the Present Research Network One-day Conference to the Memory of George Canguillhem University of London School of Oriental and African Studies, 15 September 1996

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Chapter 1: Towards a Business Counter-history

Decision making is a fundamental activity of management. It is an activity that can have far-reaching, and sometimes profound, effects both within and beyond the organisation where the decision occurs. For students of business and organisations the need to describe, analyse, explain, and make predictions about decisions is fundamental and, consequently, approaches to the study of decision making are as varied as the range of disciplines embraced by the term 'business studies'; and the outcomes of each study will be affected by the particular biases of the underlying discipline. Generally, the study of managerial decision making is dominated by economics and psychology, which give rise to the two primary perspectives of normative and behavioural theory. Studies that consider the influence of social factors are less evident or more obscure.

This chapter presents an overview of the sub-discipline of business history, which draws upon the methodologies of economics and historiography to examine decision making in a real-world context. Three major approaches are presented before a fourth, post-structuralist, is broached as the basis for this study. The aims of the research are stated and the context of the study is outlined prior to a more detailed discussion in later chapters.

A study of managerial decision making requires the consideration of many, complex issues which are often beyond the scope of the economist's model or the psychology laboratory because: "there are many variables, some modifying the relationship between others" (Jankowicz 1991, p. 86). As decisions affect organisational structures and relations so, too, those structures and relations will affect the nature of decisions and their outcomes. There is no independent variable; the decision and its context must be studied together as a social phenomenon. Decision making in organisations is the

result of interplay between values and attitudes; culture and environment; and economic and political factors. Each of those may, in turn, be influenced by other tacit, social structures. It is those underlying structures, or discourses, that this study seeks to apprehend. This is a particular usage of the term discourse; it does not refer to language usage *per se*, nor systems of shared meanings, nor the interplay of signifiers and the signified. Discourse, in the current context, refers to a "set of ideas and practices which condition our ways of relating to, and acting upon, particular phenomena." (Knights and Morgan 1991, p. 253).

That is not to imply that company managers and directors necessarily seek options which would increase their jurisdiction, intensify work or maintain a disciplinary *status quo*, nor to suggest that managers act intentionally against what they believe to be the best interests of the companies' owners or of their employees. Discourse is deeply ingrained in social practice and, as well as producing and reproducing certain disciplinary effects and forms of resistance, can create and recreate itself by limiting the apparently rational thinking of managers (and others). It builds a particular world-view, which it then establishes as 'truth' and thus the discourse becomes recognised as 'obvious' or simple common sense. The operation of that (version of) truth will circumscribe thought processes, affecting perceptions of threat and opportunity in the business environment and, thereby, delimit the scope of managerial decision making.

Some of the earliest models of decision making were developed within the applied social science of economics, giving rise to a body of concepts that can be labelled as normative decision theory. Like mathematics, this is a deductive approach that relies upon logical consistency for its validity. From this entirely rational perspective normative theories offer, often quite sophisticated, models of how decisions ought to

happen, but fail to explain why decision processes are not consistent with the models. Without such explanation, normative theory lacks predictive value.

By contrast behavioural theories, deriving from industrial organisation (IO) economics and psychology attempt to explain how decision making behaviour is modified in real-life situation. Hence, theories such as probability revision (Edwards 1954), game theory (Radner 1997; Shubik 1982; Luce and Raffiia 1957) and prospect revision (Khaneman, Slovic & Tversky 1982) have informed the more classic models, explaining how individuals will approach and conduct a decision process. A vast body of literature (Wakker 1999) has been generated to study individual decision making in terms of choice and risk-taking but which neglects the effects of social and emotional factors such as conflict and competition which are common features of organisational life.

It may be that the study of organisation decision making began in 1947 with Simon's treatise, *Administrative Behaviour*, which pioneered a paradigmatic development of organisation theory (Shapira, 1997; Hickson 1995) emphasising the analysis of information processing and decision making as the basic elements in the study of process and structure in organisation. Those early, predominantly quantitative, studies were concerned with the nature of decisions, and introduced a variety of concepts that are now widely accepted, such as *satisficing*[1] (Simon 1955, 1956), *non-decision* (Bacharach and Baratz 1962), and *incremental decision making* (Lindblom 1959).

While features of individual and organisational decision making have considerable overlap, as might be expected, decision making rarely occurs in isolation or in the rarefied atmosphere of the psychology laboratory. Shapira (1997) stresses that organisational decision making is characterised by ambiguity of information and processes, and ambiguity about preferences. Incentives, penalties and their consequences may have long-term effects on decision processes (Shapira 1995) which

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are embedded within a temporal context (Shapira 1995; March 1994; March and Olsen 1986; Cohen et al. 1972).

Several themes are constant through various studies of organisational decision making. First is the way in which power is operational both within and around decision making. Secondly, there are *"hidden layers of covert issues and interests which govern all that happens"* (Hickson 1995, xv). Third, decision making has a temporal element as it can be a lengthy or serial process, and is retrospective judgement, possibly made in the light of altered knowledge and values. The nature and operation of power, implicit systems of rules, and changes in managerial knowledge must, then, be essential variables to consider in a study of managerial decision making. Social sciences, therefore, have a distinct contribution to make to the study of organisational decision making by demonstrating how decision options and outcomes can be influenced by the social context in which they occur. By expanding understanding of the social structures and power relations operating within organisations, and by tracing their development over time, critical sociological analysis can potentially offer a discrete and complementary perspective to the classical, and often positivistic, theories of decision making within organisational analysis, administrative science and business studies.

Within the field of operations management there is a growing awareness of the overwhelming influence of "a great many unarticulated rules" (Hammer 1990), developed over time, in shaping the ways in which companies operate, and in influencing the nature of strategic as well as process decisions. Likewise, within wider society, there are systems of rules (systems of thought) operating to shape the ways in which individuals, groups and communities think and behave (Burrell 1988; McDonell 1987, Foucault 1970). These *a priori* rules, their development, their mechanisms for affecting perceptions of opportunity and threat, and for shaping strategic responses to

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new circumstances appear to be a valid subject for academic research. By investigating the circumstances in which individual managers and companies operate(d) it should be possible to compile a counter-history of businesses; to apprehend systems of management thought; and to understand why managers make decisions in a particular form and at a particular time.

THREE PERSPECTIVES ON BUSINESS HISTORY

The study of companies is not readily amenable to the hypothetico-deductive approach, because of the manifold relationships among numerous, complex variables. Where the goal is to understand systems and processes of interaction within companies, conventional quantitative research methods lack the flexibility that will allow a researcher to suspend immediate judgement while a comprehensive story emerges from the evidence. An effective analysis requires that the analyst is able to interpret competing accounts and explanations, rather than to set about research with a fixed viewpoint (Morgan 1986). What is required is a critical, interpretivist methodology with an historical focus to augment the insights gained from quantitative material. An obvious starting point is business history.

The arena of enquiry now known as business history has "always suffered from something of an identity crisis" (Boyns 1998; p95), having a continuum of perspectives, from micro to macro, and with no definitive methodology. Consequently, as an academic discipline, business history has lacked the credibility enjoyed by the more established fields of economics and management science.

Academic differences between the three major architects of the discipline, at Harvard during the 1920s (Marriner 1978), account for much of the variety which continues to encumber (or enrich) the study of business history[2]. Events were exacerbated by the

financial imperatives of the 1930's: "It was necessary to narrow business history to company history to meet the requirements of sponsors" (Marriner 1978, p5). Meanwhile, in Britain the discipline was growing only slowly, as a subservient discipline to either economics or history. Francis Hyde, who had been working at Harvard during the period of dissension, returned to Britain to take up a Chair in Liverpool where he worked to strengthen the links with economic history. His major interest, in the accumulation and employment of capital, was put to practical use when he acted as a Government adviser, concentrating consumer goods industries, during World War Two.

As a result the discipline gained credibility, and was able to develop, more rapidly in post-war Britain than in America, although it has been affected by changing academic perspectives on Britain's economic past. Business History, in Britain, has since become firmly established as a part of economic history, being essentially concerned with understanding the roles of business organisations as economic actors; and has, to some extent, inspired studies in administrative science and organisational analysis. It necessarily involves the study of decisions, and their outcomes, in the companies under scrutiny.

Through the agency of those who refuse to be constrained by orthodoxy (Wilson 1995), business history in Britain has maintained its diverse foci although there remains a close integration between three prevailing themes (Supple 1977a):

- The analysis of entrepreneurship and its contribution to economic performance.
- The biography of institutions or individuals.
- The comparative study of business structures and policies.

The first approach centres on specific points of decision making and necessarily becomes concerned with the risk-taking entrepreneurs and their contribution to general economic performance. This is the orthodoxy which shaped studies of the industrial revolution, characterising it as an heroic process involving the great inventors, such as Arkwright, rather than as a social upheaval (Alford 1979). At another level, it has been represented, in a highly systemised form, in the works of various social sciences and, notably, in the numerous theories of economic growth which have arisen since Schumpeter's treatise in 1934.

It is reasonable to suppose, as Supple (1977a) argues, that studies which concentrated on the 'heroic entrepreneur' were the products of concern over initiating growth and industrialisation in developing economies. The tradition which lies behind such works is still in evidence on both sides of the Atlantic although, over time, this approach has become less viable. Changing levels of financial involvement by entrepreneurs have limited the validity of direct comparison. Furthermore, significant numbers of company chairpersons and directors, despite some shareholdings, have effectively become paid employees of their companies (Davies 1978).

Within this type of business history, the social antecedents which permitted entrepreneurship and/or the establishment of such organisations and policies are seldom considered (pace Chandler). It seems reasonable to suppose that, if business history is taken across the disciplinary boundary between economics and sociology, alternative or complementary analyses might emerge, offering broader insights on the nature of innovation and the effects of institutional policies.

With the development of the *Annales* school since 1929 (Burke 1990) something of a revolution occurred within the study of history. The founders of that movement

established a new perspective, by examining structures which surround notable events and prominent people. Concurrently, through the work of the structuralists, such as Levi-Strauss and Saussure, a movement formed which sought to trace general trends in systems of thought as objects in their own right. It was recognised that these systems had their own existence and operations, independent of the thinkers. These new disciplines have merged to some extent through the work of post-structuralist scholars such as Nietzsche, Canguillhem and Foucault – whose studies of systems of thought offer critical alternatives to the 'great man' approach to histories. By investigating the past more critically, it may be possible to uncover the conditions which allowed the genius and the entrepreneur to even think their own particular thoughts. Further, we might apprehend why creativity, genius and entrepreneurship can violate those self-same conditions.

Business History As the Company Biography

The second approach which Supple describes comprises a detailed examination of the history of individual companies. Formal enterprises are studied in terms of their organisation, policy and purpose and through the people who guided them (Supple 1977a). Such approaches are much criticised as being limited to "the narrative method applied to a single case" (Coleman 1987, p141); for the variability of their academic rigour (Supple 1977); and for being "honest to the facts of the case, but ... narrow, insular and antiquarian" (Hannah 1983, p166). This is hardly surprising as, in order to gain access to company records, business historians have often needed to compromise their goals and produce 'company biographies'. There appear to be few opportunities to correct that 'Catch 22' situation (Coleman 1987), although there is an increasing awareness of the danger of writing optative[3] histories (Landes 1994; Crafts 1977). Furthermore, it is unlikely that commissioning companies have been motivated by some

desire to examine and understand past mistakes, and modify their own decision making processes (Coleman 1987). It is a rare firm which will allow academics to study its failures and shortcomings. Thus false impressions can be created about, for instance, the great 'industrial spirit' of Victorian Britain (Allen 1970) or the nature of relationships between managers and owners (Church 1996).

Such limitations carry an inherent risk of reducing the value of the discipline but these constraints can be, and frequently are, overcome. Broader perspectives, such as general business structures within the economy, incorporated into historical studies, contribute to a deeper understanding of the relations between firms, markets and wider economic performance (Penrose 1995). Allen (1978), for example, notes the links between expansion in national levels of production and increasing national income; and the fundamental contradictions in contemporaneous British policies of attempting to preserve traditional industries while increasing productivity and economic efficiency. The academic rigour of such works can probably be traced back to the publication of Wilson's (1954) history of Unilever; although this type of study, albeit in a restricted and less erudite form, is probably as old as history itself (Supple 1977a).

Given the complex scope of subject matter available for study, it is not easy to tease apart the various elements which come together to produce a business (company) history, but the varying fortunes of many enterprises are generally attributed to some fundamental decision(s):

> "How did Pilkington come to succeed and lead the world? ... The coincidence of periods of heavy expenditure, or of decisions to invest [in research and development], with prosperous and profitable years was of great importance." (Barker 1977, 202-3)

> "Wills still pursued a somewhat cautious policy ... this caution and lack of understanding of its true market position did have important consequences ..." (Alford 1973, 62)

"The First World War revealed the disastrous consequences, strategic as well as economic, of Britain's failure to modernise her chemical industry." (Allen 1970, 209)

Equally, large scale trends within business can be demonstrated by tracing the development of groups of individual companies operating in the same sphere. The development of highly specialised industrial areas in the 1920s (Allen 1970); and the choice by most of the autonomous trusts, within the National Health Service, to establish virtually identical management structures (Audit Commission 1994), are but two examples.

Studies which emphasise the economic and financial agendas can provide only part of the explanation for such phenomena. It is apparent that wider influences operate to govern the way that managers think about their organisations and their environments; and to influence what might be considered to be appropriate forms of response. The agenda for research in business history is still open to studies which will apprehend some of the wider social issues surrounding the process and circumstances of managerial decision making.

Business History As Comparative Study

The third approach, flowing from the first, pays particular attention to the development of comparative business structures and of overall business policies. This perspective, which extends the interests of what used to be called industrial history, derives partly from an obvious need to generalise on the basis of multiple, rather than individual, case studies; and partly from the increasing interest in the corporate character of modern economies and the associated dominance of large scale enterprises (Coleman 1987). This most recent trend addresses such need for business historians to develop an appreciation of business structures in the economy; or the relationship between the

performance of the economy and the activities and structures of business (Alford 1973; Reader 1970/1975; Church 1969; Barker 1960; Rimmer 1960). Hence, there have been increasingly rigorous and systematic attempts to generalise, from such comparative studies, about the managerial character of modern economies, and the associated dominance of large-scale and multi-national companies.

An obvious outcome of the growing acceptance of Business History, as an academic discipline, and the gradual accumulation of erudite studies, is that there are greater opportunities for comparison. A wealth of material can be subject to analysis, both chronologically and thematically (Supple 1977b).

There are, however, two serious shortcomings. Firstly, the dominant influence of the Harvard school prevails (Wilson 1995), setting an American standard against which British business organisation is found wanting. As Hannah (1976a, p. 197) argues: "one cannot blindly accept the notion that the Harvard-approved form of organisation is applicable in all circumstances...".

Secondly, despite the call for greater understanding of the effects of value systems and 'collective subjectivity' (Casson 1993, p. 40), business history is still mainly written by economic historians. Wilson (1995, p3) asserts that:

> "... it is so important to understand how and *why* the British business culture evolved, and to examine whether any ensuing managerial constraints arose which would have inhibited the ability to develop a competitive challenge to the increasingly powerful foreign firms ..." (Wilson 1995, p3 emphasis added)

Even so, decision processes and their outcomes, and even the behaviour of individuals, are assessed from a perspective of rationality or logic. Structure is considered in terms of competitive advantage, while questions regarding power relations and the changing nature of knowledge remain unasked. It is proposed here that a post-structuralist, i.e. Foucaultian, approach to business history will provide a broader insight on the nature of

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decisions which impact upon the formation, development and performance of business organisations. By reaching beyond conventional approaches to history, and interrogating the past critically, there is scope for a counter-history of business to uncover the conditions which have allowed creativity, entrepreneurship, and organisations to emerge and develop.

POST-STRUCTURALISM: A FOURTH APPROACH?

The Foucaultian approach is undoubtedly contentious, but is becoming increasingly accepted in the fields of organisational analysis and management studies, offering new insights into institutional practices. As yet there are few investigations, in the field of management studies, which have been based on a Foucaultian paradigm and of those most are theoretical rather than empirical.

What is distinctive in this approach is that Foucault rejected all grand theories as explanations of social phenomena, holding the controversial view that truth is a function of power. His technique involved studying scientific, and institutional practices from the perspective of the individual, or population, as the subject of knowledge. He propounded the view that such practices were not governed by institutions, but possessed their own internal systems of logic, regulation and self-evidence (Foucault 1991). The underlying epistemology frames knowledge (and, by extension, truth) as a social construct which is shaped by power relations and can be revealed by novel approaches to problems and to the ordering of material. It allows for (and might explain) breaks in knowledge and records.

Such methodology, although still somewhat controversial, is becoming more widely accepted, on an international scale, as an effective approach to the study of organisations. For instance, Jacques (1996) has demonstrated how the development of

discourses in the USA has produced a particular form of management knowledge about employees; Townley (1994) has demonstrated the disciplinary effects of the specific discourse of human resource management; while Knights and Morgan (1991) have traced the development of strategic management, showing it to be discursive in its origins and effects. It is suggested here that such an approach may offer new insights in the field of business history. By looking beyond the individual, entrepreneur or company, to examine the effects of managerial decisions, it may be possible to investigate the discursive basis of systems of business thought; to understand why strategic decisions are made in a particular form; and to explain the trends in management styles and practices.

RESEARCH AIMS

As Simon used psychology to challenge the (rational, economic) orthodox models of decision making, demonstrating that cognitive constraints limit individual thought processes, so this study employs a post-structuralist (Foucaultian) sociology to illuminate the discursive limitations upon organisational, and managerial, decision making.

The aim of this research is:

> to undertake an empirical study to assess whether a post-structural, discursive analysis can offer a new dimension to the study of managerial decision making; by exploring and describing systems of thought within participating companies, expounding their *a priori* rules, and describing their effects on management decisions.

The underlying propositions are that:

- Foucaultian analysis is a relevant medium for the study of organisations and that it

  can be applied:

  — to the history of enterprises.

  — to enterprises that have a weak sense of their own history.

  — to enterprises that are in a state of change.

- there are factors which influence managerial decisions which are not contained

  within current theories of decision making; and that these factors:

  — are historical in their origins.

  — are embedded in power/knowledge relations.

  — can be apprehended through discursive analysis.

This project involved the formulation and testing of a methodology informed by

Foucaultian philosophy. Evidence has been gathered within three companies (identified

by pseudonyms), located in South West England, whose histories reflect a shared

cultural and economical heritage.

Crowan's, the oldest of the three firms, grew and prospered through its links with

Cornish mining. The company contributed to the innovations in mining engineering,

such as the high power steam pump, which enabled the industrialisation of many other

British regions and, paradoxically, began Cornwall's industrial decline (Havinden et

al.1991). Crowan's has suffered badly from the global economic pressures that have

affected primary industries, and the companies that have supported them (Gripaios

1999), and is struggling to survive in the face of international competition. After one

hundred and fifty years as a family firm, the firm has been sold several times and is now

owned by a multi-national conglomerate.

It is located in an area which epitomises Cornwall's disadvantage of distance (CBI 1996) being 110 miles from Exeter, the M5 motorway and high-speed rail networks; seventy miles from the nearest commercial airport in Plymouth, and over two hundred miles distant from the centre for regional administration in Bristol. In response to poor economic performance, County administrators have launched a strong bid for Objective One status from the European Union[4], to improve the area's prospects. Meanwhile, Crowan's owners and employees are contending for a more secure future, through the reorganisation of work processes in an effort to operate on a more competitive footing.

In north Cornwall, the founder of Viands recognised a business opportunity for the manufacture and nation-wide marketing of a traditional product. It was a possibility which arose from, and exploited, the seasonal nature of tourism and effectively turned disadvantage into opportunity. A long-standing concern with product quality, and a supply-chain policy to support that, have shielded the company from the worst effects of the beef crisis. For many years Viands has manufactured 'own label' products for major multiple retailers, which continue to retain public confidence in beef products, and has thus maintained a demand for the company's bakery produce. Hence, the company is thriving despite recent problems in British agriculture.

Viands is the major employer in an area where other employment opportunities are principally in the public services that have expanded through inward migration (Gripaios 1996b). When the founder sold the company, in the 1960s, it was transferred to another private owner as one of a group of food manufacturing companies. With their head office in central England Viands, and the other companies in this study, reflect the trend in West Country enterprises that key decisions are made outside of the two counties.

The third company, Bulberry's, represent the more optimistic face of West Country commerce. The firm, which is owned by a German family, manufactures electronics cabinets for a global market and business is growing exponentially. To some extent, the company has become victim to its own success as demand outstrips productive capacity and there is a constant search for new staff and for means of improving productivity. While prospects seem to be good, much of the company's production depends upon a few major customers with short-term contracts and a tendency to adjust orders at short notice. There is a constant possibility that those customers could change suppliers if they became dissatisfied with Bulberry's product or service.

Bulberry's operates from a greenfield site on the outskirts of Plymouth where the labour market is still recovering from the multiplier effects of the closure of the Royal Naval dockyard in the mid 1980s (SWERC 1996). As a major source of employment in the city, the company has been successful in bids for development grants but, as with many new firms in Devon and Cornwall (Great Britain 1998, Gripaios 1996), it offers mainly unskilled or semi-skilled work in its machine-led manufacturing plant. It is also able to insist on specific terms and conditions of employment which, although they are competitive, include non-recognition of trade unions within a workforce which partly derives from former dockyard workers.

Within a multiple case study framework, an historical approach was used to trace the development of each company, while a range of qualitative research techniques were used to collect evidence that might provide valuable insights into the 'unarticulated rules' operating, within and beyond the individual firms, to shape the nature of decisions made by their managers. In each of the three companies a particular decisional theme emerged: product quality in a bakery; Japanisation of a traditional

industry; and employee involvement at a green-field factory. The study was delimited by focusing on decision making relating to these themes.

SUMMARY

The study of decision making, which is a fundamental managerial activity, has generally been restricted by the nature of the academic discipline in which it occurs. Because of a lack of sociological studies, research into managerial decision making has tended to overlook tacit factors, such as power relations and unarticulated systems of rules.

Business history offers opportunities to study decision making in situ and to take account of the interrelation of multiple variables. As a sub-discipline of economic history, the field has tended to be limited to one of three perspectives. Studies of entrepreneurship tend toward the 'great man' approach while company biographies can be restricted by the agendas of subject businesses. A third approach offers a more theoretical approach to understanding business structures and policies and their relationship to economic performance. There is still an agenda for studies into the wider social environment in which managerial decisions are made. Therefore, a fourth approach is proposed, that this study is intended to test. An alternative approach to business history, based upon a Foucaultian paradigm, has been devised and tested in three manufacturing companies. The outcomes of the study are presented later. First, though, this report establishes a theoretical background in decision theory and Foucaultian discursive analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CHAPTERS TWO AND THREE:

The study of managerial decision making is undertaken within a diverse range of academic disciplines and chapter two presents an overview of what is an enormous body of literature after, first, attempting to identify an appropriate definition of 'decision'. The classical, rational model is presented before the discussion moves to review various modifications to that model, under three broad headings, as the bounded rationality thesis, the decision making environment, and decisions as sense-making. Rationality, as logical reasoning, is identified as problematic to the study of certain constant, but generally unexplored phenomenon. These issues: covert systems of rules; power relations; and historical factors, are central to the Foucaultian paradigm which, it is suggested, offers a means for overcoming the constraints of rationality.

The third chapter, therefore, presents a further strand to the background literature by locating the work of Michel Foucault within the body of research into discourse. Accordingly, the first section offers a brief insight into the various forms of research that have adopted the term 'discourse analysis'. The majority of the chapter is devoted to an exposition of the Foucaultian paradigm, simplifying concepts of power and knowledge, and analysing the methodological devices of archaeology and genealogy. The final section of chapter three examines the specific form of analysis, known as eventalisation, that is most nearly a Foucaultian 'method'. This chapter, thus, provides a link between the various theoretic influences on the study and the more specific research methods that are detailed in chapter four.

While Foucaultian philosophy provides a wide-ranging epistemological critique of how discourse works, Foucault carefully avoided offering more than broad theoretical guidelines for the study of discourse in specific contexts. This chapter explains how the Foucaultian theories, presented in chapter three, were applied within this study. Various sections of this chapter are written in the first person, in order to express personal reflections of the research experience.

Within a multiple case study strategy, three manufacturing companies were studied using various qualitative methods which had been tested during a pilot study. Evidence was gathered from the companies through observation, questioning and the study of various available documents, and this account discusses the various techniques that were employed to compile the range of material that formed the basis of archaeological and genealogical analysis. A general account of these methods is offered here, as more specific details are included in the reports of the individual cases (chapters 5, 6 and 7). Methodological issues, such as the ethical concerns, that arose in the course of the studies, and questions of reliability and validity are also considered. The final section reflects on the analysis of data.

THE CASES: CHAPTERS FIVE TO SEVEN

The first case concerns Viand's[5], a bakery manufacturing short-shelf-life pastry products and which also produces separate own-label lines for most of Britain's major multiple retailers. The company attributes market success to its commitment to product quality. The theme of quality is traced through the history of the company and emerges as a complex notion and an uncompromising standard that disregards production difficulties and changing market conditions. Nevertheless it is an ideal that has served

Viands well, in terms of market leadership, and in attracting customers. It is a source of pride for the company's owners, managers and employees.

Crowan Brothers, an engineering company that is approaching its bicentennial anniversary, is the subject of case two. After many years in private ownership, the business was floated on the stock exchange in 1968, since when it has undergone a series of reorganisations, and numerous managerial innovations, under successive owners. It is now a division of a trans-national conglomerate and, in an attempt to reverse its failing financial performance, a decision has been taken to introduce Kaizen. The implementation of Kaizen has been less successful than mangers or operatives would have hoped. Bureaucratic dysfunction continues and traditional forms of resistance endure.

The third and final case concerns a young but successful company, Bulberry Ltd., that is a largely autonomous subsidiary of the privately-owned but international Kestrel GmbH. In an attempt to cope with problems consequent upon the company's success, local managers at Bulberry have, also, decided to implement Kaizen. There is, however, a secondary motive. The organisation has never recognised trade unions for bargaining purposes and, in anticipation of forthcoming legislation, the company's Director is determined to maintain unitarist relations through increased employee involvement in the organisation of production processes. This objective of non-unionism acted as a constraint on the available options for dealing with the apparent problems of productive output and quality. Foucaultian analysis demonstrates that Kaizen acted discursively to maintain the management's image of a 'good' employer and to uphold the conditions that might prevent a vote in favour of what will be a legal right by employees.

The dominant decisional themes that emerged from the three case studies, are analysed within a Foucaultian framework; to locate the rules of discursive formations and to trace the genealogy of practices.

The concept of quality, apparent in the Viands study, appears to incorporate a range of meanings and practices. Through archaeology it is demonstrated that Viands Quality is not a single discourse but that it is the problematisation of existence, or actuator, for other discourses. Hygiene, as a specific example, is analysed further as confirmation. By contrast, the theme of quality as it occurs within Kaizen, is shown to be only one discursive object within the discursive formation of Kaizen. Using evidence from the studies at Crowan Brothers and Bulberry Ltd., other discursive objects are analysed and a partial genealogy to for Kaizen is suggested.

Chapter eight suggests that, within the three case studies, two major currents of discourse are operating but, being based upon different problematisations of existence (or actuators), that they are incompatible. Sometimes these operators exist separately, creating discourses that serve the social function of providing an interpretative framework for actors. At other times, they are co-existing uncomfortably to the possible detriment of business interests. Chapter nine concludes the thesis by offering an archaeology of these competing currents of discourse and suggesting issues for future research whereby Foucaultian analysis might serve, as well as describe, business management.

1. Satisfice is a neologism which Simon derived from the words satisfy and sufficient, to describe a decision outcome which is a good-enough solution for the problem under consideration. A fuller explanation of this, and the other terms, is given in Chapter 2.

2. Marriner (1978) suggests that the original founder of the study of business history was Karl Marx, building on the work of German historians, although she claims that modern [sic] business history was developed at Harvard. The tension between Edwin Gay's perspective of business history as a part of economic history and Wallace Donham's, that it was a teaching tool, eventually caused a professional rift. Norman Gras, a former student of Gay, found it difficult to reconcile his differences with Donham and eventually withdrew from their joint editorship of the *Journal of Economic and Business History*, effectively bringing about an enduring split between economic history and business history

3. Landes (1994) coined the term 'optative history' to describe "history as it might have been, must have, should have been ... when the end (the result desired) determines as well as justifies the means" (p.637). He points to: an over-reliance on single accounts; dubious mathematics; and a tendency to favour deduction over induction, as being responsible for simplistic explanations of complex events.

4. Within the period covered by this study, the region has fought for, and achieved, the right to be considered as a separate region; and it can now formally apply for Objective One standing. However, in its fight for such recognition, it has helped to raise the profile of other European sub-regions such as Brittany and the Basque region of Spain. These areas can now also apply for Objective One aid, thus reducing the size of any awards that might be made.

5. As explained in Chapter Four all participants, companies and individuals, in this work are referred to by pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Chapter 2: Decision Making in Organisations: A Review of the Literature

Any research into managerial decision making builds upon insights arising from an immense and eclectic set of literatures. Even to summarise such a vast body of writings would be an overwhelming task. The purpose of this chapter, therefore is to present an overview of the range of theories and research that might inform an understanding of decision making processes, their outputs and their inputs.

The study of decision making activity, which is central to the management function (e.g. Brunsson 1990; Cyert and March 1992; Hickson 1995), is undertaken by a diverse range of academic disciplines, pure and applied, and is investigated through similarly diverse techniques (Lindblom 1959). These various writings do not represent links in a chain of incremental discoveries; rather, they resemble the interweaving strands of a rope. The thematic organisation of this chapter represents an attempt to tease apart these various strands, if not their individual threads, in order to reveal the construction of the rope; and to identify those areas where a Foucaultian approach might, potentially, contribute to a deeper understanding of the decision making process. There are, inevitably, areas of overlap where certain topics might be placed under two or more headings but hopefully these will not detract from the overall movement of the discussion.

The discussion begins with the search for a definition of 'decision' before expounding the classic, economic, model of decision making. As decision theory developed within the sphere of administrative science, so the discussion moves to explore the bounded rationality thesis, and the resulting studies were developed to explain the limitations of the classical model. While earlier studies of decision making examined the process at the level of the individual, students of organisations have recognised that decisions are

social processes. Hence, the review turns to studies of the influence of the organisational environment, its rule systems and organisational culture, in which decisions are made; and notes the absence of studies that investigate the influence of features in the social environment. The final section discusses more recent developments in understanding the interplay between decisions, systems of shared meanings and identities, and sense making. Certain constant, but largely unexplored, themes are recognised. These are the operation of unarticulated rules, the effects of power relations, and a temporal aspect to decision processes. Because it focuses upon these specific themes, a Foucaultian analysis is suggested as a means of overcoming the restraints of rationality that circumscribe so many studies of decision making.

DEFINING DECISION

The first, and most obvious, question to ask of the literature is "What is a decision?". Given such a diversity of sources, it is not surprising that definitions vary. What is more astonishing to note is that many writers do not attempt any form of definition and that, as Meyer (1990) observes, signifies a tacit affirmation of the conventional, rationalist model of individual and organisational decision process. Fundamentally the definition of decision (or lack of definition), and the interpretation of a decision process, will reflect the ontological stance of the researcher, and the approach that is taken to the analysis of decisions (Hickson et al 1971; Allison 1969; Lindblom 1959).

At its most basic definition, a decision is seen to be a choice between alternatives (e.g. Shapira 1997; Kenreuther and Meszaros 1997; Pettigrew 1990; Hickson et al 1989), or a series of choices (Staw 1981, 1997; Nutt 1987). There are, however, writers who question whether decisions are based on choices at all, suggesting that some decisions, at least, may simply be a system of rules (March 1994, Zhou 1997). These themes are explored later in this chapter.

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A broader perspective from Mintzberg and his colleagues (Mintzberg et al 1976, Mintzberg and Waters 1990; Butler 1990), and one that is more pertinent to this study, proposes that a decision is a process leading to a specific commitment to action (usually a commitment of resources). A commitment to action may involve a string of choices (Staw 1981), which may or not be interspersed with codified procedures.

A choice need not involve a decision (Salancik and Brindle 1997[1]), nor need a decision involve choice, as the first case in this study (Chapter 5) illustrates. While decision making might be a discrete activity, involving only one actor, and while it may be a simple choice, this definition allows that decision making need not be either of these.

This definition of decision as a commitment to action recognises a broad, and possibly unconscious, agenda within and around the decision making process and, by accepting that a decision is a process rather than a discrete activity, acknowledges the longitudinal nature of the decision making process (Mintzberg et al. 1990). It allows that social structures, including discourses, will impact upon the behaviour of decision makers and redirects research activity toward the social environment within which a decision occurred and where its traces remain within a organisation (ibid.).

Despite its limitations, the definition of decision as choice is widely accepted and has inspired numerous studies that are now considered to be classics. It is from economics, the science of choice, that a basic model has been derived to inform later scholars from various disciplines. It is appropriate, now, to review that classic model in order to appreciate how it has been adapted and elaborated over time.

THE CLASSIC MODEL: DECISIONS AS RATIONAL CHOICES

The study of the distinctly human process of making complex decisions has long been hampered by inadequate understanding of the, largely unquantifiable, processes of thinking, problem solving and learning. Much of the early work, coming from the 'logical' disciplines of mathematics, statistics and econometrics, was delimited by the qualitative perspective of those fields. The result is a normative model (Fig 1) that is intended to promote rational[2] behaviour and thereby, supposedly, increase the likelihood of optimal decision making.

```
┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐    ┌──────────────────┐    ┌──────────────┐
│ Define the   │    │              │    │ Evaluate         │    │              │
│ problem      │───▶│ Develop      │───▶│ alternatives     │───▶│ Implement and│
│ and identify │    │ alternatives │    │ and select the   │    │ follow up    │
│ objectives   │    │              │    │ best one         │    │              │
└──────────────┘    └──────────────┘    └──────────────────┘    └──────────────┘
```

FIG 1: A BASIC MODEL OF A RATIONAL DECISION MAKING PROCESS
Source: Stoner and Freeman 1992
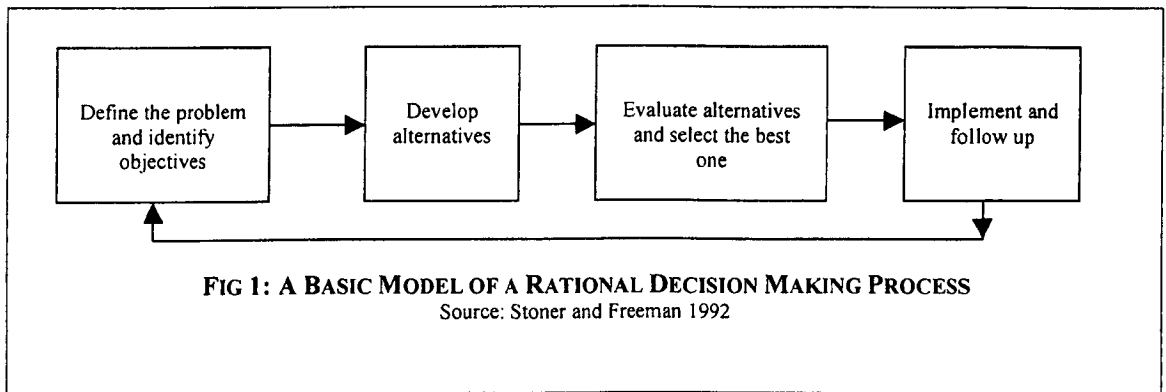
Here, decision making involves a cyclical process of: problem identification and goal setting; a search for alternatives; the assessment of those possibilities, weighing the benefits and risks of each before settling on the option offering greatest utility value. A 'good' decision is judged according to "its basis in rational thought and objective information" (Jackson and Carter 2000, p. 220) as a process, rather than by the utility or appropriateness of its consequences.

It presumes, therefore, a proper definition of the problem, knowledge of all possible alternatives, complete knowledge of all possible consequences, consistent preference ordering, and a system of decision rules (March 1997). These *ceteris paribus* conditions are seen to render the model inadequate for practical purposes (Hickson et al.

1971) and, unsurprisingly, it has not been demonstrated in empirical studies (Anderson 1983; Nutt 1987). Furthermore, it presents decision making as the activity of a single individual. Applied to organisational decision making, the model reifies the organisation through an inversion of the ecological fallacy. It disregards the multiple individuals, agendas and political systems that will, or might, impact on the process of decision making.

The classical model does, however, have a comprehensible framework which provides a substructure for more specific, detailed or complex algorithms. Hence, an abundance of research activity and theoretical modelling has developed, focusing on particular areas of the model, such as how problems are identified or how the utility of various alternative actions can be assessed[3]. Variants on the classical model have been developed to allow for several decision makers, and more than one goal, always assuming that the goals are known and that information is available and complete (Koopman and Pool 1991).

The quantitative disciplines were valuable in producing models to describe many routine, or programmed (Simon 1976; Cyert and March 1992), decision situations and for prescribing appropriate actions. Linear models provided mathematical tools for operations management, while dynamic models could be produced for inventory control and production planing. In routine, high certainty, and well-controlled situations devices such as decision trees and Boolean logic can be useful in avoiding ambiguity and confusion; while the use of algorithms based on game theory and probability theory have proved useful in representing more complex situations such as marketing and contingency planning.

The classic model is attractive because its epistemological basis captures some elements of perceived truth or, at least, it allows for inputs to be re-interpreted and explained in

terms of the model (March 1994, 1997; Allison 1971). Rooted in the notion of rationality, the model is congruent with the fundamentals of modern thought:

> "It [the rational model] is encased in habits of speech to such an extent that ideas of wilful, rational choice are the standard terms of discourse for the answering the generic questions: 'Why did it happen? Why did you do it?'" (March 1997 p.11)

Such approaches, however, have two important failings. Firstly, in order for a quantitative model or programme to be employed in its solution, a problem must be reduced to a series of quantitative statements. Where a particular problem, criterion, parameter or specification, is irrevocably qualitative[4] then these approaches will fail. Human frailties such as irrational choice, forgetfulness, naivete or simple indolence would come into that category, as would the interpersonal qualities of organisations. Secondly, most economic, statistical and systems models work from a limited definition of decision, as the choice between alternatives. Thus, these approaches can only investigate and describe decision within the bounds of 'choice'; and they decree that that should be a rational choice.

Most organisational decisions occur within a network of rules and agreements but, particularly at lower levels of management (Nutt 1987), novelty and conflict can confound normal (and normative) systems, rendering routine processes inapplicable and sometimes impossible (Koopman and Pool 1991). Where rules function choice is limited and, when rules cease to function, power structures become increasingly significant in determining and directing action. The classical model elides the structures and mechanisms of power and, in so doing, implicates itself with them by reinforcing the status of rationality as the basis of scientific knowledge.

The normative model of decision making was the received wisdom through the early twentieth century. The war years, however, brought decision theory and management

practice into close proximity, exposing the limitations of normative theory to the imperatives of a real, and all too critical situation. A new discipline, of 'management science,' emerged to deal with the practicalities of allowing rational thinking to inform managerial behaviour. By the early 1950s there was a growing body of academics who acknowledged the need to merge those disciplines (economics and behavioural science) in order to understand the finer details of administrative organisations as social groupings of thinking and feeling individuals. A new discipline of administrative science grew up from a conviction that:

> "we do not yet have ... adequate linguistic and conceptual tools for realistically and significantly describing even a simple administrative organization – describing it, that is, in a way that will provide the basis for scientific analysis of the effectiveness of its structure and operation." (Simon 1976, p. xlvii: *preface to first edition*)

With the benefit of hindsight, and over fifty years of theoretical development, these ideas seem obvious. It is easy to overlook the profundity of such insight. The result of this multi-disciplinary approach was a series of crucial new concepts that were to have major impact on the study of decision making. The basis of these concepts was the theory of bounded rationality.

HUMAN CAPABILITY AND BOUNDED RATIONALITY

Simon's treatise *Administrative Behaviour*, first published in 1945, represented a milestone in the study of decision making in organisations (Shapira 1997; March 1997, 1994; Wren 1994). He insisted that a study of the complexity of decision process needed to properly consider the range of influences on human behaviour (Simon 1976). He offered evidence from psychological theories to show that there are human limitations on rationality (hence he developed the term 'bounded rationality'). These limitations derive from an innate inability to simultaneously hold all aspects of knowledge, values, behaviours and outcomes, that would be relevant to a particular

decision. "The pattern of human choice" he asserts, "is often more nearly a stimulus-response pattern than a choice among alternatives" (1976, p. 108). Human beings, and particularly individual human beings, are not able to understand everything about the present, and cannot fully anticipate the future. With rationality being bound by such limitations of the psychological environment, individuals are unable to achieve the best possible decision.

The consequences are three-fold. Firstly, organisations seek to control the psychological environment, to limit the stimuli for decisions, so that sequences of individual decisions can be integrated into the wider strategy. Thus the scope of individual choice is synthesised within the operation of the organisation, regulated by the social imposition of stimulus patterns. It is in these patterns of socialisation, claims Simon (1976), that insights of the meaning and function of organisation can be found.

Group activity in decision making is a second outcome of bounded rationality. This is not simply the dispersal of different types of decision through the organisation, rather it is a composite decision. Even when the final responsibility for a decision resides in a single person, the decision itself will be composed of the inputs, from various formal and informal channels of communication, of many individuals who have contributed to its formation, investigation and selection. Organisational decision making is then a result of the participation of various groups, rather than a property of the scalar chain of managerial authority. The effect of the composite decision is to both expand and restrict an individual's choice and influence. The balance is very delicate but, Simon suggested, "organizations can expand human rationality, a view quite opposed to popular folklore in our society, which commonly sees them (organizations) as dehumanizing bureaucracies" (Simon 1991, p72).

Thirdly: because decision making is constrained by the psychological limits of human capacity and by socially contrived restrictions on choice; and, as inputs to the decision process are dispersed throughout the functional and hierarchical specialities within an organisation, no-one attempts to, nor indeed can, find an optimal solution to a whole problem. Instead, various participating groups proffer suggestions which will provide a *satisfactory* solution to one or more sub-problems and be *sufficient* in terms of the objective(s). The combined effect of these various inputs is that the final decision will be 'good enough' or will (Simon's term) *satisfice*.

Simon's work was a landmark in establishing that the study of decision making is central to understanding the functioning of organisations and of management. There are, however, certain methodological concerns which need to be considered. Firstly, the work is based on extensive literature reviews, supported by empirical evidence gathered from case studies of public sector organisations in the USA. Questions of external validity arise, specifically regarding the extent to which such evidence is transferable to other cultures or to management in other sectors.

The second issue is that Simon, when establishing the new, administrative science, had deliberately conflated administration and management[5] (Simon 1976; March 1978) and went on to propose that all administrative processes are decision processes which, by extension, implies that all management processes are decision processes (presumably allowing that not all decision processes are administrative processes). However, Simon also asserts that both decision making and administrative activity are group activities which pervade all levels of the organisation. The reader must be forgiven for extending Simon's reasoning to the conclusion that managerial activity also pervades all levels of an organisation.

Additionally, although Simon recognised that the effects of human limitations lead to social action, his analyses were firmly biased toward the psychological sphere. His theory of organisations describes logical (bureaucratic) structures that compensate for individual fallibility through rational administration as an apparently plausible explanation for the popularity of the bureaucratic form. However, 'ideal type' bureaucracies exist only rarely in a pure form (Weber 1947) for their rational and efficient operation depends upon the members of the organisation behaving in a manner which is consistent with their role and responsibilities.

While he lauds the efficiency of organisations in channelling decision making activity, Simon recognises their restrictive effects almost *en passant*. As Morgan (1986) suggests, one reason for the persistence of the bureaucratic form, even when it is not producing the desired effects, is that managers do not have alternative models to shape their thinking and behaviour. This is but one discursive effect of the processes which Simon describes. The processes of socialisation and other, discursive, mechanisms operate as social controls on choice and action and, thus, are vital factors in the decision making process within organisations.

Simon's initial work proved to be the impetus for further studies in the arenas of behavioural decision theory and organisational decision making; that is, decision making by individuals or groups in an organisational context (Shapira 1997; Simon 1976). While there is inevitably some overlap between the processes of individual and organisational decision making, there are some noteworthy characteristics that distinguish the real-life setting of the organisation from studies of individuals in psychology laboratories (Shapira 1997). Ambiguity is pervasive in organisations, and decisions take place within a longitudinal context, as part of on-going processes (Mintzberg et al. 1990). Many decisions are repeated (such as the appointment of new

staff or the selection of agenda items for a board meeting) so they may, in fact, be rule-based rather than choice-based. Organisational decisions have real ramifications so that penalties and incentives are salient; while conflict and power issues, which pervade organisations, will impact upon the way that decisions are made. Further, Brunsson (1990) suggests that organisational decisions have supplementary roles in that they allocate responsibility and legitimacy within the organisation. It is these features that students of organisational decision making have tried to address.

As Lindblom (1959) demonstrated, decision making is rarely the mechanistic, rational process which might be observed in laboratory studies. The analysis of decision making in organisations requires empirical study, as indicated in Chapter One, in order to appreciate the multiplier effects of interactive variables.

Decision Making in Organisations

Lindblom's (1959) research, which was limited to public policy decision, has been supported by later studies (March 1997; Nutt 1987; Bacharach and Baratz 1962). His propositions are useful in suggesting how, within organisations, strategic decisions build incrementally upon existing strategies rather than lead to paradigmatic change. The study established the 'rational comprehensive model' as one extreme of a continuum with what he calls the 'method of successive limited comparisons' (Lindblom 1959, p81). He argued that limits on human intellectual capacity and on available sets of information, restrict a decision maker's capacity for a comprehensive consideration of alternatives. The analytic stage of decision making needs to be simplified and, Lindblom suggests, this is achieved by limiting choices to those which resemble current systems or structures[6]; and by underplaying or ignoring the possible consequences (and related values) of alternative courses of action. Lindblom's view was supported in later work (March 1997) which demonstrated that searches for new

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alternatives usually occur within the 'neighbourhood' old ones. (March 1997). More critically Sharman and Dean (1997) and Nutt (1987) have shown that this pattern is particularly noticeable at the very times (high risk, low certainty situations) when managers most need to be flexible and innovative

While there is evidence of a heuristic (see below p. 37), it is reasonable to presume that a discursive mechanism may be operational here. Foucault (1970) has explained how the ordering, or structure, of information affects the ways in which it is accessed and utilised. Through the analytic device of Foucaultian archaeology, it may be shown that some covert system of rules is operating to define those features, of possible options and their consequences, that render them acceptable; and which enable, or compel, decision makers to disregard other alternatives.

Bacharach and Baratz's (1962) review of contemporaneous studies broached the notion of the *non-decision*. They suggested that neither elitist nor pluralist perspectives properly explained the role of power in the development of organisations. What was needed, they claim, was the study of an organisation's 'mobilization of bias' (Bacharach and Baratz 1962; p.592). The scope of what might be decided, they argued, is limited by implicit assumptions; a limitation which can also affect the how managers recognise that a decision is required. They pre-empted later theories of organisational (corporate) culture (e.g. Deal and Kennedy 1982; Schein 1983, 1985), asserting that the necessary studies should include the analysis of "the dominant values, the myths, and the established political rules of the game" (Bacharach and Baratz 1962, p. 592.); and investigations into who would gain or lose by maintaining existing biases. Thus follows the concept of the non-decision, where decision making is limited to safe issues by the influence of *status quo* oriented groups.

Here is further scope for Foucaultian analysis, to trace the implicit assumptions and power relations that shape the *non-decision*. The historical perspective of such a study might locate the values and myths that strengthen the position of the *status quo*, and identify the techniques that create space for power and resistance to operate within the *non-decision* making processes.

Thus far, this review has considered decision making theory as it relates to rational choice. The normative model has proved to be unrepresentative of decision making processes in empirical settings; a failing which is partly explained by theories of bounded rationality. However, whatever behavioural limitations are conceded, an underlying assumption of logical rationality remains, and that concept of rationality assumes that decision makers possess, or can access, full knowledge of pertinent information. It also assumes that decision makers have the cognitive and intellectual abilities to process that information 'rationally', and that organisations have no distorting effects upon decision making activity. Decision making, though, is an activity which, occurring in a given time frame, affects the future. As knowledge of the future is *de facto* unpredictable, decision makers must make certain guesses about that future.

Continuing the study of bounded rationality, psychologists of the 'Carnegie School' began to apply theories of cognition to the activities of problem recognition and searching (for alternatives). Within the classical model of decision making, they argued, rational actors must make two assumptions (guesses) about the future (March 1997, Thompson 1967): a guess about the consequences of current actions; and a guess about the future, retrospective judgements of those consequences. In other words, decision makers need to find and utilise the means to cope with uncertainty (the first guess) and ambiguity (the second guess).

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The bounded rationality thesis explains that the most scarce resource in an organisation is attention (Cyert and March 1992; March 1988c; Simon 1976). While decision making activities might be intendedly rational, there are human limits on the information processing abilities of individuals that render the available information incomplete and, therefore, uncertain. As managers are bombarded with information from numerous sources, and with other demands on their time, they need to filter the various inputs. These filters impact on decision making processes (within the rational model) by restricting problem recognition and by limiting the search for alternatives. For behaviourists (e.g. March 1997) the salient mechanisms for handling incomplete, complex or uncertain information, are heuristics and organisational slack.

Heuristics, or frames, provide time-pressured decision makers with a relatively simple way of dealing with a complex world, and will often assist in the production of correct or satisficing judgements (March 1997; Kahneman et al. 1982). The application of heuristics is often unconscious and, as the stimulus becomes increasingly complex, or risky, will be based on a categorisation of the subject rather than upon the features of the stimulus (Bruner 1986; Bruner et al. 1977). There are certain 'universal' heuristics (Mahajan 1992; Ashton and Ashton 1995), first described in laboratory studies, that can be demonstrated in organisational settings. When instances of a particular event are readily available in memory (the availability heuristic), those memories will affect judgement about its likely causes, probability and frequency (Tversky and Kahneman 1973;). Stereotyping (representativeness) may be used to predict the possible outcomes of alternative courses of action (Nisbett and Ross 1980; Harrison and March 1988) while assessments might also be made according to some random value (or anchor) and

subjected to incremental adjustments according some similarly random criteria (Mahajan 1992; Fischhoff and Johnson 1997) .

Ease of recall, misconceptions of chance (Bazerman 1988), and insensitivity to base rate[7] information (Tversky and Kahneman 1973; Kahneman and Tversky 1982), are deeply ingrained modes of thought. Clearly, the inappropriate application of heuristics potentially leads to errors of judgement but, as Nisbett and Ross (1980) demonstrated, it is difficult to persuade individual decision makers to discard heuristics simply by making them aware that, despite intentions to the contrary, their behaviour is irrational.

One advantage of the organisational setting is that the 'parallel processing' (Feldman 1989) of several individuals can overcome some of the problems associated with individual bias. An organisation can resist bounded rationality through holding a wider inventory of knowledge than any individual and by mobilising broader expertise. Organisations, however, present a new, additional set of problems concerning information retention, communication, co-ordination and conflict so there is still bounded rationality (Holmstrom & Tirole 1989).

The wisdom of behavioural decision making theory is that goals exist as *a priori* to (at least some) decision processes and that mechanisms exist for filtering, or restricting, information. Psychology and economics, which consider choice to be primitive (i.e. not susceptible to further analysis), may not be sufficient to explain these phenomena. The mechanisms and technologies that allow, necessitate, or perhaps constrain, the construction of goals and heuristics need to be explored for an adequate explanation of choice. Those mechanisms are probably created and maintained through the operation of discourse.

The notion that goals and choices are independent processes is questionable and often wrong, according to March (1988b) who asserts that goals are not static features of an

organisation but are, increasingly, subject to change. For as long as performance matches (or exceeds) existing goals there is no problem and, hence, no impetus for search (Singh 1986). However, when performance drops[8] there is a search for organisational slack: unexploited opportunities, undiscovered economies and waste (ibid.). Thus, the first stage of the classic model of decision making is reversed. Rather than problem identification leading to goal definition, it is the failure to achieve an existing goal that becomes the problem. The search for 'alternatives' is restricted to the identification of slack as the decision is the commitment to corrective action.

This is a system which keeps goals and performance in close alignment:

> "First, it adapts goals to performance: that is, decision makers learn what they should expect. Second, it adapts performance to goals by increasing search in the face of failure and decreasing search when faced with success. And third, it adapts performance to goals by decreasing slack in response to failure and increasing slack in response to success. The result is a system that both provides resilience in the face of adversity and confounds adaptation." (March 1997, p. 12)

Under conditions where decision outcomes are uncertain, it has been demonstrated that heuristics can be used to diminish complexity and that the search for slack reduces the number of occasions where decision making activity is required. As knowledge of outcomes becomes increasingly uncertain, the degree of risk associated with the decision escalates both for the organisation and for the individual. A comprehensive review of decision making under uncertainty must, therefore, include studies of risk-taking behaviour.

RISK, THE EXTREME OF UNCERTAINTY

Committing oneself, or one's organisation to a course of action, when the outcome can only be estimated is inherently hazardous; with the degree of risk increasing as consequences become less certain. Theorists studying risk-taking, within decision

making, have coined the term 'risk preference' to describe the propensity for risk-taking or risk avoidance. The archetypal decision-making-under-risk situation is often taken to be gambling and many experimental studies have been based on gambling behaviour (e.g. Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Staw et al. 1981). The analogy with the stock market is obvious; however, March and Shapira (1988) advise, most decision makers will differentiate between gambling and risk taking. The first is interdicted while the second is a necessary behaviour.

The value of studies of decision making under risk is open to dispute. Behaviourists (e.g. MacCrimmon and Wehrung 1986; Lopes 1994; Shapira 1995) suggest that ideas associated with risk are simply inventions of researchers, as the taking or avoidance of risk is generally inadvertent, and decision makers do not seem to modify their behaviour in response to degrees of uncertainty. The fundamental difficulty with uncertainty is that information is incomplete, therefore decision makers will utilise the same heuristic mechanisms, with the same sets of biases, to deal with that uncertainty (Kahneman and Tversky 1979; Shapira 1995; Staw et al. 1981).

Within the epistemology that constructs rationality according to Bayesian logic (Kaplan 1996), theories of bounded rationality, and their concepts of heuristics, organisational slack and risk-preference, offer some solutions to problems posed by human choice in uncertainty. However decision makers need to make a second assumption about possible alternatives. That is, they need to predict future preferences for, or attitudes toward, the consequences of current actions.

AMBIGUITY (THEORIES OF THE SECOND GUESS)

Within standard explanations of decision making, for action to be rationally valid, preferences need to be stable and enduring; consistent and precise; and unaffected by

the choices they control (March 1997; 1988c). An apparently rational decision making process, however, does not guarantee an optimal outcome and, as the commitment to one course of action effectively eliminates other options, it is impossible to know the ultimate consequences of all possible alternatives (Jackson and Carter 2000). Yet empirical studies have shown that preferences (as revealed choices) are remarkably inconsistent and unstable (March 1997). While values and attitudes are enduring they do alter over time. As decision outcomes can only be properly assessed in retrospect, they are most likely to be judged according the values of the arbiter who is unlikely to retrieve a previously held value (Payne 1997). Decision making in organisations is further complicated by conflicting preferences that represent the range of values of individual participants (March and Olsen 1976). Hence there is the ambiguity that is a distinctive feature of decision making in organisations (Shapira 1997).

Ambiguity about preferences in not necessarily bad. It can act as a stimulus for learning and for the re-framing of organisational values (Payne 1997). It may enhance a commitment to morality by recognising the variability of preferences, and may reduce an organisation's vulnerability to arguments based on spurious rationale (March and Shapira 1982). Consequently, there are veiled dangers for decision making in organisations, where incentive and penalties (and long-term ramifications of these) are salient. Where the assumptions about preferences are proved wrong, it seems that decision makers are likely to distort the initial information rather than lose face. Various studies (e.g. Staw 1981; Brockner 1992) have demonstrated that a persistent failure to achieve goals can escalate commitment to action, investing greater resources, in an effort to recoup or justify the initial investment[9].

Research into these 'theories of the second guess' (March 1997) has been limited. As yet, little is properly understood about how future preferences can be, or are, estimated.

Here is a research agenda waiting to be actioned. Issues in need of exploration include: how institutional structures constrain preferences; how power/knowledge relations may direct a decision maker to act against their own judgement; and the ways in which preferences are formed and they are changed over time. Foucault (1970) has demonstrated that systems of thought are subject to fundamental change in different historical periods (or epistémés) so that ethical values from one period will be inappropriate, or may be judged harshly, at another time. There is a possibility that, by tracing the development of systems of thought, it may be possible to make more informed guesses about future preferences for decision outcomes so that managers might act, and be judged to have acted, with a better sense of history.

A serious problem with the literature on decision making is that its essence is the classic, legal-rational model. Studies from administrative science and psychology which are conscious of the shortcomings of the classical model are, however, framed in the same terms. Arguments, propositions and theories have developed around the understanding that people intend to be rational but either rationality is bounded by other constraints, or there is an alternative basis of reasoning. In short, behavioural theories try to apprehend and explore problems associated with rationality from within the bounds of rationality, rather like a nut describing its shell. To properly apprehend the rules that govern the ways decisions are formed (and the ways in which decision making is studied) it is necessary to, somehow, stand aside from that constraint, to slip the bounds of modernist thought, and to let the nut see the outside of its shell.

An obvious fact, but one that is often disregarded in studies of decision making in organisations, is that an organisation is not an individual entity but a collection of individuals. While organisational and individual decision making will hold some common features, the interaction of structures, relations, behaviours and, even, decision

processes become important variables. In other words decisions are social processes (Hickson et al. 1986, 1989) and, as such, can be affected by environmental conditions, (see Fig. 2) as much as by the intentions or actions of the decision makers (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967/1997; Hickson et al. 1986, 1989; Matsuyama 1995).

THE DECISION MAKING ENVIRONMENT

Classical theories of decision making struggle with notions such as inconsistent preferences, the influence of historical features and the effects of power on decision making behaviour. Within the human sciences, research has begun to develop these themes by examining the relationship between decision and (explicit or tacit) rules; the interaction of decisions and action; and the effects of power upon and within decision processes. Two important studies offered models which demonstrated the complexity of decision making environment and identify integral variables.

Even apparently unstructured decision processes have a form of structure and Mintzberg et al. (1976) found that it was a circuitous and iterative form requiring three sets of 'supporting routines'. Communication routines, the exploration, investigation and dissemination of information, were apparent throughout the entire process, while political routines gave another pervasive feature in the form of bargaining and negotiation about the purpose, form and outcomes of the decision. The allocation of time and resources to the decision making process was seen to be controlled by a 'meta-decision': "decision making about the decision process itself," (Mintzberg et al.1976, p. 260) where a system of rules is devised to establish a decision space. In a statement that is redolent of post-structuralist writings concerning discourse, the researchers declared that "Decision control activities are difficult to study because they tend to be implicit and informal, taking place in the mind of the decision maker, and leave little trace of themselves" (ibid. p. 261).

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Hickson (1987) and his colleagues (Hickson et al.1986, 1989) demonstrated that decision making processes derive from the degree of complexity of the decision problem and from the 'politicality' of interests in the decision (Fig. 2) with some matters being more political than others. It is these factors that are the primary influences on how decisions will be made, rather than the form of organisation

Matters for decision, they explain, have two components in that they raise problems and they implicate interests. A complex problem might lead to a fairly straightforward decision process if the range of interested actors is small (Hickson, 1987, offers the example of a large share issue) while a simpler problem (e.g. a departmental re-organisation) will create difficulties because of the range of interests that must be considered. Before an issue can become a matter for decision, however, it must be subject to numerous social processes (Hickson et al. 1989) formed by the "rules of the game" (Hickson 1987, p. 174) within the particular organisation. Many of these rules are shaped by or enshrined within the constitution and structure or the organisation although, as Hickson (1987 p. 175) acknowledges, "taken for granted values and managerial language ... may divert or suppress the formulation by powerless interests of matters they would otherwise bring forward". It is these implicit rule systems that

FIG 2: A MODEL OF THE DECISION MAKING ENVIRONMENT
(source: Hickson et al.1986; 1989)
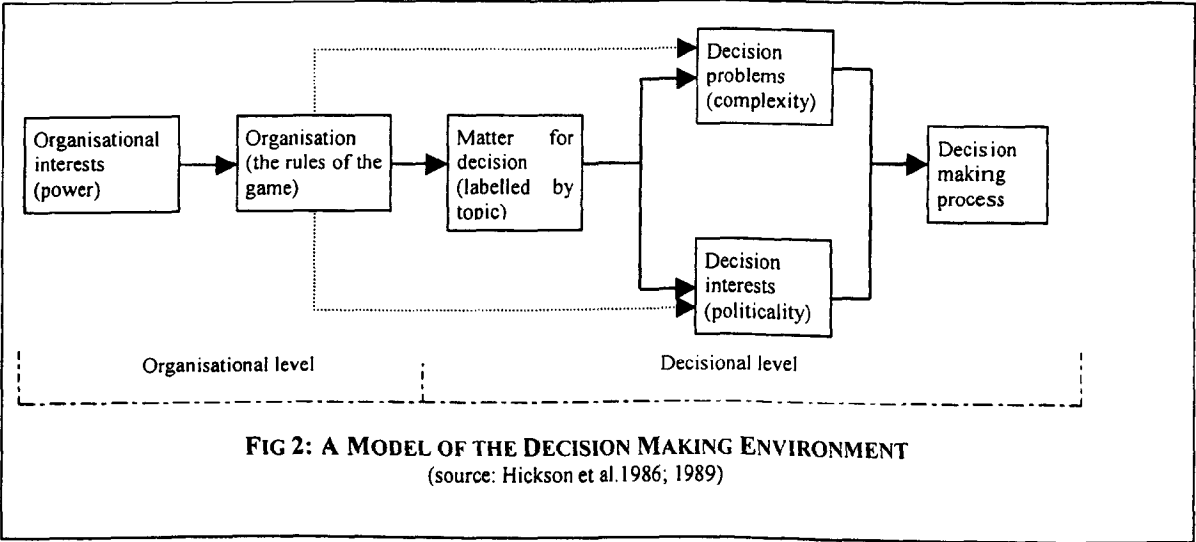
"govern what is mentionable and unmentionable" Hickson et al (1989 p. 376) and, therefore, what may or may not become a decision issue (Zhou 1997).

Although Hickson et al. (1987; 1989) do not directly discuss the discursive nature of these rule systems, such operation seems to be implied by others who recognise that "institutional processes and the construction of self-identity create and reinforce an organisational ideology" (Zhou 1997, p. 269, see also Bunsson 1989) that reduces the need for making decision save to reinforce the willingness to act (Brunsson 1987).

It is clear from these two studies that decisions are bound up in rule systems that prescribe how issues become matters for decision, how the decision making should proceed and, also, the extent to which organisational members may or will be involved in that process.

Decision Processes Within Rule Systems

Rules for controlling behaviour are commonplace within organisations. Depending upon the identity (or rôle) assumed by the actor, at a given time, systems such as standard operating procedures, professional standards and organisational structures ordain what is proper behaviour consistent with that role and function (Ashforth & Mael 1989; Wilson 1982). From a legal-rational stance, rules develop through the conscious choice of calculating actors seeking to maximise their own interests. This is the basis of the formal contract where the activity of all parties is consensually restricted by the terms of the agreement. Contractual rules are most likely to be formalised but even laws, the most formal of rule systems, can be, and are, modified in response to feedback from the environment (Zhou 1993; Huber 1991; Levitt and March 1988). These rule systems offer an alternative form of logic where the rationality of preference selection, maximisation of outcomes and self-interest is subsumed to an identity-dependent

reasoning based on obligation, duty and morality (Burns and Flam 1987; March and Olsen 1989). Much decision making behaviour in organisations, claims March (1997), is essentially the search for appropriate rules to match identity and situation, suggesting that the consequences of a decision (action) are less important than its appropriateness[10] in terms of some set of rules.

This process bears scant comparison to the classical model as it comprises: establishing identities; recognising the salient features of a situation; and matching these to each other and to a set of contingent rules. The task is by no means straightforward for rules change across time and context, reflecting previous experience and changing knowledge (Zhou 1993).

Local needs within the organisation may call for different identities, and outcomes (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967), leading to conflict. Experiential learning allows for optimisation of rules but can produce surprises. The need to perform for someone else's approval, to conform to another's perception of one's identity, leads to adaptive learning rather than 'generative learning' (Senge 1990) so that rules adapt to what is wanted rather than what is needed. Similarly, the population of rules may change through an evolutionary process (Baum and Singh 1994; Hannan and Freeman 1977) where the rules that (appear to) produce optimal results survive while others fall into disuse or are formally repealed.

As with other forms organisational behaviour, socialisation into rule systems requires the acquisition of a "set of understandings of the nature of things, of self-conceptions, and of images of proper behavior" (March 1997, p19), concepts that are so often taken for granted. However, rules systems need not necessarily be formalised but might often develop tacitly through traditions, hunches, cultural norms, or generalisations. Rule-based action, therefore, does not mean simplicity and consistency and does not

imply wilful consent to an explicit contract. The acknowledgement of a particular identity, and the selection and application of a set of rules, is another form of decision making under uncertainty, and fraught with the same sets of difficulties.

People's lives in organisations depend on their sense-making abilities, but they must act within the constraints set by the social reality that their predecessors built. Organisations are socially constructed by the pre-existing routines and competencies that members encounter upon entry, as well as the variations they enact in reproducing that organisational knowledge. Threads of meaning permeate and link the different strands of activities. The intertwined threads create an organisational culture that uniquely blends competencies, routines, member understandings and identities.

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Many organisational theorists (e.g. Deal and Kennedy 1982; Trice and Beyer 1984) have argued that a strong organisational culture can be a source of competitive advantage and have, thereby, aroused the interest of managers who have sought to create or manipulate a 'corporate culture' in pursuit of corporate objectives. There is, however, an ongoing debate about whether culture is a variable of organisational life, and open to manipulation, or a metaphor for the organisation itself (Smirchich 1983).

The dominant perspective depicts culture as something that an organisation has; a system of shared, or commonly-held, and consistent values and beliefs that are embedded in, and transmitted by, the stories, rites and symbols (Pettigrew 1979b; Schein 1985) that abound in any organisation. Elements of national and other, external, cultures can be imported into the organisation via its membership or be manufactured, "as a by-product of the production of goods and services" (Legge 1995, pp. 185-186). The result is a system of understandings, about the ways in which 'things are done

around here' (Deal and Kennedy 1982), that reduces ambiguity and conflict and promotes consensus.

However, it has been recognised that there are intrinsic and unavoidable ambiguities in all organisational cultures so that meanings are not necessarily shared (Meyerson 1991; Martin and Meyerson 1988). The subsequent disagreement can become the means by which understandings and meanings might be negotiated but such consensus cannot be reached without the prior existence of meanings within subgroups. "Organizational culture is *not* the island of clarity within a jungle of meaninglessness – it is the jungle itself" (Aldrich 1999, p. 154 original emphasis)

Importantly, from this perspective, culture can be consciously created or changed to increase commitment, motivation and control; to win the hearts, as well as the hands and minds of employees (Ray 1986). Organisational culture can, then, be seem to be imposed upon organisational members, by those with coercive power, in order to legitimise that power by converting it into authority (Watson 1995).

The opposing view holds that the company is its culture. The system of shared meanings develops through multiple processes of negotiation and sharing of symbols and meanings (Smirchich 1983) so that it is a cause as well as an outcome of behaviours. Hence, it is questionable whether, or at least to what extent, senior management can impose change. Given that there are, however, shared understandings about the rights and responsibilities of management, it is likely that one of the functions of culture-as-metaphor is to maintain hierarchical systems of authority. This does not imply, though, that managers will have absolute control over meanings, for there are likely to be other views – competing voices (Legge 1995) – that may be legitimated within numerous sub-cultures. If managers' views make no sense to sub-groups; if they do not reflect the identities and values of organisational members, then it cannot be

seen that the 'corporate culture' is in any way a useful rule system that will assist decision makers in negotiating their own positions.

The existence of a distinct culture, or rule system within an organisation provides a partial explanation about the nature of decision making within the organisation. For instance, the knowledge that quality is the paramount concern at Viand's allows for somewhat accurate predictions of decision outcomes; but it does not offer an explanation of why quality is so important, except as tautology, nor why the founders of Crowan Brothers held a similar value regarding their foundry products. An understanding of the ways in which culture is transmitted in the present-day Crowan's and Rittal does not explain why both companies should choose to initiate the same technique (Kaizen) to 'solve' their disparate problems. A Foucaultian analysis of organisations and their decision making processes may serve, in part, to further Di Maggio and Powell's (1983) quest to explain the remarkably high degree of isomorphism across organisations.

Organisations are not closed systems. They are embedded communities and are nourished and sustained by their wider social context. Organisational cultures do not develop in isolation from the surrounding society and, while internal structures may slow the rate at which an organisation responds to external changes, they can only reflect (and reproduce) norms and practices of the wider society. As Williams et al. (1993, p. 53) declare:

> "Common values in society place constraints upon the kinds of organisational culture acceptable to members. For example, since the Industrial Revolution there have been substantial changes in social values regarding ... [work and employment]... All these changes affect the kinds of values and practices that will be satisfying to people at work. They will affect the type of organizational culture that will be acceptable."

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The patterns of understandings and expectations, that form the organisational culture, cannot be considered to be politically neutral (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Organisations take the shape that they do because people draw form the values, understanding and knowledges of the society around them. As a social system, the culture of any organisation has been constructed. The insight of post-structuralist thought is that the completeness of a system is illusory for, in its construction, certain objects and people have been excluded. The notion of organisational culture, then, needs to be deconstructed in order to locate those hidden points of exclusion and to identify the contradictions, within the system, that maintain and illusion of wholeness.

It is apparently tautologous, although necessary, to state that systems of norms develop through normalising processes or, in Foucault's terminology, disciplinary techniques. A comprehensive analysis of organisational culture, and its effects on decision making, needs to consider the ways in which rule systems, that serve to construct the individual sense of self, become established. That is a central feature of the Foucaultian project (see Chapter 3), for the disciplinary technologies, which fix rule systems and ensure certain forms of behaviour are among the techniques that constitute the individual as objects.

There are, then, inherent limitations to the analysis of organisational culture as a means of understanding the nature of managerial decisions. An appreciation that the mechanisms and technologies, which operate beyond individual consciousness, are factors that must be considered in the establishment of rule systems, or cultures, invites the insight that Foucaltian analysis can offer.

It may be that the implementation of rules is a further application of rational calculation, a choice between alternative interpretations of the rule system for maximum personal utility (Downs 1967). If, however, rules and identities are not deliberately construed, it

is difficult to establish that their adoption is simply another decision that must be made. It is more likely that further systems of rules operate to shape identity, to mandate which features of a situation are salient, and to direct the process of matching them.

As collections of people, organisations cannot exist separately from their constituent individuals. Consequently, while decision making in organisations shares many of the features of individual decision making, the processes are complicated by the interactions between individuals acting as so many variable factors. As each individual member of an organisation retains a range of identities, each having related groups of preferences and rules systems, there is massive scope for disparity both intra- and inter-personally. Accordingly the results, which range from discomfort, through confusion to conflict (Coleman 1986), demand accommodation if the organisation is to function effectively.

Interactive Disparity

Economic theories of decision making (that is, theories of choice) reify organisations by assuming a market mechanism that converts conflicting demands into prices and operates through the marginal rates of substitution between goods. Interactive discrepancies are then treated as processes of value comparisons between alternatives; leading to hierarchies of prioritisation. The classic approach is the so-called game theory that envisions competition (Freund and Williams 1966). Inconsistencies between preferences are viewed as a problem of assessing trade-offs with each 'player' seeking to optimise their own position. As exemplified in the Prisoners' Dilemma[11] game, the result is either a zero-sum with no overall gain, or no-win which is the worst possible outcome (Blackburn 1996). Game theory ignores the intervening variables such as knowledge of the other person, relationships and ethics.

Political interpretations recognise that decision makers can and do act against their own best interests. Rather than pondering how inconsistencies can be resolved they focus upon understanding how decisions can happen in despite of those discrepancies. The key is power or, better, force. Definitions of power[12] tend to be vague and often conflated but centre upon the ownership or control of some resource (Bacharach and Baratz 1962; Molm 1997), although Clegg (1989) warns that almost anything can be a resource, in the right context, so it is prudent to resist the temptation to devise some *a priori* list. It is the ways in which those resources are used that determines the relationship between preferences and decision outcomes (Pettigrew 1972).

Exchange theories hold a conception of power as deriving from the mutual dependencies that operate in social settings. The underlying mechanism, explains Molm (1997 p. 1), "is not coercion, but simply the same laws that govern economic exchange". Dependence occurs when a resource is scarce (or demand is high) so that the dependent individual (or identity) will pay more in concession to those that have, or control the resource[13]. This resource-dependent power is a property of organisational structure, embedded in rules systems (Clegg 1989) and, thus, operates at unit and sub-unit as well as individual and inter-organisational levels (Hickson et al.1971).

Where there is disparity between individual preferences, decision making becomes a two stage process wherein individuals (people, identities, departments or organisations) negotiate understandings about how to co-ordinate their respective actions, each seeking to optimise their own position, and then execute those understandings (March and Simon 1993). This process is, of course, subject to uncertainty and ambiguity so there is no guarantee that the decision outcome will precisely reflect agreed actions. Agreements do not lead to precise contracts but are subject to re-negotiation at every stage (Bardach 1977).

In arenas of disparate interests, such as large organisations, a clear problem for principals is to ensure that managers make decisions, which accord with their own interests. As corporations become ever larger, dispersed, and fragmented the associated difficulties can be exacerbated by cultural differences in expectations, behaviours and preferences (Mallory et al. 1983). The collapse of Barings bank provides a vivid example of the consequences of inadequate governance (Garud and Shapira 1997), but also highlights the role of trust and loyalty in successful management and decision making. These decidedly qualitative concepts are not tangential to decision making processes but are fundamental to it, in any organisation that has grown beyond the immediate control of its principal. Positivist theories are not able to describe the organisational mechanisms that can oblige decision makers to act deliberately against their own interests and in favour of anothers', even in the absence of that other. A dependency based conception of power is inadequate to expound the construct or the construction of an ethical decision maker. Power needs to be examined and understood "as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organisation ... [and] as the strategies in which they take effect ... in the various social hegemonies" (Foucault 1978, pp. 92-93).

Thus far, this section has considered the ways in which the organisational environment can affect the process of decision making. It has noted that decisions are often complex, and frequently implicit, processes that are difficult to trace. Many decision outcomes are the result of political processes such as the negotiation of identities and rule systems. Where there is confusion or conflict between different identities or personal preferences, the operation of power becomes an important factor is producing acceptable outcomes. Political systems have been shown to operate at the most fundamental levels to control the decision making agenda, determining which issues

should be subject to decision making processes. The discussion now changes focus slightly to consider the effects of time in framing the decision making agenda and in determining decision outcomes.

Temporal Qualities of Decisions

Decision making is undoubtedly a complex operation yet, despite myriad problems, organisations continue to prevail in sometimes volatile environments and decisions do happen for good or ill. Decision making processes are not discrete phenomena, but involve collections of individuals and groups who are simultaneously involved in other activities and fulfilling different identities, each competing for attention. As demands are constantly changing, the allocation of attention can also fluctuate (Kingdon 1984) so that the degree of attention paid to any single decision need not be a function of the decision issue but of its context, that is the size and variety of issues already under consideration (Dutton 1986), and how attention is allocated by decision makers.

In the often-cited 'garbage-can model' (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972; March and Olsen 1976; Cohen and March 1986), choice opportunities, problems, solutions and people are linked by temporal rather than causal proximity. The authors suggested that the decision-making structure of many organisations resembles a large receptacle into which problems, issues, ideas and solutions can be dropped at random. 'Decisions' come about when matching issues and ideas (or problems and solutions) are in the 'bin' simultaneously[14]. Ludicrous matching of any solution to any problem is prevented by organisational structures (March and Olsen 1986) and, presumably other social systems.

The model was intended as an alternative explanation for situations where 'normal' rational models were not applicable (the term used is 'organized anarchies') and operationalises decision as a choice. The researchers demonstrated a decision making

system that "in effect, produces a queue of problems ... to the disadvantage of late-arriving problems." (Cohen et al. 1972, p. 126); and three modes of decision making were identified (Cohen et al. 1972). First, the resolution of problems by devoting time and energy to their solution was found to be successful but uncommon. Second, decision-by-oversight occurs when a choice has been made but another option is presented. If there is time and energy to do so, a switch is made without further consideration. The third mode, decision by flight, has since been labelled colloquially as 'solutions in search of problems'. This occurs when some 'pet theory' or the latest fad is implemented to 'solve' some apparent, current problem(s) (Nutt 1987). While the two latter modes were most commonly employed, the success rate, in terms of achieving a satisfactory outcome to a problem, was less than forty per cent. That rate, predictably, worsened with increased workload and time pressures; the situation which most accurately reflects trends to lean organisations and that requires prompt and effective judgements.

While a single decision is ephemeral, it occurs within a longitudinal context (Shapira 1997) involving other decisions; competing demands and preferences; mutable rules and identities; and variable states of knowledge. As a social phenomenon, decision making is embedded in its temporal context and, as the garbage-can model demonstrates, is profoundly affected by it. As decisions are controlled by their wider, organisational context, so organisations are affected by their social environment. That, too, has a temporal dimension with the development of rules, over time, to govern how organisations, as collectives of individuals, may think and behave. Apprehending those rules systems and their modes of operation is as pertinent to the study of decisions as are explanations of individual thought processes. As Shapira (1997, p. 5) declares, "These [longitudinal] characteristics call for a history-dependent analysis of

organisational decision making, and highlight the role of sense-making in organisational life." In effect, the Hickson et al. model (Fig. 2) requires another dimension: a describing loop, to represent the discursive and historical properties of the social environment in which organisations and their decision makers function.

Preferences, choices, identities and rules are the tools that individuals and societies use to create an impression of order amid chaos and confusion, and that order is an essential precursor of effective decision making. If, as Foucault (1970, 1972) argues, those tools are created and constrained through the mechanism of discourse, then discourse is a vital, although unexplored, element of decision making because it is discourse that allows individuals and societies to interpret and make sense of their increasingly complex environment.

Decision making is effectively a means of interpreting the past and present in a way that can be extended into the future (March 1994; O'Connor 1997; Weick 1994). As information is selected and framed, and rules and identities are negotiated, so sense-making in an input to decision making. At the same time actions resulting from decisions change those meanings, rules and identities so that decisions transform the sense from which they draw. Hence the construction of meaning is an input to, as well as an output of, the decision making process.

DECISION MAKING AND SENSE MAKING

Major theories depict decision making as thoughtful action where actors assume some rational processes that code situations into meaningful terms[15] but pay scant attention to the premises upon which decision makers determine rationality or rules. To distinguish rationality as goodness, or irrationality as badness (or as being unreasonable) can only

be a value judgement, based on a particular world view that invalidates other forms of reasoning, be they theological, superstitious, moral or delusional.

The modern concept of rationality is predominantly a rule-based system grounded upon legalistic and instrumental premises, and is specific to a time and culture (Gergen and Thatchenkery 1996; Ray and Reed 1994). Integral to the esteem of the rational agent is a high value on knowledge and, hence, on the possessors and givers of knowledge. Those who can make known what was previously unknown (through the application of rational methods and analyses) hold special sway in the modern world and its institutions. Participation in, and the process and outcomes of, decisions become symbolic of status.

Expressions of rationality are capable of inhibiting reflection on deeper, alternative meaning(s) of what is being said and, hence, prevent the speaker or hearer from questioning assumptions which are taken for granted within the common-sense (or shared) meaning of the spoken words (Alvesson and Willmott 1992). As Habermas argues:

> "The limits of action are determined by the range of possible descriptions ... [that] is established by the structures of language in which the self-understanding and worldview of a social group is articulated Thus the boundaries of action are drawn by the boundaries of language". (Habermas 1988, pp. 71-72)

Rationality is but one interpretation of the world and, as the accepted format of decision making behaviour, it shapes the way organisational members think and act. Indeed, as Clegg (1990, p. 2) advises, "organizations are the form of our modern condition" because rational thought is both represented and reproduced through the classic theories of management[16], and through bureaucracies. Rather than Adam Smith's 'economic man', the decision maker is 'organisation man' (Whyte 1963) who accepts hierarchical systems of authority as not only inevitable, but also as necessary and inherently good.

Simon, building on the ideas of Follett and of Barnard (Wren 1994, Simon 1976), recognised that decision making is segregated throughout organisational hierarchies; with decisions from the more senior members limiting the scope of behaviours of those at lower levels. From his rational stance, systems of 'vertical specialisation' are the heart of organisation, enabling groups to function for the group purpose of achieving goals which are beyond the scope or capabilities of individuals:

"... as soon as a task grows to the point where the efforts of several persons are required to accomplish it ... it becomes necessary to develop processes for the application of organized effort to the group task. The techniques which facilitate this application are the administrative processes." (Simon 1976, p. 8)

The effects are ambiguous. Rules, norms and clear lines of communication within bureaucratic structures reduce the risk of uncertainty and surprise but they also inhibit inspiration and innovation (Nutt 1987). Decision makers adopt frames and heuristics that tend to emphasise familiar aspects of a decision situation, or substitute complexity by some index such as 'cost of living' or 'profit'. Target-setting defines a level of acceptability for outcomes, but ignores graduations of acceptability.

Research from the arena of psychology (e.g. Ashton and Ashton 1995; March and Sevón 1988; Tversky and Kahneman 1973) supports critical sociology, showing that decision makers decompose complex problems into sub-problems, ignoring interactions. Individuals try to edit or simplify situations by focusing on some data and ignoring others. This reduces the informational basis for making a decision but simultaneously enables a rational appraisal and explanation by limiting the criteria for judgement. When decision making is seen to be a method of generating meaning, the rational process takes on a symbolic function to reassure decision makers of their own importance; "In particular these symbols reinforce the idea that managers (and

managerial decisions) affect the performance of organizations, and do so properly"
(March 1997, p23). In short, decision makers interpret experience in ways which
conserve their prior beliefs and their own status (March 1994, 1997; Nisbett & Ross
1980).

Most theories of decision making treat premise as an antecedent of decision – that the
decision will be a process of taking action consistent with a pre-existing premise.
However, the relationship has been shown to be more interactive (March 1994), as
preferences and identities develop within the context and course of making the decision.
Equally, as interpretation and the creation of meaning are inputs to decision making, so
commitment to action seems to flow from the sense-making process, in that decisions
create a sense of security by framing actions in a manner that treats outcomes as clear
(Nutt 1987). As decisions are made to reflect beliefs, so beliefs can be formed to reflect
decisions.

In a society that is committed to reason and rational justification, a 'myth of choice'
becomes important to reassure those affected that a decision has been made intelligently
and sensitively, and that the right people have been involved in decision making. The
pragmatic decision is not necessarily, or even, a rational process (Cohen et al.1972;
Anderson 1983; Staw 1981) although it can be presented as such (March 1994, 1997;
Allison 1971) and, indeed, the commitment to rational thought demands that it is. Such
post hoc reasoning re-creates the epistemological status of logical rationality that
constrains decision making to those actions which can be justified (or rationalised) in
terms of logical and quantifiable reasoning. Modernist rationality creates and recreates
the meanings and interpretations that give substance to decision making activities and it
is produced and reproduced by them. Just as rationality has been shown to be bounded

within decision making praxis, so decision making activity may be seen to be bounded by rationality.

SUMMARY

In summary, research into decision making has permeated most of the disciplines of organisational studies and has generated an overwhelming body of literature. By far the majority of that literature concerns the classical model which prescribes a rational process of individual choice making. The definition and the paradigm are both limiting and the model has not been reproduced in empirical studies. One explanation for this is the bounded rationality thesis which proposes that human behaviour is intended to be rational but is subject to cognitive and contextual limitations. Hence, behavioural studies have attempted to understand how individuals cope with uncertainty and ambiguity by filtering information.

Organisational decision making does not occur as isolated activities, however. It is a collective activity that occurs within the constraints of a wider historical and political context, that appears to be beyond the scope of traditional theories. Systems of rules seem to be constructed as the context for decision making activity, and decision makers need to negotiate identities and understandings. Conventional studies of decision making, both experimental and empirical, have customarily concentrated on the act or processes of decision making as if they were discrete events and, in the process have tended to overlook the effects of the social setting in which organisations, and their decision makers, operate. A Foucaultian approach, by contrast, would divert attention from the obvious topic (the decision making process in this account); to consider the wider environment and to apprehend the conditions that simultaneously permit and constrain the decision; and to reflect upon the role of the decision in constructing and maintaining those conditions.

Several themes are constant, if frequently silent, throughout the various studies described in this chapter. There are "hidden layers of covert issues and interests which govern all that happens" (Hickson 1995, p. xv). Some form of power is operational both within and around decision processes. The historical element is salient as decisions happen within a longitudinal context and timing limits the range of options that are available.

The nature and operation of power, the development of modes of thought and the underlying rules systems are, then, fundamental variables to be considered in the study of managerial decision making. These factors, that are the essence of a Foucaultian analysis, cannot be apprehended by traditional theories where the same legal-rational logic, that prescribes the activity they are trying to describe, constrains the investigative and analytic processes. This study is intended to redress the balance somewhat, by utilising an epistemology that problematises rationality and investigates the technologies of reason, questions the operation of power relations, and traces the historical development of systems of thought. That paradigm is reviewed in the next chapter.

1 Salancik and Brindle suggest that a decisionless choice exists where a decision maker faces one or more choices but is constrained (because of dependency-based power systems) to select only one; conversely, a choiceless decision occurs where there is a selection among alternatives but the decision maker sees no choice, (their example is using a door to enter a room, even though a window would serve the same purpose. Brunsson (1972) argues that decisions without actions and actions without decisions also exist. The latter seems to be an instance of the choiceless decision; the former, I suggest, is simply a decision to do nothing.

2 Rationality is not a simple concept. Brubaker (1984) identifies no less that sixteen different meanings within Weber's *ouvre;* while amid a series of circular definitions the Oxford Dictionary (SOED) can only distinguish what is rational in terms of what is reasonable. What is reasonable (and, hence, rational) can only be assessed from a particular point of view (Eldridge 1994).

3 The literature is copious. One site alone, (Wakker 1999) offers a bibliography of over three thousand items dealing with probability, utility and games theories, and their applications in areas such as medicine, insurance, investment and accountancy.

4 It must be acknowledged that there are many, apparently invaluable conditions that have proved to be suseptible to mathematical reduction by utility theorists. There are, also, some concepts, such as quality and health, which can only be quantified by assuming that some attribute of the phenomenon is representative of the whole.

5 Amid the current debate, about what management is and is not, many present-day writers (e.g. Torrington and Weightman 1989; Nord and Jermier 1993; Hales 1986) would take issue with that. For instance, Torrington and Weightman (1989) assert that management activity includes routine administrative work, technical work (the skill, trade or profession in which a manager has been trained) and 'managerial work' – persuading others into a point of view or towards an activity.

6 This theme is repeated by Di Maggio and Powell (1983) who argue that organisations, regardless of their sector of operations, exhibit some degree of isomorphism.

7 Base rate information is described as 'logically pertinent information' (Freund and Williams 1966). The availability of such (statistical) information does not guarantee that it will be used. Khaneman and Tversky (1982) experimented on this class of bias – the base-rate fallacy – to show that the full extent of statistical data are not used to form a judgement.

8 Rather than stimulating a new search, reduced performance may also lead to decreased aspirations, or a reduction in goals.

9 The Channel Tunnel is one example. Although the costs of building, and then operating, the tunnel escalated; and despite the safety issues that subsequently became apparent, abandoning the project does not appear to have been seriously considered. The final costs were far in excess of initial estimates (Drummond 1995). It may transpire that the Millennium Dome is another example.

10 March's view is supported by the literature on organisational dysfunction. The link between the 'appropriateness' of a decision and goal displacement (Merton 1968) is obvious.

11 The prisoners' dilemma is a classic problem in game theory. Two prisoners are jointly charged with a crime and each has the option of confessing or not. If neither admit to the crime, the charge will be reduced and each will serve two years. If both confess they will be convicted and each sentenced to six years. If only one confesses he will be released and the other will serve ten years. According to the rationality which drives the theory, each prisoner will do best for himself by confessing although if both confess the outcome is the worst possible. Axlerod (1984) challenged this rationale in an iterative game (which is much more representative of the organisational situation) by showing that a 'tit-for-tat' approach of copying the other player can result in an optimal outcome for each – a win-win situation.

12 The Foucaultian concept of power is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3. For the purpose of the current discussion, power is treated as the ability to oblige another to perform some type of activity.

13 Individual actors need to conserve their own resources in order that their own sets of preferences will be reflected in decisions and this may precipitate dysfunction within the organisation. Typically, 'gate-keeping', the ability to control information, (March & Simon 1993) is used to promote personal preferences (Wilson 1982; Pettigrew 1972; Downs 1967)

14 The garbage-can model is rather complex, requiring computer simulation to run. The authors admit its inadequacies but claim that it is a first step in understanding organisational phenomena which are common but regarded as pathological.

15 The garbage can model is a rare exception to decision making theories that are predicated upon notions of reasonableness and rationality.

16 For instance, Fayol's (1916/1997) designs are aimed at ensuring "the soundness and good working order of the body corporate" (p. 253) through such devices as a scalar chain of authority, unity of command and the division of labour which are, in turn, enacted as bureaucratic hierarchical structures.

Chapter 3: Discourse Analysis and the Foucaultian Approach

INTRODUCTION

Foucault's oeuvre is remarkable for its profundity and complexity, hence, it is inherently flexible but is also susceptible to a range of interpretations and applications. This chapter presents a singular, personal exposition of Foucault's works to demonstrate how his insights have impacted upon the thinking of this writer and were applied to the study of managerial decision making within this study. Accordingly, this chapter forms a literature review of Foucaultian ontology and a basis for the applied methods described in Chapter Four.

Discourse analysis is a multi-faceted term which is variously employed across a gamut of social sciences. So as to avoid confusion over the use of the term, this discussion first, briefly, considers a cross-section of these various applications, giving particular recognition to the more critical forms of discourse analysis that have been utilised to explore the nature of organisations. The bulk of the chapter is an overview of Foucault's philosophy. A general discussion of the Foucaultian paradigm addresses the issues of power, knowledge and the subject of knowledge. Next, Foucault's particular analytic devices of archaeology and genealogy are explored. These do not form a distinct methodology for research, but offer an alternative perspective on social enquiry. The final section offers an exposition of the deconstructive techniques that Foucault developed and which have been employed within the project.

PERSPECTIVES ON THE ANALYSIS OF DISCOURSE

The development of discourse analysis, within the human sciences, began to take shape during the 1960s and 1970s (Van Dijk 1985a). The term describes an interdisciplinary

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family of methodologies and approaches to the study of language and text that draws variously upon linguistics, literary theory and cultural studies, the philosophy of language, sociology and psychology. Consequently, discourse analysis must bear the criticism of being 'all things to all people'. Such diversity, however, has advantages within a field of research, such as organisational studies, which is itself multi-disciplinary. Firstly, it offers the potential to address the questions of any of its component specialities (Budd and Raber 1996) and, secondly, the term 'discourse' can be understood at many different levels of analysis (Corsaro 1985; Grant et al.1998).

In a strict sense, 'discourse' refers to spoken language, or dialogue, although more conventionally it will include written texts, and may be "broadened to include cultural artefacts such as music, art and architecture" (Grant et al.1998, p. 2). As this discussion progresses, that latter sense of the term discourse will be further extended to follow Foucault's inclusion of social practices. Within this first section a more agnostic approach is taken, so that 'discourse' needs to be understood within the semantic limits of the specific analytic approach under discussion[1].

Most approaches to discourse analysis can be placed on a continuum between 'bottom up' or 'top-down'. Bottom up models, as De Beaugrande (1985) explains, are characterised by low-level abstraction such as the rules of syntactic structure and the prepositional content of individual phrases. This is 'pure' or theoretical research and is often criticised as lacking practical application (Van Dijk 1985b). Within these bottom-up approaches, the definitions of discourse and discursive phenomena are limited to the synchronic or diachronic forms under investigation.

As the field broadens, applied forms of discourse analysis offer a link with linguistics by studying the means of language acquisition and the connections between written and spoken language (Gunnarsson 1997, Van Dijk 1985b). They consider the relations of the speaker to the hearer (or the reader to the writer) and their respective roles in the linguistic performance, such as turn-taking (Fillmore 1985) and the 'boundary exchanges' and 'framing moves' which people employ to organise topics of discussion (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Fisher 1997). However, that relation is seen as cognitive, where the actors are conceived in terms of their information processing role rather than their social functions (Duranti 1985). Accordingly, there may be problems in distinguishing between meanings held in the private realm and the public usage of discourse (Streuver 1985). From a sociological stance, these approaches have limited value, as they do not take account of the characteristics of participants, nor their roles, nor the particular features of the organisational setting of the study.

By contrast, top-down models are generally propelled by higher-level concepts that identify and catalogue the constituent parts of the discourse such as goals, beliefs, events, and the relationship between speakers[2]. Studies by Labov and Fanshel (1977) and Gumperz (cited by Corsaro 1985) show that discourse can operate on many levels of understanding, and that there may even be a hierarchy of levels of information. Potter and Wetherell (1987)[3] also indicate that the constructive functions of discourse can be shown to produce different, even contradictory, attitudes towards objects depending upon context; and that objects can be constructed differently depending upon the attitude of the speaker.

When discourse is analysed separately from its organisational setting, two interrelated methodological problems arise (Corsaro 1985) for, either, researchers must "make no attempt to invoke higher level predicates which would identify the kinds of social

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interaction taking place" (ibid. p. 181), or such interaction must be implied by going beyond the valid ethnographic evidence and relying on some presumed or stereotyped notion of the organisational setting. As Labov and Fanshel (1977) argue, researchers need to work with naturally occurring discourse, rather than the artificially produced dialogue of role-play, and to understand the context as well as the content of conversations.

To this point, the discussion has considered discourse analysis that is based in, or builds upon, linguistic studies. The value of such research to organisational analysis in general and, particularly, to the study of decision making is limited. However, more critical forms of discourse analysis have been developed that are more directly relevant to comprehending organisational behaviour. Some of these are considered next.

Critical Studies in Discourse Analysis

Critical linguists (e.g. Fowler, Hodge, Kress and Trew 1979) are reluctant to distinguish between content and form, on the grounds that language is a product of its social foundations, and argue that the two should be studied together. Drawing upon the principles of systematic grammar, critical linguistics focuses upon the use of grammar and vocabulary in texts, with special emphasis on the use of 'transitivity' in the representation of reality. Critical linguists, such as Fowler (1985), reject the dualisms, of conventional linguistics, that treat language as independent from use and that disregard the possibility that speakers can select various semantic options according to social circumstances. Particular regard has been given to two distinctive linguistic processes: directive practices, which include manipulative speech acts such as commands and requests; and constitutive practices, those forms of language which operate to maintain social structures (Fowler 1985).

Critical studies offer an approach to discourse analysis which has proved valuable in the study of business history and managerial practice. For instance, Yeung (1998) employed critical linguistics to determine that managers can and do alter their language to reflect a changing role, from decision making to 'decision advising'[4], as commercial organisations become democratised and increasingly participative. In general, however, the approach tends to overemphasise the 'text' as a product. While critical linguistics recognises the role of discourse in the reproduction of social structures, this is a one-sided proclivity that underplays the role of discourse in shaping social change (Fairclough 1992).

A closely-related perspective, which has bearing on the current context, is structuralism which, although rooted in formal linguistics, repudiates the idea that language has an implicit meaning, and that individual people are the source of meanings generated in speech or texts (Pettit 1975). This is a theoretical, rather than interpretative undertaking, and builds on Saussure's linguistics[5] which demonstrate the structures and rules which exist to generate systems of meaning within language. By extending the range of the relationship between signifier and the signified (Saussure 1970), structuralists attempted to show how all social activities constitute language in a formal sense (Lane 1970). The popularity of structuralism waxed and waned within a few years[6], but its influence prevails in the study of semiotics, in deconstructionism (Culler 1982) and in post-structuralism which includes the works of Michel Foucault.

In the growing field of study which has been called 'organizational discourse' (Grant et al.1998a, p. 3), researchers seek to understand how discourse is used by people to "accomplish the everyday task of functioning as part of large, coordinated, institutionalized structures." (Mumby and Clair 1997, p. 181). For instance, as the notion of the market is extended into new areas of social life, numerous institutions and organisations have

adopted new forms of language to redefine their activities, so that hospital patients become 'service users', railway passengers are described as 'customers' and university students are offered 'packages' of courses (Fairclough 1992, p. 7). Understanding how people 'construct' organisations brings together two principal streams of 'top down' research: interpretative and critical studies.

At a descriptive-interpretative level, students of organisational discourse examine how discursive practices contribute to the development of shared meaning between people in groups, including organisations. Discourse is seen as a principal means of creating the social reality by which members of organisations can construct their identities (Mumby and Clair 1997). An obvious connection with the study of organisational cultures arises, so Trice and Beyer were able to ascribe a key role to discourse in the development of organisational norms:

> "In performing the activities of rite or ceremonial, people make use of other cultural forms – certain customary language, gestures, ritualized behaviors, artefacts, other symbols, and setting – to heighten the expression of shared meanings appropriate to the occasion." (Trice and Beyer 1984, p. 654)

On another level, critical studies move from the realm of the academic towards the socio-political (Van Dijk 1985b), as they are based on the premise that organisations are sites of struggle, rather than collectives reproducing shared meanings. The struggle, Mumby and Clair (1997, p. 182) assert, is between different groups that "compete to shape the social reality of organizations in ways that serve their own interests". Working from a 'Western Marxist' tradition (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Fairclough 1992) critical discourse analysts aim:

"to systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and to explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor in securing power over hegemony." (Fairclough 1993, p.135)

In organisational studies, much of the impetus for critical discursive analysis, according to Mumby and Clair (1997), came from the labour process ethnographies which demonstrated how workers internalised and reproduced systems of consent that served the interests of capital by maintaining managerial control of production (Burrawoy 1979), and how power operated through the interpretative frames by which workers shape their identity within the organisation (Clegg 1975). Events in Europe over the last thirty years have raised questions about the validity and relevance of Marxist theory (Casey 1995); while the rise of French post-structuralism, feminism, and cultural studies, have heightened debates over the nature of theory, discourse, subjectivity, knowledge and power.

In a world where rapid cultural change has become the norm, social commentators, and particularly the French philosophers, have challenged the validity of Reason, Truth and Science which have been central precepts of modernity. Borrowing from literary theory, post-structuralists have adapted concepts of deconstruction and representation to develop new theories concerning power, subjectivity and the nature of history (Casey 1995). Every system is seen as a construction. Something has been assembled and, in its assembly something (or someone) has been excluded, so that the completeness of the system is illusory (Culler 1982). Deconstruction looks for those places within a system where exclusion is disguised and hidden, perhaps even from the system itself. Locating such points and interrogating them leads to a deconstruction (not destruction) of the system which identifies the logical and rhetorical contradictions that maintain the illusions of

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completeness. The Foucaultian paradigm, employed in this study, is an extension of the principle of deconstruction to examine, not literary forms but social (or discursive) practices.

In summary, the term 'discourse', which fundamentally refers to spoken language is susceptible to broad interpretation and has come to encompass written texts, cultural artefacts and social practices. Likewise, the term discourse analysis has been adopted by many of the social sciences to give rise to a wide range of research methods. Bottom-up approaches, that study lower level linguistic structures, extend understanding of language acquisition but have limited value in the study of social structures and practices such as organisations and management. Higher-level analyses, from the top-down perspectives, recognise the role of discourse in affirming, and creating, social structures. It is from these approaches that organisational discourse studies have derived, to examine the development of shared meanings within organisations. Critical discourse analysis, arising from Marxist concepts, further expands the range of research by exploring the causal relationships between discourse, social practices and hegemony.

Although a growing body of research has been examining the impact of various organisational forms of language, such as metaphor, rhetoric, conversation and cliché (Grant et al.1998a give further examples), discourse analysis is rarely the principal focus of management research. Perhaps this is because understanding the role of discourse does not add to the commercial bottom line (Wallemacq and Sims 1998) or because management theorists hold an affinity for quantitative data (Linstead 1996). It must be acknowledged, too, that for many the association between organisational discourse analysis and, seemingly impenetrable[7], postmodern texts poses a barrier to its acceptance by those who must, daily, deal with such practicalities as cash flow, supply chains and industrial relations.

Nevertheless, the dilatory uptake of discourse analysis within management research does not indicate irrelevance. Discourse analysis can, potentially, further management and organisational theory by apprehending the mechanisms and technologies through which social forces delimit and constrain, for good or ill, the ways in which managers perceive their enterprises, the commercial or competitive environment, and frame their responses.

The insight of post-structural philosophy, is that there is no truth, practice or phenomenon that can be studied outside of discourse. Michel Foucault (1926-1984) offered a new paradigm on the role of discourse in shaping power, knowledge, and subjectivity. His work, which is central to this study, is now examined in greater depth.

AN OVERVIEW OF FOUCAULTIAN PHILOSOPHY

Michel Foucault had a unique perspective on epistemology. He took an historical approach to the study of the 'human sciences' such as linguistics, psychiatry and sociology; although he professed to be neither an historian nor a sociologist. His projects extended the works of the structuralists, yet he was, he claimed, not a structuralist (O'Farrel 1989). Neither did he accept any of the labels, such as 'post-modernist' with which others tried to characterise him:

> "Do not ask me who I am and do not ask me to remain the same" (Foucault 1972, p. 17)

Though he may have been something of a maverick, Foucault was, first and foremost, a philosopher: who saw philosophy as an interrogative practice, rather than as a search for fundamentals (Rajchman 1995; McHoul & Grace 1993; O'Farrel 1989). Through a series of projects, essentially conceptual in nature, he worked toward what he described as an 'ontology of the present'. That designation has become modified by his successors to 'a

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history of the present', a term which is probably too ambiguous to adequately describe a life's work, for Foucault drew upon a rich diversity of social disciplines in order to establish an history of 'systems of thought' (the title of his chair at Collége de France). In the process he questioned the traditional uses of history and, at a fundamental level, social norms. His work challenges the sources and nature of knowledge and the intentions of those who claim to hold specialist knowledge.

Suspicious of all universal explanations and grand narratives, along with structures, theories and ideologies, Foucault's studies focused on 'regimes of practice' and the conditions which made particular practices acceptable in any given era. He hypothesised that:

> "... these types of practice are not just governed by institutions, prescribed by ideologies, guided by pragmatic circumstances ... but possess up to a point their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and reason" (Foucault 1991, p. 75).

In this respect, practice is recognised as the point of convergence of discourse, action, rules, rationales and plans. 'Regimes of practice' then comes to mean programmes of conduct which have normative effects: effects of jurisdiction, which prescribe what can be done; and effects of veridification which define and limit what can be known (ibid.). Analysis of regimes of practice is a process of tracing their origins, revealing the circumstances by which they come to be accepted as social and societal normalcy, and discovering the mechanisms by which they operate. The objective is to expose the interrelations of power, knowledge and discourse; and analysis operates at three levels (Foucault 1984c).

Archaeology aims to uncover the rules for the formation of discourse, which prescribe what may be known and what may be done at any given time. It examines the *a priori* conditions which allow that the same types of rules can operate simultaneously, across a

range of disciplines, giving rise to particular forms of thought and conceptions of 'the truth'. Genealogy takes a linear perspective, to understand how discursive practices come to be seen as normal or 'natural'. It looks beyond the rules of discursive formation to trace the descent of practices as a series of social phenomena. The third level, ethics[8], extends genealogy to examine the ways in which people constitute themselves as moral agents.

Where an analytical perspective revolves around a single personality, it is helpful to apprehend some of the influences on that individual's thinking, and a proper assessment of Foucault's work requires the recognition of the close relationship between the, apparently diverse, range of subject material and his personal experiences. Foucault was a 'draft-dodger' (avoiding conscription in 1951), a political activist, and a moving force in penal reform (Macey 1993), and his openly homosexual lifestyle led to his direct experience of psychiatry in the 1950s (Eribon 1991). His various works on, inter alia, the development of psychiatry, penal systems and the history of sexuality, form a less bizarre collection than first impressions would suggest. One should not suppose, however, that Foucault was necessarily anarchic or revolutionary. He has been variously described as 'anti-utopian' and neo-conservative (Flynn 1994), but also as a crypto-Marxist, being accused of KGB membership (Foucault 1984a). In at least one interview, however, Foucault (1975a) stresses the distance between his works and those of Marx, and points to some of his own research outcomes to demonstrate how revolution, alone, cannot change regimes of practice[9]. The underlying purpose of his work was not to reveal some arbitrary, superficial or precarious base for practices nor to find some weak point via which to direct an attack on the status quo. Rather, Foucault wanted to provide something more akin to a "topological and geological survey of the battlefield"[10], leaving the goals and tactics to those who want to fight (Foucault 1975a, p. 62)

The questions which emerge from such enquiries are uncomfortable, for, in order to understand the answers, readers must apply the same questions to their own knowledge, beliefs and value systems. That discomfort, though, is not necessarily negative for it can lead to a healthy scepticism which will protect the reader from the risks of gullibly accepting Foucault's eloquent (even poetic) explanations of knowledge as a social construct.

For Foucault there are many forms of knowledge, each of which is firmly enmeshed within the clash of power struggles, great and small, which make up the human world. It is not within the task of present-day philosophers to maintain the principles of the Enlightenment and of revolution as some ideal model, and Foucault denounces those thinkers who try to do so as 'being captives of the analysis (*Analytik*) of truth' (Habermas 1986, p. 107). Yet he presents these thinkers, along with himself (Florence 1994), as the 'legitimate heirs of Kantian critique' (Habermas 1986, p. 107). Kant's works offer a challenge to expound the 'will to knowledge' which, he asserts, was bound up in the enthusiasm for the French revolution and is subdued by the analysis of truth.

Traditionally, knowledge has been viewed as a defence against power, so the customary techniques of power have involved tools such as mystification and misinformation which can conceal the truth. Truth and knowledge have been considered as precious commodities protecting their possessors from abuses of power. Foucault, though, implicates them in power; at a discursive level where, through complex and anonymous interrelations, power defines knowledge and knowledge creates power (Apperley 1997).

Knowledge cannot be external to human struggles and neither can it offer a means of escape from the battle. The 'will to knowledge' in today's culture is simultaneously part

of the danger and a tool to combat that danger (Rabinow 1984, p. 5). In confronting these threats Foucault steadfastly refused to separate power and knowledge, to the point where he used the term Power/Knowledge to denote their co-existence within a single trajectory that subordinates humanness to the exigencies of the scientific knowledges, and the social practices developed around subjectivity.

Within Foucaultian ontology the fundamental concepts of power, knowledge and the subject of knowledge are closely related and intertwined. In order to appreciate the subtleties of Foucault's theses, those notions will now be anatomised and discussed individually.

Power

Foucault's concept of power is one of relationships (Foucault 1991). Power, in this sense, is not a commodity deriving from, and serving, the economy; but is artefactual (Osborne 1994). It cannot be possessed by, or embodied in, any individual, group nor institution; neither can it be used in the service of any individual, institutional or class objectives, for it is a product of relationships, practices and technologies[11] (Dean 1994). Where we recognise power in action as, for instance, in the relationship between sovereign and subject, what we observe is the result, rather than the cause, of the relationship:

> "In analysing power relations from the standpoint of institutions one lays oneself open to seeking explanation and the origin of the former in the latter ... One must analyse institutions from the standpoint of power relations and not vice versa." (Foucault 1983, p. 222)

Part of the purpose of research is to trace the relations of power in the minutiae of social and personal relationships where they are obscured by traditional theories, and to develop an analytic of power relations rather than a theory of Power (Foucault 1978, p. 82). So

Foucaultian analysis rejects, for example, the Marxist notion of power being represented within a class struggle suggesting, instead, that it was the need for social order – a power relation – that ultimately led to the creation of capitalism (Pasquino 1991). He answers critics, who see his outlook as pessimistically offering no escape from domination and loss of liberty (e.g. Habermas 1986; Taylor 1985), by asserting that power can only exist where there is freedom and choice (Foucault 1991; Hindess 1996). 'Power' where there is no freedom is domination.

For the analyst, though, there are problems in that Foucault defines power mainly in terms of what it is not, rather than what it is. The word, he claims, is only a shorthand for his usual term: the relationships of power. "In human relations, whatever they are ... power is always present" (Foucault 1991, p. 11). 'Power' is those relationships where one person wishes to direct the behaviour of another, and these relations can be found at all levels of society. It is curious that, elsewhere, Foucault is prepared to use neologisms to "avoid words that are already over-laden with conditions and consequences" (Foucault 1972, p. 38), yet he chooses not to do so with such an emotive term as power. Furthermore, Habermas (1986) points to a deep contradiction in that Foucault contrasts his critique of power with the 'analytik of truth', effectively circumventing any standards which the latter might exert on the former. Taylor (1985) also criticises Foucault for foreclosing his arguments.

Power relations are symbolised in Bentham's panopticon (Foucault 1977, p. 200*ff*). This architectural design for a prison comprised a central observation tower set within a ring of individual cells. Back lighting in the cell blocks, and the careful use of blinds and screens in the tower, ensured that prisoners could be constantly observed without seeing their observer. Additionally, and the 'beauty' of the design, prisoners could not see into the

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tower, so it was not necessary for the observer to be always present. Unable to know whether or not their gaolers were at their posts, prisoners had always to behave as if they were being watched, effectively becoming their own warders. Furthermore, the efficiency of the design, as a mechanism for power and control, meant that any shortcomings on the part of the 'governor' (e.g. riots or escapes) would be immediately apparent. So the design includes a system for observing the observers and controlling the controllers "It's a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those over whom it is exercised." (Foucault 1980a, p. 156)

Taylor (1985) believes that Foucault is unnecessarily pessimistic, describing a trap but offering no way out of it, nor the means of devising an escape. To Foucault, though, power not a possession, it is relational; it is exercised rather than held; and does not necessarily have a locus, being associated with practices, techniques and procedures. It is multi-dimensional, being employed at all levels, in all directions, and can be found in all social networks. Hence, power is ambiguous in its operation and can always be contested. Foucault holds that power needs resistance as one of the fundamental conditions of its operation. It is through the combination of points of resistance that power spreads through the social field. But it is also, of course, "through resistance that power is disrupted" (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, p. 147). Resistance takes as many diverse forms as power itself. Like power, resistance is mobile and transitory, and can be exercised by everyone. To talk of power and resistance becomes tautologous (Foucault 1989/96b), for they are reciprocal, co-requisite and co-existent, each providing the other with a focus (or multiple foci).

Power, then, cannot be described as an external force, operating on something or someone, but must be recognised within its relations. In this way the positive, creative aspects of

power can also be acknowledged; for power, to Foucault, while having a repressive role is also productive: "it produces reality; it produces domains of objects, and rituals of truth." (Townley 1994, p. 8). Thus power creates the framework of 'reality' through which social actors make sense of the world and their situation. This creative aspect of power ensures that the formation of knowledge cannot be neutral, but must be inextricably linked with the techniques and operations of power itself. "...knowledge is one of the defining components for the operation of power in the modern world" (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1983, p. 203). Hence Foucault comes to a point where, in describing the intricate web of relations between them, he is asserting that knowledge defines power but also that power produces knowledge.

Knowledge

Knowledge is impossible to define within Foucaultian epistemology as it is deemed to be a social construct which is located in time. Foucault's theory "undercuts the Enlightenment belief that truth is beyond the reach of power" (Apperley 1997, p. 16) as knowledge is seen to be established by power relations and upheld through the mechanisms of discourse. Here is a potential no-win situation for Foucault, for he proposes new 'truths'. If his theory is not convincing then he loses but, if truth and reason are simply the effects of power, then he loses again, "because he wants his theories to be accepted as truth. How can Foucault be true and history not be?" (Horrocks and Jetvic 1997, p. 169). Nevertheless, historical analysis of power has a key role in the research process in delimiting the cultural, chronological and geographical boundaries of knowledge.

Between different periods of history there were distinct shifts in conceptions of truth and knowledge which Foucault expounds in The Order of Things. There, he claims that the

modern empirical sciences of biology, linguistics and economics have more in common with other modern sciences than with the (apparently) corresponding classical sciences of natural history, grammar and the analysis of wealth. Using an ancient and exotic classification of animals as his exemplar, Foucault postulates that the ordering of: "belonging to the emperor; embalmed; tame; ... sirens; fabulous; ..." (Foucault 1970, p. xv) is absurd only because of the limits of our own way of thinking.

Such limits are determined by an unconscious grid, or network, which allows thoughts to organise themselves. That grid – the epistémé – limits all science, experience, knowledge, and notions of truth in a given era although, as O'Farrel (1989) emphasises, there is confusion over the periodisation of these eras. In the seventeenth century Cervantes' Don Quixote heralded the transition from the renaissance epistémé to the classical, when reason replaced representation as the basis for thought. Another shift, around the turn of the nineteenth century, saw the transformation to the modern epistémé which introduced 'man' as the subject of knowledge. Foucault acknowledges that some continuities persisted in despite of the overriding changes in the nature of knowledge, and recognises the possibility that (by his archaeological methods) previously unrecognised continuities might be discovered. However, new kinds of statements which, on the surface, appear to be "mere incremental additions to scientific knowledge" are only possible by epistemic transitions (Davidson 1986, pp. 223-4). Mendel's theory of genetic inheritance, for instance, could not have developed within the mysticism of the mediaeval epistémé. It needed the notion of a self-governing universe which came forth during the Enlightenment (the renaissance epistémé). Darwin's concept of evolution could not have occurred before Mendel, but, even so, his theory needed imaginary freedom and concepts of identity and difference; functions of the classical epistémé. Later, the modern epistémé produced the structuralist

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concerns of function and of disclosing the invisible, which allowed. the secrets of DNA to be sought, discovered and manipulated.

The framework which an epistémé presents needs to be in place before the possibility of some new object or concept can even be imagined.

> "[The epistémé] is what is required for us to comprehend the various attempts to construct the sciences of kinds of analyses that are able to reach elements of reality and kinds of calculations or combinations that make it possible to match ... the universalities of nature." (Cangulhem 1994, 67)

Multiple examples, from Newton's Principia Mathematica and Hobbe's philosophy, to the invention of the microscope, are held to produce evidence of the discontinuities which occurred; but the changing systems of thinking are secondary to what was happening to the nature of knowledge itself[12]. Because knowledge itself changes, the nature of the epistémé of a given era is not readily grasped by those who inhabit that time and think according to the rules of the epistémé. In an era that values scientific (i.e. logical rational) knowledge, it is difficult to image forms of knowledge that eschew a human reality, such as existed in previous eras. Yet, Foucault (1970) maintains the concept of human-ness is a product of the modern epistémé wherein Man (Foucault's term) is "defined as that entity for which representations of objects exist" (Gutting 1994, p. 11). Modern thought takes a dual concept of Man as both an experiencing subject through which the world is constituted[13] and an object of the world which can be made known.

This modern concept of Man, and the technologies by which Man can be known are the theme of the next section of the discussion.

Individuals are constituted as the objects of knowledge through three mechanisms – modes of: dividing practices, scientific classification, and what we might call self-subjectification.

Firstly, individuals are 'objectified' by processes of division exemplified in such practices as the isolation of lepers; confinement of the insane, the indigent and the criminal; and the proscription of social deviants. As human sciences (knowledge) became increasingly sophisticated, so dividing practices became more selective, efficient and acceptable (power). These dividing practices are similar in that, through the mediation of scientific knowledge, individuals are categorised as mad, bad or sick, and excluded from society, though not necessarily in a spatial manner, by reason of that categorisation.

In a related but independent manner, individuals are objectified by means of scientific classification[14]. According to the particular knowledge in operation, people will be classified in a manner which ignores their humanness. In a hospital we find ENT cases, geriatric cases, and such; in a factory, blue-collar and white-collar workers; and category A, B & C prisoners in a gaol. The criteria for such classifications appear to be 'common sense' or 'natural' within their own time but, Foucault asserted, progression and refinements of knowledge give rise to abrupt changes in concepts. For instance debt is no longer considered to be a criminal offence[15], so there is no class of prisoner labelled 'debtor'; likewise classifications of mental illness could only occur once the nature of psychiatric disorder(s) had become known. Foucaultian history emphasises those discontinuities in knowledges and, by combining them with the long continuities that occur within non-discursive practices, attempts to reveal the lack of legitimacy within discursive formations.

While dividing practices and various forms of classification act upon passive individuals, self-subjectification is the way in which people are active in constituting themselves as subjects of knowledge. The process operates through practices which people exercise on their own bodies, souls, thoughts and conduct (techniques of the self). Characteristically they entail processes of increasing self-understanding but that understanding is mediated by external authorities such as doctors, confessors, teachers and, even, television talk-show hosts.

These modes of objectification, though analytically distinguishable, are not easily separated but it is important that the relations between them are recognised. It is in combination that they transform the human individual into the subject of knowledge and the object of discursive and non-discursive practices. In the current epistémé, the systems of classification and division, and the 'techniques of the self' appear to be quite natural, or common sense, and here lies a problem (Taylor 1986). For as long as power is still described in terms of authority and obedience, its techniques cannot be recognised as a normalising, rather than legal, practice. Meanwhile, humankind's quest for knowledge virtually achieves the status of doctrine:

> "Where religions once demanded the sacrifice of bodies, knowledge now calls
> for experimentation on ourselves, calls us to the sacrifice of the subject of
> knowledge." (Foucault 1984b, p. 95)

A further purpose of Foucaultian analysis, then, is to "create a history of the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects" (Foucault 1984d, p. 208). The underlying imperative is to discover the power/knowledge relations of specific scientific disciplines and particular social practices; and to understand the plurality of roles that common sense uses as a benchmark against which to judge those practices.

Years after his death, contention over Foucault's theories and concepts continues. This philosopher who, allegedly, needed police officers to control overcrowding in his lectures, was never accepted by the orthodox philosophical community and, despite his loathing of such a label, Foucault's work is frequently rejected along with the corpus of all post-structuralist and postmodern writings. Yet, unconvinced by allegations that the work is overly pessimistic or 'self-indulgent radical chic' (Rorty 1986, p. 42), pockets of acceptance, even discipleship, have appeared. Seminar groups such as the 'History of the Present Research Network' have growing memberships; and well-respected organisation analysts, on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean are attempting to offer new insights into institutionalised practices through the application of Foucault's philosophies. References to Foucault are frequently found in academic journals, especially in relation to organisational analysis and labour studies, and even introductory textbooks are raising his theories before undergraduate and non-specialist readerships.

Such commentary is not, however, lacking in critical appraisal particularly in relation to the labour process debate. Within that context, Foucault's work is attacked for failing to found a proper theory of resistance (Thompson 1993; Thompson and Ackroyd 1995); for neglecting the possibility of a 'reasoning' subject (Newton 1998); for an absence of connection between power and subjectivity (Knights and Willmott 1989) and, particularly, for inadequately explaining how power relations are subjectively experienced and expressed (Collinson 1994). Other writers suggest that it is improper to draw comparisons between the carceral institutions, of Foucault's studies, and factory systems where there is supposedly some degree of voluntarism (Sewell and Wilkinson 1992).

The question of subjectivity is part of a wider debate among labour process theorists and Smith and Thompson have argued that the 'construction' of the missing subject is probably

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the greatest task facing labour process theory. Writers, since Braverman have tended, either to ignore the subject, or to treat subjectivity as "representing the productive and autonomous aspects of human existence, which are to be contrasted with the objective structures that constrain them" (Knights 1990, p. 303). Alternatively, some writers have tended to hold implicit assumptions about the subject, the individual involved in a collective class struggle, as, for instance Braverman's romanticised and self-directing artisan (Watson 1997). Where labour process theorists have tended to be somewhat short-sighted in their own consideration of 'the subject' (Knights 1995), criticism of Foucault's writings, which do not specifically address the labour process, seems to be rather sanctimonious. However there is some justification for claims that there has been "an absence of an adequate theorisation of the connectedness of power and subjectivity in the organisation of social life" (Knights and Willmott 1989, p. 52) and attempts are being made to redress the imbalance (e.g. Jermier et al 1994).

For Foucaultian analysts, subjectivity is inextricably linked to the concept and practices of power/knowledge, because the 'subject' is the creation of a particular discourse. As the individual is unaware of discourses in operation, Foucault was insistent that such operations should be the foci of investigations, rather than the subjective experience (e.g. Marsden 1993). In this respect, it can be contended that Marx and Foucault shared a methodological concern; for Marx presented his views on the development of capitalism in a way that demanded "that primary attention be given to the structure in order to uncover what has become obscured" (Knights 1995, p. 302).

Within the field of industrial sociology there has been an increasing interest in the rising tide of 'new' management practices that are aimed at increasing productivity and, it might be argued, control over labour and productive processes. Thompson and Ackroyd (1995, p.

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622) cite numerous examples of how analyses that "rely heavily upon Foucauldian conceptual props" have tended to overemphasise panoptic mechanisms and to marginalise "misbehaviour".

For writers who follow Braverman's thesis, the problem of control, by management, over the labour process is a central issue (Kitay 1999), and it is understandable that labour process theorists should be concerned about issues of resistance. However, it is entirely possible that criticism regarding the lack of a coherent theory of resistance stems, to some extent, from a misunderstanding about the reciprocal nature of power and resistance and of Foucault's insistence that the subject should not be the unit of analysis.

If, as Foucault asserts, power and resistance are inseparable then to seek a source of resistance (in opposition to power) is a form of dualism (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995, p. 624), where the two concepts are framed as dichotomous and resistance is expressed as a phenomenon that is distinct from, rather than a product of, power. Dualism can be a useful analytic device, however, as it enables the analyst to distinguish the reciprocal practices. Therefore, Thompson and Ackroyd's (1995) argument holds insofar that many analyses of workplace practices have elided the operation of resistance claiming, rather, that resistance has been effectively squeezed out by successive and successful managerial methods of control (e.g. Delbridge 1992; Sewell and Wilkinson 1992).

The ultimate outcome of such claims is expressed by Barker (1993, pp. 435-6) in terms of the 'iron cage' wherein workers "have harnessed themselves into a rational apparatus out of which they cannot squirm". This iron cage is constructed by a misplaced concept of knowledge being the property of one party or group (in this case management) so that the object (and subject) of knowledge is ignored, in a form of discursive closure (Thompson

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and Ackroyd (1995). Further, by framing practices in the language of the prison and in terms of docile obedience (Deetz 1998), Foucaultian analysts risk creating a new discourse, and a new version of reality, that reinforces the bars of the cage.

The danger of treating power as synonymous with control is undeniable, partly because of Foucault's failure to offer an alternative phraseology to describe power relations. Therefore, the criticism, that studies grounded in a Foucaultian ontology fail to provide a commentary on resistance, can be justified. To overcome such criticism it is essential that research, premised on a Foucaultian paradigm, recognises and describes the collateral operation of resistance *and* power. These operations are not so obscure as initial impressions might suggest but are apparent in the contradictions that social researchers have identified for many years. An example would be the insoluble paradox, evident in Kaizen (see chapters 6 and 7), wherein the 'get it right first time, every time' ideals of Total Quality Management sit alongside the 'Just do it' imperative of continuous improvement.

Foucault recognised that the construction of meaning is central to the sense we have of ourselves as individuals, but that that sense of 'subjectivity' is created as much outside individuals as inside. For Foucault knowledge *is* socially constructed and negotiated; it is symbolically constructed through discourse; it is historically constructed through style and genre; and, through its place in narrative of the past and future, it is sustained in discourses in the present.

Explanations of the nature of power, knowledge and the subject of knowledge can only provide a partial account of Foucault's various theses, for his propositions are principally concerned with the effects of power/knowledge. It is through the analytic devices of archaeology and genealogy that these effects can be apprehended. This discussion,

therefore, changes focus to examine these devices which, for want of a more appropriate nomenclature, might be called a methodology.

FOUCAULT'S METHODOLOGY

Michel Foucault was the first to admit that there is no such thing as a Foucaultian methodology. His work contains no fixed set of propositions but simply offers alternative approaches to problems and to the ordering of material. He saw the purpose of history as being to illuminate and comprehend the present; holding historians responsible for providing the instruments of analysis (Foucault 1975a, p. 62). Foucault's legacy is essentially a 'little box of tools' which the reader can use as they wish (Faith 1994, p. 37).

This box of tools (something of a misnomer) does not contain neatly labelled compartments, and there is no clear set of theoretical propositions. When Foucault began his earliest theses, he did not have well-defined formulae which were later applied to successive works. His 'methodology' was built up over many years and several studies, each work augmenting its predecessor. The result is a series of analytic practices which can be used individually or in combination to interrogate the past. Such inherent flexibility is appealing within critical investigations. It permits the researcher to consider what would be the best possible means to study a particular discourse or practice rather than being pre-emptively limited by paradigmatic constraints.

It is generally accepted that three periods can be identified within Foucault's work. The archaeological period is evident in the earliest works (Foucault 1967; 1970; 1972). The genealogical period emerges from those volumes, is most clearly evident in *Discipline and Punish*, and extends into later works. The ethical period, which covers the *History of Sexuality* series, is not easily discernible and appears to be less of a distinctive approach,

rather a closely focused application of genealogy. This discussion, therefore, concentrates

on the themes of archaeology and genealogy and, later turns to consider some of the

methodological issues raised by these forms of analysis.

Archaeology

Archaeology is the basic methodological process which underpins Foucaultian analysis.

The term is intended to convey the idea of uncovering layers of civilisation:

> "It is a dangerous word, for it seems to imply traces that have fallen outside
> time and are now frozen in silence. In fact, it is an attempt to describe
> discourses. Not books ..., not theories ..., but those familiar, yet enigmatic
> groups of statements that are known as medicine, political economy, and
> biology. I would like to show that these unities form a number of autonomous,
> but not independent, domains, governed by rules, but in perpetual
> transformation, anonymous and without a subject, but imbuing a great many
> individual works." (Foucault 1972, back cover)

The process began with Foucault's doctoral research (later published as Madness and

Civilisation) and was elucidated in The Archaeology of Knowledge, his major

methodological text. Successive works are reckoned to have demonstrated the sequential

stages of the process (McDonell 1987, Brodeur 1987) although the methods described in

The Archaeology of Knowledge are not readily apparent in prior writings without a

contrived reading (Gutting 1989).

Archaeology is an addition to the disciplines of grammar and logic in establishing the rules

of language, and an extension of the methods of epistemology. Where grammar defines the

conditions under which a statement is meaningful; and logic specifies what may, or may

not, be added to a given set of statements; archaeology attempts to distinguish the rules

about what may and may not be said within a given sphere of knowledge. These are the

rules of discursive formation. While epistemology explores the nature of knowledge and its

linguistic formation in a given society, archaeology analyses the transformations of the fields of knowledge; the shifts in regimes of discursive practice, and the resulting changes in their effects of veridification (what may be known). We might say that archaeology is the means to discovering how notions of truth change over time, and how these variations become established as 'truth'.

The focus of analysis is the statement [*énoncé*]. This may be defined as a verbal performance, although the laws of the primacy of speech and the historical nature of these studies allow that it will often be part of a written document. It may even be pictorial, such as a diagram or graph (Burrell 1988; Foucault 1972). A statement can be seen as an object in its own right, which has a specific intrinsic organisation. That is not to suppose that a statement will have a grammatical structure, in the way that a sentence would; nor does it imply any logically correct form. A statements is:

> "a function of existence that properly belongs to signs and on the basis of which one may then decide, through analysis or intuition, whether or not they 'make sense', according to what rule they follow one another or are juxtaposed, of what they are a sign, and what sort of act is carried out by their formulation ... [It is] not in itself a unit, but a function that cuts across a domain of structures and possible unities, and which reveals them, with concrete contents in time and space." (Foucault 1972, pp. 86-87)

It is also an event governed by a set of historical rules.

> "No-on can say just anything about anything whatsoever at any given time. Every statement that has appeared, appeared when it did and where it did, within the series of statements because a set of a priori conditions which ... are historical." (McDonell 1987, p. 543)

A collection of statements which are made possible by the same historical conditions (their historical a priori) is deemed to be a discourse. Examples would include a scientific text or a business plan. The rules governing the existence of the statement are the same rules

which govern the practice and formation of the discourse. Sets of discourses which obey the same set of rules become discursive formations.

> "Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion [the same theme in different types of statement], whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can find regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a discursive formation – thus avoiding words that are already overladen with conditions and consequences ... The conditions to which the elements of this division (objects, modes of statement, concepts, thematic choices) are subjected we shall call the rules of formation. The rules of formation are conditions of existence (but also of co-existence, maintenance, modification, and disappearance) in a given discursive division." (Foucault 1972, p. 38)

Archaeology, then, identifies and defines discursive formations, and expounds their historical a priori – the rules of discursive formation – and describes the relations between them. It notes how such rules appear, simultaneously, in many different disciplines at certain points in history (Foucault 1989/96a).

There are four groups of rules which determine, respectively, the formation of objects, enunciative modalities (types of statement), concepts and strategies (thematic choices).

The object is what a statement is about, but it is not the same as the grammatical subject. Within any statement there will be a range (the referential) of possible objects. This referential is created by the relations between social and political institutions, forms of behaviours, systems norms, and forms of classification and characterisation. Those relations provide the conditions which permit a given referential and, by extension, a specific object to emerge at a particular point in time.

An example might be the term 'crime'. That is the referential which allows objects such as theft, murder or fraud to exist. The notion of crime is created by the relations between, inter alia, the institutions and concepts of law, society, citizenship, sanctity of life and

ownership. If we consider a time before the idea of ownership existed, the referential of crime (in the form which it had at that time) could not have held, within its domain, the object of theft. Consequently, there could be no discourses on theft, and no-one could have been identified as a thief. That object (theft) could only emerge when historical conditions permitted its existence. Nevertheless, the conditions which allowed 'theft' to exist as an object are not part of 'theft' itself and are not employed when the notion of 'theft' is analysed[16].

In examining the formation of the objects of a discourse, the archaeologist is attempting to locate the relations which are characteristic of a discursive practice – not a linguistic or semiotic study of the word that is spoken, but a study of "practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972, p. 49)

The study of practices will also establish the relations which lead to the acceptability of ranges of statements within a discursive formation. It is these relations that:

> "characterise and individualise the co-existence of dispersed and heterogeneous forms of statement ... that govern their division, the degree to which they depend upon one another, the way in which they interlock or exclude one another, the transformation that they undergo, and the play of their location, arrangement and displacement." (Foucault 1972, p. 34)

Close examination of discursive formations will reveal a succession of concepts emerging over time. Discourses develop by taking up notions from other disciplines. In some cases new knowledges come to be formed by the merging of objects and concepts from diverse, even incompatible, fields e.g. geophysics or psychophysiology. At other times the same sets of rules can allow competing or contradictory themes to emerge, such as Ricardian and Marxist economics. Analysis of the rules for the formation of 'strategies' will disclose how

thematic choices are made, within a discourse, to establish the truth of one theme over another.

It was from such analysis that the conception of the epistémé was formed. However, epistemic shifts and the rules of discursive formation are not, in themselves, sufficient to explain the human sciences as practices performed upon their subjects. To do that, a broader methodology was required which could trace the descent of those practices through history, along with the discourses which supported and condoned them. Within that form of analysis (genealogy), archaeology became a means, rather than the end, to uncovering the conditions which made regimes of practice acceptable or even normal (Flynn 1994).

Genealogy

Over the course of his works, Discipline and Punish and History of Sexuality Vol. I., Foucault developed genealogy, building on the work of Neitzche. This is a form of history which attempts, not to reconstruct the past, but to understand the present by uncovering its traces in the past. The genealogist examines social phenomena which are taken for granted (such as the imprisonment of criminals) by treating them as if they were strange, and searching for the superficial and unexpected details in its descent into present-day practice. Of particular interest are the 'subjugated knowledges'. These are the knowledges held by the low-ranking or unqualified (even disqualified), and the popular knowledges [*le savoir des gens*] of local and regional origins. Foucault includes, also, the 'buried knowledges of erudition' (Foucault 1980d), those scholarly works which were never accepted by the scientific community because of their contention or criticism of established discourses.

"If the genealogist refuses to extend his(sic) faith in metaphysics, if he listens to history, he finds that there is 'something altogether different' behind things: not a timeless and essential secret, but the secret that they have no essence or that their essence was fabricated in a piecemeal fashion from alien forms." (Foucault 1984b, p. 78)

Genealogy is then a counter-history which is concerned with knowledges that oppose the effects of centralised powers that are linked to the "institutions and functioning of and organised scientific discourse" (Foucault 1980d, p. 84). Foucault maintains that knowledge has an inherent politics which administers the relations of power. When knowledge is analysed "in terms of region, domain, implantation, displacement, transposition" (Foucault 1980c, p. 69) it is possible to recognise the processes whereby knowledge functions as power and disseminates the effects of that power.

While Foucault was surely inspired by Neitzche's work, Dean (1994) suggests that it would be a mistake to the read that influence as methodology, for it simply provided insight into critical problems. Even so, it is difficult to reconcile that influence with Foucault's reliance on conventional histories to provide the source material for his genealogical works. Another obvious influence came from the Annales group of historians. From such scholars as LeRoy-Laudrie and Braudel, Foucault derived the notion of eventalisation. In their turn, later historians, notably Chartier, accepted Foucault's criticism that historians had a 'meagre idea of the real' and explored the link between history and power (Burke 1990).

Speaking with the benefit of hindsight, Foucault (1984c, p. 351ff) identifies three pivots for genealogy. He claims that they were all present "albeit in a confused fashion" even in his earliest work, Madness and Civilisation.

The first is the truth axis, "an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to truth" through which people are defined as the subjects of knowledge. It was the focus of *The Order of*

Things and *Archaeology of Knowledge*, and might therefore, be seen as the archaeological aspect of genealogy. Our knowledge though is bound up in a power field. If we are to understand the purpose and use of knowledges we must also appreciate the technologies of power. There is, then, a power axis – "an historical ontology of ourselves in relation to given fields of power". This is the mode by which individuals are constituted as subjects acting upon others. From his retrospective viewpoint, Foucault asserts that the necessary focus on the practices and relations of power, control and their co-requisite, resistance, inevitably leads to a history of morals. Consequently, the third domain for genealogy is the ethical axis: an ontology of the mechanisms through which individuals constitute themselves as moral agents. While the truth and power axes contain concepts of how individuals are acted upon by others, the ethical axis concentrates on what people do to themselves. Such was the emphasis of the tightly focused, and much criticised, *History of Sexuality* volumes.

The published works from the *History of Sexuality* series presented a genealogy of the relations between the subject and 'truth', examining how the individual, as the subject of knowledge, could become an object within truth games. The later writings have been subject to accusations of not living up to the promises of A History of Sexuality, Volume One (Davidson 1986). To a large extent this is so, but the changes reflect Foucault's flexibility and his willingness to adapt his approach in the light of emergent findings, to make "each theoretical position a way station rather than a final destination" (McKinlay and Starkey 1998b, p. 5). Within the bounds of certain methodological considerations, which are discussed next, a Foucaultian analyst has the freedom to contrive, adapt and experiment with research methods in order to expose the rules, technologies and effects of power/knowledge.

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In Florence (1994), which is understood to have been authored by Foucault (Gutting 1994, p. viii), the History of Sexuality series is used as a thread to trace the methodological issues within Foucaultian analysis.

The first of these issues relates to Foucault's scepticism towards 'universal truths'. While he did not claim that they should be dispensed with entirely, they should only be allowed if they are seen to be indispensable, having been subjected to rigorous testing and analysis ('Florence' 1994). Foucault's reaction to grand theories is not refutation but 'historicization', subjecting them to the same forms of analysis as he applied to the practices of the human sciences. Smart (1983) points out, however, that Foucault uses the works of Marx and Marxists as a constant reference point. Foucault admits that he frequently makes references to Marx's works, often without acknowledgement: "One might even wonder what difference there can be between being a historian and being a Marxist" (Foucault 1980b, p. 53).

Like empirical scientists, Foucault changes why questions into how questions, in order to examine the social functions that concepts, such as truth, justice and health, and including grand theories, have played within the context of 'practices' (e.g. politics, economics and law). He drew distinctions between the operating categories, utilised by specific disciplines at particular historical times, and the 'broad conceptual markers' which he saw as having little if any, effect on the changes occurring within scientific disciplines (Rabinow 1984).

"Foucault's work reached far beyond the insular world of academic philosophy and even beyond the academy." (Jones 1993, p. 438). As a result this is an approach which brings the Foucaultian analyst into direct conflict with the 'academic endeavour' and Apperley

(1997) suggests that many have found it impossible to continue working in universities and similar organisations. Foucault was ever ready to challenge received opinion and to offer hypotheses which invited debate. This led him along uncertain paths which were subject to change between his successive works (Burrell 1988), although whether this is viewed as inconsistency or flexibility becomes a matter of personal interpretation.

Linked to the first, the second issue is the overturning of orthodox philosophical procedure. This is a philosophy that emphasises practices, by which objects are constituted by immanent domains of knowledge. The focus of any derived study must, then, be the practices themselves rather than the objects of knowledge upon which the practices operate. This is not to behave as if the subject does not exist, nor to set the subject aside in the pursuit of some pure objectivity.

Many readers have a problem with this concept because to allow that it is the discourses and practices which constitute the subject, then we must deny human agency in establishing the discourse. Discourse, though can only be a human artefact. A circular argument thus develops, where Foucault seems to be saying that the discourse, which is constructed by individuals, in its turn constructs those same individuals. However, the analysis is intended to cut such a Gordian knot by illuminating the dialectic processes and experiences by which "subject and object form and transform themselves in relation to, and as functions of, one another" ('Florence' 1994, p. 317).

Hence the proper domain of analysis is the practices themselves, and this is Foucault's third methodological principle. The angle of approach is to ask "What was done" in respect of the subjects of knowledges: prisoners, patients, or workers. This focus on practices "that are more or less regulated and more or less conscious, more or less goal-oriented"

('Florence 1994, p. 318) allows the analyst to apprehend what was deemed to be 'real' by those who were attempting to conceptualise and govern that reality; and how those same people could constitute themselves as the possessors of knowledge – knowledge which they could possess, analyse, manipulate and modify. It is thus that the links between power, knowledge and the subject are revealed. Analysis of practices, aligned with Foucault's concepts of power relations, reveals the ways in which people 'govern' one another and themselves, and how certain patterns of governance allow the subject to be objectified.

While archaeology and genealogy are important, in that they offer alternative readings of history, they are supplements to, not substitutes for, standard histories. The aim is not a reconstruction of the past, but a selective and flexible exposition of those aspects of the past which can enhance our understanding of present circumstances. However, the converse of flexibility is uncertainty. For an ingenuous researcher that uncertainty is profound, leading to a search for a set of research methods that can be applied to a given study. However, as the next section reveals, that set of methods does not exist.

FOUCAULTIAN 'METHODS'

Within the corpus of his works, the source materials for a 'Foucaultian method' are unspecified and, as Gutting (1994, p. 14) states, "Foucault's distinctiveness as a historian lies less in his invention of new methods than in his willingness to employ whatever methods seem required by his specific subject matter". His limited exposition of methodology and method seems to indicate that the researcher can use any data which provide insights to what was said and what was done regarding the practice under scrutiny.

What is clear, is that evidence should derive from the subjugated knowledges which may be found in all manner of documentary and literary material as well as in popular culture and

oral records. Within historical archives, where written documents are the main source of evidence, we must acknowledge that most 'subjugated knowledges' will be absent (Burgess 1982a). It is only during the twentieth century that literacy has become widespread; and the technologies which allow other forms of record making have only become available within living memory.

The starting point for a 'history of the present' is the contemporary problem ('Florence' 1994). It is from this perspective that multiform liaisons and connections should be traced in order to comprehend the emergence of practices, power/knowledge and truth.

Accuracy is not a central concern, in the same way that it would be in conventional historiography (Gutting 1994)[17]. Legends and myths, and even repartee, serve to illuminate the systems of thought and discursive formations that were operating to sanction a particular practice at a specific time. Reliability cannot be a problem within this paradigm, for it is subject 'errors' and 'biases' that provide the insights so vital to the analysis. Likewise, validity is not an issue here: as that involves judgements about truth and, in the Foucaultian epistemology, truth is a temporally located, social construct. However, no historical evidence should be taken at face value as, for Foucault, all history is culturally fabricated (Jones & Porter 1994). Here, what is more important is the analytical approach which Foucault (1991) described as eventalisation.

Eventalisation

Eventalisation operates on two levels. The first is to concentrate on a single aspect of what appears to be an historical constant, a trait or uniformity, and to show how "things weren't as necessary as all that" (Foucault 1991, p. 76). This is to dispute and analyse the self-evidence on which knowledges and practices rest. Secondly, eventalisation means

rediscovering the mechanisms by which that apparent self-evidence became established. The aim is to break the causal link by viewing the event as a 'polyhedron' rather than as a single link in a chain of development. This is a process of 'causal multiplication' (ibid.) wherein the multiple processes which constituted the 'event' are systematically examined.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault cited the practice of penal incarceration as an 'event'. Eventalisation involved tracing all the processes which led to carceral practices and to subject each of those processes to similar analysis. That is the genealogical processes which leads to the construction of an evolutionary map (in the Darwinian sense) of the descent of practices. Archaeological analysis, at various stages, then provides an 'increasing polymorphism' as the analysis progresses through the manifold elements which are brought into relation, the relations described, and the domains of reference identified.

A cautionary note, here, is the need to avoid the temptation of explaining events through reason alone. Reason is part of power/knowledge and 'rational' explanations will result in events being explained only in terms of themselves. The axes of interpretation are codification (or prescription), and truth formulation. On the one hand there is a need to demonstrate how a given 'event' forms an aggregate of rules, procedures and praxis; and, on the other, to expose the means by which it formulates domains of objects upon which judgements of truth or fallacy can be predicated. In other words, eventalisation is the method which reveals the 'effects of jurisdiction' and the 'effects of veridification' of practices.

Analysing Practices

In his discussion of Foucault's 'fieldwork in philosophy', Rose (1994) argues that archaeology and genealogy are fundamentally processes of deconstruction; although the

target is practices rather than language. He suggests that the human sciences (medicine in his example) are "constituted by a series of associations between different events distributed along a number of different dimensions, with different histories, different conditions of emergence" (Rose 1994, p. 50), and offers several elements which can traced through analysis of source materials.

DIVIDING PRACTICES are those modes that legitimise and delimit knowledges by distinguishing (to use Rose's example): sickness from health, mental illness from crime, madness from sanity. Within this study we would need to consider the practices which distinguish management from production, operations from strategy, and planning from implementation. Alongside these, thorough analysis would identify the specific issues to which practices address themselves. These "problematisations of existence" (Foucault 1985, pp. 14-24), such as productivity, efficiency and quality may take one of four forms:

— A fear of harm to society or to the group.

— An ideal of conduct that manifests virtue, self-mastery and/or moral courage.

— An image, based on stereotype, or stigmata that is deemed to be offensive to the 'natural' order.

— A model of abstention that demonstrates self-discipline and, hence, the right to hold sway over the behaviour of others.

In each case they are themes, whose origins are long-forgotten, that have been perpetuated throughout history and which form the bases for practices.

The distinctive value of analysing dividing practices is to locate and describe the processes that produce people and populations as the objects of expert (managerial, within the context

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of this study) attention, and which separate them from those which would be the focus of other authorities such as education, law and medicine.

ASSEMBLAGES. The second arena for analytical attention is the combination of spaces, and techniques within which the practice has been deployed. A study of management, for instance, could not be limited to the factory or office but must include considerations of wider social apparatuses such as the home, the law, the school and welfare systems. These apparatuses, which Foucault called *dispotifs*, can be recognised in five broad areas:

— Administrative apparatus, such as factories and hospitals, for regulating social space so as to allow the operation of practices.

— The transformation of the home and the family into a machine for the service of the practices.

— The staffing of the population in the form of specialists and other agents.

— The varieties of organisations in which the practices function.

— The apparatus of security which enable individuals and societies to protect themselves against perceived risks.

EXPERTISE. This third arena for attention is that of various forms of knowledge and skills within the specific practice and specifically involves all types of specialist practitioners who make a business out of their science. Over time different groups of experts will have emerged, from monks and gypsies to Nobel prize winners, each with different agendas and modes of operation. Foucaultian analysis involves the examination of their various rivalries, divisions of labour and the diverse forms of legitimacy that each group has claimed.

TECHNOLOGIES are the fourth focus of analysis. Examination of technologies is not the same as a study of techniques, but is a comparative analysis of relationships and the technical forms through which practitioners enact their business. The implication is that various forms of relationship between practitioner and subject, which are distinguished by their various settings, influence the practices of human sciences. These relations empower practitioners by endowing various responsibilities upon them, dependent on the setting. They locate the subject in varying relationships to the processes of decision-making and activity; and demand that subjects constitute themselves in particular, manifold ways. So, we might include here the 'technologies of the self', those processes of self-subjectification by which individuals label and constitute themselves in those relations.

STRATEGIES. Finally, there is a need to appreciate the strategic dimensions of practices. These are the various activities by which specialists have established themselves and their knowledges. These will include the means whereby political tasks and objectives have been specified in vocabularies; and the various forms in which practices and knowledges are enacted

Data analysis within the Foucaultian paradigm is a reflexive activity, focused on the discourses and practices of a particular theme, (say, quality, to take an example from the cases in the study). The primary device is the discursive analysis of what the are participants' own versions of their personal realities. This is not the content analysis of positivist research nor the documentary studies favoured by, for instance, humanistic researchers but is a form of analysis that follows and develops the critical approach (Jupp & Norris 1993). In the Foucaultian paradigm, the discourse is the phenomenon under investigation, being the means by which power/knowledge and resistance are exercised. Discourses must be analysed in terms of different stages of history, the social relations

prevailing at those points, and in comparison to the alternative discourses which are operating at the same time (McDonnell 1986).

The principal source materials are the statements (in their variety of forms), collected through interviews and documents, which describe the ways in which quality is practised both within and beyond the factory. What was not said is as important as the words that were spoken. (Viands do not, for instance, use their product quality as a marketing feature.) Practices of control are also subject to analysis (quality control in that example) – and these are frequently present in some documentary form – for these are the dividing practices, assemblages, technologies and strategies which give focus to eventalisation.

Clearly, Foucaultian analysis is a massive undertaking, "at once too much and too little" (Foucault 1991, p. 78). It is neither an historical study nor a sociological project, but an attempt to illuminate the present by tracing contemporary problems to their historical antecedents. Foucault offers no original methods for the study of knowledge although his philosophy overturns conventional wisdom by questioning universal truths and by focusing on practices rather than on individuals or institutions.

SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the variety of research that may be described as, discourse analysis. The variety of analyses and definitions of discourse reflect a diversity of social sciences that are interested in how language may be acquired and used, or in its impact upon social structures and behaviour. While linguistic studies have limited sociological value, those disciplines that operationalise discourse in a wider sense have contributed to a clearer understanding of the inter-relations between discourse and social practice.

Within Foucaultian ontology 'discourse' refers to a range of social practices and ideas, rather than simply language, that construct meaning. Foucault recognised that the construction of meaning is central to the sense we have of ourselves as individuals, but that that sense of 'subjectivity' is created through the effects of, mutually constitutive, power and knowledge. The purpose of Foucaultian analysis is to apprehend those effects through two principal analytic techniques. Archaeology identifies the rules of discursive formation to describe how knowledges are established; while genealogy traces the descent of practices, revealing how individuals are constituted as the subjects of knowledge. This approach is fundamentally historical is order to understand the present in terms of its antecedents.

The Foucaultian paradigm rejects dogma and grand theories. It allows for flexibility in the choice of research methods, providing a freedom for the analyst to utilise whatever methods might prove to be useful in uncovering the technologies of power/knowledge and the descent of discursive practices. The next chapter of this report will describe the range of qualitative techniques that were utilised in this discursive (Foucaultian) analysis of managerial decision making.

NOTES

1 Kress (1985) suggests that these forms of investigation should be distinguished by using the term 'text' for the unit of analysis, saving 'discourse' to describe larger linguistic units, that occur above the level of the sentence or clause (see also Budd and Raber 1996, Van Dijk 1985a).

2 From such research, Corsaro (1985) asserts, has come a realisation of the limits of autonomous rule systems for the study of discourse; that such rules have been derived from some imagined context or tacit knowledge of social structure that transcend the level of abstraction expressed within a given model. Although this project does not specifically address the issue, similar phenomena may be demonstrable within the study of rule systems in decision making. A future research agenda is indicated.

3 This approach is a methodology of social psychology, based upon the argument that the discipline has been held back because its key data (the elements of language) are capricious and, as they construct reality, may vary according to the purpose of talk.

4 The original study was undertaken in China and much of the interpretation is extrapolated to the English speaking situation. The analysis is, however, supported uses secondary analysis of European and US studies and is supported by accepted theory.

The study demonstrates that, the choice of language might sometimes signal a clear choice to an employee, but more often invites the employee to participate in the decision making process by amending, rather than substituting the managers' original decision.

5 Saussure (1970) discerned that meaning is generated through the relationship between the linguistic sign (the signifier) and the concept that it represents (the signified). That relationship is not readily apparent at the level of the vocabulary (Pettit 1975) but must be detected by de-familiarising and analysing language synchronically rather than diachronically; by examining the language system (*la langue*) rather than the individual speech act (*la parole*).

6 The influence of structuralism grew to embrace fields as diverse as mathematics and literary criticism (Lane 1970) but was seen by many of its early proponents to become part of the intellectual orthodoxy which they had set out to challenge.

7 The inaccessibility of postmodern and post-structuralist writings might also be adjudged a discursive practice, in the Foucaultian sense, which is worthy of further research.

8 Foucault's theories of ethical development were still being developed at the time of his premature death. The promised History of Sexuality, Volume 4 was never published (which does not indicate that it never will be) and, according to his biographers (Eribon 1991; Macey 1993) indicates a new direction in genealogy of ethics.

9 In this respect his view is not novel, as Trotsky (1931) was aware: "The conquest of power by the proletariat in backward Russia flows inexorably from the correlation of forces in the bourgeois revolution. What further economic prospects will be opened by the dictatorship of the proletariat depends upon the domestic and world conditions under which it is inaugurated. It goes without saying that Russia cannot arrive at socialism independently".

10 The geographical metaphor is an apt descriptor of discourse for, as Ahrne (1990 p. 26) declares, topology is important as "in a landscape there are certain kinds of terrain. The terrain keeps objects together ... to know the terrain is extremely important in order to be able to orient oneself in the social landscape", while geology explains how those various forms of terrain developed.

11 This parallels with Weber's definition of power as arising from a set of factors "the valuation of a system unit according to the common value system, the feasibility of enforcing those standards without the use of sanctions, and the control of possessions" (Brennan 1997, p. 75). It opposes the Marxist concept of power being embedded in social structure. For Foucault there is an intimate relationship between power and liberty (Hindess 1996)

12 In the renaissance/classical shift, for instance, all knowledges came to rely on a science of order, rather than on 'systems of interpretations of occult signs and the hidden signatures of God' (Cangulhem 1994.).

13 As opposed to the creature of some divine super-being that has made the world to be as it is.

14 A residue of the Classical epistémé prevails in the form of classification and taxonomia (verbal tables) and through measurement and mathesis (numerical tables) that create a form of order through which individuals, and groups of individuals can become known – and thus disciplined and policed (Foucault 1977). For instance insects (taxonomy) have six (mathesis) legs thus insects may be recognised, or known, by the number of legs. Examples of taxinomia and mathesis operating in employing organisations (from Townley 1994) include job analysis, performance appraisal and salary scales.

15 With the exception of debts to the State.

16 If we allow that epistemic shifts occurred at different times in other cultures (Foucault is silent on this matter) it is easier to establish parallels. For instance, a point of contention for the Kikuyu peoples of colonial Kenya was the notion of common ownership (Kenyatta 1938). While the indigenous population regarded common land as belonging to everybody, so that nobody had the right to sell it, the colonial powers understood that it belonged to no-one in particular and could, therefore, be gifted to immigrants.

17 The imperative to accuracy and reliability in research, notwithstanding Foucault's view, is acknowledged. These issues are discussed, with particular reference to the current study in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4: Investigating Decisions – Methods of Enquiry

While post-structuralism provides a wide-ranging epistemological critique of how discourse works, Foucault carefully avoided offering more than broad theoretical directions for the study of discourse in specific contexts. This chapter explains how the Foucaultian theories, that were described in the last chapter, were applied within this study.

Within a multiple case study strategy, three manufacturing companies were studied using various qualitative methods which had been tested during a pilot study. A brief account of these three companies is offered here, as more specific details are included in the reports of the individual cases (Chapters 5, 6 and 7). Evidence was gleaned from the companies through observation, questioning and the study of various available documents, and this account discusses the various techniques that were employed to compile the range of material that formed the basis of archaeological and genealogical analysis. There were, inevitably, ethical concerns that arose in the course of the case studies, and these are discussed under the heading of 'methodological issues', as are considerations regarding reliability and validity. The final section reflects on the analysis of data which, although it might be more appropriately placed after the presentation of the evidence, is included here so that the narrative should not be disrupted.

The question of how to collect, read and interpret discourses, and how to analyse and situate their power relations is complex. Throughout the corpus of his works Foucault eschews reference to any particular techniques for the collection of evidence, however his various writings demonstrate how, as his enquiries were developed over time, his approaches were adjusted to accommodate changing perceptions and new insights. This flexibility and adaptability, that is the enduring strength of Foucault's approach to the

study of social phenomena, also generates uncertainty, leaving the reader to devise a set of methods that are appropriate to the situation under investigation. The only certainty is that Foucault's studies took an historical perspective and that they involved the collection of statements which could be subjected to the particular forms of analysis, known as archaeology and genealogy.

Given that general silence, any researcher who attempts similar forms of analysis must, clearly, devise their own systems for the collection and recording of evidence. There is still a deal of contention about the value of Foucaultian studies, and within the business community research by such means is still in its infancy. As the form of analysis is relatively novel, and in the absence of specific guidelines within the methodology, it was reasoned that the methods used to collect evidence should have an accepted basis if the research is to be seen as credible. Within the current study a range of techniques were adopted from the fields of ethnography, historiography, business history and grounded theory, within a case study strategy. This multiplicity of methods, increases the prospect of gaining access to some of the subjugated knowledges, as well as the recorded histories, of the companies under investigation.

THE CASE STUDY STRATEGY

The purpose of this study was to explore and describe situations which have been, and are, beyond the control of the researcher. No single set of outcomes could be expected or predicted. Therefore, and in keeping with the Foucaultian and interpretative paradigms, the methods selected needed to be sufficiently adaptable to allow for different techniques and forms of approach to be included, if necessary, as the study developed.

The overarching design for the study was a multiple case study. Using three companies situated in the South West of England it was intended that each study, here, should have

the potential to stand alone as a piece of social research, but that the three studies could be subject to comparative analysis for the purpose of generating theory (Yin 1994; Glaser and Strauss 1967). The multiple case study is not so much a technique, as a strategy (Hartley 1994; Hammersley 1992) for the collection of evidence and the observation of a phenomenon in its everyday context. As Yin (1994) argues, in case studies the context can become a deliberate part of the design so that the complex interaction of manifold variables can be observed, allowing the researcher to capture something of the 'rich quirky messiness' (Bryman 1988b) of the real situation. Research design involves balancing the advantages and limitations of particular strategies. Case studies brings difficulties, but not impossibilities (Hammersley 1992), in generalising findings and conclusions, and in the identification of causal relationships. Conversely, they have the advantage of being able to combine an assortment of methods within a single study, which can be conducted within various time frames, to explore diverse characteristics and social processes in context and in depth (Hartley 1994).

As a first stage to the research, a preliminary study was conducted to assess the feasibility of the chosen methods, and to identify potential problems in the design and implementation of the study. Regardless of some disappointments encountered during its execution, the feasibility study served its purpose well, revealing the full scope and complexity of the original research design.

Pilot Study

Rather naively, the pilot study had begun with the expectation of being able to investigate some ready-made discourse, and to access a substantial archive of company documents. Almost inevitably, it now seems, evidence was not so easily accessible. Arranging visits to the factory site was straightforward, and senior managers were

receptive and co-operative, often introducing other contacts such as retired colleagues. However it was limited co-operation, in that they were resistant to broadening discussions to include, for instance, human resource issues or relations with customer organisations.

Documentation was found not to be easily accessed, or even located. There is no requirement on commercial companies to maintain historical archives, and few records are held in the public domain. Contemporary records, such as board minutes were considered to be commercially sensitive and, therefore, were not made available for scrutiny. A range of alternative documents was, however, available from unconventional sources such as company newspapers, posters and advertising material and, despite their managerial focus, these yielded valuable insights into the culture operating inside the company. An important obstacle, for a project taking a Foucaultian approach, was the lack of 'subjugated knowledges'. Opportunities for in-depth conversation with staff members could be brief and scarce. Where there is no trade union operating within a company, as is becoming increasingly commonplace, access to alternative stories is reduced. In the absence of such resources, the pilot study demonstrated that a prolonged period of investigation would be needed to permit a wide range of contacts and, thus, glean some of the 'unqualified or disqualified' accounts which are at the heart of Foucaultian studies.

The pilot study revealed that, at a personal level, I was prone to over-identify with the perceptions and experiences of the first group with which I had contact. Where I had met with employees and had heard complaints, ideas and comments, I became sceptical of managers' accounts for I had also been a junior within my various employments and could identify with the view that managers did not really understand how the job was done. While that perspective will represent some of the subjugated knowledge, which

Foucault advocates as a primary source, it does not adequately incorporate the heterogeneous groups which comprise the organisation. Likewise, when I spoke with managers, their views and problems coloured my perception of what employees told me. I have been a middle-line manager and am aware of the stresses of that role and how easily the behaviour and comments of employees can appear to be unreasonable. Clearly this was a problem which I needed to resolve (or utilise) within the main study. The major tools for this came through the research design, by prior research on the development of the companies and by planning interview topic guides before any investigation had begun. I resolved that the full study should intersperse the various methods of investigation in order to avoid an overly partisan view. Additionally, having become aware of the problem I was able to use it to advantage so that whatever I saw, read or was told, I could consider the opposing view.

Undertaking a comprehensive business historical study, as well as discursive analysis of a range of business decisions soon proved to be an overwhelming task. It was resolved that the main study should concentrate on a discrete decisional theme within each of the subject companies, rather than attempt the massive project of a full, genealogical counter-history of one business. Time constraints meant that there was an inevitable overlap between the three cases under investigation. The themes of quality, employee participation, and Kaizen were agreed with managers during the initial approach to each company, and were easily communicated between researcher and informants. It was expected that, through archaeological and genealogical analysis, it could be demonstrated that they operated as discourses, by serving to generate, re-create and maintain the culture of the respective organisations through changes in power relations, practices and language.

It is clear that the time and resources devoted to a pilot study were a worthwhile investment. Difficulties encountered during the course of that study highlighted weaknesses within the original proposal that could be amended to produce a more robust doctoral project. Nevertheless, the investigative process produced many and varied points of interest along with a wealth of evidence which is clearly amenable to Foucaultian forms of discursive analysis.

PARTICIPATING COMPANIES

For this study it was important that the managers of companies involved appreciated the exploratory nature of the research and were willing to co-operate in a project which offered little in return for their contribution. To facilitate the comprehensive collection of evidence, and to provide for the validation of analysis and interpretations of that evidence, several visits were needed. It was essential, therefore, that the company could tolerate repeated enquiries. It is gratifying to note that there are companies which were sufficiently altruistic as to accommodate research for its potential value to the wider business community, and were prepared to tolerate the researcher's inquiries into various aspects of their organisation.

While the received wisdom of social research suggests that participants should be selected by overtly 'objective' methods, the pragmatics of operating within a commercial environment dictate that the process is much more opportunistic (Buchanan et al.1988). Initial approaches were made via contacts (Hussey and Hussey 1997) within the university, that is current and former MBA students[1]. Five such contacts indicated likely agreement to research being conducted within their respective organisations. In two cases, the anticipated co-operation was not forthcoming[2]. The remaining three companies were happy to assist the research, subject to certain limitations (detailed in later chapters) which included assurances of confidentiality.

Managers at all levels within these companies were willing to be interviewed, to release operatives for focus groups, and to permit some degree of participant observation. Further, it was possible to identify a primary focus during the initial visit. These three companies thus became the subjects of the main study.

Each of the companies studied is unique in its development, situation and social groupings; although they hold several features in common. All are secondary sector (manufacturing) companies whose main customers are other commercial concerns rather than end-users or consumers. In two cases, there is private ownership and no recognition of trade unions while, in another pairing, two companies are located in rural towns where they dominate the local labour market. Yet another pair are exposed to international competition, while all three must cope with the distribution and communications problems caused, by distance and poor infrastructure, that are common in Devon and Cornwall. Moreover, the three companies share the historical heritage of the South West, and all operate within a particular set of political, legal and economic circumstances at regional, national and international levels.

Case One

Viands, a bakery, has three production units in East Cornwall. The firm had a history of collaboration with the university, in various projects. Several of its staff members are enrolled on business and management courses, and university staff have worked, in a consultative capacity, for the firm.

The company was established by a local businessman, and his two sons, in the late 1960s, for the manufacture of a single, traditional product from a 'secret recipe'. Ten years later, the company was bought, in a private deal, by a family group that already owned a chain of small meat producing firms in the Midlands. Viands is currently the second largest private employer in the county and maintains a strong competitive

position within its industry. At the time of this study the company's three bakery sites are undergoing reorganisation to create 'centres of excellence'.

During early discussions with the company's personnel manager, arrangements for access were agreed. The researcher would assist the company to compile a series of historical case studies for training purposes; four specific cases, with a common theme of product quality, were agreed. These studies provided a legitimate access to the company, and ensured the co-operation necessary for an enlightening study. However, while the case studies facilitated the exercise by reciprocating the company's assistance, they also acted as a constraining factor. There was an ever-present risk that the original purpose of the study would be lost in pursuit of the company's agenda.

Over a nine-month period in 1996/97, the study (described in Chapter 5) progressed by investigating the phenomenon of quality in two of Viands' bakeries. Although the managers and owners talk a great deal about the quality of their product it proved to be difficult to locate the term as a discursive formation and, as an archaeological 'object', it eluded location within any particular referential. These problems were, it transpired, only transient as, through the application of Foucaultian principles, their chafing eventually provided the locus of more thorough analysis of decisional themes (see below, Chapter 8).

Case Two

Crowan Brothers is a heavy engineering company located in West Cornwall, manufacturing tools and equipment for construction and mining. The enterprise had been part of world-wide concern, owned and managed by the descendants of the founder until the 1960s. Since then it has had several owners; most recently a German-owned corporation that is renowned for a lack of sentimentality in pursuit of its shareholders' interests. Beset by cash flow problems and a fluctuating demand for

products, the company has survived many bleak times; but, with a net loss of around £100,000 per month, its future is far from assured. The owners have demanded that managers make strenuous efforts to balance the company finances and have prescribed that this be done through lean production techniques.

At the time of the first approach, via the industrial engineers, preparations were underway to transform production through the introduction of Kaizen in all areas of the factory. A management consultant had been engaged to provide training and there was a general air of optimism that Kaizen (the latest in a series of production reforms) would rescue the company from the threat of closure and secure the jobs of the 360 employees. The company's directors were proud of their efforts and content that this project should be a subject of this study without any expectation of reciprocity. An invitation was extended for me to participate in a forthcoming, two-day workshop with the consultant. For those two days, I became a full member of one of the project teams which formed a 'natural' group for the rest of the study. Through the medium of the workshop the research activity became generally known throughout the factory, and trust relations were established.

Over a twelve-months period, during 1997/98, a trusting and relaxed relationship with the company directors, managers, and workers contributed to an enlightening study of the practice of Kaizen. Kaizen, it transpired (see Chapter 8), can be clearly located as a discursive formation, while its emphasis on product quality provided a logical link with the study at Viands. This was the longest of the three studies as the company's two-hundred year history, combined with the contemporary changes provided a rich source of evidence and the major points of comparison with the other two companies. The story of Crowan Brothers is told in Chapter 6.

Bulberry's, the subject of Chapter 7 and the final case in this project, is a thriving new company serving the electronics industry. The current site was purpose-built on the semi-rural outskirts of Plymouth in 1984. It, too, has a German head office, being part of international group of companies in private ownership. Managers here enjoy a degree of autonomy which is unusual in South West companies (Gripaios 1984).

Despite a rapid growth of the premises, which is now four times the size of the original building, demand for products is outstripping the company's productive potential. It is only through heavy reliance on subcontractors that Bulberry's can produce at 175% of available capacity. This has led to a noticeable reduction in product quality and an intolerable lengthening of lead times. Amid plans for further physical expansion and changes to working shift patterns to increase productive capacity, the company has been endeavouring to reverse its problems with product quality. Additionally, expected changes to employment law regarding trade union recognition have prompted action to create a culture where workers will not want union representatives within the firm. With the support of corporate directors, local managers have taken the initiative to introduce Kaizen. This strategy is intended to address production problems and to realise an objective of greater employee participation in the running of the factory.

Contact with Bulberry's was made through contact with the Quality manager, who was pleased to allow access to the premises, its managers and the workforce in return for an appraisal of the Kaizen project[3]. This was the shortest of the three studies, lasting for six months during 1998/99. Analysis of the other two studies was beginning to yield useful results, so that this study was more confirmatory than exploratory.

As well as the obvious opportunities for comparison with case two, this study potentially introduced a third discourse for examination: that of employee involvement,

although, as the study, and analysis, progressed it became clear that within the operational discourse, of which employee involvement was a part, was the apparently, secondary agenda of non-unionism. By studying practices at Bulberry's it was possible to recognise the ways in which negative attitudes to trades unions altered both the constitution of the subject (the worker) and nature of Japanisation in a European company.

As the three companies each offered different research opportunities, each study varied from the others in its emphasis, although the same general approaches were utilised within each firm. The specific methods and their applications are presented within the individual accounts (Chapters 5-7) while this chapter now continues with a discussion of the general methods that were employed for a Foucault-inspired study.

COLLECTING EVIDENCE

The collection of evidence in social research takes three principal forms: observation, questioning and the study of artefacts such as documents (Robson 1993). This investigation utilised each of these primary techniques for collecting evidence. Workplace practices were observed during field studies on the shop floor of each factory; participants were directly questioned during interviews, focus groups and informal conversations; while a range of documentation was examined. The nature of the case study is that different methods can be used both alternately and simultaneously. In the account which follows, the three principal elements have been separated in order that they might be properly discussed.

Participant observation has been described as being particularly suited to research where meanings and interactions are important, "where the phenomenon under investigation is generally obscured from public view" (Waddington 1994; p. 108). The pilot study demonstrated that, even in a limited form, this was a strategy which revealed a rich melange of evidence and, hence, it was retained as a key element of the main study.

PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION

The ratio of participation to observation was variable as conditions in each of the three factories brought their own constraints. It was greatest during the Crowan's study where, encouraged by senior managers, I was able to fully participate in the two-day workshop where the principles of Kaizen were introduced and practiced by a mixed group of production workers. The organisation of this workshop integrated me into a particular project group and provided an obvious group to study in depth. Some weeks later, I was able to build on that foundation by working, in an observer-as-participant role, alongside some of the toolmakers and storespeople who shared in that workshop and formed the project team. During that period I worked in close proximity to another groups of craft-workers who had attended a previous Kaizen workshop, so there were also opportunities to observe, only, their work.

At Viands, the degree of proficiency required to maintain the machine-paced speed of work, and my lack of prescribed training in food handling, prevented any realistic participation in routine work. My role there tended toward the participant-as-observer end of the continuum, although occasionally, and to the amusement of those who had long been accomplished in their work, I was sometimes able to take a place on the lines in packaging, inspection and, once during an emergency, unloading the ovens. In some

areas, such as the preparation and packing areas, I was able to carry on conversations with the usual operatives and to appreciate their personal experiences of day-to-day work in the bakeries. Being allowed to move freely within designated areas, I was able to build up a picture of how each area worked and, also, to take time to peruse the surroundings and survey the various notices, posters and documents that were part of the working environment.

In the Bulberry's factory, the observer role was even more prominent as the health and safety implications of working with metal presses acted as a major restraint on participation, while the need to wear ear-defenders was an obvious hindrance to communication. The factory environment was much more amenable to note-taking than at Viands, although conversation was limited to informal, but officially sanctioned, discussions in the staff restaurant. In all the studies, but particularly here, the ambiguity of my role was problematic in that I was attempting to mix with, and talk to, operatives on an equal footing although, as my presence was officially ratified by management, I might easily be perceived as an agent of the various managements. As a "researcher from the university" managers could feel vulnerable that I was there to pass some form of judgement on their performance, although such apprehension was directly vocalised only once.

In these studies, there was no attempt to deceive participants or informants of my identity or the objectives of the research (Frankenberg 1982), although explanations were somewhat brief, in the nature of "She has come from the university to see how we do Kaizen", rather than long discussions about the nature of discursive analysis. Remarks were frequently passed suggesting that participants derived some form of prestige from being associated with university research. On one occasion, at Viands, a manager said "I'd heard that there was a student coming, but they didn't tell me that

you're doing a PhD", while his Chairman, on the telephone, gave the impression that he was happy to co-operate with a doctoral project while he might not have been so willing to collaborate in other forms of study.

NOTE-TAKING

The making of notes has been described as "an indispensable instrument in the technique of sociological inquiry" (Webb 1982), forming a first stage in analysis and theoretical discovery for the researcher; and throughout each study I made copious notes. Where conditions prevented note-taking on the factory floor, however, periods of observation had to be planned with frequent breaks to allow time to make notes on what I had seen and heard. Those notes were necessarily limited because of time constraints and sometimes amounted to no more than a few mnemonics as prompts for the more detailed accounts that I wrote at the end of the working day.

Throughout the studies I maintained a reflective diary, that was written as soon as possible after leaving the site, as a supplement to field notes. There, I was able to engage in reflexive activity concerning what had been done, seen and heard through the day (Burgess 1987c), so that the entries include my personal impressions and attitudes, as well as some early analytic thoughts The reading and re-reading of this diary, along with the interview transcripts, proved to be the primary activities for generating and developing a range of hypotheses (Webb 1982) during the analysis stage of the research.

Interviews (Questioning)

Burgess (1982) quotes Vivien Palmer (of the 'Chicago School', circa 1920) to stress that the unstructured interview – the purposeful conversation – is an essential element in any well-rounded study. It was through conversation that I was able to identify and confirm the informants' views of reality. Unstructured does not mean undirected,

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though, and for the purposes of this project a topic guide was developed (Appendix B) with reference to background information which had been compiled from documentary sources.

Unstructured, but controlled, interviews are useful in exploratory research, offering breadth and depth to the expository and analytic stages of investigations. Interviews within this study were conducted with several groups of informants, representing a cross-section of stakeholders[4] in participating companies. Senior, operations, and production managers were interviewed as well as workers and their trade union, staff association or works council representatives. Hence, a range of opinions and perspectives could be gathered on the processes under investigation. The distinctiveness of individual participating companies, however, made it unrealistic to attempt to construct exactly comparable groups of interviewees at each site. The reality of the 'sampling frame' was that the sample was prescribed by circumstances rather than by any theoretical ideal.

Time is a precious resource to most of the people who participated, hence, most meetings were limited to a period of thirty to forty-five minutes, and needed to closely follow the agreed topic guide. Within those constraints, interviews proceeded comfortably with little prompting beyond the scheduled questions. Although the interviews were being recorded for later transcription, informants spoke easily and freely, giving me the impression that they were at ease with the subject matter and happy to give comprehensive accounts of their rôles. The primary theme of the interviews was the participants' accounts about life and work within their respective companies. Participants were asked to give a short account of their career and to identify the highlights within the time that they had been working for the current organisation. Questions then focused on informants' involvement in the specific

matters of quality control or Kaizen. From that foundation, questions were broadened to issues around the underlying concepts.

At Crowan's and Bulberry's there were groups of workers who shared common experiences, that is the training workshops. Interviews with these people were conducted with the whole group, in each company. This technique, which over the past ten years has come to be known as the focus group (Morgan 1993), builds upon the assumption that people's attitudes and beliefs develop, not in a vacuum but through interaction with others. Group interviewing allows participants to reflect upon and supplement the opinions of others. "The trick is to promote the participants' self-disclosure through the creation of a permissive environment." (Marshall and Rossman 1995, p. 84). Within a group interview actors are able to gain immediate feedback on their personal view of reality and to respond to the views of others – a process described as 'indefinite triangulation' by Frey and Fontana (1993, p24); while as interviewer I could vicariously participate in that process. As with the individual interviews, focus groups were tape-recorded for later transcription.

The focus group has a high face validity because the method is easily understood and results are agreed or challenged within the group, while the evidence is being collected (Krueger 1988). The nature of the conversation is somewhat specious, as the group facilitator needs to control the direction of the discussions and to manipulate the normal flow of conversation so that everybody speaks and, occasionally to ask a speaker to give way to another. Also, aware of the potential for bias and its threat to reliability, via peer group pressures, it was sometimes necessary to proffer an alternative view in order to encourage participants to express differences of opinion. Within those constraints, the focus group has advantages of being socially orientated and friendly; without the strain of the one-to-one interview, or the artificiality of an experimental setting (Morgan and

Krueger 1993). The topic guide that I devised for focus groups (Appendix B) was less directive than for individual interviews and had been planned with the aim of stimulating a balanced discussion..

Here, the goal was to explore participants' perceptions of the change processes they were experiencing, and to assess if and how specific forms of discourse were filtering through the organisation. Aware of the potential for personal bias, and aiming for the greatest possible consistency between the individual studies, the basic topic guide was planned before the main study had begun. Issues of particular concern were identified, through reference to the field work diary, so that questions were framed with company-specific exemplars and terminology.

The participants and I were known to each other by virtue of the field studies which had preceded all the group interviews. Once potential concerns regarding mutual trust and the confidentiality of responses had been clarified, frank and open discussions were forthcoming. However, I constantly needed to remind myself that, as an outsider studying the organisation, I was also altering the power relations and, to the greater extent, needed to accept that as an inevitable consequence of the empirical nature of the study.

Documents.

Company documentation comes in a wide variety of forms: policies and procedures; minutes; strategy statements; legal documents; and formal, or informal, correspondence (Orbell 1987). At a fundamental level, the documents 'tell the story' of the company in focus. This is not to presume that such a story will be complete, nor, from some points of view, entirely accurate; but a chronology of events can normally be compiled, and that can inform the planning for the rest of the study, e.g. design of interview guides. At another level, the documents themselves form texts, or discourses, being the by-

products of interactions and communication between groups and individuals at all levels of company life[5]. As such they can provide a far broader background to a company than any researcher might glean from even quite lengthy interviews (Forster, 1994). Being contemporaneous records of events they can serve as a benchmark against which to assess informants' own accounts. Company records are, though, subjective and often fragmentary, having been written for particular purposes by, or for, particular stakeholders. They cannot, then, be accepted at face value but may be regarded as sources of some forms of discourse and points of comparison for other types of evidence.

Once the range of available documentation has been identified, collection is a relatively straightforward process. Many documents are already housed in various archives such as company files, county archives, specialist collections and public libraries. Alternative documents, as images and sounds, are also available via BBC educational videotapes. The availability of such collections reduces the effort need to amass documents, and research time can be devoted to fieldwork, and to the examination and analysis of evidence, rather than to the accumulation of data.

Various documentary sources were collected in this study. It was disappointing that none of the companies maintained historical archives[6]. Neither were there any formal company documents held in the local libraries, although annual reports were obtained from Companies House and, in one case, from the Internet. A great deal of background information about the companies and their histories was, however, acquired from published material in the public domain. A search of local newspapers, and cuttings collections in the local libraries, brought forth a useful yield of press reports and advertising features, which provided a setting to the earlier stages of the study.

In two cases, published histories were available[7]. Ottery (1997) tells of the first hundred years of the Strongman businesses (the owners of Viands), while a special volume was commissioned by Crowans to mark one hundred and fifty years of manufacture (Ealing 1951). In the latter case, the story of the intervening fifty years had to be gleaned from the other documents and from interviews. There is an obvious risk in over-reliance on such overtly biased accounts when researching the history of a business but, as here, they may be the only available history. They were, therefore, read cautiously, with careful regard for their original purpose.

Additional, but less obvious, sources of documentary evidence and organisational discourse were found during fieldwork. Although these were not portable, posters and notices displayed around the factory were read avidly, and copious notes were taken. Recipes and process control documents were also made available by the company hosts although, for commercial reasons, these could not be copied or removed from the sites. Advertising materials were also collected as they offered an additional perspective on the corporate culture, showing how the company sold its image to customers.

Over the various periods of their publication, company newsletters/ works journals have carried a range of features detailing the everyday life of firms, and celebrating achievements and social events. As such, they serve to perpetuate the legends, symbols, slogans and heroes (Buchanan & Huczynski 1997; Deal and Kennedy 1982) that shape corporate cultures. Viand's managers were happy to facilitate access to their archive of such seemingly innocuous records, and a collection of Crowan's works journals was located in a specialist library[8]. Within them rich histories were documented, albeit from the management viewpoint, tracing patterns of change and development within the companies. It was easy to identify their discursive operation, introducing new ideas and

terminology; 'explaining' change processes and applauding those who had served the company.

An important technical point is that while these documentary sources comprised some unusual sources of information, all had been generated by the company management. Such documents are not simply records of events but will have been, consciously or unconsciously, "artfully constructed with a view to how they might be read" (Silverman 1993, p. 63) [9]. This is one of the reasons for Foucault's stress on the need to access the 'subjugated knowledges', in order to gain a thorough awareness of the nature and effects of social practices.

In any research design, the purpose of the study is not the only consideration in the choice of methods. For a research study to be considered worthwhile, it is generally accepted that the chosen (collection of) research methods should have been selected with regard to their validity and reliability (Sarantakos 1993). In the fields of social research, which deal with human subjects, there are also ethical considerations which may impact upon the conduct of a study. With regard to the current project, such issues are addressed in the next section.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

Ethical Concerns

The concept of ethical behaviour is ingrained in all societies, requiring people to exercise critical judgement over their personal (and professional) conduct. Ethics is concerned not simply with what is right and what is wrong; but asks why behaviours are right or wrong. By the process of discussing that question, the core of ethical problems can often be identified and, possibly, addressed.

Academic research that involves human subjects is generally governed by officially-sanctioned ethical guidelines which, in the case of this university (currently University of Plymouth 1999), incorporate the code of conduct of the British Sociological Association. However, business research is not a profession so there is no one particular institution, equivalent to, say, the British Psychological Society, which concerns itself with the ethical consideration of that form of enquiry; and there is little or no literature available on the subject, (save in the specialist area of market research). The absence of such writing, or of a central institution, absolves no-one of their social responsibility to assess their proposed behaviour ex ante (even if those responsibilities are discursive artefacts), with proper consideration of the morality of their actions.

The major division in approaches to ethics (Kimmel 1996) is between deontology and utilitarianism (or consequentialism).

Deontology is the science of duty or rights which, after Kant, holds that there are general principles of rightness regardless of any notion of a 'greater good' (Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy). It asserts that 'right' should prevail regardless of what might happen to be 'good', and appears to suggest that there is a perfect 'rightness' which can prevail despite all other considerations. Conversely, utilitarianism, is a retrospective approach; for the 'goodness' of a behaviour can only be judged *ex post* in the light of its consequences and, as Marcus (1993) argues, an ethics based only on intentions without regard to consequences must be inadequate.

With research, the design, as well as the conduct, of a project needs to be ethically sound. The ethical efficacy of research activity must be assessed prior to its execution. Neither consequentialism not deontology can offer clear guidance for ethical behaviour. However, Thiroux (cited by Tschudin 1994) suggested that, despite their differences, the two approaches address many similar concerns. He derived five principles that are

common to both philosophies. These principles concern: the value of life; goodness and 'rightness'; justice and fairness; truth telling; and individual freedom. The first two have particular relevance here.

THE PRINCIPLE OF THE VALUE OF LIFE

The principle of the value of life may seem irrelevant to the arena of business research, for there is no intention to place participants in mortal danger. However, if we adopt the notion of registered companies having legal 'personalities', then this principle might be extended to the commercial survival of a given business. This would indicate that researchers, should not behave in a manner which would put a company's competitive position at risk. In practice this translates into issues over the design of a research project and the dissemination of findings[10]. Particular methods such as action research might become unethical, if the initiatives could jeopardise a commercial concern.

'Fashion-consciousness', in the business world conspires against objective evaluation of popular practices such as Business Process Re-engineering (Coulson-Thomas 1994) or Japanisation. Where some technique offers genuine competitive advantage, a company will be reluctant to share its methods with the rest of the business community. The need to protect a firm might require that publication is embargoed or that some, possibly vital, details are omitted. Both negate the purpose of research, and compromise the principle of truth-telling, as would any alternative which involved some form of deceit. If discovered, deceit would certainly damage the relationship between researchers and participants and, possibly, the wider research and business communities.

Within this project, commercially sensitive information was made available for study and needed to be guarded. The principal tool, agreed with participating companies, was anonymity, necessitating that companies be disguised through the use of pseudonyms

and by oblique references to the nature of their products, invoking parts of the second principle: of goodness and rightness.

THE PRINCIPLE OF GOODNESS AND RIGHTNESS

That principle evokes three goals: to promote goodness over badness; to cause no harm or badness; and to prevent badness or harm (Tschudin 1994). Problems lie in knowing what is good or bad, and against what standards to judge. In practice many ethical codes address this principle under the specific headings of responsibility, competence, integrity and confidentiality (Harris 1989). These bring into focus researchers' responsibilities to their science. 'Responsibility' and 'competence' require that researchers retain accountability for their work while integrity addresses, inter alia, issues of academic honesty.

It is a truism to say that, within a report, all sources should be clearly cited and properly referenced. Academic integrity deplores plagiarism and demands that researchers make direct reference to, and acknowledgement of, any sources which have influenced their thinking (Fairbairn and Winch, 1996). Here, though is the second horn of an ethical dilemma. If sources (especially documents) are properly cited within this report, then the identities of participating companies will become obvious to most readers. Other, sensitive information could then be placed accurately and, thus, undermine the commercial well-being of the firms and their owners.

After careful consideration of this problem and, following consultation with academic seniors, I came to the opinion that the dilemma should be resolved in favour of the participating companies. An unorthodox approach to referencing has, therefore, been developed. Sources which might identify individual companies are disguised with pseudonyms, as cited thus in the bibliography. Readers are asked to trust the competence and integrity of the project supervisors in ensuring that those sources have

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been used appropriately. For the purposes of examination, only, an additional Appendix (E) provides the correct details.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality, in its most basic sense, means that information is restricted to those who own it. Questions may arise over the ownership of a finished report, or if a researcher discovers evidence that a company is violating the legal or moral rights of others[11]. The decision not to speak out may embroil the investigator in complicity; while the converse action will damage the research relationship, may cause harm to the company, and could lead to legal proceedings for defamation (Waddington 1979). In such a case, the principle of rightness conflicts with the principle of the value of life (as operationalised here).

Within this study a decision has been made to uphold the first principle. It has been reasoned that, through the dissemination of findings, the existence of any dubious practices can be exposed, if not located. This holds the possibility of raising a general awareness within the academic community, and retains opportunities for access for further research, if it were indicated, by maintaining access to a particular company.

Confidentiality was also a concern relating to individual participants. If a full and frank discussion is to be encouraged, an interviewee should not feel that his or her job is at risk. At the initial interview in each company, therefore, the confidential nature of individual contributions was agreed. I claimed ownership of all interview tapes and transcripts so that, while managers knew who participants were, they would not have details of any information that I had collected from those people. There was an exception, where anonymous transcripts of focus groups were made available to Bulberry's Quality manager as part of his own action research. In those groups, participants were informed of that condition before the tape recorder was switched on.

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Ethical issues are issues, precisely because they are difficult to discuss and complex to resolve. So often actions which uphold one ethical principle can be considered to be a violation of another. That is the basis of ethical dilemmas. The decisions described here have been taken carefully but they are, inevitably, compromises which may not meet with universal approval. They represent a conscientious attempt to anticipate and reconcile potential difficulties.

These ethical considerations are not the only constraints on research design, and researchers must also give attention to how validity, reliability and accuracy can be ensured in a given study.

Validity, Reliability and Accuracy

Conventional theories regarding the cogency of research findings tend to be preoccupied with rationalist notions, demanding that research meets the criterion of validity, that is, that it has actually examined the phenomena which were intended to be studied; and that evidence offers reliable information on those phenomena. To some extent any researcher who moves beyond the bounds of quantitative studies or experiments is open to criticism that their work is unreliable and/or invalid. Human fallibility means that, where one person is undertaking all aspects of the research, the potential for human error is ever present (Robson, 1993; p. 402). Hence, the approach to the collection and analysis of qualitative evidence needs to be rigorous and systematic with careful regard to the potential for bias.

Unstructured interviews and documentary analysis are both methods which rely on subjective views of reality. They would, normally, present problems of reliability as "distortion of emotions and motives invariably occurs as individuals attempt to harmonise issues" (Dunkerley 1988, p. 90). Within the Foucaultian paradigm, however, that distortion is part of the evidence in its own right, providing additional insights to

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the discursive processes being investigated. Operating within a paradigm that posits 'truth' and, hence, 'reality' as culturally fabricated, it could be reasoned that notions of reliability and validity are fallacious or misguided and should, therefore, be disregarded. However, social sciences and social scientists exist and operate in a world which is permeated by, however they might be constituted, value sets. Within them 'science' and its associated (claims to) objectivity, validity and reliability are prized. Therefore, whatever philosophical and ideological consideration may underpin their investigations, social researchers are obliged to conduct their enquiries in a manner which recognises the demand for reliability and validity, and presents findings that are perceived to be objective.

Reliability of the interview process was safeguarded by two strategies. First, interview topic guides (Appendices A and B) were constructed to ensure that all interviews dealt with the same broad range of issues, allowing that the nature of the qualitative interview is to be flexible and unpredictable (King 1994). Secondly, the interviews were all conducted by the same person, reducing the risk of researcher bias, although it does carry a risk, as the pilot study demonstrated, that that person's individual sensitivities will have their own bias on the interview form. The use of a variety of sources of evidence may also be held to be an aid to ensuring reliability within case studies (Yin 1984), although within a discursive study it cannot be presumed that any one (type of) source will necessarily confirm another.

The issue of validity in qualitative interviews centres on the nature of conclusions and interpretations of the evidence. Here, as the study forms part of an educational process, it was appropriate to draw upon the accumulated expertise available within the university, especially within the supervision team. Computer assisted analysis of transcripts, using specialist software, might also have been useful in extracting themes

and patterns of discourse (Lewins 1995). As is discussed later, these were eventually eschewed in favour of manual analysis, accepting the potential to bias, to allow for the emergent nature of qualitative analysis (Ely et al.1997).

ERROR AND BIAS

Many academic sources analyse and debate the issues surrounding error, bias, and the manifold threats to validity in qualitative studies (e.g. Marshall and Rossman 1995; King 1994; Robson 1993; Bryman 1988). While various strategies are offered to solve the problems that field researchers will inevitably encounter, many of these remedies have been developed within the same tradition which made reliability and validity problematic As Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue, it is reasonable to suppose that conventional, positivistic criteria are inappropriate to apply to the qualitative case study. They offer alternative notions, more faithful to that paradigm, to assess and establish the trustworthiness of enquiry-based evidence. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability.

A credible piece of research is conducted in such a way as to ensure that the subject of the enquiry was accurately identified and described (Marshall and Rossman 1995). Major techniques for assuring credibility are: prolonged involvement, persistent observation, triangulation and peer debriefing (Robson, 1993).

Within this project, individual cases were investigated over several months thus providing opportunities to gain insight into the cultures of individual sites; to identify particular circumstances such as the small scales rivalries between different parts of Viand's bakery and the verbal play-fights between fitters and tool makers at Crowan's; and to discuss suppositions. The case study strategy allowed me to become submerged in settings and the social groupings; to appreciate the complexity of variables and interactions; and to grow in my understanding of the multiple realities that exist in each

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organisation. It facilitated the collection of evidence using multiple methods so that, for instance, interviews and focus groups were used to confirm or refute issues which seemed to arise from observation.

Questions of generalisability are particularly problematic in qualitative research as the aggregation of variables will be unique to each setting. Bryman (1988a) believes that, within the case study strategy, the problem arises from a fundamental misunderstanding of the aims of such research. Not surprisingly, naturalistic researchers, such as Lincoln and Guba (1985), reject the notion as rationalist and irrelevant. Some (Marshall and Rossman 1995) suggest that the burden of demonstrating that one set of findings is applicable in another setting rests with the investigator who wishes to make that transfer rather than with the original researcher. However, there is an onus on those who report research to make their methods transparent, as an aid to credibility as well as meeting the, possibly theoretical, requirement that the study could be replicated in another time or place. There is a recognition that a degree of 'transferability' can be achieved through the use of 'thick description' (Hammersley 1992; Ely et al.1997). Where the methods of investigation are clearly described (Robson 1993; Marshall and Rossman 1995) and findings are thoroughly and dispassionately discussed (Ely et al. 1997), and placed within a clear theoretical framework, that possibility becomes viable.

Just as reliability is a necessary condition for validity, so dependability is part of the criteria for credibility (Robson, 1993). So, a study which has credibility must, then, be dependable. Dependability is a concept which has no equivalent in positivist methodology. Like reliability, its closest analogy, it is based on the assumption of a stable environment[12] that can be investigated, explained and, possibly, generalised and predicted. Hammersley advises that dependability is linked to consistency. He acknowledges that replication is not often possible but charges the researcher with a

duty to "seek and assess the effects of research strategies employed on the findings, and distinguish these from variations in the phenomena studied." (Hammersley 1992, p. 64). Dependability follows from the documentation of procedures at all stages of the research so that, as Robson (1993) suggests, if the research processes has been well documented, providing safeguards against error and bias, then the documentation itself represents a dependability test.

The construct of confirmability embraces the orthodox notion of objectivity which is notoriously difficult to achieve in social settings. Traditional scientific approaches strive for objectivity by trying to distance the experimenter from the experimental subject, so that any interaction is formalised. However, to comprehend meanings and practices, an understanding of the associated values is essential (Williams and May 1996). Thus artificial, 'scientific' distinctions would be lethal for any real understanding of phenomena involving people in social settings. If personal values and subjective judgements will inevitably influence an investigation, then researchers need to consider their own values in the design and administration of research studies. This requires the accurate reporting of all processes employed, acknowledgement of possible difficulties, and a distinction between simple reporting and interpretation.

In respect of the issues discussed above, the pilot study served its purpose well. It highlighted a range of potential difficulties, not least of these was my own proclivity for bias, and the majority were compensated for, in the main study, by employing a wide range of methods for collecting evidence. A variety of documentary sources were used to compile company histories. Observations were supplemented by note-taking, documentary analysis and questioning. My own impressions, recorded in the field work diary, were either confirmed or refuted with interview questions that had been constructed at an earlier stage. Opposing views were collected through two different

types of interview, that were tape-recorded for later analysis, as well as informal conversations. Ethical issues have been considered and possible solutions were incorporated into the research design. The whole was set within a multiple case study approach to enable comparative analysis.

Before this chapter is closed, a discussion of the analytic processes follows here. It may be that such a discussion would be properly placed following the presentation of the collective evidence, but that would distract from the narrative and interrupt the flow of the analysis from the evidence. Further, as Foucaultian 'methodology' is primarily concerned with analysis, the next section of this chapter serves to link the current description of method with the Foucaultian perspective that was presented in the last chapter.

ANALYSIS OF THE EVIDENCE

In the Foucaultian paradigm, discourse and practices involving, in this instance, *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement,* are the phenomena under investigation, being the means by which power/knowledge and resistance are exercised. Discourses must be analysed in terms of different stages of history, the social relations prevailing at those points, and in comparison to the alternative discourses operating at the same time (McDonnell 1986). The various practices of *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement* are also subject to analysis for these are the dividing practices, assemblages, technologies and strategies which give focus to eventalisation. The principal source materials are the statements, collected through interviews, observations and documents, which describe the ways in which *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement* are practised both within and beyond the three factories.

The nature of analysis was primarily reflective and many false starts were made in the effort to identify units of discourse, and their rule-based systems. Archaeological

deconstruction of the terms *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement* concerned the rules governing the discursive formations that are operating in the 'here-and-now' of the participating companies in the late 1990s. Phenomena had to be conceptualised as discursive objects (Foucault 1972), their referential established, and the system of rules inferred from the ways in which they were practised, communicated and controlled. Attention had to be placed on what was said, and what was not said, about *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement*.

Genealogical analysis required the deconstruction of the practices surrounding the management and maintenance of phenomena throughout the history of the companies. Practices had to be 'eventalised' (Foucault 1991); to be construed as historical events with some form of constancy and uniformity, and their self-evidence brought into question. The major concerns were to discover how these practices have operated as mechanisms of power/knowledge; how they have shaped the managerial response to environmental changes; and how workers (and others) have been governed through practices of *quality, Kaizen* and *employee involvement*.

Some established techniques were employed to assist reflection. Field notes were transcribed by an audio typist and individually checked by myself. The transcripts were analysed in two ways. Firstly the were repeatedly replayed and, on almost each occasion, new themes identified. Secondly, they were coded by hand according to those themes, with a random sample being independently coded by a (psychologist) colleague as a check on possible bias. Coded entries were next sorted into a thematic matrix (a sample is included at Appendix C) using a simple spreadsheet for display. Over a period of months, these matrices were scrutinised, reread and sometimes rearranged as new insights emerged.

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Tentative efforts were made to use a specialist software tool to assist in the process but this was found to be at best, no better than a manual process. Lewins (1995) suggests that NUD*IST can assist the qualitative researcher by eliminating the time-consuming processes of coding and, because it uses plain text files, files can be manipulated directly onto the computer screen. The subjective experience was that coding and re-coding, though often tedious, was an important part of the analytic process. Frequently the same theme was expressed in different phrases (e.g. 'just do it'; 'go for it'; get on with it') that a computer could not connect. Using software detracted from, and obstructed, reflection by eliding the repeated reading of entries. Further, although it might have been a long-term investment in skill, the time spent learning to use the software was time that could be usefully spent in reading and listening to what my interview subjects were telling me.

The real breakthrough in analysis required the courage to be perverse and to question axiomatic statements such as: 'long-term company survival depends upon appropriate managerial response to environmental change'. By asking 'who says so?' and 'why can't a company offer stability at times of change?' the breadth and strength of managerial discourse became apparent. Soon after, when the same types of questions were applied to statements made participants in this study, the discursive structures and processes became increasingly transparent.

Foucaultian analysis, as his work clearly demonstrates, is neither a simple, swift nor straightforward process. In this study, it began after the initial contact in the first company and has continued to develop through all stages of project including the report writing. The outcomes of that analytic process are presented in Chapter 9 of this report.

SUMMARY

This chapter has detailed the range of research methods that were used to investigate managerial decision making. The primary strategy for collecting evidence was a multiple case study that combined techniques adopted from the fields of ethnography, historiography, business history and grounded theory. A pilot study had revealed that to undertake a comprehensive business history as well as a discursive analysis of the full range of managerial decisions would be an awesome task. Instead, a major decisional theme was identified within each of three firms, and the investigation focused upon them. Evidence was gleaned through a combination of observation, questioning and the study of various available documents; which included some unconventional sources such as company newspapers and, in one case, attendance at a training workshop.

As the three companies each offered different research opportunities, so each study varied from the others in its emphasis, although the same general approaches were utilised within each firm. Research methods were selected and designed with regard to the conventional issues of validity and reliability and special care was taken to ensure confidentiality for the firms as well as for individual participants. Each individual study presented a unique set of problems which had to be accommodated while, in all three, the presence of a researcher might possibly alter the power/knowledge relations that were the subject of the study. Additionally, a personal potential for bias had to be countered by careful advanced planning and interview design.

The analysis of evidence was primarily a reflective process. The options of using computer software was rejected in favour of a manual process, aided by a thematic matrix. It was by the repeated reading of individual transcripts that the self-evidence of quality, Kaizen and employee involvement became questionable, and through perverse

questioning of that 'self-evidence' that the underlying systems of thought and technologies of power/knowledge were exposed.

In the absence of a clear mandate from Michel Foucault, for those who seek to model their research on his, it is impossible to prescribe methods for the collection and analysis of data in a discursive study. The methods described here might, or might not, emulate Foucault's own. They are certainly not the only possible methods but they were perceived to be appropriate given that time constraints prevented an in-depth longitudinal study which the search for subjugated knowledges might require. The combination of formal and informal interviews; participant observation and the examination of unconventional documents has provided a wealth of evidence, that is credible, dependable and confirmable; and that has generated a fresh, alternative perspective on the study of managerial decision making. That evidence is presented next.

[1] A problem of bias arises as it might be reckoned that firms which send their managers on MBA courses hold particular attitudes toward education and research. However, it is not uncommon for institutions such as the Open University (Maeby 1997) to distribute surveys throughout their executive student body.

[2] In one case (an electronics firm) a false start was made but it soon became clear that the personnel manager (who was the designated liaison) was not happy to allow the necessary access. In the second case (an engineering company) an initial interview was 'postponed' and never rescheduled.

[3] This manager was, at the time, a student of the executive MBA programme and it was agreed that I would supervise his dissertation. The arrangement was often mutually beneficial but occasionally problematic as will be discussed in Chapter 7.

4 The term stakeholder tends to be overused. Within the context of this study it is taken to mean individuals, or groups of individuals, who have an interest in a particular company (SOED); and, therefore, includes managers, employees and directors.

[5] As such, company documents lend themselves to a variety of forms of discourse analysis. While it would be tempting to examine, for instance, the minutiae of rhetoric or the nature of the social interaction, such analyses would be tangential to this study.

[6] Crowans' current owners had deliberately destroyed historical material as a signal for the intended change in the company's 'culture', disregarding their potential as part of the "corporate memory" (Griffith 1997)

[7] These accounts fall into the category of the company history that has been criticised (Supple 1977a; Hannah 1983) for their narrow scope and insularity, and for a lack of academic rigour. They were not commissioned so that the companies might examine, understand and modify their own decision making processes. Rather, they illustrate the point, made in Chapter 1, that such accounts 'enshrine' company founders and theirs heirs, so that the resulting accounts are heavily biased.

[8] Unfortunately, there was no equivalent record at Bulberry's although some similar types of story were found on the parent company's web-site.

[9] The nearest parallel in Foucault's oeuvre is probably in *I, Pierre Revière ...* (Foucault 1975b) where he demonstrate how the same story yielded various accounts depending upon the perspective of the writer.

[10] In a similar vein, the principle of the value of life can also be applied to the careers of individual participants. While, again, the risk of some fatal outcome is low it may be that, without care, a researcher might put individuals' jobs (and livelihoods) at risk. The possible long-term consequences of such a outcome being realised are appalling. The primary concern is over the nature of the information that a researcher might relay to managers and the degree of confidentiality that may be promised to individual participants.

[11] Conversely, research might lead to the discovery of dishonest behaviours by workers against their employers, but to reveal such practices could jeopardise the positions of those workers.

[12] The response of some interpretivists, such as Marshall and Rossman (1995), is that researchers should expect change and account for it, although others (Silverman 1993) are sceptical of such a view and suggest that if we could never assume any stability in social systems there would be no point in attempting any systematic research.

Chapter 5: Quality Culture at Viands Ltd.

The study now turns to the collected evidence, derived from three companies in South West England. The first case concerns Viands, an established Cornish firm, which is part of a group of companies with a national reputation for producing high quality, traditional, short-shelf-life pastry products. This chapter first offers a brief history of the company before offering specific details of how evidence, concerning the company's predisposition toward product quality, was gathered. Evidence collected during this study is presented in a predominantly narrative style and, finally, notions of quality are discussed in greater depth.

With over one thousand employees, Viands is one of the largest private employers in Cornwall. Manufacturing around two million units per week, with over ninety product lines, the company has a turnover in excess of £80m per annum. Branded products command twenty per cent of the market overall, and seventy-eight per cent of pastry sales in garage forecourts. Directors attribute their market leadership to their paramount commitment to product quality. Daily 'bakes' from the production bakeries provide a range of branded products as well as several own-label lines. These are delivered nationally by the company's fleet of refrigerated lorries and sales vans, operating from thirteen distribution depots, serving business customers from the home counties to the highlands of Scotland. During the course of this study the company's three bakery sites underwent reorganisation to create 'centres of excellence'. The newest factory became a separate company devoted to the manufacture of own-label products for the multiple grocer which is (was) Viands' biggest purchaser.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIANDS

The company was founded by a local dairy farmer in the late 1960s. Graham Viand and his two sons had originally traded in clotted cream but felt restricted by the establishment of the Milk Marketing Board in 1966 (Ottery 1997). After a short period of retailing meat pies, they founded their own bakery, with a staff of four, for the manufacture of Cornish pasties from a 'secret recipe'. At the time the market for pasties within Cornwall was prosperous, but only during the short holiday seasons, and the non-Cornish Cornish pasty had a poor reputation and was seen as a bakery by-product: a saleable dustbin for meat off-cuts (Interview, Viands' Production Baker). There was a demand for the rich savoury concoction which tourists had eaten during West Country holidays but no-one was producing genuine Cornish pasties on a commercial scale (Ottery 1997 p. 99).

The original bakery, which is still producing pasties, began as an egg-packing station. Production began in 1967 with 20,000 units per week. Within three years a staff of thirty were producing 48,000 units a day and the company had purchased a farm for the sole purpose of growing potatoes for the pasty fillings. During this 'personal management' phase of the company's development (Schmitz 1993), the business thrived under Graham Viand's direct leadership. In 1971 the business developed further with the establishment of its first van depot which enabled wider distribution and so overcame the seasonal fluctuations of the tourist market. Further expansion followed in the distribution network as well as in the product range.

By 1977, selling unwrapped ready-to-eat products to a wider customer base, including Woolworths, the firm was making an annual profit of £200,000 on a £1m turnover[1]. The movement of the product into stores, rather than the usual outlets of pubs, clubs and fish-and-chip shops was an important development for the firm and its brand image.

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"The first big one was Woolworth – they were big and were selling hot pasties over the counter. We could sell as much in one of their stores ... as in all our other outlets put together. Then came Waitrose, Fine Fare and the others. That brought us to the attention of people like Sainsburys and M and S, so all the time we were evaluating the product and its quality. It was still Cornish pasties, wrapped and under our brand name in the major multiples." (former sales director)

Ottery tells how Graham Viand resented paying 98% income tax and the constraints of the recent Employment Rights (Consolidation) Act[2]. Apparently he was experiencing unrest on the shop floor and felt that "There's no justice in the industrial courts" (Graham Viand quoted by Ottery 1997, p. 103). He began to look forward to retirement and to consider selling the business. The potential for growth was recognised by James and Daniel Strongman, Managing Director and Chairman, respectively, of Midlands Meals. The company was bought by James Strongman in a private deal, a move which necessitated his resignation from the Midlands Meals board. With the change of ownership Viands moved into the next stage of business development, the entrepreneurial form. Before that period is described, however, it is necessary to appreciate the development of the Strongman business in order to understand how the change of ownership affected Viand's.

The Strongman Family Business

The Strongman family business began as a one-man 'pig running' operation at the turn of the century. George Strongman, the grandfather of the present owners, acted as an agent for pork farmers, delivering live pigs to butchers around the city of Birmingham. The business was inherited by his son, Frank senior, who used his close contact with meat retailers to learn the mechanics of those enterprises.

During the second world war, when meat trading was limited by Ministry of Food restrictions, Frank, George Strongman's son, became general manager for a large retail

butcher. Over eight years he not only mastered many of the crafts of the pork butcher, but introduced his three sons to the trade through casual employment with butchers and bakers of his acquaintance. It was in one such placement that James Strongman, the eldest son, was introduced to the principle of product consistency: "I don't care how you make the things; you can make 'em good or you can make 'em bad - but be sure to make 'em the same every day" he was told by one bakery owner (Ottery 1997, p. 9).

Discussions on the concept of quality do not normally include notions of product consistency see (below p. 161*ff*), yet here was a principle that gave substance to many later trading decisions within the Strongman group. In a decision that intervention beef would not be purchased, for example, possible cost advantage was surrendered to the Strongman Brothers' ideal of quality as product consistency:

> "Our policy over intervention meat was the hardest to defend. Some of it has been frozen for years and it might not always be what was described – say percentage of lean – but it was cheap enough that you could afford to throw away a few boxes if they didn't measure up. But we didn't want to compromise standards in any way. We could have saved £6,000 a week at the peak of the intervention business and we were the only meat pie manufacturer who wouldn't use it. The crucial time was about four years ago [c. 1992]. We did use it in the past – that made it even harder to defend [...] The Strongmans, especially James, were very keen to stick to the highest quality products. [...] It's only by saying 'no movement from those high standards' and sticking to that, even through the painful times, that you get your reputation for being consistent." (Managing Director)

From these early days, while the business was only one butchers shop, the Strongmans developed a culture where "quality is a way of life" (internet1), of which the quality-as-consistency notion is but one aspect.

The Strongman brothers of today grew up in the assumption that they would follow their father's profession. Frank, though, had nursed dreams of owning his own business and, although it was not a good time to run a meat business, in 1949 he bought an established butchers shop in the Midlands. Despite its local fame for producing fresh,

hot, good quality pork pies, the shop was, according to Strongmans' advisor, "pretty run down" (Ottery 1997, p12) but had the potential for development. With the aid of a bank loan Frank Strongman bought, and later built up, his first butchering business. By September 1953 he had decided to expand the business through the acquisition of another local butchers, with a similar reputation for quality. As his sons left the Forces, each having decided to join the family business, they were set to work there, for in a self-contained operation they could learn all aspects of the trade.

In the manner of most family businesses (Leach 1964), the family members worked as a team, each being able to take on any aspect of the business. Within an inherently flexible structure each partner worked mainly to their own strengths. As a closely-knit team, the partners could meet frequently to deal with problems informally, with a regular weekly board meeting to formally adopt new proposals. The directors (Frank Strongman and his sons) met every morning to open the post and for the daily product tasting, a tradition which the boards of all Strongman enterprises abide by today:

> "I believe there is a danger that quality controllers will weigh a product, measure it, smell it, do everything with it, in fact, except taste it. We believe it is the job of top management to ensure quality of our pies, sausages, hams and bacon and we do it by the best possible method. Every day we eat our products, and those of some of our competitors." (Daniel Strongman 1971, quoted in Ottery 1997, p. 45)[3]

Such a hands-on approach to the management of a company is typical of the personal management style (Wilson 1997), where the close links between control and ownership allow a highly individualistic culture within a company. Informal (or semi-formal) face-to-face contact allows the owner-manager to maintain control through example rather than codified structures, and to build up a form of loyalty that is based upon personalities rather than rewards (Goffee and Scase 1995). The current chairman makes regular weekly visits to Cornwall to meet with his managers and to tour the factory

floor; and staff are well accustomed to occasions where he was 'just passing'[4]. Despite the growth of the Strongman group of companies, Viands is firmly imprinted with the personalities of its owners who retain control over strategic decisions

Another enduring feature of the personal management style is the traditional, paternalist approach to staff management which, Goffee and Scase (1995) assert, is typical of entrepreneurial organisations. The Strongmans have always had regard for the well-being of their staff and this is reflected in the active social programme, private medical insurance, and profit sharing scheme from which all their employees benefit (Ottery 1997; Viands Journal; Strongman Standard). It is tempting to ascribe such provisions, which are so redolent of 'enlightened' Victorians such as Lever Brothers, Rowntree and Colman (Bradley 1987), to some altruistic value-set, however, there may also be an element of *noblesse oblige* wherein affluent industrialists accept responsibility for the well-being of their social inferiors (Bendix 1956, cited by Wilson 1997). There is, however, also a sense by which paternalism directly addresses a business need for a content and effective workforce (Williams 1931) and ties the workforce into the system of industrial capitalism (Wilson 1997). While the social conditions of twentieth century Cornwall bear scant comparison with those of, for example, Victorian Staffordshire, the advantages of working for a company which provides for personal and social welfare may, superficially at least, outweigh those of employment in a unionised organisation[5].

During the 1960s the Strongmans, aware of the climate of industrial mergers, anticipated a probable rationalisation of the meat industry. Their company had continued to grow by concentrating its operations into van sales rather than shops, but they now agreed that a programme of expansion through acquisition was the means to achieve their long-term targets. They began to buy other meat businesses in nearby

towns and cities, each having an established reputation for high quality products; and briefly diversified into grocery retailing.

With nineteen shops and a fleet of delivery vans operating, the company needed a more comprehensive system of management. Daniel attended a four-month Programme for Management Development at Harvard (Ottery 1997) and, on his return, was appointed managing director as his father took a less direct role in administering the business. A Company management training course was begun which continues today (Internet 1) as a carefully structured and well regarded graduate development programme. The first trainee went on to become Managing Director of Midlands Meals in 1977.

Midlands Meals, had been the Strongmans' only serious rival. When the opportunity arose, the family lost no time in buying that company in 1969. The deal, which doubled the Strongmans' business, marked a turning point for Frank senior. He recognised that his business had grown to be too large for his direct control; and that new methods of management would be needed if it were to fulfil his hopes of achieving a leading position in the food industry. Frank senior stepped down from his executive position, although he insisted on retaining control of the buying of pigs and pork meat: his primary area of expertise.

Expansion through acquisition continued. By 1970 the Strongman group owned fifty retail outlets, operated eighty wholesale van rounds, and was continuing to grow. Pre-tax profits were in the order of £100,000 per annum on a turnover of £4 million. The family, however, possessed very little financial security. That fact, and the combined effects of the new Capital Gains Tax, probable Estate Duty, and the potential for improved status for the company, led to the decision to float the company on the stock exchange. The flotation of Midlands Meals (the brothers had decided to use the famous brand name of its subsidiary company) was over-subscribed 31 times on the first day,

with share prices rising from 115p to 140p in six hours. At the end of the first year's trading the company report showed an annual turnover of £5.2 million with a profit of £424, 100.

Typical of the entrepreneurial (as opposed to personal) form of company structure, the Strongmans had placed personally approved managers into their shops, bakeries and abattoirs, while relying on outside capital, in the form of bank loans, to finance expansion. Floatation marked the transformation into the third stage, that of 'managerial capitalism' (Schmitz 1993), divorcing ownership and control. Management becomes a professional function while the company is effectively owned by shareholders who will provide the equity but have no role in running the business. For the Strongmans, who prided themselves on consistent high quality in their products, the demand to achieve financial targets was difficult to tolerate. Demands on their time to meet with financial analysts and constant scrutiny by shareholders detracted from the business of manufacturing and selling foods, and they soon became disillusioned with life on the board of a public company.

> "I always hated having someone else tell me how I should being doing my business that I was the expert at. Yes, being the owner is a big part of it. I think that's why I got on to the development boys to come up with a new sausagemeat. A lot of it was a reaction to being able to be in control again." (James Strongman)

> 'We are proud to be privately owned and professionally managed. Private ownership allows us to move fast, be flexible and take the long term view on People, Quality and Profit. We will remain a private company.' (from the Company website).

Furthermore, the 1970s were difficult trading times. Demand for ready to eat food products was increasing but world-wide economic recession and, in the meat industry, the fluctuation of the 'pig cycle'[6] took their toll on company profits. The brothers had worked hard to build up their company but had no desire to continue that hard work for

outside interests. Although Daniel was reluctant, the brothers agreed that they would sell their interest in Midlands Meals to a larger chain of food manufacturers, and would purchase Viands where they might recover their entrepreneurial leadership.

To support the purchase of Viands, James and Daniel set up a new holding company with James as Chairman. Once Midlands Meals was no longer a separately quoted company, Stock Exchange regulations permitted James to return to its board, while Daniel retained his position as Chairman. There may have been some underlying financial consideration that obliged the brothers to maintain their interest in the latter company but the move also demonstrates a curious contradiction in the entrepreneurial mind-set. While the Strongmans resented the control exerted upon them by, for instance, shareholders, they were not averse to imposing their own controls on others.

Viands – 'Under New Ownership'

Under the leadership of James Strongman, with the Viand family retaining executive positions, Viands began a period of continuing growth, modernisation and development. James Strongman (at interview) considers that the highlight of this period was the winning of contracts to supply major multiple retailers, as do the current senior managers. This achievement is attributed directly to Strongman Brothers' continuing philosophy that: "Quality is a way of life" (Internet 1) which so closely reflects the beliefs of the original owners: "Appearance sells the first product. Flavour, texture and quality sells the second." (Gerald Viand quoted in Ottery 1997, p. 103). It did, however, bring its own dilemmas:

"It was a big dilemma when we were asked to do own label for Sainsbury. We agreed because they had the public trust for quality which meat pies didn't generally have. It was a way of elevating the product more. But it was a case of do own label or whither. They were the brand really. Other manufacturers had been driven down in price ... no such thing as sell by dates and people didn't trust them. But they did trust brands [hand signals of quote marks] like Sainsburys and M and S." (Brands Director)

A growing business needed space to expand. A second bakery was built, alongside the original, to accommodate continuous flow ovens and allow for automated production of pies and sausage rolls. Cornish pasties continued to be hand-crimped at the first site. This was a major marketing feature and, in its earlier volumes, Viands Journal carries accounts from 'crimpers' who demonstrated their skills at trade fares and special local events such as the RNAS Culdrose Air Show.

"There is now a tried and tested formula that works very well. As well as giving out samples and information on the Company, there is a hand crimping demonstration, where the public can try their hand at crimping, being shown the art by [named female workers] who ... look stunning in their traditional [country wench] costumes" (Viands Journal September 1988)

During the building of the second bakery the company began to experience labour problems. High absenteeism among the production staff, and a sharp increase in labour turnover were interpreted as symptoms of low morale among the workforce. While the cause was obviously complex, it was attributed in part to the intense change associated with the rapid development of the company. The Strongman Brothers needed to deal with these difficulties to avoid replicating them in their other, newly acquired, businesses[7]. A renowned management consultant was engaged to:

"Find ways of making Strongman Brothers into one of the most interesting and worthwhile companies to work for in Britain so that the Group will attract more of the best recruits." (Ottery pp123-124)

The resulting proposals suited the Strongman's paternalist approach, although the brothers were accustomed to a fairly autocratic style of management, and were adopted in full.

Changes aimed at improving trust relations began with the merger of the personnel and organisational development departments into the Department of Human Resource Management. The Chairman issued a policy statement affirming that "our most important asset is our people" (Viands Journal, June 1986), and similar rhetoric began to appear in the Journal. A profit sharing scheme was introduced on the premise that increases in value-added should go to workers as well as the management; 'product champions' were appointed from among some of the longer serving staff, while others were formed into multi-disciplinary product teams; and a staff suggestion scheme was introduced with great fanfare. Viands Journal gave details:

> "...In line with the company's increasing awareness of the importance of its employees, we are introducing a suggestion scheme. It is being introduced to encourage all employees to take a more active interest in the future of the company as this in turn will obviously affect the future of each of our employees ... No matter which departments you work in there is always room for improvement and cost saving. Your suggestion need not have anything to do with your particular job that it could be to do with anything that you have observed whilst at work ... Put forward your suggestions and you too could receive up to £5000 for your trouble". (December 1986)

Subsequent editions told stories of 'heroes' who had been given substantial 'rewards' for their suggestions:

> "... November saw our largest single pay-out for an adopted suggestion. Peter was awarded £750 for his suggestion to use red diesel, instead of white, in the fork-lift trucks [thus saving on duty]... (March 1987)

> "Steve received a near miss award. He suggested that instead of throwing away the fat that is cut from roast pork joints before dicing, it should be melted down and used when frying onions, therefore saving money on lard and also improving the flavour of the pork pie." (December 1990)

"Andrew was presented with a cheque for £2293.75, for his excellent suggestion... By using pastry guides and making a few simple adjustments the amount of scrap (formerly 113 kilograms of scrap per 400 kilogram mix) has been greatly reduced." (March 1993)

"... Peter who received £2675! Peter submitted a comprehensive idea for dealing with trade effluent in a more efficient way." (December 1993)

The scheme has undergone various modifications over the last ten years, but continues to run with varying degrees of success. While the major focus of both suggestions and awards has been on cost savings, there have been many ideas concerning product quality, health and safety, hygiene and staff welfare improvements.

An attribute of the private ownership so valued by the Strongman brothers is flexibility in production. When the multiple retailers approach the company for new product lines, or for special offers, a prompt response is needed to cater for the particular demand. Such was the case when, in 1992, a major multiple approached Viands, and other food manufacturers about supplying a new product line – sweet pastries such as custard tarts.

"They were already dealing with another company but what we had was that we were good at pastry and we could give a more consistent quality as well as volume. [The retailer] had already identified – rightly – that what we could do with savoury pastry we could do with sweet. There was quite an investment – new machinery and processes – we'd never had to deal with liquid fillings, for instance. ... I took it back to Daniel Strongman. It was a case of does he want to risk his money in this area. He said he did and from there it was a management process – getting and developing skills. ... We're now making custard tarts, fruit pies and lemon meringue. It's the sort of area that Lyons and Kipling can't do so well. We can make a fresh, more natural product." (Contracts Manager)

The outcome of what was essentially a swift response to an uncertain opportunity is that that retailer has become a major customer. Viands needed to build yet another new production unit to cope with the demand from that customer. That factory has, during the course of this study, been established as a separate company within the Strongmans group.

"The majority of our business is in other people's labels. We have two businesses really. We're supplying the supermarkets' brands and the other side is our name out in the streets." (Brands manager)

Throughout an hundred years of business, Strongman-owned companies have been established upon and sustained by a commitment to product quality. The company history indicates that the underlying concept of quality is personal, tacit and immensurable. It is built upon notions of product consistency, taste as well as appearance, and (from the contracts manager quoted above) a fresh, natural product. Product quality was the factor that enticed the family to purchase the businesses that were later amalgamated into Midland Meals, and it was a reputation for quality that attracted the multiple retailers to offer them new product lines. While other market advantages (such as pricing) were relinquished, the commitment to quality has served the Strongmans well. Since they purchased Viands, other firms have been acquired to put the Strongman group into a strong market position. This study, however, concerns Viands and this account now turns to the mechanics and findings of the field study within that enterprise.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

Initial contact was made with Viands' personnel and development manager, who gave agreement in principle to the study. Following early discussions it was agreed that, in return for the company's co-operation, the researcher would assist in a series of historical case studies which would be used for training purposes. It was felt that some of those cases could form the basis for this research as they would legitimate the presence of a researcher and ease access to senior managers. Four cases were agreed upon, having the common theme of product quality:

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CASE A – THE CASE FOR AND AGAINST INTERVENTION MEAT (PASTIES AND PIES)

The use of 'intervention' meat (supplied by the EEC Intervention Board) could have saved the company thousands of pounds a week. However, in the pursuit of quality, the decision has always been to avoid its use, even during difficult trading times.

CASE B – THE CASE FOR PRODUCT QUALITY (FILLINGS)

A management trainee instigated a blind tasting of two meat products. One had a marginally higher proportion of fat compared to meat, which could increase the profitability of the product. A taste panel, including the company chairman, could not differentiate the two products. The decision was made, however, not to accept the product change as it was considered to be the beginning of an incremental denigration of quality.

CASE C – THE CASE FOR MOVING INTO A COMPLETELY NEW PRODUCT CATEGORY

The company was approached by a major multiple grocer and offered the opportunity to move into the production of sweet pastry products. The multiple had made a connection with [Viands'] savoury pastries and excellent service level for short shelf life products.

CASE D – THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADITIONAL PRODUCTS (QUALITY)

A successful traditional product had undergone continuous development of ingredients and seasoning. The Chairman suggested a 'back to basics' approach using simple fresh ingredients of the highest quality. The price rose but so did sales.

Following that early meeting, other contacts within the company were introduced, and with the co-operation of staff of all grades throughout the company, the data collection phase of the study began.

The first stage of the research consisted of a series of in-depth, unstructured interviews. A total of ten such interviews were conducted with current and retired senior managers. These were people who had been involved, with the specific cases (above). Their names had been suggested, and their agreement to interview sought, by the company's personnel manager. An expected meeting with the Chairman was not possible but James Strongman, the former chairman of Strongman Brothers, was able to give a short interview by telephone. With that exception meetings took place at Viands' factories. Interviews were tape-recorded while hand-written notes were taken as a precaution against the adverse effects of background noise[8].

Arranging visits to the bakery sites was straightforward, and senior managers were receptive and co-operative. Time, however, is a precious resource to the people who participated, hence, most meetings were limited to a period of one hour (twenty minutes for the telephone interview), and needed to follow, closely, the agreed topic guide. Within those constraints, interviews proceeded comfortably with little prompting beyond the scheduled questions. Informants spoke easily and freely, giving the impression that they were at ease with the subject matter, apparently took great pride in the quality of their product, and were happy to give comprehensive accounts of their rôles, thoughts, procedures and processes

Various documentary sources were collected, although it was disappointing to find that The firm does not maintain an historical archive and, although Viands is the major employer in its locality, neither are any company records held in the public libraries. Nevertheless, a great deal of background information about the company and its history

was acquired from published material. The current annual accounts were obtained from Companies House and a fruitful yield of press reports and advertising features was collected by a search of local newspapers. These documents provided a setting to the earlier stages of the study. A ten-year collection of the company newsletter was made available for photocopying. More recently, Strongman Brothers has commissioned and published an official history of their businesses. That volume (Ottery 1997) gives brief histories of all the group's companies along with a valuable account of the current Chairman's vision for his family's business.

The second phase of the project consisted of a period of fieldwork at one of the factory sites. It would convey a false impression to identify this work as participant observation, as a lack of specific skills on my part prevented any real integration into the working teams. Neither was it a non-participant observation, for I was allowed access to all areas of the factory, to talk to all grades of staff, and to attempt many of jobs involved in the assembly and packing of products. During these visits I was made welcome by managers and supervisors. In most areas of the factory employees were told, within my hearing, that I had come 'from the university' to look at how they [the employees] contributed to the quality of their product; and that they could talk freely and answer any questions which I might ask.

During this period I was given opportunities to observe the daily meeting of managers and to participate in some quality audit activities. I was able to experience most areas of the factory: the pre-bake 'sub-assembly' areas for fillings and pastry; the production line; and the packaging and dispatch areas. Occasionally, but with no great proficiency, I was able to take a place on the lines. During an emergency in the 'oven room' I was quickly put to work in 'rescuing' baked products by helping to manually unload the

oven belt. I took my turn at strictly prescribed hygiene procedures; product packaging; and as 'assistant' to the quality controller.

QUALITY CULTURE IN THE WORKPLACE

Each morning, I joined the bakery managers for their daily production meeting. These were occasions when managers, or their deputies, from all parts of the factory met to discuss areas of common interest or concern. The previous day's output would be announced and reject rate assessed. Products might be rejected as a result of mechanical breakdown, for failing a visual inspection because they were cracked or singed, or on the judgement of the daily tasting panel. That panel would comprise the development chef, one of the company directors and three other members of staff chosen at random (and on one occasion a visiting researcher 'from the university'). High rates of rejects (or in company parlance, RBs) lead to overproduction and increased overtime rates, but occasionally overtime would be needed to meet the production targets which were revised at mid-day after contact from sales teams and retailers.

Quality ratings for the previous day's production were also discussed. The most common cause for a poor rating (less than 98%) was a failure in hygiene standards. If this occurred an extraordinary hygiene audit would be ordered by the meeting and, once, a worker was called to a disciplinary hearing. Ongoing quality problems and possible solutions were discussed. For instance, when a product champion had reported that lemon meringues were subject to finger damage, because the layout of the packing area meant that the packers did not have a clear view of products and were working by feel, a production team was set up to investigate how this might be overcome. An ongoing-problem through the week was the cracking of the piecrust on a particular

product. The source of the problem was unclear but the progress of an investigation was reported daily.

Issues of product quality were the chief concern of these meetings but, as the study progressed, it became clear that the concept was complex, complicated and intangible. Consistency of the product, taste and freshness have already been identified as components of the concept, but the evidence from the management meetings is that aesthetics and hygiene standards also contribute to a good quality pie.

At the time of the study, the launch of a new own-label dessert product was being delayed because of difficulties in getting the mix right. Two weeks from concept to product launch seemed rather adventurous to me, but there was a danger that Viands would lose the contract if the new pudding could not be on sale within three weeks. The retailer, I was told:

> "always want to follow Marks and Spencer. If Marks and Spencer launch a new line then [this retailer] wants the same but better. If we can't do it for them, they'll go to someone else." (Technical Controller).

The product launch had originally been set for the Monday, was postponed until the following Monday, but finally happened on the intervening Saturday. The staff involved had worked long days in order to solve their problems and managers came into work, voluntarily, on the Saturday rather than postpone the launch until the next Monday.

Other topics for discussion included changes to job rotation in the packing area because of a case of repetitive strain injury. The nomination of the 'employee of the week/month' led to some heated discussions, with each manager supporting their own nominee. The final decisions were announced in a brief ceremony on the factory floor. Each Friday lunchtime, following the reading of a brief citation, the candidates are each

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presented with a sash and the key for a designated parking space, next to that reserved for the Chairman.

On entering the pre-bake (assembly) area of the factory all visitors are instructed in the rituals of *hygiene*. Hands must be washed, at operating theatre style sinks, before and after donning protective clothing, and then sanitised with an alcohol-based hand rub. The strict hygiene regulations prevented note-taking on the factory floor, so that periods of observation had to be planned with frequent breaks to allow for writing up time.

The temperature and the noise were immediately noticeable. Pastry making needs a cool atmosphere (c.12°C), and the general chill is exacerbated by a constantly damp atmosphere, as staff have to continually '*do hygiene*' by washing the floor with pressure hoses. Pastry cutting machines produce a rhythmic 'kerchun-chung' against a steady whirring from conveyor belts, with a counterpoint 'phud-phud' from retractors at the end of the belt. Ambient noise levels prevented any meaningful conversation, but this was compensated for by enthusiastic discussions, with the line workers, over lunch. These ad hoc meetings provided opportunities for informal discussion on a range of issues relating to the working lives and experiences of the line workers at Viands.

Each section sends one member of staff for each break period, so there is a mix of workers in the canteen at any one time. Many of the staff are related, as might be expected in a town with only one major employer. The major topic of conversation concerns how production is progressing. Staff, who begin work at 6 a.m. will not know until 12.30p.m., when the retailers confirm their orders, when the shift will end. Even if the planners have made an accurate forecast for the day's production, any 'down time' will extend the working day. Several people, especially from dispatch, pointed out that they were not obliged to stay late but, they claimed, they were doing management a favour which they might recall at a later time. An alternative perspective

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was offered by a young the female packer. On the Wednesday morning one of the night staff ('Tracey'), who was finally finishing her shift at 11 a.m., told me that there had been a prolonged 'down-time' during Tuesday night. While she was willing to stay on and benefit from overtime payments, her primary motive was to ensure that her mother (a day-shift packer) would not have to work late, as Tracey needed her to baby-sit that evening.

The factory is organised into two distinct areas. Pre-bake includes all procedures, from deliveries to assembly, which occurs before products are moved into the ovens. The high-risk area deals with cooked products and includes packing and dispatch. Staff cannot move between the two without going through *hygiene* and donning distinctively coloured clothing.

Quality and hygiene controls begin in the delivery bay where meat must be kept separate from other ingredients. (At any time one of three qualified butchers must be present to inspect meat before it is accepted into the factory.) Once accepted all batches are given numbers and 'conformance sheets' which will ultimately allow any problems to be traced back to the original batch. After cooking, samples of each batch of product are stored by the hygiene auditor for random testing at a microbiology laboratory.

The pre-assembly areas work to a closely timed plan, based on forecasts of the day's required output. While pastry-making is largely an automated process, the company does not trust machines to sort fruit and vegetables; these are sorted by hand. A quality product, I was told, begins with high quality ingredients.

> "Any visitor to the factory, be it [retailer], the Chairman, or any other visitor can see the quality of the fresh produce we use. Daniel Strongman always says 'if you can't see the quality for yourself you can't be sure of the quality of the finished product.'" (Technical and Quality Manager)

The details of each batch of ingredients are entered on the conformance sheets, and on special Hazard And Critical Control Point (HACCP) forms which, staff were keen to point out, 'came from NASA'. HACCP is an internationally recognised food safety control (Bodenham 1988), which was developed originally to safeguard the microbiological safety of food being supplied to astronauts during the early days of the US manned space programme. Its use has become customary, and increasingly important, since the enactment of the Food Safety Act (1990) which established a sole defence of 'due diligence'.

While the exact format may vary, HACCP systems allow a systematic assessment of hazards to be conducted (Whittle 1998) through the audit of processes and the listing of any characteristics which will affect the integrity of the final product. Where it is established that a hazard presents a risk, then preventive measures are identified and controls put in place. Test points are established to monitor likely hazards. At each of these points HACCP forms record the delivery details of each ingredient as well as preparation times. Operators sign for each element of the procedure and are held accountable for specific hazard controls. The particular strength of the system is that it can monitor and control a range of hazards, particularly contamination by microbiological and chemical agents, and foreign bodies.

Within Viand's bakeries HACCP is part of quality control, suggesting that hygiene and microbiological safety are also factors in the elusive concept of product quality, and factors which predominate at shop-floor level. Hygiene is also a multi-faceted concept which involves, at least microbiological safety, cleanliness and the absence of foreign bodies. It induces its own rituals of washing, dressing and maintenance. Hygienic practices justify separation of, and distinction between, different sections of the workforce and represent a form of panopticism through systems of audit, conformance

and random testing. Staff are accustomed to being watched[9] while they work and seem not to notice visitors (distinguished by their hat bands). The area is subject to regular quality (hygiene) audits and the presence of a researcher apparently made no impact upon the chargehand who, on being informed of a low score (92%), proceeded to harangue the worker responsible for not disposing of pastry scraps properly.

Staff rotate, within their assigned areas every hour, to prevent boredom and, in some cases, repetitive strain injury. On a planned basis they are rotated to other areas of the factory so that they become multi-skilled. In the event of staff shortages managers and supervisors would rather reallocate their regular staff than bring in temporary (agency) workers who are less reliable about hygiene and quality. The staff are not always willing to work outside of their established teams but sometimes appreciate the overtime pay and "... anyway, its better than getting temps in. They're so slow you'd be here all day waiting for them to get on." (Fruit room worker).

Functional flexibility allows for swift and smooth redeployment of staff between activities (Atkinson 1984). In a small factory this has obvious advantages and at Viands staff can be moved quickly from one area to another if some crisis occurs. On the final day of the study a mechanical failure meant that products leaving the oven could not be transferred, automatically to the cooling area. A bell was sounded and the pre-bake assembly line was stopped. The ovens hold half-an-hour's worth of production: 1,250 pies and 4700 sausage rolls, that could be wasted if they were not manually transferred. Everybody in the high risk area was moved quickly to the 'oven room' to begin loading trays. Within a few minutes, staff from pre-bake had changed, washed and moved into the oven room to assist with the procedure. Their skill in handling delicate pastry products was vital to minimise the damage that was inevitable in the manual transfer.

The low skill, automated work of a pie factory does not suit everyone. Inevitably there were workers who had grievances about their jobs and conditions. As a general rule, though, workers at Viands appeared to be content with their position. Skill is a relative concept (Grint 1991) and many of the staff consider their work as skilled, even if accepted definitions of the term do not apply: "You can learn the job in a day, but to be really good at it takes about a week", said an assembly worker who controls the speed that pastry is fed into the line.

Viands is a major employer in the area but, even so, there is a waiting list of people wanting to join the company. Pay and conditions are considered to be superior, especially with benefits such as health insurance and a company pension scheme. Questions about pay did not produce any direct answers except that the rates were "good for around here" (dispatcher). At the time pay rates were based on the nature of the job, skill, and seniority. Staff Association Minutes detailed a proposed reform to a simplified, company-specific system based on seniority. Staff were more forthcoming regarding the profit share system. Most, like their managers, felt that it made little difference to their work efforts. While managers, typically, said that:

> " ... if you took it away I wouldn't work less. I feel personally involved so it is emotional." (Personnel Manager)

> "I'm paid to do a job that I enjoy. The profit share is just icing on the cake" (Bakery Manager)

the workers were more instrumental in their attitudes:

> " I might think about it a bit during February. We get it paid in March"

> "I wouldn't call it an incentive. It's only worth about five pounds a week. Mind you if I had [the managing director's] profit share, that would be worth getting."

Systems of human resource management (HRM) form the basis of a major stream of academic research that is beyond the agreed scope of this project however we might note here that the company has developed a level of loyalty, compliance and commitment (Edwards 1989) that larger firms with more sophisticated HRM systems might envy (e.g. Storey 1995a). Through a system of traditional paternalism, that is so often derided, the company has achieved functional and numerical flexibility and maintained a non-union stance. Staff might not enjoy working outside of their customary areas but they do not object to doing so, and managers are willing to give up a Saturday in order to advance the company's interests. Workers enjoy the family atmosphere of the bakery and, according to a recent audit of the company, are proud to be associated with a quality product (Plymouth Business School, 1992).

Inevitably, the rich evidence that a case study produces will evoke many issues that might be studied in greater depth. At Viands HRM is one of those issues, but to linger on this subject would be to neglect the central issue that is the company's commitment to product quality. The final section of this study considers that commitment, and its associated concepts, within a theoretical framework.

MANAGING QUALITY

In his afterword to the published company history, Daniel Strongman declares that "the history of our family and our business has only one benchmark with which to judge us: Quality." (Ottery, p185). For the Strongman Brothers, second only to the well-being of their staff, quality is a strategic priority in all their companies, including Viands. Visitors to the company's bakeries see the rhetoric as soon as they enter the premises for, facing the door, taking precedence over all other plaques and decorations, is a board declaiming:

The relative quality of products or services has been described as the most important factor to affect the long term performance of a business (Buzzell & Gale, 1987, Feigenbaum, 1982). The pursuit of quality is, therefore, of crucial importance to business managers. Like justice, success or goodness, *quality* has a delicious ambiguity in that it is universally deemed to be a 'good thing' yet it defies a universal definition. If quality is to be sought and/or achieved the term needs to be operationalised and even, oxymoronically, quantified. For researchers, too, a valid and reliable perception of what is to be assessed is vital before a valid measurement can be achieved (Attree 1993).

While terms such as inadequate, shoddy or inferior are typically used for the purpose, there is no real antithesis of quality. The absence of an antonym suggests that, unlike so many concepts, quality cannot be defined by what it is not. It is an attribute of people and artefacts that, like height or age, may be held to a greater or lesser extent. However, unlike height or age, quality eludes precise measurement unless the concept is represented by some quantifiable characteristic. Various attempts to ascribe meaning to the concept have generally been less than adequate, resulting in a confused and imprecise collection of definitions; which suggests that some alternative form of (qualitative) analysis may be more appropriate in apprehending the nature of quality.

Not surprisingly, no unequivocal definition of quality can be found in the literature. Although the categories have since modified, in an early version of the popular *Quality Control Handbook* Juran et al. (1962) identified eight primary uses of the term in industry. Two of these refer to the organisational functions surrounding quality control, three focus on the customers' requirements, and two on the characteristics of the

product or service. Only one of these eight interpretations relates to excellence, which is the primary dictionary definition (SOED).

Focusing on the customer, Juran et al.(1962) identified that quality may refer to satisfaction of a particular customer's wants (marketplace quality), the potential to satisfy people generally (quality of design) or to customer preference for a particular product over competing goods. Marketplace quality was, though, deemed to be the most fundamental definition.

Customers are the ultimate arbiters of quality (Buzzell and Gale 1987; Gronoos 1990) so that customer requirements, if they can be identified, will be more reliable guides to standards than judgements made by managers. A firm that can consistently discover or drive customers' expectations, and meet them, will have a distinct competitive advantage (Reeves and Bednar 1994). When quality is defined as meeting (or exceeding) customer expectations it takes on a wider meaning than the technical standards of materials, design and techniques (Kuehn and Day 1962). The balance between price and quality become important as do the customers' expectations prior to the decision to purchase (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1988) and, presumably, the firm's reputation.

For Viand's there are at least three groups of customer: the major multiple grocers for which they bake 'own label' products; small retailers such as corner shops, garages and service stations; and, ultimately, the consumers. The major multiples have very precise requirements which Viands are obliged contractually to meet.

Most important in this process is the recipe. Products have slightly different recipes for each of the major multiples. No two versions of, for example, chicken pie are identical. While Viand's retain copyright to the recipe, the product is owned by the retailers who

have the final say about what the recipe contains. If, for instance, Viands needs to buy from a new supplier, this cannot be done without explicit consent from the retailer. In practice there is a close liaison, via contracts managers, between the company and the retailers which involves concessions from both sides.

Consumers who buy from the multiples are an ambiguous factor, and supermarket policies of 'no quibble refunds' bring their own problems to the company. One particular multiple will refund a customer, without question, but will charge Viands £10 plus the refund regardless of whether a complaint is justified. The technical controller keeps standard letters regarding complaints about mushrooms fibres – which customers perceive to be hair – and 'gristle' (chunks of lean pork) in sausagemeat.

Customer expectations are difficult to measure, they may be idiosyncratic, and are subject to change over time and between various groups and/or individuals. However, firms that seek to discover their customers' requirements are best placed to identify major changes in the market (Garvin, 1988). A major link for the meat industry is the British Association of Meat Manufacturers with which the Strongmans have a long relationship. Intelligence on consumer choice and preferences, from the Association, along with Viands' own market research combine to enable the company to forecast changes in customer expectations; information which they share with suppliers for mutual benefit (Managing Director). Successful forecasting has allowed the company to predict and prepare for changing attitudes to offal products, an increasing preference for white meat, and growing demand for meat-free products. Mistakes have been made along the way. A low-fat 'pasty' which used a potato flour was a market failure as was another product with a pizza-style vegetarian filling (Brands Manager).

Market research is not the final arbiter in production decisions, however, and Viands' directors are prepared to reject such evidence if it is contrary to their own views on what is a quality product:

> "Sausage rolls were always a cash cow. We used to use something called 'banger mix' which was as awful as it sounds, it had little if any meat in it. I never liked it. When [the development baker] came to us, he had the skill we needed. I told him to make the best sausagement he could[10]. Price wasn't an issue, I just wanted us to make the best sausage rolls. It was expensive but it turned out to be a best seller. Now other producers are trying to copy what we do." (James Strongman)

A similar attitude to beef products became instrumental in protecting the company during the height of the BSE crisis. Graham Viand had rejected the customary pie-filling of meat scraps using, instead, shank of beef which was prepared and minced in the bakery. Under the direction of James Strongman and his development baker the meat filling was further improved as sequential tastings identified the most flavoursome muscles within the shank.

Further, a decision was taken to buy only from approved beef farmers, eschewing the cheaper beef derived from dairy herds. As problems surrounding BSE grew, Viands were already using approved sources of beef and could confidently label their products as coming from 'assured' sources. While the company could not directly affect consumer decisions to avoid beef, existing policies already met the requirements of the multiple retail companies which, as had been established so long before, held consumer confidence.

Garvin (1988, cited by Reeves and Bednar 1994) contends that consumer decisions are based on price as well as quality. Value may be a more accurate definition of quality because it considers both effectiveness and efficiency as indicators of customer perceptions, and offers the notion of affordable excellence[11] as the bases of purchase decisions. Curry (1985 p. 112) argues that "consumers clearly recognise differences in

value", because firms that offer high quality at consistently low prices were market share leaders. There are, however, conflicting opinions about the relationship between quality and value. For Stahl and Bounds (1991) quality is a component of value, but value is not synonymous with quality. However, Bolton and Drew (1991) found that perceptions of value were dependent upon perceptions of quality.

As the study began, Viands were about to launch a new range of premium quality products. The company had bought the rights to a name which was considered to be associated with the best in British foods. The new range of pies comprised only the best of ingredients, such as rump steak or spit-roasted, free range chicken, and were considered suitable be sold in the grandest of food halls as well as in supermarkets. The pies were delicious (a subjective judgement) and, it could be argued, offered value for money because the raw ingredients were of such high grade. However, despite glossy, exquisite packaging and a distinctive brand name, sales did not reach targets. While these pies did not bear direct comparison with those that were displayed alongside them, the price was some fifty per cent higher, weight for weight. The new brand was withdrawn after only three months of sales.

When quality is defined in terms of value, multiple interrelated variables are conflated. Extracting the individual components and assessing their relative importance to the consumer is a time consuming and difficult task which has eluded managers and researchers alike. The concept of value, however, must be a consideration where 'marketplace quality' is the driver of a company's quest for quality. Conversely, a meeting-or-exceeding expectations definition of quality should include value considerations in customers' expectations. Thus, value is seen by some to be a sub-component of quality, whereas others view quality as a sub-component of value.

Juran et al.(1962) identified two usages of the concept of quality which focused on the product (or service) rather than on the customer. These concerned characteristics of a product, such as longevity, reliability or ease of maintenance, and how well the product conforms to specifications or design (quality of conformance). These notions, also propounded by Deming (1982) and Crosby (1979), have attracted much support as they provides quantifiable, and hence controllable, parameters for an otherwise imprecise concept.

A 'conformance-to-specifications' definition of quality (Crosby 1979) is attractive because of its clarity and the ease with which it can be implemented. Specifications can be established and outputs measured with relative ease; and failures identified quickly. Production costs can be reduced through the standardisation, and interchangeability of components and products; the regulation of procedures; and specialised of processes[12]. Further, the use of specifications reduces the need for subjective, 'expert' judgements; enables mass production and may reduce labour costs. Numerical measurement allows for the comparison of 'quality' over time and between manufacturers.

Crosby, Deming, and Juran stressed that managers must isolate the components that customers demand in the final product and/or service if appropriate standards are to be established (Reeves and Bednar 1994). When customers' needs are correctly identified and codified, a conformance-to-specifications definition drives an organization toward both efficient and effective production (or service delivery). However, the approach is not without risk, for preferences can and do change over time so that established specifications can quickly become irrelevant. If a company is slow to respond to changes in requirements, or specifications are otherwise inappropriate, the 'conformance to specifications' approach can detract from, rather than improve, quality (Oliver, 1981b).

There were obvious examples of specifications to be found in all areas of Viands' bakery. Conformance sheets, and HACCP documents ensured that products were of a consistent standard. Temperature and microbiological tests, and regular audits, safeguard hygienic production. Weight checks prior to packaging confirm that a product fits its description. Food production, however, ultimately depends upon the recipe, the equivalent of a standard operating procedure, which derives from matters of taste rather than some concrete variable. The question, therefore, arises as to how does one specify a Cornish Pasty?

Convention holds that the 'traditional' Cornish Pasty was simply a meal which was wrapped in a pastry case for ease of transport. Recipes were as varied as the housewives who cooked them. A pasty might contain any food scraps available in the home while, at a time when farm produced meat was an expensive luxury, the protein element, if any, was likely to be the rabbit or shellfish which could be caught locally. Popular accounts hold that there would be savoury and sweet at either end of the pasty. The pastry, which was possibly only a flour and water damper, had to be tough enough to withstand 'the drop down a mine shaft' (Viands Journal, March 1987). Viands' pasties are a different matter. Prime cuts of Scottish beef, with potato (introduced to Britain in the sixteenth century) and Swedish turnip, are delicately spiced with imported herbs and wrapped in a delicate French puff pastry. Such a product could hardly be described as either traditional or Cornish. Viands, it seems, have effectively redefined a Cornish pasty to fit their own concept of a quality product. This point was put to the Brands Director:

> "Well, you could say that but we are the market leader and as the market leader we have a duty, a role as guardians of the standard. We make the best product we can, and the others have to follow us if they want to compete."

Defining quality as excellence means it is understood "ahead of definition ... as a direct experience independent of and prior to intellectual abstractions" (Pirsig 1992, quoted by Reeves and Bednar 1994). Excellence implies that a product is as good as it can be; that only the highest grades of components and processes are used in production (or service delivery) and, by extension, that a premium price can be commanded. Excellence is an uncompromising standard (Garvin, 1984) but it is subjective, and liable to change over time. Managers who aspire to excellence are left with little guidance about how they might achieve it.

Excellence is a source of pride for an organisation, its employees and for customers. However, even if a product and/or service is perceived to be excellent, a sufficient number of consumers must be willing to pay for it, if a firm is to be economically viable. While advocates of quality management programmes, such as Crosby (1979) and Deming (1986), have argued that quality does not represent a net increase in costs to producers, Viands' experience with premium products (see also Curry and Faulds 1985; Bonner & Nelson 1985) revealed that premium quality foods (and appliances) attracted fewer sales, and lower market share, than less expensive alternatives. Even when customers desire excellence, they are willing to compromise between quality and price to purchase products which they judge to provide best overall value.

The available evidence and literature point to one firm conclusion: that there is no single, unifying concept of quality. The term employs so many notions that any attempt to identify a comprehensive definition would result in a confused, and often contradictory, model. Furthermore, as Attree (1993, p367) suggests, "to propose a single definition would be a contradiction of ... ethnographic principles". Consequently, the challenge is not to formulate one definition, or model, that attempts to account for all possible variables, but to examine the de facto use of the concept

(Donabedian 1980; Buchan et al.1990; Reeves and Bednar 1994) so that circumstances will dictate which meaning is appropriate. Within the context of this single study, quality is based upon notions of consistency and excellence but also embraces diverse issues such as hygiene, aesthetics (appearance and taste), conformance to specifications and the use of premium grade ingredients. In order to apprehend quality as a discursive phenomenon, operating within the decision making process at Viands, it is this multi-faceted and complex concept which must be analysed, and this will be attempted in Chapter 8.

Summary

This chapter has presented the first in a series of three case studies. Viand's history shows how it has grown, from its beginnings as a small local enterprise, to command a strong trading position. Under the entrepreneurial leadership of the Strongman brothers, the company now bakes its own range of short-shelf-life pastry products and also produces separate own-label lines for most of Britain's major multiple retailers.

An enduring theme throughout that history has been a commitment to product quality that is expressed in many forms. This study has investigated the various ways that such commitment has been translated into workplace practices whilst recognising that other themes, worthy of study in their own right, have emerged from the collected evidence. The theme of quality can be traced through the history of the company and its present owners. As the empirical evidence demonstrates, it is a complex notion that embraces notions of product consistency, excellence, value, and aesthetics, as well as productive processes in the form of specifications and hygiene practices.

Quality is an uncompromising standard that does not make allowances for production difficulties or changes in market conditions. Nevertheless it is a standard that has

served Viands well, in terms of market leadership, and in attracting customers. Viands have defined and operationalised quality in the same way that, due to their market presence and success, they have been able to define the Cornish pasty. Product quality is a source of pride for the company's owners, managers and employees.

Later in this report (Chapter 8) quality will be subjected to Foucaultian analysis. That analysis will attempt to move beyond the difficulties of definition and to examine the term as discourse and practice, to apprehend the technologies of quality and to assess its operation as a social control within a commercial organisation.

NOTES

1 The source (Ottery 1997) does not specify whether this figure represents gross or net profit.

2 Such a view is considered to be typical of the entrepreneurial mind-set for, as Casson (1993 p. 31) explains it was the function of entrepreneurs "to take the judgmental decisions relating to the co-ordination of resources". Presumably Viand believed that it was his duty (and right) to find his own solutions to industrial relations difficulties.

3 The on-going custom of product tasting is an indicator that, despite the regulatory requirement for product specification, Viand's managers and directors reject that as a means of ensuring quality, preferring instead to trust their own subjective judgement in recognising that elusive property.

4 The Strongman group head office and the chairman's home are some 250miles from the Cornwall bakeries.

5 Wilson (1997) suggests, employee welfare schemes were often developed as the means to encourage workers' loyalty toward their employers, and that profit-sharing is one of a number of managerial strategies to combat the strength and popularity of trade unions.

6 The 'pig cycle' is a fluctuating swing in the size of the country's pig population. When pork is profitable there is heavy breeding, and when prices are low there is widespread slaughter; which leads to a shortage of breeding stock when prices rise again. Daniel Strongman predicted similar cycles in the beef and lamb industries if British prices could not be stabilised by continuing membership of the (then) Common Market. (Ottery 1997)

7 It would be derelict to disregard the industrial relations effects of the Strongmans' antipathy to trade unions. That theme recurs and is discussed in Chapter 7.

8 Most interviews were conducted in managers' offices, near the production area where the noise was a problem. Afterwards, only two interviews could be completely transcribed.

9 Representatives of the multiple retailers make frequent visits to the bakery, as do suppliers who are regularly invited to "see for themselves what we do in the factory, and why it's so important that we get only the best ingredients" (Managing Director).

10 The resulting mix did not have the artificial pink colouring with which consumers were familiar. The company had to begin a 're-education programme', via van salesmen and retailers, to remind purchasers that cooked pork meat is grey and that pink meat is indicative of either undercooking or chemical additives.

11 Another difficult concept, that lacks well-defined limits and is often highly subjective.

12 Thus quality can be built into Taylorist or Fordist methods of production, and can be assessed at any stage of the production process provided that specifications have been established. It must also be recognised that specifications are arbitrary and tractable measures so that a product's quality might be defined in terms of what is produced rather than what could, or ought to be, achieved.

Chapter 6: Crowan Brothers and the Struggle for Survival

This chapter presents the second case which concerns Crowan Brothers, an established Cornish company that manufactures air-driven tools for mining and construction. An abridged history of the firm, which is approaching its bicentenary, is first offered to provide temporal orientation to the company's current trading position. Case-specific details of the research methods are next offered, before moving onto an account of the evidence that was collected concerning the company's recent introduction of Kaizen. At appropriate points the underlying principles of Kaizen and its constituent techniques are discussed and compared with the empirical findings.

CROWAN BROTHERS' BRASS AND IRON FOUNDRY

The undertaking known here as Crowan Brothers was founded in 1801 to manufacture, among other things, boilers for Trevithick's high-pressure steam pumps and engines. Hence, as is common with so many Cornish companies, the history of this enterprise is linked closely with that of Cornish tin and copper mining. Through a working partnership with Trevithick, Crowan's small firm contributed many of the improvements that enabled Cornish mining engineering to progress during the first half of the nineteenth century. The business thrived and, as the company reached its golden jubilee year, markets outside Cornwall were being developed.

By the 1950s the company was a world-wide operation with production sites in Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and the Midlands; and subsidiary companies in Canada, South Africa, Kenya, Australia and Malaya. Additionally, there were engineering representatives and agents in six continents. In spite of this enormous expansion, the company, and its world-wide sales organisation, remained under the direct control of the founder's descendants,

with two great grandsons and four great-great grandsons forming the board of the directors. John Crowan, the founder's son, had developed the firm into a high-quality foundry and as the principal supplier, of almost every type of mining machinery, to Cornish ore mines. He was also a shrewd businessman; his investments in local mines proved sound and highly lucrative, and he died a rich man. His sons had joined the business in 1870 and, 10 years later, inherited the enterprise, beginning a fruitful partnership under the name "Crowan Brothers".

Cornwall's prosperous years were now past, however. The mining industry which had fostered the growth of the Crowan's enterprise virtually collapsed in the face of overseas competition. Crowan Brothers' survival was attributed to rigorous research and development, that provided miners with increasingly efficient, high-quality equipment[1]. It was, claims Ealing (1951), chiefly due to such activities that the township of St. Peters thrived despite the Depression. Recession in the Cornish mining industry had led many Cornishmen to emigrate to various parts of the world, taking their skills to new mine-fields, using the techniques to which they were accustomed, and demanding the high-quality Crowan tools upon which they had come to rely. As an international reputation was established, the demand for products grew and the company expanded. Thus the foundation was laid for the world-wide activity of the group, which for over one hundred years has exported at least sixty per cent of its St. Peters' production.

Immediately after the 1914 - 1918 war there was a slump in tin mining (always subject to severe price fluctuations on the world market), but Crown's launched its pneumatic tools programme. It had taken a long time for the industrial importance of compressed air to receive a general recognition, but soon demands for pneumatic spades, excavators, road drills and hammers grew steadily (Ealing 1951). Within thirty years the pneumatic tools

works had become one of the three most important departments at St. Peters, and continued to expand.

During the years of the second World War, Crowan's production was directed to the war effort. Demand for their normal range of products remained steady while the company was also called on to manufacture "special equipment for the forces operating on various fronts"[2] (Crowan's Notes No1, p. 1). The post war period began with stocks severely depleted and the continuation of restrictions on the supply and purchase of steel and other raw materials. Reconstruction efforts increased the demand for rock-cutting equipment and air compressors[3] but, because of supply difficulties, the company was quoting lead times of up to thirty months for its products although customers were apparently prepared to endure the delays rather than buy elsewhere.

Despite the size of what was now an international company, the characteristics of entrepreneurial ownership (Wilson 1995; Deakins 1999) were much in evidence. The company's owners had a serious regard for their responsibilities to their workers and to the town which provided them:

> "We are determined to stay there [St Peters], because we like it and, anyhow, we have a responsibility to all the people we employ to-day. We realise that if anything were to happen to our works there.is no other source of employment which our employees could turn to …
>
> … We are by far the biggest employer in the district, and represent a situation which is probably unique in England. … that a town the size of St Peters should be so dependent upon one industry, which still finds itself as it started so many years ago in a corner of this county." (Company Chairman; Local Press 4, 22 September 1960)

Consequently, the company was active within the community of St. Peters. The firm's sports field was the 'home' ground for the town's football, rugby and cricket teams; while the work's canteen served a secondary function as a concert hall/theatre for the locality.

The works also ran their own sports teams as well as a male voice choir and the 'Gay Nineties' musical theatre group. In September 1949 the company launched an annual 'Crowan Week' with the aim:

> "... to afford opportunities for each department at the Works to co-operate in a programme of activities within which all sections could participate in a real spirit of comradeship, to consolidate the team spirit prevailing throughout the organisation" (Crowan's Notes, September 1949)

The Cornishman newspaper of the following week estimated 20,000 visitors.

Celebrations lasted for four days and continued the strong sense of community and mutual respect which was apparently so characteristic of the Crowan's operation:

> "There is a solid element at the core of our commemoration of respectful admiration for the ingenuity and determination of our predecessors and a serious sense of our responsibility to sustain these essential qualities...
>
> ... Reference to this family quality has been made in previous issues of Crowan's Notes. We are convinced its vital character has played an important part in the steady development of the ... organisation throughout the century and a half of progress that we have been celebrating. Fluctuations in conditions at home and abroad have been experienced but the traditional team-spirit has survived, inspired by the personal example of the Directors whose genuine interest in the well-being of all members of the organisation is so highly appreciated." (Crowan's Notes, September 1951)

A relatively large organisation in a small town will inevitably employ several members of the individual families and the Crowan's were keen to include all their employees in the Company family[4]. That atmosphere of kinship was maintained, on an international scale, through the pages of the company newspaper which regularly reported on the activities of overseas branches, and applauded their achievements. Branch offices and production sites were visited at least annually by one or more of the directors; while overseas staff who visited the St Peters site were welcomed 'home' with great ceremony.

Current employees have fond memories of the sense of 'family' engendered by Crowan's descendants:

> When I was an apprentice, if you did well at college you always got a letter from the Misters Crowan. And it was really personal, like 'Dear Paul, Well done.', And they'd remember next time they saw you – they were always in and out of the shop – and they'd look you out and say how proud they were. It made you feel really good about yourself. It was like we were all one big family." (Fitter)

> "The high point was coming back. When I came back everybody came from all over the place to see me. ... It was really nice when I came back. That sort of feeling that we were all together. 'cause we used to be a family firm through and through. With Crowan Brothers, when I did my apprenticeship, you used to have an interview with the Crowan Brothers after you'd done the IQ test or whatever. They'd give you an interview to discuss things with you. And they'd remember your name. They'd see you on the shop floor two years later and they'd know your name. They came up to me and said 'how are you Michael, how're you getting on?'. That was the thing. It was like a family firm and there was a sort of close knit thing. And when I came back that was still here amongst the men. So I came back to the family. Guys came round and slapping me on the back 'Hey Michael, how are you' you know. And that was after a lot of years really. I'd been away fourteen, fifteen years." (Toolmaker/shop steward)

Throughout the years Crowan's endeavoured to devise equipment that would make the work of miners less hazardous. In the 1950s the launch of a dust-reducing drill ensured the firm's continuing success, as the tool was in great demand in all mines where there was a dust hazard. Although mining continued to occupy an extremely important position in the Crowan programme, an expansion of markets led to increased specialisation in compressed air plant. Public works schemes, including hydro-electric undertakings and civil engineering projects, created new demands for the pneumatic machinery. Those enterprises were amongst some of the principal Crowan customers and, by the middle of the twentieth century, the range of applications of Crowan products was so wide that there where very few industries beyond the firm's markets. Railways, ship building, engineering of all kinds, quarries and breweries were using Crowan pneumatic equipment extensively.

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As the company celebrated its 150th anniversary, in 1951, it apparently commanded an enviable position with its international operations supported by a solid reputation for quality, reliability and service. The home operation was exporting eighty per cent of factory output from its twenty-three acre site at St Peters in Cornwall. However, it is difficult to derive a confident assessment the company's trading position at this time. Archival material relating to the period has been destroyed by later owners[5]. Editorials in company magazines convey an air of optimism but consistently refer to intense overseas competition and urge the workers to greater productivity (e.g. Crowan's Notes June 1952, September 1953). While the company's fine reputation had sustained it through the depressions of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, it seems that the financial pressures of the last fifty years could not be resisted.

In common with other manufacturing companies in post-war Britain, Crowan's had constantly to contend with restricted supplies of power and raw materials. It was not until September 1950 that the company was able to report a monthly output from the St Peters factory that had exceeded new orders during the same period. Characteristically, the editorial in Crowan's notes record the directors' thanks for "the effort exerted throughout the Works [and by] the Selling Organisation at Home and Overseas" (Crowan's Notes December 1950, p. 2). Nevertheless, the priorities of post-war reconstruction and re-armament; trade recession in 1952; inflation within the national economy through the 1950s and 1960s; and third world industrialisation all took their toll on the fortunes of Crowan Brothers.

The first major change came in 1951 when Crowan's was 'linked up' with 'Zenith' another rock drill manufacturer in West Cornwall. The joint managing directors of Crowan's (both great grandsons of the founder) were appointed to the board of the organisation that had

been their major local rival. This arrangement allowed Crowan's to take up spare manufacturing capacity at Zenith but also led to a 'rationalisation of products' (Crowan's Notes, May 1952).

Zenith was formally acquired in March 1953 resulting in the closure of the Zenith foundry, the 'absorption' of redundant labour within the organisation (Crowan's Notes May 1953), and, later, the 'rationalisation' of overseas agencies (Crowan's Notes April 1956). It was fully integrated during mid-1957, as Crowan's was floated on the Stock Exchange (National Press 18 July 1957)[6].

International competition continued to grow and, for Crowan's, pressures were compounded by the moves to independence in Commonwealth countries. By the summer of 1963 the company directors proposed that they should centralise operations, concentrating all UK production at the St Peter's site[7]. The centralisation project lasted for two years as industrial engineers planned and organised the move, including the closure of two plants, the test mine and the Head Office site, without loss of production. It was shortly after the completion of this project, in 1968, that Crowan's merged with a home counties-based company to form a new corporation, known here as Industrial Air International (IAI), with James Crowan, the last of the Crowan dynasty, as Chairman.

With the announcement of this merger came the first, albeit veiled, indications that Crowan's workers could not necessarily look to the company for life-long employment, and that their continued job security would require co-operation with directors' plans:

So far as Crowan Brothers is concerned the first main effect of the merger could be felt in St Peters. The manufacturing requirements in this country of the new group need immediately to be increased. Further expansion at [the home counties site] is not practicable, and therefore first priority will be given to St Peters to meet this increase. However, it remains to be seen whether we will be able to recruit the additional necessary labour force in the St Peters area; and moreover we must be assured that we can achieve a level of productivity in St Peters that will at least be equal to what we could expect if this extra workload were to be placed in another part of the country." (James Crowan writing in Crowan's Notes, September 1968. Emphasis added.)

Within a year of the merger, for reasons that were not explained in the available sources, James Crowan resigned from the board of IAI. The divorce between ownership and management was now complete and a period of turmoil began as ownership changed three times, and a succession of managing directors joined and left the company. The production manager described the frustrations that he and his team of industrial engineers experienced:

"What normally happens is ... You install new machine tools and the machine tools go a long way to – you get a massive improvement ... and then you find out the machine tool can only go that fast. So you've gone from machines that go at 300 rpm to ones that go at 2000 rpm and you say, ' OK, I'm now producing much faster. What's stopping me progressing?' so you look outside the machine tools. Think "Well, I need to get the material there to the operator on time – you need to get the tools pre-set and delivered to him in a useable fashion" And you start to looking at the support and the services, because they become the delays on the machine tools. You start implementing plans to initiate those support services, and reducing the costs and things, and you get a change at the top. A new exec. comes in who's not had the experience in CNC machine tools – how they're used, how they're supported – and you have to sell this to the exec. By the time you do sell it and get their support, they're gone and another team comes in. And then you have to go through the same programme. And in many cases, the executive that comes in does not have the product knowledge, or the detailed knowledge of how the process works. [Q. So how many changes of executive have you lived through?] Oh, I think I've had about twenty M.D.'s – if not more." (Production Manager)

While successive owners have invested in the company, to varying degrees, there has been considerable disruption to the workforce. Each change in ownership has resulted in a 'rationalisation' of production and, apparently inevitable, job losses through redundancy.

Since the formation of IAI, the St Peters workforce has been reduced by over ninety per cent to the current level of 360. Nevertheless, trading fortunes continued to deteriorate, and in 1986 a regional newspaper reported a loss of £10million over the previous four years (Green 1986). The increasingly familiar 'co-operate or close' message was published, in the same article, to persuade workers and their trade union representatives to agree to drastic reductions in the workforce: "the only alternative was complete closure of the works and the end of the Crowan name after almost two centuries of engineering in Cornwall" (Green 1986). Such a move would also have destroyed the single major source of employment in the locality.

The company is currently controlled by 'Sturme', a German-owned, multi-national conglomerate which is alleged to be an 'asset stripper'. Crowan's competitive position is poor as, claims the current (in November 1997) Managing Director, a Japanese rival for the factory's main product is selling for less than Crowan's manufacturing cost. In the face of such dire prospects, and in line with a strategic commitment to lean production[8] (Annual Report 1997, from company web-site), the decision to implement Kaizen was imposed by corporate directors. Another new Managing Director had been appointed in the year before this study was undertaken. An Operations Director with a (self-proclaimed) reputation for innovation was recruited to oversee the new project, and a management consultant was engaged to train the workforce at Crowan's in the philosophy and techniques of Kaizen.

Crowan's long history made the company an attractive subject for a research study with a strong historical bias and, hence, the company was approached for agreement to carry out one study within the current project. The first meeting, with the production manager, was initially disappointing as the lack of archive material became evident. However, there appeared to be great enthusiasm for the newly initiated Kaizen project and it was felt that this might be a suitable focus for the study. Management consultant, Fred Phillips, had been engaged to conduct training workshops throughout the factory and an unsolicited invitation was made to participate in the next scheduled seminar in November 1997; the second such event to be conducted with the workforce.

Phase one of the study was, then, participation in a two-day Kaizen workshop with twenty-four workers from various parts of the St Peters factory. At the workshop, all participants were randomly allocated, by the trainer, to one of five groups and each group worked together throughout the classroom input of the first day and in a small-scale improvement project on the second. As the only woman in the room, I was subjected to gentle sexist banter, not least from Fred Phillips himself, but as the rest of my group did not participate, beyond the colloquial form of address as "my lover", I took this as a sign of acceptance into the team. I was asked privately to be careful not to undermine the men's 'ownership' of their projects by, for instance, accepting the role of scribe or spokesperson. When the workshop dispersed at lunchtimes I had the opportunity to discuss some of the more theoretical issues with Fred and the works' Operations Director.

Various documents were distributed during the workshop and I was permitted to take these away for reference. However, these materials were subject to copyright and permission to reproduce them was expressly withheld by the consultancy.

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The group to which I was allocated, and its project, formed a sensible focus for more in-depth, participant observation during January 1998. This second stage comprised one week of observation within the tools shop. For four days I was to undertake some of the less skilled, everyday activities involved in building and supplying air tools (road-breakers and spader/picks), such as building palettes, washing and de-burring parts, and packing finished tools. There were also ample opportunities to meet with workers in the nearby air-end assembly area, which had been the subject of a previous project, and even to take photographs. At meal and break times I was able to mix, and chat informally, with the members of the project team and the air-end fitters. As skilled crafts-workers, these men worked without obvious supervision, although a foreman visited at several points throughout each day. No senior staff were in the shop or the lunchroom during breaks and, as conversations included matters such as personal opinions about individual managers, and how to play the 'overtime game', it seems reasonable to assume that the men were not worried about speaking freely.

At the end of the working day (7am to 3pm) there was time to visit specialist libraries in the area. The library of the Camborne School of Mines (University of Exeter) and the Cornish Studies Library were able to provide several historical documents: a celebratory history of the company to 1951; a collection of company newspapers for the period 1948-1971; and various newspaper cuttings relating to the company's more recent history. When time and privacy permitted, short notes were kept to augment a field work diary. As in the other studies, that was a private and reflective account of observations and some early analytic notions, which was completed as soon as possible after the end of each shift.

At the end of that week a series of unstructured interviews were conducted and tape recorded. The original project team were interviewed as a group over a one-hour period,

although the conversation continued for some time after recording stopped. A further six interviews were held with various individuals from around the site[9]. It was agreed, with the operations director, that these would include people who were responsible for overseeing the Kaizen projects, including a foreman who had not yet been to a workshop (although a project was underway in his area) and, by specific request, a shop steward[10]. All interviews followed topic guides (Appendices A and B) that had, in the light of experience from the pilot study, been devised following the training workshop but prior to the field study.

As a third phase to the study, a return visit was made during the following September (1988), to ascertain how the projects were developing. I was allowed to move freely around the factory to meet with 'my' team and a new foreman overseeing tools assembly (the air-ends assembly cell, and its foreman, had been moved into the main workshop).

In the management suite I was able to discuss early impressions with the some of the interviewees from the previous visit. By the time of this visit the managing director had been replaced and the operations director had been promoted to works director.

These various visits, and the associated documentary evidence, enabled a degree of longitude that, as had been identified in the pilot study, would allow greater access to the 'subjugated knowledges' within the Crowan's factory. That evidence is described in the next section, following a literature-based overview of Kaizen which is offered as a context for that evidence.

Kaizen was first introduced to the West in the 1980s (Kaizen Institute 1998), one of a series of 'world class manufacturing' techniques from Japan. Like those antecedents, such as Just-in-Time production and Total Quality Management, Kaizen was developed within the Toyota corporation (Elger and Smith 1994), in response to a need for low-cost, small batch production of a variety of motor cars (Womack et al. 1990). Consequently, the term is often used as a synonym for the Toyota production system and is seen to epitomise the Japanese style of management (Imai 1986; Conti and Warner 1993; Oliver and Wilkinson 1992) which is held as being responsible for Japan's 'economic miracle' (Webb and Bryant 1993; Williams et al. 1992).

The term loosely translates as 'continuous improvement' reflecting its deeper roots in the Japanese world view. In a culture that is based partly upon Buddhist doctrine people are familiar with the teachings that offer an escape from the human suffering, and endless reincarnation, caused by human desires. The enlightened state of Nirvana, with its release from the phenomenal existence, is achieved through a constant effort to perfect one's life in a way that respects, and seeks harmony (*wa*) with, the lives of others. This level of perfection is brought about through continual small improvements (Kaizen) in personal and social life. Imai (1986, 1997), however utilised the term in reference to work-life claiming that:

> "... The Kaizen philosophy assumes that our way of life – be it our working life, our social life, or our home life – should focus on constant improvements. This concept is so natural and obvious to many Japanese that they don't even realize they possess it! " (Imai 1997, p.1).

Within organisations the concept is sufficiently catholic that its associated techniques can be applied to the full range of management activity, from product design to marketing

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(Malloch 1997; Krause and Finley 1993; Storey 1994). Kaizen has been taken up by Japanese business managers and modified to represent a process-orientated approach to the management, and incremental improvement, of quality, costs and delivery, which are held to be the essential activities of business. It is based on a fundamental principle that the whole system is driven by customers, internal or external and, as every customer's first priority, quality is given prominence.

As with Total Quality Control, or 'Modern Quality Control' (Feigenbaum 1951), the purported objective of Kaizen activity is to delight the customer, and any process which does not add to the customers' delight (by adding quality or value) is *muda* (or waste). Hence the essential elements of Kaizen are the elimination of waste and a gradual but incessant improvement in the quality of processes, products and services. To this end it can utilise any management technique, either quantitative or qualitative (Malloch 1997) and there is now a catalogue of methods which have become accepted as being part of Kaizen, although many of these 'tools' have derived from, inter alia, the USSR, Israel and Scandinavia as supplements to or improvements upon Taylorism (Graham 1988, Hannam 1993; Conti and Warner 1993). These include: total quality control (or management), aimed at zero defects; Just-in-time and Kanban; cross-functional management; policy deployment; total productive maintenance; 5S[11] or good housekeeping; waste elimination; the plan-do-check-act cycle, visual management controls, and quality circles (e.g. Imai 1986, 1997; Walker 1993; Graham 1988).

Such techniques have emerged in various guises, and in different times and places, since the advent of scientific management (Graham 1988, Hannam 1993) and many were already familiar to the various groups of employees at Crowan's. Over many years these workers had experienced: suggestion schemes which had operated since 1937 (Crowan's Notes,

January 1957); discussion circles (in 1948) which had all the features of the quality circles that were introduced in 1980 (time-study engineer); workplace stock control to identify excess inventory (1955); individual bonus schemes associated with time studies (production manager); a workforce centred productivity drive entitled "Always A Better Way" associated with national Productivity Year, 1962-63; and a customer focused quality drive during National Quality and Reliability Year, 1966. More recently they had been instructed in Total Quality Management, Just-in-Time production and Business Process Re-engineering, each with limited success and 'inevitable' job losses (tools foreman, production manager, shop steward).

It has been suggested that the concept of 'zero defects', the practice of Kanban, and the establishment of long-term relations between suppliers and purchasers are innovative to Western manufacturing (Voss 1987), although there are examples from the West to suggest that this is not necessarily so.

To many observers Just-In-Time inventory controls are the pivotal factors of Japanese management techniques and, therefore, a key element in Japan's economic turnaround. The stark contrast between this system, that delivers components and sub-assemblies to the next operation 'just in time' to be used, and the 'just in case' systems of stockpiling that was common in US and British motor works, led early commentators to declare that this was 'another revolutionary management system" (Monden 1981, quoted in Schwartz and Fish 1998, pp. 49). However, evidence from Detroit in the inter-war years shows that a system of reduced inventory, known as hand-to-mouth, "was indistinguishable from the just-in-time methodology developed 20 years later at Toyota" (Schwartz and Fish 1998, p. 50). Each was a product of particular circumstances; Toyota engineers consciously developed a system to support small batch production, while hand-to-mouth developed

from the need to conserve space following a fire in the Olds warehouse. There was some differences between the two systems and among them was the relationship with suppliers. Both systems entailed long-term relationships but with varying degrees of exclusivity. In Detroit, the production heartland of the automobile, several manufacturers bought identical components from the same group of suppliers, while Japanese factories are generally isolated and therefore rely on a single suppler and order components that are unique for their requirements. The history of the Rover company (Whipp and Clark 1986) also gives lie to that claim that long-term supplier relations are uniquely Japanese, and illustrates a potential pitfall for, when Rover's long-standing steel supplier was bought by the rival BMA, designs for Rover cars were included in the sale.

The benefit of just-in-time is the reduced inventory and associated costs, but it is a system that is susceptible to disruption from, inter alia, labour disputes, at any point along the supply chain. Perhaps that is why Crowan's managers ensured that trade union officials were included in the earliest 'events' and derived immediate benefits from brighter, cleaner work spaces. Crowan's employees were acquainted with just-in-time systems and controls, for they had been introduced to the factory by a previous MD, after an attempt at TQM and before business process re-engineering. The Kanban system of stock replenishment was, therefore, familiar[12] and many project teams incorporated such arrangements into their plans. In some areas, previous experience had shown that Kanban was incompatible with the Computer Numerically Controlled (CNC) systems that were already operating however, as far as could be ascertained, none of those areas had been the focus of a Kaizen project.

It may be that the quality control target of zero defects (Crosby 1984) represents innovation in Western businesses (Voss 1987), although the pursuit of quality is not. Since the 1960s industrialists and government have expressed concern about the quality of British exports.

This target is part of the Kaizen system, deduced from the earlier principles of TQM that includes the characteristics of customer orientation, teamwork, and a 'scientific approach' to creating standards (Wilkinson et al 1992).

With Kaizen, and TQM, quality is not sufficiently defined[13] except in terms of itself, so that, for instance, Imai can only distinguish between arenas of control in his own 'definitions':

> "Quality refers not only to the quality of the finished products or services, but also to the quality of the processes that go into those products or services" (1997, p. 11) and

> "We may call the former result quality and the latter process quality. By this definition, quality runs through all phases of company activity – namely, throughout the processes of developing, designing, producing, selling, and servicing the products or services" (1997, p. 37)

'Process quality' refers to the methods of manufacture where Taylorist principles have been modified so that inspection is incorporated as an integral part of each process, rather than as a discrete function and final process. By depicting the assembly process as a supplier-customer chain, so that every operator has an internal customer who must be 'delighted' with what they receive from their internal supplier, TQM aims to eliminate the costly waste that arises from re-working, rejects, and repairs, and to induce all employees to accept a responsibility for product quality. It is the elimination of waste that is at the heart of Crosby's (1979) assertion that 'Quality is Free', and that was incorporated into the version of Kaizen taught and extolled at Fred Phillips' workshop.

Learning Kaizen

The two-day Kaizen workshop was held in the on-site training room. After an introduction by the operations director, the management consultant introduced himself, as Fred, and spent about an hour building a rapport with the group and discussing their work experience

at Crowan's[14]. The men, who each had between eight and thirty-four years' experience in the company, were invited to catalogue their every-day experiences and the problems which might contribute to rising costs, poor quality in products and services, or dissatisfaction at work.

Lack of timely supplies, poor communication and under-investment were most frequently mentioned. The men complained, too, that there had been "so many managing directors" each bringing a new scheme, with associated change, disorganisation, uncertainty and insecurity. Workshop participants were, understandably, cautious about embarking on another project:

> "The first thing was, was this another 'flavour of the month'? Because we'd gone through the TQM and that had died a death. And we'd gone through problem solving teams. I was open-minded but with some trepidation, if you like, because this one had got to work. But we'd been through two or three programmes like this before and it hasn't been followed through. The initial response has been positive. Everybody's been fine but things have withered on the vine because they haven't been followed through. We all had a will to want to make it work but there's a sort of nagging doubt in your mind whether this one's going to fly after the previous false starts we've had." (Sales manager during focus group)

Fred understood:

> "It's what I call BOHICA – bend over here it comes again. It's a flavour of the month touch. I know how it is – along comes a new boss, it's all change and chaos and you feel like you're being kicked between the legs [paraphrase] because you've been there before and you, or your mates, have lost their jobs. And you know you'll have to do it all again when the man at the top changes."

This time it would be different, Fred promised, because the company was going to use its experts: "intellect and intuition are no good – we need to go with the wisdom of the people who do the job.". While no extra money or people would be invested in the Kaizen programme, the directors had guaranteed that there would be no job losses as a result of improvements. Fred emphasised that he would have had no part in the Kaizen programme

without the express assurance of the Managing Director that that was the case. However, Crowan's had lost £5millions during the previous year, claimed the operations director, and had only averted closure on the condition that they adopted Kaizen and turned that loss into profit. The implicit threat of closure was articulated by the MD during the final session:

> "If we can pull this off – make Kaizen work – the future looks good. We'll be able to start filling the orders that RurhCo [sister company in Germany] is getting at the moment. But, and it's a big but, if you can't do this, Crowan's will close and St Peters will all but die."

This threat, too, was not new to Crowan's workers, for during the post-war years the 'co-operate or close' message had been made by successive managing directors, usually before a process of re-organisation and followed by a programme of redundancies (Crowan's Notes: July 1957, April 1960, June 1963; Local Press 1: 8 November 1986, 17 October 1985, 31 August 1985; Trade Press 1982)[15].

Throughout the first day, workshop participants were schooled in the tools of Kaizen, as Fred expounded; the '5 S's' of good housekeeping; the '5 M's' of production; and the '7 wastes', and taught that there are cures:

> Concentrate on one specific problem and collect all possible information
>
> Understand the information collected
>
> Resolve the different actions that can be taken
>
> Execute the actions and evaluate the results
>
> Standardise the new procedure so that everyone can see what they have to do.

Although most writers, on Japanese management techniques generally, and Kaizen in particular, have described the same tools, Fred Phillips claims to have a unique approach that has been specifically designed to make abnormality visible. While his claim to exclusivity is debatable in the light of, for instance, evidence collected elsewhere during this project (Chapter 7), his efforts toward increasing the visibility of problems was not.

Throughout the two days of the workshop, men were exhorted to measure, photograph, chart and display every aspect of their projects.

Throughout the factory, each Kaizen project had a dedicated display board (plate 1) showing: the original state of the area; measurements of distance and time, before and after the project; plans for the projects, with expected outcomes and completion dates; and the new 'standard operating procedures'. Project plans were to be copied and forwarded to the Sturme's Chief Executive in Germany who would ask the MD periodically for an update on progress. One overheard response to that information suggested that this would be beneficial because: "if we ask for something, then, management have got to give it to us because Sturme will be asking them why they haven't done it." The speaker had, however, overlooked a vital condition; the men could do anything to improve their workplace but there would be no more people and no extra money.

PLATE 1: (OVERLEAF)

THE KAIZEN BOARD IN THE AIR-END ASSEMBLY AREA OF THE CROWAN'S FACTORY

On the left is a diagram of the new layout; the previous layout is still visible through the tracing paper, and claims of (anticipated) improvements are listed beneath the diagram.

The photographs on the right show the various stages of the original project.

The hand-written and hand-drawn sheets in the centre detail the initial assessment, agreed improvements and the 'to do' lists, which itemise each aspect of the proposed tasks, with names, completion dates and other comments, such as reason for delay. The printed sheet repeats the claims for improvements, expressing them as percentages.

The display is completed by Certificates of Completion for those members of the air-end assembly team who attended the training workshop.
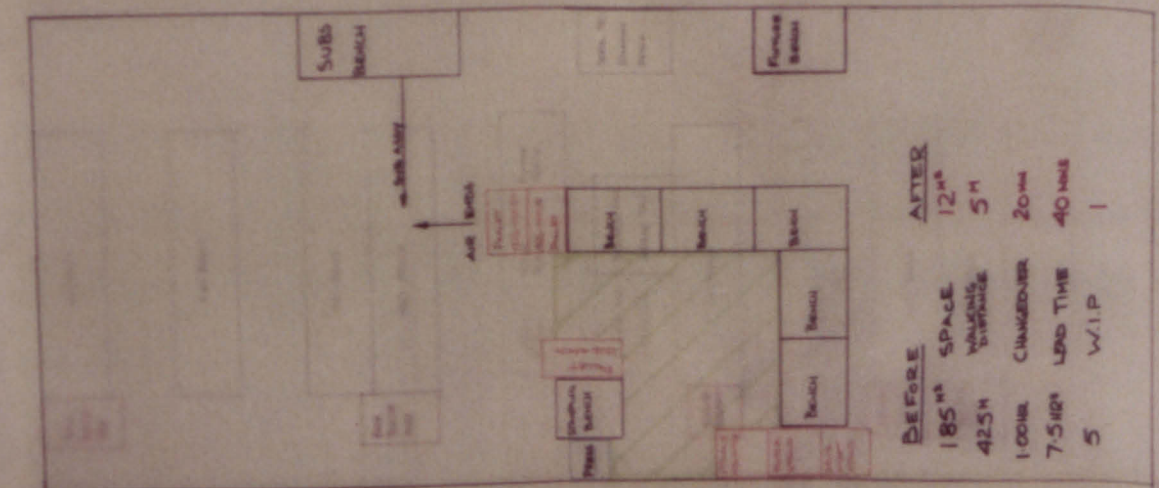
IN THE BEGINNING

THE FIRST ATTEMPT NOT BAD BUT NO U

THE TEAM BODY GETTING IT TOGETHER

WELL DONE! FROM THE GAFFER

THE PRESENTATION BY ERIC

Kaizen Project Aim End
Assembly Cell Layout

SUB BENCH

BENCH

FUTURE BENCH

MAIN AISLE

MAIN AISLE

AIR LINE

	BEFORE	AFTER
SPACE	185 m²	12 m²
WALKING DISTANCE	425 m	5 m
CHANGEOVER	100 hr	20 m
LEAD TIME	7.5 hr	40 mins
W.I.P	5	1

Activities during the first afternoon had a practical bent with two exercises.

Firstly, participants were given an example of the virtues of single batch production, with a specially devised exercise, measuring the time for a single 'product' to complete three processes of varying length. By retarding all the processes to the rate of the slowest, a single item could pass from start to finish in less than one-tenth of the time needed if batches of ten were used with machines at normal speed. This example appeared to be readily accepted by participants. However, if the same exercise is repeated using different standards for assessment, (e.g. finished products over a set time, or finished pieces per unit of time and labour), the results are far less impressive.

In a second exercise, a scenario was given (this car is using more petrol lately) and each group was asked to work through the CURES process to improve it. Having established hypothetical measurements, and drawing appropriate graphs, each team began to catalogue possible problems and suggest action for improvement. The proposals, as might be expected included measures such as checking tyre pressures, topping up the oil, changing petrol station and, even, retrain the driver. When one group member suggested that several activities could be combined as 'have the car serviced' he was told very firmly that he had the 'wrong approach', for each possible factor must be considered in turn, and each possible problem should have its own corrective procedure.

Day two of the workshop was spent in the factory, as each group was given a 'real' project to tackle. In the tools assembly shop, with the instruction to improve the timeliness of delivery, the project team set an objective to deliver eighty per cent of orders on an ex-stock basis[16].

The data collection phase of the project was effectively a time and motion study as project members measured walking distances and timed the picking, washing (waiting) and build processes. The most difficult of these tasks was to ascertain the time from order to delivery as, much to the chagrin of the sales manager in the team, there was no record which could give that information. Forty to fifty years ago, Crowan's Notes had published such information regularly, making it available to the entire, international workforce. Now, with a computerised ordering system, the best estimate was made by assessing the interval between orders for specific components of the tools[17].

The afternoon was given over to a planning exercise, devising new systems and layouts and the estimation of improvements. The primary methods were directed at improving build times by: modifying the picking process to reduce the walking distances involved; rearranging and tidying the 'build' area, to include a washing machine and a Kanban system; and a recommendation to sales administration to collect specific data relating to lead times in filling orders. For Dave, the tools fitter, this was a dream come true:

> "I've been asking for a Kanban system for two years, and they're supposed to have ordered a washing machine four years ago. I've been telling them for ages that it takes forty minutes to wash the stuff out of stores, and then I have to wait for it to cool else the bedding valves won't fit while they're hot."

The proposed plans were duly displayed, alongside the photographs, charts and measurements that had been gathered during the morning. The finalised plans were presented to the assembled senior managers. By then the air of enthusiasm in the training room was virtually palpable as teams made arrangements to come in at the weekend to begin their 5S activities. The Managing Director announced his delight at what they had all 'achieved' and, with his blessing, were told to "... get on with it. Put your excellent ideas into practice and we'll turn this place around." As the workshop dispersed, the men

were making arrangements to put their plans into action; and three groups asked for permission to attend the factory, in their own time, to begin their 5S projects.

Weeks later, the focus group members claimed that they had been cautiously optimistic about the tools shop project. While "we started off with some very empowered individuals who actually felt that they were achieving something" (sales manager), there was an awareness that

> "if the truth is known, they more or less had projects set up for us before we got there. That had already been decided   It was being engineered to a certain degree." (storeman)

or, in the words of the dispatcher: "They pick the car, we pick the colour."

'Just Do It'

By phase two of the study, the tools shop had been re-organised. Access from the store room had been improved and a low-temperature, solvent-based washing machine installed, reducing walking distance by some eighty percent and halving the wash time. Washing of parts was now done manually, by the fitter, as opposed to the previous automatic process, so labour time had actually increased. Despite the assertion that there would be no money to spend on Kaizen projects, it seems that funds had been allocated to finance a change that gave, at least, an appearance of improvement.

Benches had been re-arranged to make way for the Kanban racks that had been selected, although no-one on the team had been able to ascertain the status of the order. Extensive re-painting was in progress, being undertaken by the men at weekends when they came in on overtime. However the project team was disturbed that their project may have been a waste of time, effort and materials as there was, apparently, a long-standing plan to re-

organise various parts of the factory which included transferring tools assembly to another workshop:

> "Just this afternoon, [the foreman] asked us how we were getting on with the painting. We told him that it will be finished by the weekend. He said that we shouldn't do much more than that because here's a likelihood that we may be moved." (Storeman)

A more certain, and contentious move was planned for the air-end assembly. That section had been 'Kaizened'[18], as part of an earlier project, into a cell assembly which utilised approximately one quarter of the former floor area. The operations director wanted to see it moved to become a sub-assembly in the main part of the factory.

> "We're now at the second stage of the air-end assembly project, which is planning to move it out from that building, to where it ought to be, which is at the end of the assembly line." (Operations Director)

There was open disagreement about the wisdom of the move, which highlighted wider problems concerning communications within the factory and a potentially disruptive debate over the extent to which projects should be planned and co-ordinated. The field-work diary records an impression that managers and directors were discussing their differences with men on the shop floor.

On the one hand, some felt that the beauty of Kaizen was that: "you just do it; you just do it" (assembly foreman); and that no amount of planning could foresee all contingencies:

> "I say, 'let's just get on and move it [air-end assembly]. Find out what goes wrong.' We can sit here all day thinking what might go wrong. So we're actually going to move that air-end assembly area down here." (Operations Director)

On the other, there were those, particularly the industrial engineers, who were concerned that the move would be detrimental to performance:

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"...Nobody knows why they're moving air-ends, they just know that there was a strategy once, so let's move it. Because the strategy was based on moving air-ends and test, but they can't move test there too, because it's a high-capital cost to move it. So it means now that the air-ends are going to actually travel further, but they're moving it and nobody knows why. ...

... There is no co-ordination. If you ask 'why are they moving the air-ends to where they want them to go?' they don't know why. If you ask 'how are you going to handle VoltAir, Well, they're going to handle their own. So you'll have a duplication of storage now. You're going to have to split the air-ends between them. So when you start asking these questions, there's no answers. When they don't have any answers to your questions they say 'oh, you're being negative. You're against Kaizen' All I'm saying is, if you plan it out first, think about what you're doing and then implement it you could save yourself a lot of money and a lot of time. That's where we get branded as being negative." (production manager)

"The philosophy 'just do it' is OK as long as you are aware of the implications of 'just doing' it. ... The easy bit is to pick up something from there and move it to there but how do you support it and what effect does it have on the rest of the company and the system by doing that move?" (time study engineer)

The air-end fitters had become disillusioned with their Kaizen project, which was still being held as an exemplar of what Kaizen might achieve. They had set about improving the area with enthusiasm and had proudly displayed their achievements for all to see. However they were now over-producing to the extent that finished products were being stored in the space that had been saved by the original 5S project (plate 2).

While Kaizen is about change and flexibility, it is a surprisingly mechanistic process. By following the Plan-Do-Check-Act cycle, redolent of organisational development; through the normative 'U' shaped assembly lines; and in a preoccupation for quantitative measurements and standardised procedures, Kaizen as practised at Crowan's reflects its roots in scientific management[19]. That influence, as time and motion study, was clearly evident in the measuring, timing and charting activities that began each Kaizen project at Crowan's. It was also manifested in the 5S, or 'good housekeeping' activity which

effected the re-arrangement of work-spaces, to improve work flow, and encourage standardisation.

<div style="border:1px solid">

PLATE 2: (OVERLEAF)

THE AIR-END ASSEMBLY AREA, THREE MONTHS FOLLOWING THE KAIZEN WORKSHOP

The cell, which previously occupied all the visible space, is on the left of the picture.

Test beds are in the sound-proofed area beyond the double doors at the top of the picture.

Two notice boards are fixed to the wall on the right. One bears standard notices such as health and safety warnings and standard operating procedures. The other is the Kaizen Board (shown in plate 1. P. 202)

The blue bins in the (right) foreground hold completed, and properly stored, rotors.

Large areas, marked by tapes, are labelled: "This Space Saved Through Kaizen". The bins in those areas contain parts that have been completed in excess of the planned output.

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In the air tools workshop, the reality differed from the utopian vision painted by Fred Phillips. In their quest to eliminate the *muda* of unnecessary activity, waiting and transport, the air-end fitters felt that the quality of their products had deteriorated and that cell manufacture amounted to little more than assembly line production, which was deskilling them.

> "It's just like an assembly line now. I used to make air ends, now I just do one bit and pass it on to Mike. I can't take you out there and say 'I made that' because you can't see what I did. [The Operations Director] will tell you that productivity's improved but we're overproducing now. The store's over-flowing with air ends they haven't got orders for."

> "We all served a five year apprenticeship to do this job. Now a trained monkey could do what we do. And you don't get to move about and talk to, like, Dave and Eddie. You just have a couple of yards to stand in and get on with the job. And the quality's not so good neither. A lot of what we do can't be seen so if a bolt's missing or whatever nobody can tell. When it's your own piece you take a sort of pride knowing that it's all right inside." (Fitter, from the field work diary)

While attempting to cope with disillusions, the workers were well aware that their futures were at stake. They might not have been sure of immediate plans to re-organise the factory but they were kept abreast of the state of business. They knew that a special order (which had been 'stolen' from a sister company) was not going to be ready by its due date; and they were informed of a major potential order for a privatised utility[20]. They felt that this knowledge only added to the stress and uncertainty of their work. One of the fitters complained that it was management's job to worry about things like that; shop floor workers were not paid enough to deal with those concerns (from field work diary). After two years with no pay rise, and, having seen many of their work-mates made redundant in an area where alternative employment is limited, they recognised a double-blind situation so that although they felt that they were being increasingly exploited, they had few options but to acquiesce. Most seemed resigned to the idea that the question of factory closure was one of 'when' rather than 'whether'.

They we aware, too, that major decisions were being taken at head office rather than in St Peters:

> "I don't think that the managing director has the right, or is not allowed, to manage this company the way he wants to. Not just to the detriment of the company, but to his own detriment. Because what is happening is he's telling us one thing, his plans to do so-and-so, and then the poor old sod is having his legs took away from underneath him from somebody above him. Now, anything that he has said to us, he can't fulfil because somebody above him is shooting him down every time." (Dispatcher)

Workers' response to the pressures was apparently dissonant. Where local management directives were concerned they say that:

> "You just keep playing to the referee's whistle, and you just let it go over your head. We decided, as a little group here, that we would press on, to do to the best of our ability, those things we can. We can do the painting and the sorting, get the racking and get the parts from stores in a Kanban, put a red card where we're waiting for parts. Then we can say 'we've done as much as we can with it'." (Sales Manager)

Regarding Sturme, though, they felt justified in playing the 'overtime game'. Lunchtime conversations revealed that skilled and semi-skilled workers can still manipulate their work to gain as much overtime as they wanted, although they emphasised that they only took enough overtime to make their wages up to a realistic rate. Clearly these workers were not surrendering craft knowledge to their managers but were, they claimed, simply repeating suggestions that they had made countless times before. Furthermore, the Kaizen projects were providing additional opportunities for overtime shifts.

Despite the firm's precarious trading position, and notwithstanding managerial attempts to restructure working practices and processes, it seems that bureaucratic dysfunction and traditional forms of resistance endure at Crowan's. Kaizen has provided a new focus for goal displacement, becoming an end of itself rather than a means to the professed objective of 'delighting the customer'. Craft knowledge has not been utilised to improve the company's competitiveness, but is being retained by experienced workers to continue resistance to managerial controls. Meanwhile the pursuit of 'world class' manufacture has been re-directed into a flurry of re-organisation and re-painting.

New Techniques; New Games

Kaizen is more than an aggregate of techniques. It also represents an underlying philosophy which is embedded in the unique combination of cultural, economic and historical circumstances which have shaped contemporary Japan (Hannam 1998; McConville and Cook 1998). The late but rapid industrialisation of Japan released a

"massive supply of rural labour ... for transference to the advancing manufacturing trades" (Allen 1978, p.15), that had resulted from her aggressive acquisition of foreign technology (Porter 1990), and which was, in its turn, assisted by distinct patterns of investment and economic policy (Chen 1995). Cultural roots can be traced in the semi-religious concepts of *Wa*, or harmony in relationships, (Yoshataki 1998) and continuous self-improvement; and in Confucian values, stressing mutual moral obligations within social groups, that were actively reinforced following the Meiji restoration in an effort to "mitigate the social amorality of *laissez-faire* capitalism (Kinzley 1991, p84). The resulting conventions, such as enterprise unionism, guaranteed employment, and seniority-based reward systems[21], stand in sharp contrast to the British orthodoxies of adversarial industrial relations involving trade unions and a mobile workforce (Dore 1973), a protestant work ethic and meritocratic values. Furthermore, British companies have to operate in an intensely competitive, and often hostile, financial environment which discourages long-term investment.

An obvious question arises, about the portability of Japanese management practices, including Kaizen (e.g. Durand and Stewart 1998; Delbridge 1998; Jones 1997; Oliver and Wilkinson 1993). The effective adoption of Japanese methods, suggest Proctor and Ackroyd (1988) requires a commitment to high-levels of investment in time, technology and training, which British companies are unlikely to achieve in a much more hostile environment than that enjoyed by their Japanese counterparts. Nevertheless, various industrial evangelists have exhorted Western companies to adopt Japan's 'world class' manufacturing techniques (e.g. Sobek et al. 1998; Womack and Jones 1996; Hannam 1993; Schonberger 1982; Ohno 1988). Their central message is essentially the same, that British industry was being routed by the Japanese; or, as Fred Phillips put it: "It's a war out there,

and we're losing. If we want to beat the Japanese we have to play them at their own game."

The analogy of the game is, perhaps, more apt than it first appears, for there is a sense in which employer/employee relations are a form of game playing. A growing body of studies, build upon the work of Burrawoy and Roy (e.g. Lee-Treweek 1997; Durrand and Stewart 1998) describes how the introduction of new management strategies initiates new games. Durand and Stewart (1998) describe how, when Kaizen was introduced in a French motorcycle factory, the traditional game of 'making out' was replaced by the new 'transparency game' which:

> "entails exhibiting the 'right' attitude, participating in kaizen and promoting quality initiatives. But this also ensures space for the 'simulation' of acceptance of new managerial imperatives ... it is by means of 'simulation' that conflict and alternative employee agendas are highlighted." (ibid. p.150)

'Game playing' describes a rule-based form of reciprocity, and the concept is framed by a specific ideological approach to the labour process. From a similar stance, Kaizen can be perceived as a form of 'management by stress' (Parker and Slaughter 1993), and as a de-skilling mechanism (Klein 1989), where workers are implicated in their own sub-ordination by humanised Taylorist techniques (Adler 1993; McConville and Cook 1998). There is evidence of all of this within the Crowan's study. Without detracting from the objective validity of the empirical evidence, or of the analyses of labour process studies, caution suggests that such explanations are insufficient, because they are based on a simple concept of power as a commodity that can be wielded by one person, or group, against others. To describe management by stress, deskilling, or game playing, does not explain how they can occur within a supposedly egalitarian and democratic society.

Because of its multi-faceted methods and objectives, and its polyvalency as technique and philosophy, Kaizen operates on several levels (Malloch 1997). If, instead of exploring those methods and effects, analysis focuses on the meaning of Kaizen and the mechanism by which it creates knowledge, it might be possible to apprehend the circumstances that allow it to exist. If power is considered to be relational rather than coercive; then ideology might be peeled away to reveal the deeper social constructs which allow this particular game to be played in the first place. Such analysis is undertaken in Chapter 8.

SUMMARY

Crowan Brothers has a long, rich history that reflects the changing fortunes of the Cornish mining industry. From its beginnings as a foundry in a small Cornish town, the company grew, under the management of successive generations of the Crowan family, into an international business with a sound reputation for reliability, quality and innovation. Even the exigencies of the post war years did not deter customers from ordering Crowan products and enduring the lengthy lead times that the firm was obliged to quote. The company which, by the mid-twentieth century, supplied construction equipment world-wide maintained a close-knit family atmosphere; that many current employees still recall affectionately, and incorporated itself into the community life of St Peters.

Over the last fifty years, however, economic pressures have taken their toll at Crowan's, transforming the once buoyant engineering enterprise into a small division of a large, trans-national conglomerate. With the floatation of the company, the formation to IAI, and the departure of the last of Crowan's descendants, ownership and management were separated completely. During the intervening thirty years, the workforce has weathered several changes of ownership, which have each brought a new round of reorganisation, restructuring and redundancies, and the vicissitudes of a succession of managing directors.

This study began as the current owners, with a fresh senior management team, had decided to introduce Kaizen in an attempt to reverse heavy financial losses. The change process began with training workshops where the principles of Kaizen were taught, by a management consultant, and put into practice by small project teams. Many of these principles were familiar from previous schemes but were presented as novel, as they would utilise the knowledge and skills of those who were 'experts' in the various processes and procedures involved in the production of, inter alia, air compressors and pneumatics tools.

Despite their initial scepticism, operatives were enthusiastic about Kaizen and set about re-organising their working areas and, in some cases, implementing ideas that had been ignored or rejected for a long time. Impressive claims were made, by the operations director, for the resulting improvements but the overall outcomes were disappointing. Bureaucratic dysfunction persisted and traditional forms of resistance continued, buoyed by the tenets of Kaizen, and cynics found justification for their early misgivings about the lack of planning. Meanwhile, Kaizen enthusiasts remained optimistic that 'common-sense' would prevail for the factory was still busy, no jobs had been lost because of improvements, and new orders had been won.

Crowan's continues to operate at a deficit, and the company's prospects remain grim. Kaizen cannot be blamed for the misfortunes that have resulted from, among other factors, the economic and political pressures of recent years, and the disadvantage of distance that is common to businesses in Cornwall.

Postscript: At the last contact with the company, I was informed that the Kaizen project had been abandoned. In preparation for the (then) forthcoming merger, Sturme had instructed all its companies to adopt 'Six Sigma' statistical quality control.

1 The first Crowan air operated Rock drill was produced in 1881, it had made speedier and cheaper mining possible at a time when the world prices of tin and copper were falling. During the great depressions "it stayed the creeping paralysis with which the Cornish mines were already affected" (Ealing 1951, p. 4).

2 These included a patented anti-aircraft potato catapult for home defence!

3 During the severe winter of 1947 diesel driven generators had to be withdrawn from sale in order to maintain production while the electricity supplies were limited.

4 While the town was not established as a company village, in the manner of Bournville or Port Sunlight, the population of St Peters has been closely associated with Crowan's either directly through employment or because of the links with nearby (but now abandoned) mines.

5 According to participants, the archives were consigned to a shredder, with some degree of ceremony, by previous directors who wished to signify a break with the past and herald a new beginning. Crowan's was to be a firm of the twenty-first century, not the nineteenth (Production manager; shop steward; sales manager). The American owners, of that time, clearly did not see any educative or other value (Griffith 1997) to documents that were old enough to trace the company's progress during, and since, the industrial revolution.

6 The company had been highly geared for some time (Crowan's Notes March 1957), and there was a national credit squeeze during 1957; although it is not clear, from available information, whether the banks had forced the floatation

7 Although there was major plant and capital investment underway, to complete the project of centralising all production in St Peters, the directors had long talks with the President of the Board of Trade (Crowan's Notes January 1964), about problems affecting Company activities. These were principally concerned with the physical distance from ports, suppliers and customers, that centralisation at St Peters could not address.

8 Sturme's annual report refers, in eight separate places, to its commitment to lean production. Kaizen was being introduced in the former IAI group's plants, but not in all of Sturme's companies.

9 These were: the operations director, production manager, a shop steward from the assembly area, the tools shop and assembly foremen, and a time-study engineer. The original project team comprised the researcher, a sales manager, a storeman, the tools fitter and the tools dispatcher.

10 This was an outcome of the pilot study where it was recognised that trade union or works council representatives could offer an alternative view of developments within a company. When it became clear that a more complete industrial relations history would be useful, a direct approach was made to the regional offices of the Amalgamated Engineering and Electrical Union but, due to general work-pressures, Officers were unavailable for interview and clerical staff could not supply only the requested information.

11 The Japanese terms: *Seiri, Seiton, Seiso, Seiketsu*, and *Shitsuke*; are translated into English as: sort, straighten, scrub, systematise, standardise.

12 It is simple system, familiar in most households, where two supplies of stock items are held. One is in use while the other is ready to be used. When the first supply is finished, the second is opened and a replacement is ordered.

13 It is not intended to reiterate the possible definitions of quality, nor to submit the concept to Foucaultian analysis, as these exercises have been undertaken elsewhere (see chapters 5 and 8)

14 The initial impression was of a visitor who had a genuine empathy with a manufacturing workforce. Fred had a background in industrial engineering and clearly understood the organisation of and the processes within the factory. From a series of videotapes about Fred Phillips' work and philosophy (BBC 1993), it is clear that what was witnessed was a well-rehearsed performance.

15 There had been eighty redundancies in 1996 and a further sixty, in two waves during 1997, prior to the mandate for Kaizen. Two months following the workshop, shortly after phase two of this study, the company announced a four-day week, although there were no job losses. More recently the parent company has announced a multi-billion pound merger, anticipating approximately one thousand redundancies throughout it UK operations (Local Press 4, 26 November 1998). A union convenor is quoted as saying "I think there is still a future in St Peters but I don't know how much of one, because of the worker's skills and the compressors they make."

16 A curious objective considering that 'Just-in-time' production is an integral part of the Kaizen philosophy.

17 The computer, though, cannot be blamed for its programming. The absence of such fundamental data indicates a serious, and long-standing problem in inter-departmental communication which must have existed from at least the time when the database was constructed. At the time of the final visit, and despite the efforts of the Sales Manager, that had not been rectified except in respect of this specific issue.

18 Kaizen was used as a verb, as a noun and as an adjective at various times and by all grades of staff in the factory.

19 Japanese industries had adopted Taylorism in the early twentieth century, after establishing links with foreign counterparts (Sasaki 1992)

20 In several reports during January 1999 Local press 1 told of the order, for 5000 new compressors, shortly before phase three of the study. The news was presented as a signal that the company's fortunes were changing. It transpired that the main order had been taken up in a German plant and that Crowan's would undertake the sheet metal work. While a secure order was welcome it actually amounted to approximately one day's output, for only one section, per week.

21 Briggs (1996) argues that close scrutiny of Japanese management philosophy reveals many working practices as being rooted in coercive techniques which are, themselves, culturally dependent; and that the literature often neglects to recognise that the majority of workers in Japan do not benefit from the security of employment and its associated advantages.

Chapter 7: Bulberry Ltd. – Employee Involvement Through Kaizen

The third case within this multiple case study concerns Bulberry Ltd., a Plymouth-based firm that manufactures cabinets and enclosures for the electronic communications industries. Bulberry is an autonomous subsidiary of the privately-owned, Germany-based Kestrel GmbH and supplies customers in over one hundred different countries, including many household names and multi-national corporations. Company catalogues list over four thousand products ranging from a tiny junction box ($1.8cm^3$) to computer server cabinets measuring 3.6 cubic metres (Corporate web-site 1998). With a strong and continually increasing demand for its cabinets, that constantly outstrips productive capacity, the company has been forced to rely on out-sourcing to maintain output. The quality of sub-contracted work is beyond the managers' immediate control and is a cause for on-going concern as rejects and re-working have led to intolerable lengthening of lead times. Additionally, the company managers are eager to continue operating as a non-unionised company and would rather increase employee involvement in company operations. With support of corporate directors, local managers have taken the initiative to introduce Kaizen in an effort to absorb extra demand, address quality issues and increase employee involvement.

After a brief account of the company history, the specific research methods and their associated problems will be discussed. A contemporary account of the company, and particularly its human resource management, is presented next before turning to a more detailed account of the introduction of Kaizen. This chapter does not include a general account of Kaizen, as that would repeat details from the previous chapter however, the final section discusses and eventalises the company's non-union stance.

The company which is now based in Plymouth began, across the River Tamar in Cornwall, in 1969 (Local Press 1, 18 September 1986). Under the name of Kernow Signs, the firm produced silk-screened signs on metal plates with other metal working as an ancillary service. Over a few years, however, sheet metal working began to take prominence until the two activities reversed, with signs and silk screen printing playing only a minor part in the company's rapid growth. By the mid-1970s the sheet-metal working business at Kernow Signs was winning major contracts from companies such as IBM, Plessey and Racal. It became clear that there was a promising future in store if the company could further develop its links with the electronic technology industry, with the progression towards design and development for both enclosures and racking systems, but a small company such as Kernow Signs was not well-placed to compete.

Kestrel-Werk of Germany had meanwhile been engaged in the business of building cabinets and housings for electrical equipment for over twenty years and, in 1980, decided to invest outside Germany in pursuit of its policy to maintain its position as market leader. Recognising the potential of the small Cornish firm, Joseph Strauss, the owner of Kestrel, began negotiations and, in an amiable arrangement, Kestrel GmbH took over Kernow Signs in 1981, along with another plant in Hampshire. The business was immediately successful and, as it continued to grow, plans were made to expand; with the South West location being preferred because of its potential for long-term development. In 1986, the new manufacturing unit in Plymouth was opened, to replace the two older factories in Cornwall and Hampshire (Local Press 1, 18 September 1986). When the new factory began production ninety-five employees produced a manufacturing output of £4million. Since then the company has experienced a

satisfying year-on-year growth (Fig. 3) and today there are seven hundred employees at the Plymouth site which has been expanded a further four times.

Year	Manufacturing Output (£m)	Year	Manufacturing Output (£m)
1986	4.0	1993	16.3
1987	5.2	1994	19.7
1988	6.4	1995	23.1
1989	7.3	1996	34.7
1990	8.2	1997	45.5
1991	9.4	1998	65.0
1992	10.6	1999 (forecast)	(85.0)

FIG 3. MANUFACTURING OUTPUT AT BULBERRY 1986-1999

From Company sources (1999)

Within ten years the Plymouth factory was exporting globally, including to the Pacific Rim countries. When, in 1995 the company won a huge contract with 'Modular', a major multi-national computer company, Bulberry was expanding again. Turnover increased by over fifty per cent in one year. By the time of the field study, in 1998, the company was working from a 260,000 square metre factory and beginning yet another construction of 5,000 square metres, representing an additional capital outlay of £11 millions. In the words of a local MP:

"The rapid growth of Bulberry's bucks the trend in British manufacturing, which has been going through lean times, hampered by interest rate rises and a strong pound. The growth is particularly impressive as the company exports around 90% of its output." (Local Press 2, 18 July 1998)

Over the last decade, the Kestrel Group has experienced rapid growth in all its international business markets. World-wide operations include twelve major manufacturing plants in Germany, the United States, England and, most recently, India. Additionally, twenty-seven sales subsidiaries and fifty agencies supply all Kestrel products on a next-day delivery basis. Competition is fierce, however, so that sustained growth is not straightforward. Over the last three years, for instance, Kestrel's two

main international rivals have also been expanding, their growth being generated through the acquisition of numerous smaller companies.

Business historians have noted that German[1] industry exhibited a pattern of development that not only differed from the American form preferred by Harvard scholars, but actually "proved capable of dealing with growing American industrial strength in Germany" (Wilson 1995 p. 70). Chandler (1990) offered the term 'co-operative managerial capitalism' to describe arrangements whereby, as an alternative to public ownership via shareholdings, many German companies are heavily financed by banks to form cartels (*Kartels*). Under such arrangement even relatively large businesses, which might technically be 'owned' by their creditors, remain in the direct control of founders or their descendants. In this respect Kestrel is exemplary of German industry as, despite its size, the international scale of operations, and a multi-divisional structure, the company strategy[2] is dominated by the personal preferences of the owner.

It is typical in another respect, also, in that company operations are directed by managers who are skilled in the business of the company (i.e. engineering and sheet metal working) rather than management specialists (Lane 1994; Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1993; Wilson 1995). Indeed, the appointment of the current director, a financial accountant, at Bulberry is so unusual within the group that the title of Managing Director was withheld until the appointment could be ratified by a full corporate board.

As owner and chairman of Kestrel, Joseph Strauss believed in a 'hands off' approach to overseeing his company. He selected managers and directors who had specialist skills and who knew their market. They were paid to do their best for the company and, as he often told them, could only do so if they were allowed to exercise their own judgement. To that end local managers have been given a degree of autonomy that many would

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envy. Consequently, when local managers at the Plymouth site decided that Kaizen offered a potential solution to meeting demand, Strauss' response was not to give approval for the scheme, but rather to ask what they had done so far.

The remarkable growth of Bulberry, especially since winning the Modular contract, has meant that the company has been continually operating under stress. The firm has had a constant struggle to meet growing demand which, at the time of this study, was 175% of productive capacity. Subcontractors had been engaged for some of the sub-assembly work but this caused increasing lead times and concerns over product quality. For Bulberry's managers, Kaizen, with its promise of improving production and quality, seemed to be the solution to their problems. The techniques had first been introduced into the factory in the mid 1990s but had gradually lost impetus. When, in 1998, the quality manager began studies for an MBA he came to agree with the production manager that they should try again to introduce Kaizen; "not just Western style improvement, but also to build in to the system the Kaizen philosophy and its associated techniques from Japan" (Quality Manager). It is this, second, attempt that is the focus of this research.

GATHERING EVIDENCE

First contact with the company was made via the quality manager. Predictably, he had chosen to focus his MBA dissertation on the implementation of Kaizen. At an initial meeting it was agreed that this research could be undertaken within Bulberry's in return for independent feedback and appraisal of what, for that manager, was effectively an action research project; and for acting as supervisor for the MBA dissertation. The agreement had drawbacks, as well as advantages, which reflect the practicalities of conducting research in a commercial organisation that has financial and production targets to meet on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

As managers considered that I was actively involved in the Kaizen project, they were willing to participate in interviews and to permit observation in all areas of the factory, including various meetings. That observation was the first stage of the study, in June 1998. It occurred shortly after a three-day training workshop, for supervisors and chargehands, but before any new Kaizen projects had begun. Effectively, it involved 'shadowing' the operations superintendent for one day and the manufacturing manager[3] for the second.

Each day's observation began at a 8 a.m. production meeting, where I was a silent observer but was permitted to make notes. The previous day's output was declared by each section supervisor and the current day's targets were set. There was no open debate of those targets which were itemised on 'Customer Requirements and Production Priorities' sheets (locally referred to as CRAPP forms) but a subtle form of words: "So, how many Moldulars don't you want us to make while we do that?" led to a moderation of demands from the Production Manager. After the meetings the two mentors conferred about particular points of concern, and, at those times I was able to ask questions about what I had seen and heard.

For the remainder of each day, I followed my mentors as they went about their daily business. On day two, the manufacturing manager was involved with inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive who were investigating an accident that had occurred earlier on the same day. I did not attend the related formal meeting nor, likewise, a disciplinary hearing that the operations superintendent had convened on day one. I took advantage of these breaks in observation to catch up with note-making, and was able to chat with shop floor workers, in the canteen, to glean their impressions of what Kaizen entailed. Most of these men[4] had heard about the Kaizen proposals, and some had been involved in projects from the previous initiative. Those meetings proved to be valuable

as during the short periods spent in the production area I was obliged to wear ear protection, which effectively eliminated any opportunity for conversation.

As the Kaizen initiative progressed, update meetings were held for individual supervisors to present their group's projects to others members of the original workshop[5]. The 'interested observer' role extended to silent attendance at one of these updates in December 1998. Managers had also agreed to participation in the training workshop, although conflicting commitments actually prevented that.

Formal, unstructured interviews took place during July 1998. All six of Bulberry's senior management team had agreed to be interviewed but a restructuring initiative, by the company director, had reduced the team to three. Interviews were conducted with the director, the production manager and the quality manager[6]. A fourth interview was held with the operations superintendent who regularly deputised for the production manager during his frequent visits to a new plant in India. To maintain a consistency of approach, the interview format followed same topic guide that had been used at Crowan's.

My role as dissertation supervisor involved regular contact with the quality manager where the progress of both project and dissertation was discussed. These fairly informal meetings were not recorded but ideas, themes and topics were entered in the field-work diary.

The nature of my involvement in the company changed the researcher-informant relationship. As an instrument in the power relations of the factory it would have been unethical and inappropriate to assume a participative role on the shop-floor and to behave as a member, transient or otherwise, of a work team. The would-be participant observer role was therefore surrendered in favour of that of interested on-looker[7]. Likewise, within focus groups, there was a second agenda. Bulberry's managers felt

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that they would receive more candid feedback on the project if groups were moderated by someone who was seen to be independent and impartial. Therefore, these groups were used, partly, to provide a forum for supervisors to relay their views about Kaizen to management.

The focus groups were convened during February 1999. Two groups of supervisors (foremen), who had been selected by company managers, were asked about their experiences of, and views on, Kaizen. Again, the topic guide that had been produced for the Crowan's study was used although the (semi-) natural flow of conversation meant that different sets of issues were discussed. The first group were seven supervisors who had attended one of two training events that the company had provided. The second group, of six people, was about to embark on Kaizen training at Nissan.

These meetings took place in one of the reception rooms, normally used for meetings with customers, which was soundproofed (necessary in a metal-work factory) and comfortable. As some of the supervisors were attending in their own time, coffee and sandwiches had been provided by the company, which added to a relaxed ambience. Before the tape recorder was switched on, participants were told that, while individual comments would be anonymous, managers knew who had attended in each group (for they had selected the participants) and that transcripts would be passed to the Quality Manager's office. The effects of this lack of absolute anonymity had to be considered as an additional factor during analysis. Despite that possible constraint on free speech, however, participants seemed to be relaxed and comments were consistent with those heard in the canteen.

Documentary evidence for the study came mainly from public sources. As Bulberry's is a young company there is no formal business history; and because company archives

are treated as confidential they were inaccessible for research purposes. The company's success had, though, generated several lengthy newspaper articles which were available in the local history library. The Kestrel company has an active website which serves most of the normal functions of a company newsletter. The site, which was accessed frequently during the study, provides information on the global product range, some historical detail, and a regularly updated 'company news' section.

Two uncommon sources of documentation were also available. Firstly, participants at all of Bulberry's training sessions are asked for written feedback. Copies of these 'evaluation forms' from the first workshop were made available for perusal within the factory. Secondly, early drafts of the MBA dissertation (Stone 1999) were used, with permission, to construct an account of how managers were accommodating the additional workload caused by the Kaizen project, and resultant problems and achievements, within the daily business of a busy factory.

BULBERRY TODAY

Bulberry Ltd. is housed in a purpose-built, white clad factory within a small, green-field industrial estate that is set in the rather pleasant countryside so typical of west Devon. The neat, exterior and the bright but tranquil reception area belie the frenetic activity that is conducted within the building. Inside that factory there is an appearance of spaciousness because of the high ceiling and good lighting.

At ground level the factory is spatially divided into four assembly lines, that each produce a slightly different product. The ends of each line are physically separated by the automated paint unit. Raw materials are stored at one end of the shop from where they are extruded, drilled and welded into basic cabinets. Storage bays hold these skeletal units until a sufficient batch is available for painting; a necessary delay is caused because each customer requires a different colour. Units emerge on the other

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side of the paint unit where they are finished, glazed and wired (a safeguard against static electricity) before being moved into the despatch areas. A fleet of lorries stand by to transport shipments to the air freight depot at the nearby airport, for the majority of orders are competed within such a tight schedule that air transport is necessary to ensure timely delivery. Outside, and out of sight from the road, re-locatable units house stores so that factory floor space can be devoted to production activities.

Even as it opened in 1986, less than five years from the initial agreement, it was known that Bulberry's 100,000 sq. ft. Plymouth factory would be too small for its needs. Planning permission had already been obtained, and all mains services laid, for an eventual 500,000 sq. ft. manufacturing area. Simultaneously to opening the Plymouth site, a new product was launched and the company announced plans for a further phase of development of the factory. The building work that was underway during the period of this study was the fourth such development.

At the time of the study, Joseph Strauss had retired and had been succeeded by his son, Johann, who continues to manage the Kestrel Group in the manner that he learned from his father, upholding the same principles. Within the Kestrel group, and consistent with the Strauss' policy of local autonomy, each plant is deemed to be a 'centre of excellence' manufacturing a specific set of the company's products for the international market so that, for instance, Bulberry is the group's producer of cabinets for computer servers. Management teams are required to draw up annual objectives, congruent with a set of 'guiding principles' that Johann and Joseph produced during the mid 1980's, and to report progress and developments to Head Office. The ten principles (Appendix D) acknowledge the importance of people in the pursuit of 'perfection' and meeting customers' needs. Customer care and high quality products are seen as the key to

competitive success. To that end, the principles emphasise training, innovation and supplier/customer relations for the company.

Manufacturing for an international market, the local management team at Bulberry are intensely conscious of market demands and of their competitive situation. In order to sustain growth into the future, and in line with the 'Kestrel principles', the Plymouth management team devised its own vision statement, in 1996, aimed at maintaining the close links and understanding between the company and its external environment. Fundamental to that vision is the involvement of all company employees:

> "To be a financially successful company which continually delights our customers - through employee involvement, continuous improvement, right first time, supplier partnerships, world-class manufacturing techniques and with due regard to our environmental responsibilities." (Source: Company Director)

At that time (1996), Bulberry ranked seventh in the UK, for market share, being displaced by smaller companies which competed on price. The firm is steadily working towards its stated objective, to become national market leaders by 2001, through continuing investment in plant and machinery, in research and development, and in human resources.

Investment and Research

Although the company has been considerably assisted by the endowment of DTI inward investment grants, of varying (and sometimes undisclosed) amounts, its approach to coping with expanding markets has not been passive. Investment and development plans are re-defined and implemented as part of the annual process of objective setting, and at least £2 million is invested annually in capital equipment. The physical development of the Plymouth factory represents an additional investment.

Corporate headquarters, in Germany, is the international centre for research and development projects where teams work with customer groups to invent or refine products according to client feedback.

The German operation is reflected at the local level in Plymouth. One-third of the tool-making workshop is devoted to experimental projects, where mixed-skill teams collaborate in devising new (and refining current) products and production techniques, and in fabricating prototype tools to support them. On-going dialogue with customers is maintained through all stages of production, and customers' various representatives are welcomed on the factory floor as well as in various marketing forums.

Local, as well as corporate, directors are proud of the company's approach to innovation. Quoted in a local newspaper at the time of winning the Modular contract, the company's finance director claimed that:

> "the key to this success is our adaptability and flexibility in responding to the challenge of designing and producing a new cabinet in a very rapid turnaround" (Local Press 2, 6 July 1995).

Currently, through the medium of the Internet, the corporation avows its commitment to customer-driven innovation and value:

> "The secret of the enormous innovative power of Kestrel lies in the consistent focus towards the customers' wishes and needs. Thousands of discussions with customers lead to new requirement profiles and ideas for products to suit the people with practical applications."

> "Rombaden - Kestrel headquarters - is ... synonymous for the economic, cost optimised manufacture of such classical Kestrel success products as [product names] produced on the most modern production lines." (From Company web-site; edited to maintain confidentiality)

Kestrel's (and, hence, Bulberry's) approach to innovation is accordant with Germany's economic policy that competitiveness should be achieved through the introduction of new products that, because their manufacture required specialist technical knowledge,

could command a high price by virtue of their utility (Jacobi et al. 1992). Within Germany, that approach is sustained by particular patterns of industrial development, employee relations and human resource development that are not reflected in Britain. As Bulberry's managers are concerned to invest in and utilise their human resources to best effect, Bulberry's particular approach to human resource management[8] (HRM) is described next.

Human Resource Management

With growth in output and factory size, also comes growth in organisation. To keep up with demand for products, recruitment has been an almost constant process that began with the opening of the Plymouth factory, since when there has been a seven-fold increase the workforce. While competitors are expanding their global capacity, and investing in similar plant and equipment, Bulberry's competitive advantage from investment and innovation is quickly offset. As the company is not prepared to compromise on quality for the sake of reducing costs, managers are convinced that the only extant source of competitive advantage is the people involved within the business.

The approach to human resource management is strongly coloured by a particular stance on trade unions. In common with many greenfield companies (Guest 1995; Beardwell 1997), Bulberry has never recognised a trade union for bargaining purposes[9]. The company director holds a personal view that unions are formed where managers are perceived to be unfair in their treatment of their workforce. If Bulberry workers were to vote for union recognition, he explained, he would view this as a sign of failure on his part:

"we do believe that the legislation which is coming in is right in certain respects. There are some groups of employers who do not do their best for their employees and I would *not* count this company amongst those. I would like to think that, generally, we do our best for the employees – and I suppose a measurement of that is whether people are actively wanting a union or not. So, I'm actively trying to make sure the union doesn't come in, but really only as a barometer of whether we're doing right as a management group... it's my job to make sure that the people here are managed properly. And I don't need a union to be able to communicate with them. If we're doing the right thing by our employees then a union becomes superfluous." (italics denote vocal emphasis)

Although the firm utilises many policies and practices of what is now regarded as HRM (Guest and Hoque1994), there is no evidence that Bulberry has a clear policy to integrate those policies and practices with the wider business strategy. HRM is a line management function within Bulberry and, since the restructuring exercise, is the secondary responsibility of the quality manager. The personnel office is staffed by three clerks who undertake the administration of recruitment and payroll functions but refer problems to the operations superintendent.

Terms and conditions of employment at Bulberry compare favourably with other firms in the area. Pay, which is calculated on a single spine, is incremented according to company performance, with enhancements for night-shift (or back-shift) working. Holiday entitlements are supplemented with parental leave and an additional twelve hours per annum is allowed for incidentals such as dental appointments. A bonus payment is universally awarded for productivity and another can be earned for individual 'commitment', defined as full attendance over a calendar month. Thus, Bulberry competes in the local labour market. Many potential employees approach the company directly rather than respond to advertisement[10]. While recruitment is an on-going process, the company has experienced no problems in attracting or retaining staff. The personnel department holds a list of people who have been interviewed and accepted pending a suitable vacancy.

In common with most new industries in the South West (Gripaios 1999), the majority of the posts offered by Bulberry are 'screwdriver jobs': unskilled or semi-skilled work overseeing automated processes such as the extrusion, laser-welding and painting of metal sheets. Nevertheless, on-going training is considered to be important. Alongside the concept of Bulberry as a centre of excellence, there is a vision to build a centre of learning. Employees are encouraged to work for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) and, while arrangements are still somewhat ad hoc (production manager), a steadily-growing number of chargehands are training as assessors. However, the constant pressure of work, and the unremitting need for increased productivity are obstacles to this goal:

> "It's something that we have to do. We have to – I used IIP as a benchmark, for how far down the people management road we were, as part of the vision that I had of the type of company I wanted us to be. And the stumbling block has become training – the lack of training in certain areas, because we don't have the time to do the training properly." (Company Director)

Winning their contract with Modular was a major achievement for Bulberry, assuring the future of the company for as long as the contract might run. Expansion continued apace as the size of the Modular orders continued to grow, reflecting the general trend in information technology industries. As the physical size of the factory increased, Bulberry was able to accommodate a wider product range and, hence, attract other customers. In some respects, though, the Bulberry management team were frustrated by their own success. Capital investment and customer-driven innovation had ensured (over) full order books but the need to maintain such high levels of factory output was an obstacle to continued improvement. Managers resolved that better employee involvement in operations was to be their next objective:

"We'd identified that where we're lacking was really on our people issues. We're not good at people management. So we took all our management team, our deputy's and the production supervisors to [an hotel] for a weekend, brainstorming, and basically giving them presentations of where we were, what we had achieved during the last year and what we were going to do for 1998. ...So we targeted some objectives particularly on the people side. Basically our objectives were, 'we want to have greater employee involvement, customer awareness and customer care'." (Quality Manager)

EMPLOYEE INVOLVEMENT

Employee involvement is not a new concept but, since the 'excellence' movement of the 1980s, the term has become closely associated with the softer models of human resource management (Marchington 1995; Holden 1997). It is an umbrella term encompassing manifold processes whereby workers might be permitted or encouraged to influence the operations and/or strategy of their employing organisation. While this may involve organisational decision making, it is not necessarily synonymous (Biggs 1991). The degree and level to which employees may be involved with administration is in the gift of managers and is often inversely related to the importance of a decision (Cressey and Williams 1990). Marchington (1995) suggests that many initiatives ebb and flow like waves, depending on the current fashions in management circles although Ramsay had previously (1983) postulated that movements for participation occurred in cycles that coincide with periods where managerial control of labour is under pressure or threat. That view is supported by Poole who suggests that initiatives for employee involvement are functions of a particular manifestation of power:

"Workers' participation and control are reflections of the latent power of particular industrial classes, parties or groups and the 'value' climate which may or may not be favourable to participation experiments' (Poole 1986, p. 28).

A range of survey data suggests that concepts of employee involvement are popular with managers and attractive to workers (Marchington 1995) but, as Holden (1997) comments, the success or failure of an initiative depends upon the objectives that

predicate the project. Bulberry's managers had two goals: first was the aspiration to improve productivity in line with their mission of market dominance; and, second, they wanted to dissuade workers from voting for union representation. Those objectives create a space in the power relation, as their realisation requires the co-operation (or consent) of the workforce. For Bulberry's managers, the key to the realising their vision was, they felt, the implementation of Kaizen, which offered the promise of increased productivity, improved quality and an element of employee involvement which might support the company's stance on unionisation. This chapter now continues with a description of the implementation of Kaizen at Bulberry. Many of the techniques (or tools) for Kaizen have already been explained in the previous chapter (Chapter 6) and will not be repeated here. The concept of employee involvement is analysed further in Chapter Eight.

THE KAIZEN PROJECT

The idea to implement Kaizen into Bulberry's production processes was originally tabled in 1996, by the production manager who had learned of Kaizen during an MSc Management Science course. Under his guidance, and with the support of other managers, volunteer teams of three or four people were formed to tackle problems defined by management or supervisors. A group of about twenty people, from all functions and levels in the organisation, met each month to review progress on each of the projects. Many of these initial projects were simple (for example designing and building poka yoke[11] systems, some safety improvements, and re-arranging shelving) and were soon implemented. These small, fast-moving projects motivated team members, who were keen to move onto the next project. Other projects dragged on for several months, being too complex for the small teams to complete, and many were eventually discontinued as those involved became disinterested and de-motivated.

A serious problem was a lack of involvement by supervisors for, even though two senior managers were trying to drive the project, the supervisors were reluctant to release their workers for an hour or two a week to work on the various projects. As the factory went through another major expansion, little or no time resources were available for Kaizen projects, or for training. Slowly, the Kaizen drive lost momentum and eventually ceased.

New impetus came when the Quality manager began to study for Master in Business Administration. During that course, as he learned more about Kaizen, he began to realise where mistakes had been made in the past and felt that it was "worth another go" but that, this time, supervisors and chargehands should be seen as key roles. Following the 'awayday' weekend referred to above, a new Kaizen initiative was begun and that, second, initiative is the subject of this sub-section of the case study.

Implementing Kaizen

Following their earlier, aborted attempts to implement Kaizen, managers at Bulberry's were certain that supervisory grades were the key to a successful project. Their first objective, then, was to an educative programme for supervisors. A management training company 'Production UK' was engaged to conduct a two day workshop based on 'traditional' workplace (*gemba*) Kaizen. Twenty-four supervisors and assistant supervisors attended a workshop, at the Bulberry factory, during April 1998. The underpinning principle of Gemba Kaizen is that those who work in the gemba should identify and correct small problems, possibly saving only seconds of time or a few pence. Such tiny savings accrue to represent substantial gains in productivity (Imai 1997). Yet, as a focus group member explained:

"The training as a whole was based on our shop floor; we looked for problems on the shop floor.... we went out in the factory for about 20 minutes to look and write down all the problems we could find. The projects everyone took on were big projects, we've learnt a lesson not to take on such big projects."

The operations superintendent was disappointed with the results. Firstly, the trainer from Production UK had not appraised the proposed projects which, as was later identified, were too big for Gemba teams to tackle. Secondly, the four teams were comprised of people from different departments and shifts, which made collaboration difficult and militated against anyone taking ownership of a project. Despite their initial enthusiasm, the teams had ceased functioning within three months with no tangible benefits from their activities.

In an effort to reinvigorate the project teams, a subgroup went to a further, three-day training event at Nissan UK in Sunderland. There the emphasis was on just-in-time manufacturing or, as Nissan termed it, 'JIT Kaizen'[12]. Training was based upon the use of takt time[13] and the elimination of waste from processes. Specially designed charts were used to track products, from start to finish, and identify even the briefest units of time when value was not being added. This concept does not translate easily from the car plant to Bulberry's factory, as the production manager explained:

"We are aware of takt time but we haven't applied it here. It's difficult with the forecasting of customer's orders. Takt time is supposed to be in balance with the customer's demand, but how can you do that when they can't forecast accurately what they will need a month ahead? We budgeted for two hundred and twenty [cabinets] a day. The sales people told us a hundred and eighty a day. We're now doing five hundred."

While there would inevitably be some problems involved in transferring ideas, the supervisors returned to Plymouth with renewed enthusiasm for Kaizen and wanted, for instance, to compile standard operating procedures[14]. New projects were begun with varying degrees of success. For example, one supervisor worked with the purchasing

department, a quality engineer and a supplier to devise a modified Kanban system which has saved the company some £7,000 per year, on a continuing basis. Another felt sufficiently confident to devolve responsibility for projects to his workforce. A number of small projects were identified and teams of two or three people, from each shift, proceeded to implement small modifications. As he explained in the focus group:

> "They didn't want to start on the problem I wanted to, but it encouraged them to do it. Later on we can steer them more. It's important that they can work on what is important to them first."

Yet another supervisor, 'Trevor', had proceeded in a similar manner. With four sections under his control, he split the sixteen people into four teams of four. He seemed proud to report to the progress meeting that the Strippet table was mended. The Strippet Support Table is used when large pieces of steel are pierced on the machine. A year before it had broken away from the machine, and the workers have waited in vain for a maintenance team to fix it. Now they have carried out the work themselves. The mended table was not the only beneficial outcome, Trevor said:

> "Its also good for them to be doing something different for a change, they spend 8 hours a day on a folding machine, its good to spend two hours working on a project."

Imai (1986) stresses that Kaizen is an activity for everyone in the factory. Different Kaizen activities can involve the whole organisation, groups and individuals. While Gemba Kaizen is directed at small groups, aiming for small incremental improvements, gemba activity can and should be punctuated by short, sharp 'blitzes' of improvement: the Big K (Imai 1986) or *Kaikuku* (Womack and Jones 1996; Wickens 1995). This is an event, initiated by management, where a dedicated team is formed to spend a few days concentrating on one particular problem. Following the encouraging outcomes of the Nissan course, Bulberry's staged a *Kaikuku* event aimed at improving processes in manufacturing aluminium doors. A team of the Nissan-trained supervisors was

assembled and briefed to eliminate waste throughout the processes of manufacturing, painting and assembly of a particular product.

> "Using takt time as the basis for improvement they proceeded to map out the complete process. They went through each stage of the process looking for the seven wastes to eliminate. They ended up redesigning the complete method of manufacturing, painting and assembling. The results included savings of two people, who were moved to other jobs, 50% reduced travelling time and 25% fewer rejections after paint. Once again, the team was greatly enthused and motivated to carry out the project, with the minimum of support from management. The results look good, however it has taken 12 months to implement, due to process changes needed. Time constraints have been a main reason why it did not take place earlier." (Stone 1999, p. 89)

In August 1999, some fifteen months after the *Kaikuku* event, the quality manager reported that:

> "The doors are now painted in separate piece parts now, before they were painted as complete doors, this resulted in the whole door being rejected, sometimes scrapped because of one small defect on one piece of extrusion. The parts are more manageable to handle, before we used to use large stillages, now we use smaller ones, with dedicated protective packaging. We have reduced the level of labour used during manufacturing by four people, this has occurred because there is no longer a pre-paint build assembly, one operation is gone! Savings are about £348 - £350 K. just on this one process operation. We have improved the throughput, to achieve the higher volumes we need. Capacity improvement is probably about 15 - 20%." (e-mail August 1999)

As the managers had anticipated, there were some problems in the transition to new methods of working. In a company, such as Bulberry's, with a constant demand for high levels of output and which had committed so much finance into capital investment, it is not surprising that time and material resources were perceived as scarce. The supervisors had identified those potential problems at the start of their training (in their training evaluation documents), and later confirmed their views in the focus groups. Managers, too, recognised the problem but felt that much of it could be overcome by re-evaluating priorities and establishing new routines:

"We need to design the process, so it can't go back. Prevent the old ways coming back in. We need to build it into the routine, for example 8.30 every morning we could have a production meeting – right after the managers' production meeting – and everyone attends. It's breaking into it that's the difficult bit, making it the routine… That's why there is a need to change physical things like tables, tools – move equipment, then the old ways no longer exist and we can't go back. People issues are not the same, that comes down to attitude and discipline." (Production Manager)

"Essentially waste reduction through the whole process – it is very time consuming – they can work on it whenever they want – on overtime – the problem is it tends to get a low priority with everything else going on here." (Company Director)

One of the espoused benefits of Kaizen is that, eventually, it will create the time and space for more ambitious projects. For Bulberry's, though, there were two, more intractable, difficulties. One was the problem of rewards for suggestions and the other was persuading supervisors to relinquish some of their controls and empower their teams to implement new ideas. These are discussed next.

Leistung für Leistung

Since the Plymouth factory opened, Bulberry's have operated a suggestion scheme where employees were encouraged, by the offer of a monetary award, to submit suggestions of how to improve output, efficiency or safety within the factory. The scheme has operated well, in that some very useful and profitable suggestions have been put forward, and awards of between £10 and £4,000 have been made, although the level of input has often been disappointing. Managers hoped that, through the medium of Kaizen teams, they might harness the collective experience and insight of all employees, some of whom at been at Bulberry's since the move from Cornwall.

The tensions caused by teamworking, and other collective forms of organisation, within a unitarist industrial relations framework is widely acknowledged in human resource management literature (e.g. Kessler 1995; Marlow 1997). Nevertheless, potential problems were not foreseen by managers, despite their experience and their academic

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studies. There was a clear clash between two forms of employee involvement (Marchington 1995). Although some people claimed that they were interested simply in being involved in Kaizen, other employees wanted to know if they could still claim suggestion awards when they propose Kaizen improvements; and whether the individual or the team would be eligible.

Managers received conflicting advice. On the one hand, mentors from Nissan were shocked that anyone should seek additional payment for doing their job. They told the Bulberry management team that, within the Japanese approach to Kaizen, participation in improvement teams was a part of working life; managers had a right to expect employees to make suggestions for improvements. On the other hand, Kestrel's owner had a clear and opposite view, as the production manager explained:

> "This benefit thing is very sticky, I'm still not sure which way we are going
> to go. We must reward people because it's Herr Strauss' philosophy of
> Leistung für Leistung – meaning benefit for benefit – if someone has a
> good idea that benefits the company they should also receive a benefit – a
> reward."

Bulberry's managers were caught in the horns of a dilemma. If Kaizen was going to work it needed the synergy of group efforts, but the workforce was used to, and expectant of, a reward system that recognised individual merit. The company could not simply abolish the established practice of a suggestion scheme, especially when the government was about to introduce legislation requiring a vote on union recognition, but any system of rewards had to be equitable and perceived as such.

Their confusion is reflected in the very unclear picture in management literature. Some writers claim that there is no need to reward workers for suggestions and improvements because they gain simply by being involved in Kaizen activities. Through Kaizen, the working environment improves and employees have more direct control over their work and, hence, more job satisfaction (Forza 1996). Kaizen training provides both

developmental opportunities and the scope to demonstrate management potential (Malloch 1997). However, in the Western business culture, claims Barnes (1996), employees expect financial rewards.

Gondhalker (1994) maintains that (unspecified) successful Japanese companies reward every improvement with a small sum of money, but points out that "Employees ... have a mutual understanding to contribute the rewards to a common kitty" (Gondhalker 1994, p.4)[15]. At Toyota's Kentucky plant (Besser 1995) small awards are made in the form of gift vouchers so that employees can purchase a tangible reminder of the benefits of Kaizen, rather than obscuring the reward by simply banking the money with their normal pay.

The quality manager, in the course of his own research, had asked other Plymouth-based companies what they did:

> "Prodco recognise and praise the team, Contech award a plaque to improvement teams and the General Manager buys cups of coffee for the team. Veltech reward the best Kaizen team each year with a trip to their Japanese headquarters, where they compete with other subsidiaries of the group for world recognition." (Stone 1999, p. 77)[16].

For some time Bulberry continued to operate its long-standing suggestion scheme but found that workers were submitting suggestions twice; once to the scheme and once to their Kaizen team. Eventually, a new reward system was devised. Awards would be made to teams with a proportion being paid to each team member. However, where small improvements had been made the final award could be just a few pence for each worker, and the system failed to have the desired effect as it proved to be slow and unwieldy for its administrators, and insignificant to the workforce. At the last contact with the company another new version of the suggestion scheme was operating. Workers continue to submit suggestions to the scheme administrator who makes an assessment and takes one of three actions:

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- If the suggestion is impractical it is rejected.

- When the administrator considers that a suggestion should form a Kaizen project, it is sent to the appropriate team leader for action and the entire team is awarded points for the work. Each quarter, points are totalled and translated into an incremental scale of non-monetary awards, ranging from a free lunch to a weekend break in a hotel.

- More significant suggestions which have the potential for high savings, and which will need to be implemented at management level, are accepted and a monetary award, based on potential savings to the company, is made to the individual who offered the suggestion.

This new scheme has not been appraised at the time of writing.

The other problem that occurred as a result of the Kaizen project proved less tractable to management intervention. It affected the identities of first and middle line managers who had become socialised into roles that required them to control and direct activities on the shop floor[17]. Kaizen, by contrast, required supervisors and superintendents to hand over problems to operatives, for them to solve. Effectively, once a problem had been identified line managers needed to be able to let go.

The Kaizen approach to employee involvement builds upon its forerunners of quality circles and Total Quality Management, as an upward, problem-solving form of communication. It does not aim for co-determination, nor industrial democracy, but rather seek to harness the accumulated experience, wisdom and knowledge of their workforce and to align individual and organisational goals in order to increase efficiency (Holden 1997)[18]. Its success, as Bulberry's have realised, depends upon commitment from senior managers, a sense of empowerment for workers, and co-ordination rather than control by intermediate managers.

Bulberry's first attempt to introduce Kaizen floundered for want of co-operation from supervisors but the decision to make a second attempt testifies to senior managers' commitment to the concept and practices of continuous improvement:

> "...once you've got people involved in solving their own problems out on the line, in their own area, not only will they be more motivated – because they're involved in solving their own problems, but they actually will take a greater responsibility for their products. And take a greater responsibility and ownership for their own customers, and they actually feel part of a company; they're involved with the company because they *are* directly part of it. And that is the whole basis of trying to get the continuous improvement down the organisation." (Company Director, italics reflect vocal emphasis)

However, to espouse an idea is different from putting it into practice. The company director believed that his role in Kaizen was to be supportive; to approve extraordinary expenditure, to attend presentations, and to offer praise and encouragement. He trusted the quality manager and the production manager to oversee the project successfully. The quality manager felt that there should be a unified approach and that he ought not approve projects without the agreement of his colleague. However, that colleague, the production manager, was also overseeing a technology transfer project in India. Many potential Kaizen projects lost momentum during his regular absences abroad, a situation

which could clearly undermine managers' attempts to convince shop-floor workers that Kaizen had their serious attention..

The production manager also saw his input differently, claiming that Kaizen is basically a people issue and not his remit except where it involved 'hard' issues such as SMED[19], Poka Yoke and productive capacity. Furthermore he was used to a directive style of management:

> "[Production manager] called a meeting with his superintendent and the foremen from the Modular line and the paint unit. Apparently there's an ongoing problem because the Modulars have to go through the paint unit in a batch and that causes a log-jam on the line while they wait. He just sort of said 'here's the problem and here's what we're going to do about it'. It seemed like a very sensible solution to the problem but any one of the men in the room could have sorted it out. Surely it would have made a great Kaizen project for a small team – if he can't delegate a problem to his foremen, how's he going to handle problem solving teams?" (from field work diary)

During the interviews it became apparent that each of the three senior managers had different views about what Kaizen is. The Director (who preferred to use English terminology) said that "Continuous improvement is something which has to become a way of life in our organisation because it's one of the few ways in which we can try to sustain a competitive advantage over the competition"; a view consistent with that espoused by Imai (1986, 1997) and others. The production manager, however, did not see it as an initiative that should involve everybody in the company. He believed that "only those people who want to participate in Kaizen should do so". Meanwhile, the quality manager, unlike the authors he had read so avidly, saw Kaizen as a range of techniques that should be applied as *ad hoc* problem-solving rather than in any prescriptive manner.

The confusion continued down through the organisational structure and, despite their training, the supervisors were unclear about what Kaizen is, and their role in it. The

most successful projects at Bulberry's have come about through three foremen who have followed up their initial training by creating and instructing small teams among their own workers. As one supervisor told the focus group

> "this time it is concentrated at a lower level, so you don't need the management to be involved. We have to sort it out, getting the shopfloor guys in teams".

Several informants, though, felt that they should not initiate any changes until their operators had also been trained, and called for an in-house team of mentors or overseers to instruct operators in the use of the 'tools' (charts and techniques). Participants at the second focus group were keen to start some improvements, having already identified several areas for attention, but four of the six felt that they could not do so until they had had the training. The field diary records an impression that the (external) training had become symbolic of empowerment for the supervisors and operatives.

By the time of writing all supervisors and approximately two-thirds of assistant supervisors have been to Nissan for training in 'JIT Kaizen'. Oversight of the various activities has been devolved to the operations superintendent and manufacturing manager who are in frequent, direct contact with foremen. Many projects are underway although managers have needed to give more prompts than they had anticipated. Two particular events have helped to improve the overall rate of participation. The first involved a customer complaint:

> "... we set up a customer Kaizen team to work on a customer complaint when a customer flew from America and the Kaizen team – I wasn't here at the time – the Kaizen team you know, explained exactly what they did to the customer, and he went away very impressed ... It was just a gang of four who worked on the project – the customer came in, the quality engineer said well, rather than me tell you, here's the Kaizen team, this is what they did to resolve the problem. [The customer was] Well impressed. So there were a lot of good things came out of it." (Quality Manager)

The second event involved a team representing each shift on one particular line. There was a long-standing problem where a certain part was getting scratched during the mounting of anti-static units. The team identified a possible modification but it would have to be made by the supplier (General Electric). The operations supervisor arranged for a GE representative to visit Bulberry's where the operatives demonstrated their problem and the proposed solution. The result of ensuing discussions was that General Electric changed their production methods; Bulberry's saved circa £7,000 per year through quality improvement and faster process time; and General Electric had an improved product to market.

In contrast to the scenario at Crowan's, the introduction of Kaizen into the Bulberry plant has, based on early evidence, been adjudged a success. Although it has required more managerial input than had been anticipated, the improvements in production have been impressive and Kaizen has involved employees at all levels, in line with managerial objectives. It should be remembered, however, that a secondary motive for involving employees in problem solving exercises was to reduce the possible demand for trade union recognition. When the quality manager was asked, in November 1999, to anticipate the outcome of a vote his reply was "I think we'd win". The metaphor suggests that he viewed the matter as some form of fight, implying that the vote would be something more serious than a simple barometer of managerial performance in HRM.

The matter of union recognition was deserving of further investigation although the conditions that prevailed upon the investigation within Bulberry prevented an in-depth, focused exploration of the theme. However, certain incidental remarks made during the interviews suggested that the matter of unionisation was a serious issue for Bulberry's management team and that it was instrumental in their selection of Kaizen,

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as opposed to other techniques for increasing productivity. For instance, in an early contact, the quality manager said:

> "We really want them to have more say, more participation. We don't want them to start joining unions. If this new bill goes through there'll have to be a vote. We don't want them to have any reason for wanting unions."

Given the physical expansion of the works, and the company's reputation as a 'good employer', there was scope merely to increase the size of the workforce to increase output. As the company was paying above-average wages, it could have simply reduced pay and benefits, to match local conditions, to reduce costs. Other techniques, such as Business Process Re-engineering or Total Quality Management (as a discrete process) could have been implemented to improve productivity and/or product quality. Nevertheless, there was no indication that such options had been considered. Rather, as the Director had said (above), the management were actively trying to prevent a union presence within Bulberry. In order to prevent complicating the discussion in Chapter 8, the matter of the non-union firm is analysed in the next, final section of this chapter.

A NON-UNION FIRM

Since the early 1980s, following the introduction of legislation to curb union strength, industrial relations literature has developed an increasing focus on the decline in union density. Such literature has generally concerned the (over-estimated) increase in firms that have de-recognised unions (Clayton 1989; Disney et al. 1996; Gall and McKay 1999) and, since the Labour government announced its 'fairness at work' legislation, the procedures and issues surrounding statutory recognition (Wood and Godard 1999; McCartney 1998). By contrast there has been an under-emphasis on those firms where trade unions have never been recognised for bargaining purposes (Terry 1999; McLoughlin and Gourlay 1992). It has been noted that the phenomenon is most common in green-field firms, such as Bulberry, and within the electronics industries

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with which Bulberry is associated. Findlay (1993) suggests that non-unionism is associated more with the age of a company than with any other factor. As her exemplars were all companies that began operations during the Thatcher era, the influence of the political milieu cannot be ruled out (see also Disney et al. 1996).

Several writers have attempted to link attitudes to trade unions with management style. Purcell and Sisson (1983) offered a two-by-two matrix which would locate Bulberry in the 'high individualism/ low collectivism' quadrant as practising, what they labelled as, sophisticated human relations. The descriptor[20] offers a broad approximation of the management style at Bulberry but, within the company, there are also features of 'traditional' (low individualism, low collectivism) and consultative (high individualism, high collectivism) styles. As others (Marchington and Parker 1990; McLoughlin and Gorlay 1992; Guest and Hoque 1994) have indicated, it is difficult to locate the two dimensions of the model empirically. McLoughlin and Gorlay (1992) attempted to redraw the model using degrees of 'strategic integration' (of human resource management) as one dimension and the predominance of individualism over collectivism (and *vice versa*) as the other. Again, Bulberry straddles three quadrants of the matrix which demonstrates the limited analytic value of such models and the potential risks of trying to force an organisation into an existing matrix. Bulberry, as with any other organisation, is a unique case that combines some aspects of both individualism and collectivism. Company managers have integrated non-unionism into their strategic planning while other policies and practices of 'people management', such as training and recruitment are treated as operational concerns.

Maintaining conditions that might curtail employees' enthusiasm for trade union representation is expensive. Given the state of the local labour market, the company's stance defies the rational economic arguments both for and against trade unions. Neo-

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classical theory holds that unions create an artificially high and inelastic wage (the price of labour) which places financial limits on the number of workers a firm can employ[21]. At Bulberry, however, it is the company that has set such an artificial rate which can only otherwise be explained, in terms of the neo-classical model, if the workers are deemed to be sufficiently valuable as to offset additional production costs – an unlikely explanation given the low-skill nature of most jobs within the factory. The alternative argument is that collective bargaining takes wages (and other terms and conditions) out of competition (e.g. Tuckman and Finnerty 1998; McCartney 1998). In a tight labour market a firm might need to raise its rates above agreed levels in order to attract workers. Those conditions do not apply in the South West so, again, anti-unionism is an unnecessary expense for Bulberry.

In the small number of relevant studies (Beardwell 1997; IRS 1995; Findlay 1993) two dominant reasons were given for firms not recognising unions (as opposed to those that de-recognised). Firstly, many companies reported that they had never been asked, by unions or employees to consider the issue. Second, there was a strongly-held view that the presence of a union represented managerial inadequacy in managing their workforce and that, as Bulberry's director maintained, where the workforce is treated properly unions are unnecessary (also McLoughlin and Gourlay 1992).

McCartney (1998, p. 38), as Minister of State for Trade and Industry, maintains that "only bad employers, uninterested in the views of their employees" would disregard the views of their workforce in respect of union representation. But this is a view that contradicts the opinion of Bulberry's director, who perceives himself to be a good employer whose workers do not need a union to intercede on their behalf. The director, and his management team, hold an image of the good employer that represents an "ideal

of conduct" (Foucault 1985 p. 17); and their resistance to trade unions can be seen as an effort to prevent a union presence which would contradict that image.

That perception of employee relations is further supported by a stereotype of what managers refer to as 'the Plymouth attitude', a view that the Director educed before joining the Bulberry management team:

> "I used to work for a company called [name] ... We had two manufacturing facilities – one up in Immingham near Grimsby and one up in Avonmouth. And we'd never had a problem with the Immingham factory.   ... The Avonmouth one was always a problem and there were certain individuals who either through unions or through, just general involvement, were damned awkward. And I remember saying to the production director, one day when we were driving down 'Why is it there's such a difference between the people up in Immingham and the people down in Avonmouth?'... and I named three people down in Avonmouth. I said, well, if all Bristol people are like that – they're hopeless. You know we don't have this problem up in Immingham. He said, 'Well funnily enough, all those three people come from Plymouth' ... it's difficult to know whether the dockyard was the basis of the culture and the attitudes that exist or whether the dockyard was in fact the result of it. Because you know that, if somebody's as miserable as sin and as awkward as hell, if you look at his application form, you'll find that sometime, they've had experience in the dockyard.

Clearly, the presence of trade union representation can limit management's options in the flexible deployment of workers yet, suggests Findlay (1993), in companies where they have an official presence, unions are generally acknowledged to offer a pragmatic response to management requests for flexibility over hours and duties:

> "Not only was it felt that trade unions were co-operative and realistic ...
> [but] ... once union co-operation had been achieved on an issue, management's task in implementing proposals was made substantially easier" (Findlay 1993, p. 33)

When HRM theories stress the link between unitarist structures and non-unionism (e.g. Storey 1992), proponents of the 'new industrial relations' (e.g. Marchington and Parker 1990) tend to present ideal forms in which there is a congruence of values and objectives between employers and employees. It is easy to forget that such models are

presenting the extremes of a continuum, and to underestimate the degree to which apparently unitarist systems will incorporate collectivism. Bulberry is an example of such an organisation where HRM practices exhibit a mix of individualised measures (seniority-based pay, attendance bonuses, a reward-based suggestion scheme and, to a lesser extent, training) with collective practices such as productivity bonuses, team-working and a works council. Notably though, as Findlay (1993) indicates, the latter are forms of collectivism which are firmly within the control of the company. While Findlay's accusation of hypocrisy presents an extreme interpretation, there is a degree of contradiction apparent in this study, in that Bulberry's management support forms of collectivism that maintain the managerial prerogative but, those forms which do not support the company's ethos, are rejected in favour of unitarist practices.

If, as the identification of an 'ideal of conduct' and the stereotyping of Plymothians suggest, non-unionism addresses a particular set of problems (in the Foucaultian sense) it can be deduced that the decision, by Bulberry's management, not to recognise unions is a discursive phenomenon that encompasses discursive themes and objects such as pay structures, training and employee involvement. For as long as trade unions can be excluded from the company, control of these objects[22] is firmly in the realm of managers who retain expertise over HRM related issues, and the authority to define them. The power/knowledge effects of non-unionism, then, serve management by upholding the image of the good employer, and preventing the establishment of structures that might challenge their authority (or world view); while they also serve the workforce by maintaining superior conditions of work and employment.

This issue of non-unionism is an extensive theme which deserves a comprehensive analysis, on the scale of Foucault's major works. It is unfortunate that the conditions of this study prevented further investigation and a more thorough eventalisation. What the

evidence does demonstrate, however, is that Kaizen (which is analysed in Chapter 8) is a discourse that is eminently compatible with the Director's concept of good management and that also problematises Bulberry managers' concerns regarding productivity and quality.

SUMMARY

In summary, this chapter has presented the case of Bulberry, a young but successful company that is part of the privately-owned, German corporation, Kestrel GmbH. Through planned investment and on-going research and development, consistent with the company principles established by its owners the business has achieved an impressive rate of growth and now produces computer cabinets for an international market that includes many important customers. Bulberry's managers are now attempting to cope with the productivity and quality-related problems, that have arisen from such rapid growth, and to preserve the company's operation as a non-union enterprise.

With the support of Kestrel's owner, local managers have taken the initiative to introduce Kaizen in an effort to address those issues. An earlier initiative had failed through, inter alia, pressures of time, over-ambition on the part of project leaders and under-involvement of supervisory grades. This study concerns a second attempt to establish the techniques of Kaizen as the basis for productive processes within the Plymouth factory. This time, under the leadership of the full management team, and supported by professional training, the project was intended to encompass the philosophies as well as the techniques of Kaizen. Small gemba teams have been used to implement modest modifications within their own working areas while larger, Kaikuku events have taken place to deal with major or widespread problems.

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The introduction of Kaizen has brought its own problems. Predominantly the existing individualised rewards-based suggestion scheme has need to be overhauled, and intermediate line managers have needed to re-assess their roles in the control operations. However, the company is able to report a set of impressive results in production and quality, and some effects that have benefited suppliers and customers as well as Bulberry.

The company, which already offered superior pay and benefits to its workers, wanted to increase the level of employee involvement in the company's operations. Kaizen, as an upwards (problem-solving) form of communication, has also been useful in achieving that end, by empowering workers to intervene where they identified a problem, offering different forms of activity within their working week, and bringing them into closer contact with suppliers and customers.

Bulberry's management team, which has never recognised a trade union for bargaining purposes, was also eager to prevent a union presence within Bulberry, as result of forthcoming legislation. This was, apparently, a secondary agenda but one that served to redirect the available options for achieving the primary objective. Foucaultian analysis shows that, in being problematised, the issue of non-unionisation can operate discursively to maintain the image of the 'good employer' and to uphold the superior conditions that might prevent employees from exercising their forthcoming legal right to trade union representation.

1 Reference to Germany excludes East Germany during the period of separation.

2 Since the 1870s Germany companies have had two boards of directors. The supervisory board (*aufsichtsrat*) is responsible for strategy, and an executive board (*vorstand*) oversees functional and operational matters.

3 These were second-in-charge to the production manager. Despite the difference in job title, both were considered to be middle-line managers within the manufacturing team. The operations superintendent dealt with human resources and supplies issues while the manufacturing manager was responsible for technical processes.

4 Bulberry's workforce is 90% male. Most women work in 'traditionally female' occupations. I had no contact with any of the few women who work on the factory floor.

5 These updates also had a deliberate coercive effect. Managers felt that obliging supervisors to report on the progress of individual projects would provide 'motivation' for participants to increase their Kaizen activities. The company director explained it thus:

"I don't think they were actually progressing so basically we instigated that we should have a monthly meeting; to see some sort of progress on the four initial projects from Production UK; but also we've spent, probably, by this time, near on £10,000 worth of money on training. Let's have a monthly meeting to try and find out how we can progress things along. With the monthly meeting maybe something will happen."

6 Duties and responsibilities had changed as a result of restructuring. While titles were retained, the production manager assumed responsibility for supplies and dispatch while the quality manager also took charge of the personnel function.

7 Bulberry's was the third in the series of case studies, and reflection on evidence from the previous studies was yielding some tentative conclusions. Restrictions on the research processes were, therefore, less critical than if they had occurred earlier.

8 It is not the intention here to enter into a debate regarding the constituents of human resource management, or the differences between HRM and personnel management (e.g. Guest 1989). Rather the term is used here as a convenient phrase to describe those policies and practices which concern the management of people at work.

9 In accordance with European Union directives, Kestrel has a works council that comprises representatives from all areas of the factory, and includes a management representative. Its role is predominantly consultative and, although representatives are encouraged to bring issues of contention or discord to the attention of managers, it does not have a bargaining role.

10 The production supervisor, who interviews applicants for shop-floor posts, informed me that a local Japanese-owned company has complained that Kestrel is enticing its employees to move. Bulberry managers deny this, claiming that they have no need to actively encourage recruitment. On one occasion, I observed an interview where a welder wanted to resign his full time position with that Japanese company in order to take up a temporary post at Kestrel.

11 Poka yoke is a fail-safe (Bulberry managers call it fool-proofing) system, where machines are modified to signal the mis-alignment of materials prior to processing, thus reducing the incidence of incorrectly machined components.

12 JIT Kaizen, that Nissan taught the supervisors, bears a striking resemblance to 'unique' form that Fred Phillips introduced to Crowan's.

13 Imai (1997, p. 148) defines takt time as "the total production time divided by the number of units required by the customer." For example:

A line needs to produce 600 pieces in one day. Process time for each piece is five minutes, and the operators work for eight hours.

The takt time will be calculated as: working minutes divided by number of pieces required

$$(8 \times 60) : 600 = 0.8 .$$

So, the line must produce a piece every 0.8 minutes (or 48 seconds) in order to fill the order.

The number of operators can then be calculated as: process time, per piece, divided by takt time

$$5 : 0.8 = 4 .$$

Therefore, four operators are needed to fill the order. Kaizen activity would then be focused on eliminating all waste (activity and waiting time) from the process so that the four operators can produce the required 600 pieces; and then to continue improvements so that process time and the number of operators can be further reduced.

14 Bulberry's already had a form of standard operating procedures, called the production manual, but the trainees did not, apparently, equate the two terms.

15 Gondhalekar (1994) is reporting the implementation of Kaizen at a factory in India. His report continues: "During the implementation, we toyed with the idea of introducing monetary rewards. We found a steep rise in jealousy and destructive internal competition. We quickly dropped the idea." That company now awards gifts tokens for major improvements, and non-monetary forms of recognition such as certificates and badges for those making smaller improvements.

16 Prodco and Veltech are Japanese owned companies and have never operated a payment-based suggestion scheme.

17 Many researchers (e.g. Poole 1986; Marchington 1995) have noted that employee participation (or involvement) schemes cause particular problems for first and middle line managers as new forms of communication between workers and managers effectively by-pass, or exclude, these grades and challenge their place within the chain of command.

18 Babson (1995) uses the term 'democratic Taylorism' as the system retains many of the features of Taylorism (e.g. specialisation, time and motion study, standard operating procedure, machine paced work) but some responsibilities are delegated to workers to encourage interest in their work.

19 SMED: Single Minute Exchange of Dyes. The change of dyes for forming metal sheets has typically been a protracted process which is not problematic in larger-scale, mass production units. However, the key to small batch production is to be able to exchange dyes quickly. Single Minute exchange implies that the time of the operation is reduced to a single number of minutes (i.e. 1-9 minutes) rather than hours.

20 In sophisticated human relations "employees are viewed as the company's most valuable resource. Firms adopting this style often deliberately have above-average pay, and clear internal labour market structures ... The aim is to inculcate employee loyalty, commitment and dependency. As a by-product these companies seek to make it unnecessary or unattractive for staff to unionize." (Sisson 1989a, p. 10)

21 At a macro-economic level an inelastic price will cause a reduced and inelastic demand which is blamed for demand-deficiency unemployment and for wage-push inflation.

22 Archaeological analysis of the object 'employee involvement' is undertaken in Chapter 8.

Chapter 8: Decisions, Discourse and Discord

Thus far, through a range of qualitative research techniques, this study has investigated three manufacturing companies in Southwest England, an area of the country which is distinguished by a particular set of historical and geographical circumstances; a popular image of rural tranquillity; and economic difficulties. In each of the three companies a particular decisional theme has emerged. The purpose of this chapter is to analyse and discuss those themes within a Foucaultian framework; to locate the rules of discursive formations and to trace the genealogy of practices.

The first section examines that concept of quality, apparent in the Viands study, which appears to incorporate a range of meanings and practices. Through archaeological analysis it will be demonstrated that quality is not a single discourse, but that it is a problematisation of existence, giving rise to a range of discourses. As an example of those discourses, hygiene is eventalisalised to demonstrate that hygiene is a distinct discourse, by identifying the rules for its formation. As hygiene is a discourse, that addresses the problem of quality as it occurs within Viands, it follows that Viands Quality is not a single discourse, but a collection of discourses. By contrast, the next section will develop the theme of quality as it occurs within Kaizen to show how, in that form, quality is an object within the discursive formation of Kaizen. Using evidence from the studies at Crowan Brothers and Bulberry Ltd., other discursive objects will be identified. Through an archaeology of those objects, the rules of discursive formation for Kaizen will be distinguished, and a foundational genealogy established. It will be shown that, within the three case studies, two major channels of discourse are operating as social mechanisms which will delimit the managerial decisions which could be made, in a given circumstance, by restricting the ways managers

can think about that situation. Sometimes these discourses operate separately, serving a social function by providing an interpretative framework for actors. At other times, they are co-existing uncomfortably to the possible detriment of business interests.

VIANDS AND THE DECISION FOR QUALITY

As a manufacturer of specialist pastry products, Viands Ltd. holds an enviable market position which its management attribute to an overarching concern for product quality. That is a notion which embraces many concepts of quality and, despite attempts to do so, it defies abbreviation although, where it is appropriate for ease of expression, we might consolidate the various facets of the concept into the term Viands Quality The issue of quality is prominent within Viand's business practices, as is clear from specific events such as the rejection of intervention beef and the quest for high grade sausage-meat. The company's ability to provide consistently high quality pastry products has led directly to opportunities for expanding the product range, and has afforded some protection during times of adverse trading conditions.   The Viands Quality theme is emphasised through various media such as the Company's basic policy statement:

> "This company is wholly committed to the manufacture of safe wholesome food products of a quality which consistently meets the customers requirements. This is achieved by the purchase and use of high quality raw materials from company-approved sources. All stages of manufacture, storage and distribution are controlled so that the product is protected from any form of contamination, subject to strict temperature controls and good hygienic practices appropriate to the product and its position in the manufacturing process.
>
> All staff engaged in the manufacture and distribution of this company's products will receive adequate training to ensure [that] the safety and consistent quality criteria of its products are met and maintained". (Ottery 1997, p xviii)

In all of the interviews, managers and directors stressed their concern for quality[1] and all of them retold, without prompting, at least one of the stories (legends) concerning the

individual cases being explored. Interestingly, the story most often repeated concerned a sister company in the Midlands (Case B). The events had occurred some years before where at a tasting no-one could differentiate between two mixes of sausagemeat with different fat contents (the new mix had 500 grams more fat in a 64Kg mixture). It is difficult to understand why this tasting was permitted, as the attitude of senior managers to product quality meant that the decision not to accept the change in recipe was virtually inevitable[2]. The notion of product consistency was one of the earliest indicators of Viands Quality, for the company's owners, as the product development chef explained:

> "You can put in a pound of fat and sure you can't tell the difference. Then later you put in another pound of fat and you can't tell any difference and so on. Each time you dilute the lean you can't tell the difference from the last batch. But you get to a point where you've lost the original recipe. But if you have slowly added five pounds of fat – there's no real difference from four pound – but it's a sight different from what you started with. The Strongmans won't have it. If you have found a way to make the best sausagemeat on the market that's what you make, what you sell. It's what the housewife expects and if you spoil it you'll slowly lose your reputation."

Product quality arising from the use of premium ingredients is also a source of pride, for the owners of the company, for managers and for employees.

> "As a van salesmen I knew that I could go to a potential new customer, open the van and it will be packed full of freshly-baked products and that the customer can break open any one of them and find only the best quality of filling – and that it will be a good eat." (Former Sales Manager in Viands Journal, March 1984)

Inside the production areas of the factory, however, the quality theme changes, deviating from the notions of product consistency and premium grade ingredients. Beginning with regulations on how to dress and how to wash one's hands, the focus is on hygiene. It is hygiene that is audited several times per week (and chargehands are required to sign the audit documents when scores of less than 98% are achieved). When cleaning down

working areas between product batches the staff "do hygiene", and the cleaning crews are known as the 'hygiene teams'.

Two other themes of the quality concept were also apparent. One concerned aesthetics as evidenced by the problems of cracked pie crusts and the finger damage caused to lemon meringue pies during packaging. Second, in the pre-bake areas quality-as-specification was evident as the standard of the meat, vegetables and fruit that are accepted for cooking; and as standardised procedures, both of which are controlled by the HACCP system.

Viands Quality has several definitions operating at various strata of the company and, hence, can be seen to have many control functions both within and beyond the bakeries. It is the means for the company to justify: its control over suppliers' practices; adverse working conditions; and the unpredictable (flexible) hours of work. To a lesser extent it also allows the company to control the ways in which products are stored and displayed by purchasers.

Everybody within the organisation has a strong sense of the contribution that Viands Quality makes to the company's image, but it would be insufficient to simply describe a culture of quality within the firm, for this is a concept that pre-existed the company. Further, although understandings of the term are comparable, there is a noticeable dichotomy between management's views of quality and, especially, the dominance of hygiene at the shopfloor. Analytically, this phenomenon might be described as one of competing discourses. However, that would be insufficient, for it would imply that the two discourses speak of the same objects in different ways. Yet, within Viand's, there are two areas of the organisation, each having a distinct discourse. Hygiene is talked about by workers in the same manner as managers discuss quality. Both are controlled in a similar,

and often identical, manner which leads to the same processes and outcomes. Hygiene is not actually competing with Viands Quality in the creation and recreation of meaning and practice, and shop floor practices indicate that hygiene, like product consistency and the use of premium grade ingredients, is but one part of Viands Quality.

The Production Manager offered an apparently rational explanation, that reinforces the impression that hygiene and Viands Quality are different:

> "... that's because hygiene is down to the individual. Quality is a strategic matter – for management to deal with. But hygiene is part of it, you could make the best quality products in the world, but that would be no good if they made people ill."

From a Foucaultian perspective rationality and reason cannot be accepted as sufficient explanation to justify anything. The situation must be 'eventalised' to show how "things weren't as necessary as all that" (Foucault 1991, p. 76). Hence, this theme of Viands Quality needs to be assessed as a discourse in the archaeological sense and analysed genealogically, to apprehend the mechanisms by which it constructs knowledge and power relations.

Discourses on Quality

For Foucault, a discourse is a social process, located within a web of power relations, which transforms knowledge into objects. The conditions of existence of a discourse are: that the statements [*énoncé*] within it all refer to the same object; that those statements have a common format; that there is a customarily accepted set of relevant concepts; and that there is a persistent theoretical theme (Smart 1985). A discourse may contain contradictory statements about its objects, but those statements will still conform to the rules of discursive formation.

The rules for the formation of objects, the conditions of its (the object's) existence, include the 'surface of emergence' – a collection of concepts and theories which give substance and status to the object. There should be distinct groups of people who are empowered to speak about the object (the authorities of delimitation) and, by extension, groups who are not. Additionally there must be a system of classification (grid of specification) to differentiate between various forms the object might take (Foucault 1972, p. 41). We might summarise this by stating that the *rules for the formation of objects* define what the object is (grids of specification), how it came into existence (surfaces of emergence) and who may speak of it (authorities of delimitation).

Viands Quality is an expression which defies absolute definition, rather, it has many meanings which are used in diverse contexts. Therefore, it is not possible to apprehend (or devise) a grid of specification. Neither are there clear authorities of delimitation, for the term is used variously by different groups of individuals for their own purposes. For some it refers to aesthetics e.g. taste and appearance, while for others it is represented in a series of quantifiable standards. The company owners are the final arbiters of quality, but they do not have a monopoly on the term. Suppliers, customers, consumers and production staff are qualified to use the term, for their own purposes, in different contexts.

At Viands, quality describes conformity to standards as well as to meeting the requirements of customers (retailers and consumers). It includes hygiene practices and product consistency. It may refer to the finished product, to ingredients, to particular stages in production, or to other factors surrounding delivery of the product. Quality, as the case study demonstrates, is the justification for a range of practices exercised upon the workforce ranging from audits, and the (NASA-style) HACCP controls, to formal

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disciplinary procedures. It may be used as a device by which the company can exercise control over suppliers and customers, or for customers (the multiple retailers)[3] to use to influence practices and processes within the bakeries. In each circumstance, quality takes on a different meaning and cannot, therefore, be recognised within the current context as a single discursive object for, in the Viand's bakery, different rules about its usage are in simultaneous operation.

Neither can Viands Quality be described as a discursive formation, for it contains a variety of objects which have different rules of formation. Consider the following statement by the personnel officer. The theme of the discussion was the need to use only the finest ingredients (Case A):

> "We had to discipline one of the men in the meat room the other day. We have this rule that between batches all the vats must be thoroughly cleaned – I know the recipes are only slightly different but even so – I mean – that's what the rules are for. Anyway he's been given a final warning. You despair sometimes – don't these people know what quality means?"

The answer, in the light of this study, is "probably not". In that statement alone *quality* can be recognised as being used in several ways. It is supporting the company's supply chain strategy and is the basis for standardised procedures. It justifies certain forms of disciplinary action, and is a means of reasserting the managerial prerogative.

Quality as Practice

If quality is neither a discursive object nor a discursive formation it may, nevertheless, be a disciplinary practice, or 'technology of power'. As such it would contain a series of dividing practices, assemblages, skills, technologies and strategies. In the case of Viands Quality, such series do not exist. Undoubtedly, there are dividing practices in operation at Viands, such as those related to control of production, skills in product development, and

strategies of supply chain management. None of these, however, directly addresses the 'problem' of Viands Quality.

Meanwhile quality operates to justify a range of practices such as those indicated above – 'hygiene', supply chain strategy, disciplinary measures and production controls –it does not operate *as* a practice but as the basis *for* a range of practices. Here then, quality is the reason that those practices exist. Additionally, through archaeological analysis, it can be deduced that Viands Quality is the operator for several discourses such as hygiene, aesthetics, and the standardisation of products and production. It becomes apparent that Viands Quality is not, in itself, a discursive formation; but that it operates at a supra-discursive level, giving rise to distinct discursive formations, such as hygiene, product consistency, and aesthetics (as demonstrated visually in Fig. 4). For such a conclusion to be credible, clearly these individual concepts must be demonstrated to be discourses. Space prevents a thorough analysis of each of these concepts, but this case study offers a wealth of empirical evidence concerning the discourse of hygiene.
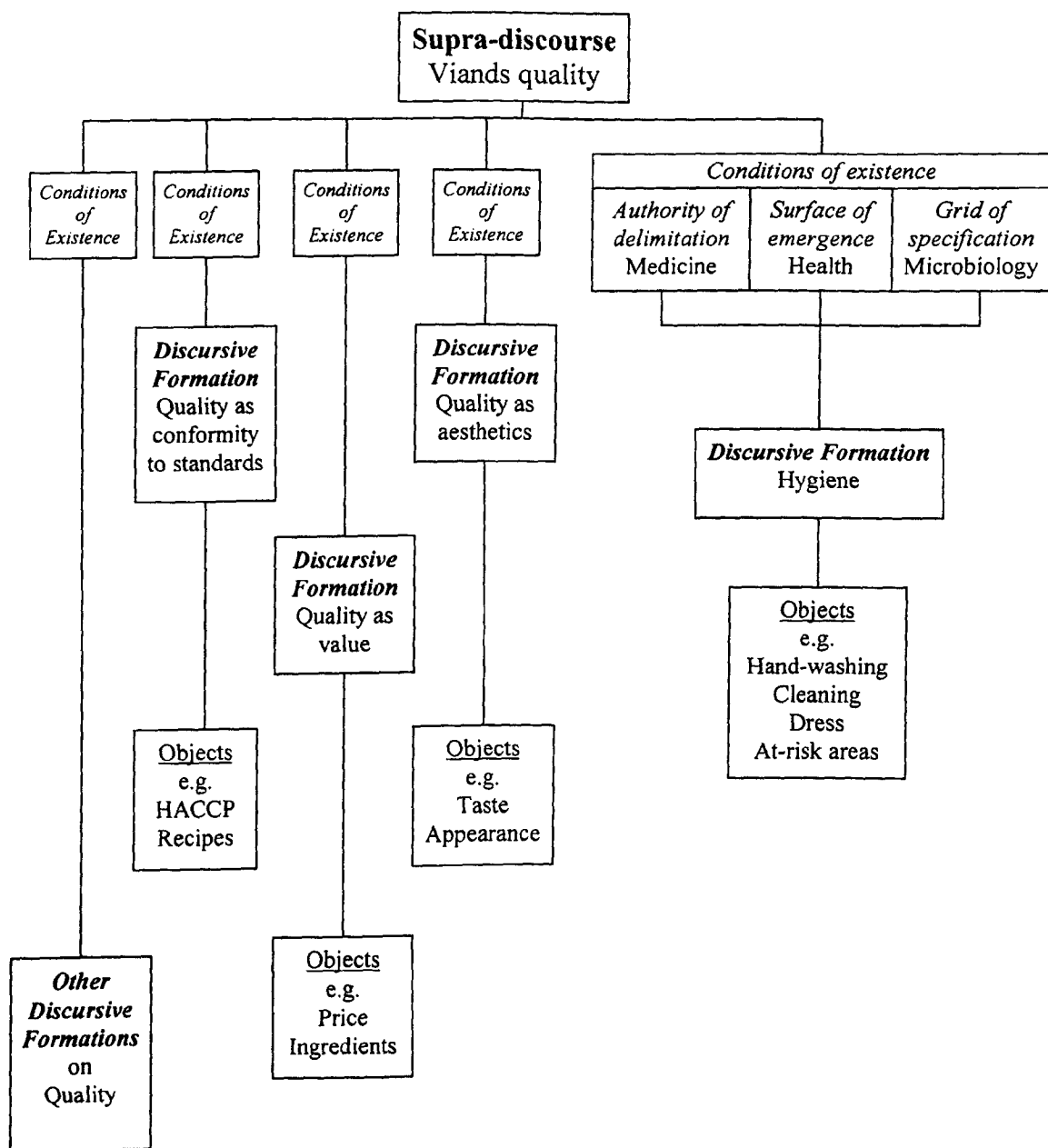
FIG. 4: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF VIANDS QUALITY,
USING HYGIENE AS AN EXAMPLE OF ITS DISCURSIVE FORMATIONS

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Whatever the perceived cause, physical, psychological or supernatural, societies have sought to protect themselves from illness and, since prehistoric times, have developed mechanisms for that purpose. That is hygiene in its broadest sense (SOED), encompassing the complex and dynamic interaction of biological, socio-economic, behavioural and cultural factors which impact on individual and collective health (Emch 1999). However, since the discovery of (pathological) micro-organisms, the term has generally come to stand for those practices which promote health through cleanliness and prevent the transmission of pathogens. Within a bakery hygiene is a quality issue. Although a pie may be made from premium grade ingredients; while it may conform to specifications of size, weight, and content; and even though it may look and taste appetising, a product which turns mouldy or causes gastro-intestinal problems cannot be deemed to be a quality product. Thus, hygienic practices have become socialised as common-sense precautions (Schutz 1973) that the wider society (in Britain) requires from food manufacturers.

Expertise in hygiene is restricted to a finite group of people including epidemiologists, food scientists (in this case), medical doctors and associated professionals. Their ultimate authority derives from the discipline of microbiology[4]. Microbiologists will be the ultimate arbiters of what is hygienic, by virtue of having undergone certain social processes, i.e.. university education and specialist training to detect and recognise pathogens. They will not necessarily be particularly knowledgeable about, or involved in, a specific situation although other 'derived experts', such as the hygiene auditors[5] and the quality controllers in the bakery, will know the situation that they are assessing more intimately. Further, hygiene experts address their knowledge claims through specific channels, mainly to other

experts in hygiene, in a particular format (the language of biology), and in styles which demonstrate answers derived through procedures that are accepted by their peer group, such as bacterial cultures and quantitative tests. These experts do not use language accessible to lay people and whether or not the non-experts understand it is irrelevant. Others who are involved in the monitoring, assessment and control of hygiene, such as the bakery hygiene (cleaning) team, those who collate the HACCP documentation, and bakery workers, fall outside the category of expert even though they are most familiar with the specific situation. They are expected to follow procedures that have been devised and specified by others. They have been told only what the experts deem to be necessary for them to know, but their own contribution toward the knowledge of hygiene and hygienic practice is liable to be ignored[6].

There are other surfaces of emergence, which uphold the 'need' for hygiene as a practice. The State, through the agency of the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food ordains what levels of bacterial growth can be deemed as safe; and enforces standard practices through local government health inspectors. In law a food manufacturer which is (found to be) failing in the maintenance of hygiene might be deemed to be guilty of criminal or civil neglect. Similarly, if an individual employee disregards some aspect of the hygiene rituals, their employer would be justified, within the existing framework of employment law, in disciplining or even dismissing them. Recently, too, the mass media have assumed a role in exposing such apparent neglect or carelessness (Førde 1998), as evidenced by recent reporting of outbreaks of BSE and E. Coli infection.

The Viands study discloses quite clear evidence of the operation of disciplinary practices sustaining the discourse of hygiene. Groups of individual workers are dressed distinctly

and transformed into spatial areas that are subject to the scrutiny (or gaze) of auditors; while the results of audits are reduced to tables of numbers (mathesis). The discourse of hygiene does not allow that Mary in the fruit room did well in maintaining standards; it will only record that the fruit room scored x% in an hygiene audit. However, if Mary did not maintain standards, her failure will be detected through the panoptic mechanism that is the combination of audit, random sampling, HACCP and conformance sheets. Individual workers do not know whether or when their work will be subjected to audit or sampling but, as each product that leaves the bakery can traced to every operator's input, they must always behave so as to meet requirements (Foucault 1977).

Inspection by public health officers, and by representatives of purchasers, operate upon the company in a similar fashion, so that everyone is "caught in the exercise of power" (Foucault 1980a, p. 156). It is not open to those outside the discourse to question the criteria by which hygiene is judged. The bakery assistant does not challenge the sampling criteria of the auditor, for instance, and neither does the consumer ask how the company identified the hazard and critical control points. These are not factors open to general discussion for they have come to be regarded as both normal and reasonable.

Hygiene is not a finite condition where a particular situation is or is not hygienic, because micro-organisms can spread and replicate in any condition where sterility is not absolute[7]. However, the discourse and practices of hygiene imply otherwise, as if there are conditions where pathogens can be transmitted, and other conditions where they cannot, with the latter situation deemed to be preferable. The principle of hygienic practice is applied to situations where there is clearly no (additional) risk of microbiological contamination. A poor hygiene audit score (92%) was awarded because pastry scraps, which would be

consigned to the waste bin, had not been picked up from the (clean) floor. Disciplinary action resulted from an operator's failure to properly 'clean' a vat between mixes with slightly different recipes.

Douglas (1966, p. 2) contends that "dirt is essentially disorder" and that the elimination of dirt represents an effort to organise the environment. If dirt, as matter in the wrong place, represents disorder then the act of putting matter into its correct place becomes symbolic, representing a particular view of how things ought to be. Douglas (1966) also recognised that concepts of dirt, and hygiene, are subject to cultural convention[8]. The evidence from Viand's upholds that view, while Foucaultian analysis extends it to show that individuals as well as the environment are subjected to that process of ordering.

Because society prizes health over illness, and fears disease (Frankish et al. 1998), and because individuals do not accept sole responsibility for their own health (Smoyer 1998), experts in microbiology have been empowered to judge what is hygienic and to enforce practices that they deem to be necessary for the promotion of hygiene. Under the threat of public exposure, the company and its workers must act, and be seen to act, in a manner that absolves them of blame in the event of a mishap (Craven and Stewart 1999), by being able to prove 'due diligence' (Food Safety Act 1990). Hence, the Viand's bakery is divided spatially into high-risk, at-risk and low-risk areas (and different colours of uniform distinguish who is allowed to be there). In the changing rooms it is an accepted and codified practice that a bench, running the width of the room, differentiates the two areas[9].

The practice of hygiene is not without cost to the company or the workforce. During the oven room 'emergency', there was a clear delay, with a higher risk of damage to the thousands of pounds-worth of baked pies, between the alarm sounding and help arriving

because all pre-bake workers had to observe the hygiene protocols before entering the 'high-risk' oven room. At another level, the staff association have been unsuccessful in negotiations for a 'wash-up' time to be added on to the rest periods for production workers.

While the above does not constitute a thorough analysis of the discursive aspects of hygiene, it is sufficient to demonstrate that *hygiene* operates as a discourse, having its own rules and power/knowledge relations. In a non-commercial setting, the rituals and rhetoric of hygiene would address the problem of health. In a commercial bakery, however, hygiene problematises quality in the same way that, for instance, safety would be an aspect of quality in an automobile plant or a toy factory.

However, this conclusion presents an, as yet unresolved, analytic problem. If quality, as the evidence from Viands suggests, is the basis of a range of discourses, how can we deal with quality as it is taken up within Kaizen? As quality is only one aspect of Kaizen, the next 'logical' assumption would be to view Kaizen as some form of super-supra-discourse. However, that would indicate a major, and ludicrous, inadequacy in Foucaultian analysis where Kaizen (or similar concepts) would need to be traced to first principles and give rise to a circular, and possibly infinite, genealogy. Before arriving at such an extravagant conclusion, it would be sagacious to subject the particular occurrence of quality within Kaizen, as it appeared at Crowan's and Bulberry's, to archaeological analysis. Discussion of the situation at Viands will be resumed later in this chapter.

The term, Kaizen is a recent addition to the managerial lexicon and, as such is the subject of a sizeable body of managerialist and academic literature. Within publications by, for example, Imai (1986; 1997) and Schonberger (1982) the underlying concepts are explained in uncomplicated detail that, together with the empirical evidence collected within Crowan's and Bulberry's, provide a promising basis for an archaeological analysis of Kaizen and its constituent objects (see Fig. 5).

Kaizen is closely related to Total Quality Management from which it derives many of its concepts and techniques. Critical studies of TQM have been undertaken by several writers (e.g. Wilkinson and Wilmott 1995) especially with regard to the labour process and the manufacture of consent. While these works are not necessarily Foucaultian in their emphasis, they are helpful in offering points for comparison with the empirical evidence.

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│of    │ │of    │ │of    │ │of    │   │Management│          │            │
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│Discur│          │Forma-│                       │     Profit       │
│sive  │          │tion  │                       │     Quality      │
│Forma-│          │Human │                       │      Waste       │
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│Market│          │Manage│
│Logic │          │ment  │
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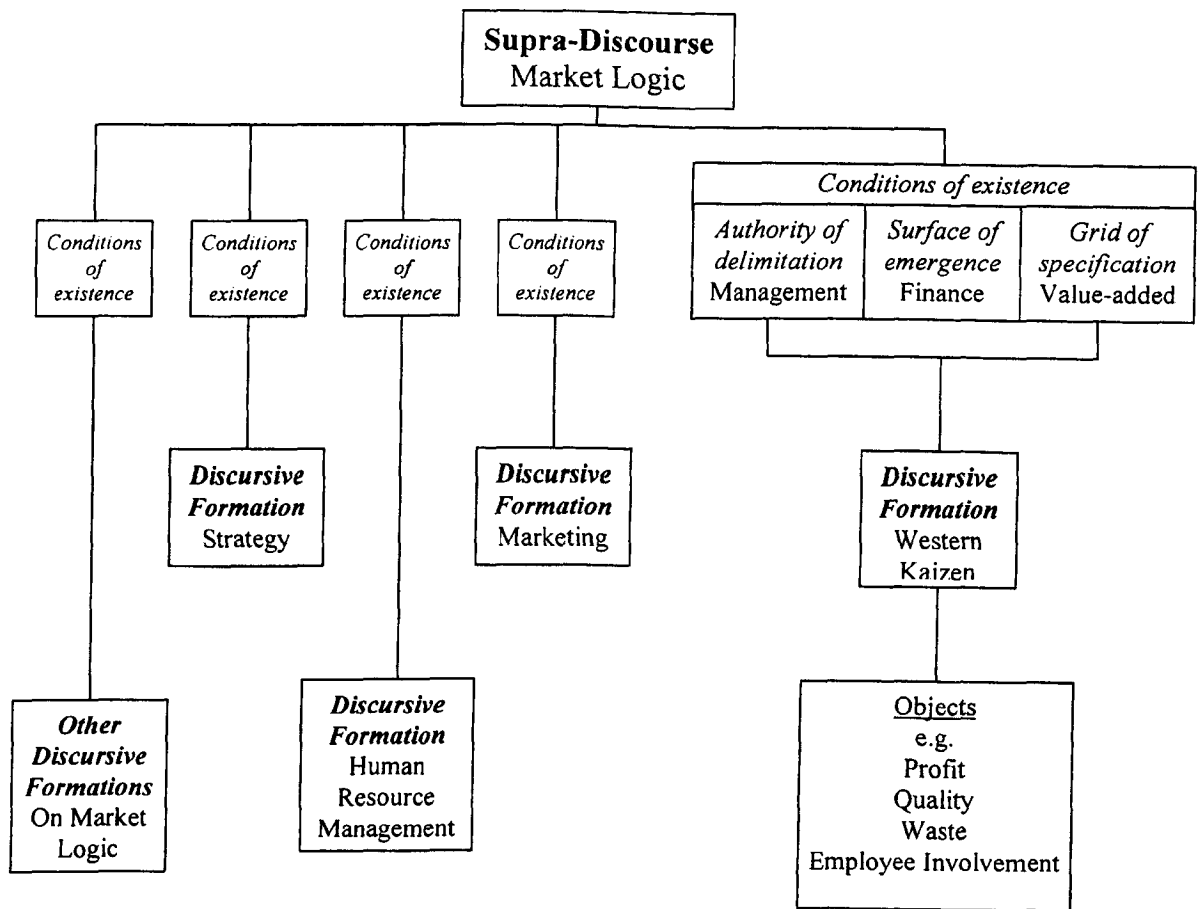
FIG. 5: AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF KAIZEN
INDICATING OTHER DISCOURSES THAT PROBLEMATISE THE
CONCEPT OF MARKET LOGIC

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Rhetorically, quality in Kaizen is synonymous with 'delighting the customer' (Imai 1986, 1997), and, in keeping with the concepts of TQM, that customer may be internal or external[10]. In practice, the emphasis was found to be concerned with satisfaction rather than delight, and concerned with the prevention of rejects by the customer (as rejection was a form of *muda*). The underlying rationale as Imai (1997, p. 19) explains, is that "a company that produces quality products or services at a reasonable price and delivers them on time satisfies its customers, and they in turn remain loyal".

When Bulberry corrected the problem of scratched cabinets, it did not make the customer happier with the product, for the scratched units would never have been shipped. Managers were pleased because changes in the manufacturing process had reduced the number of re-works and, thus, increased factory output and reduced costs.

Here, then, is an indication of a financial imperative, for the customer's delight must be at the right price. This is not a case of making the best air drill, or computer cabinet, that can possibly be made[11] for, in both case studies, it was explicitly stated that Kaizen projects would not attract any additional money or manpower (although in the Crowan's tool shop there was some negotiation over the supply of a washing machine and racking for the Kanban system). It is the financial success attributed to Kaizen that has been marketed to the West (in, for instance, Schonberger 1982). From Crosby's (1979) assertion that 'Quality is Free' and Imai's (1997) claims that increased quality and reduced cost are not incompatible, and that quality improvement initiates cost reduction, it becomes clear that the notion of quality, within Kaizen, is delimited by financial considerations.

Within the TQM/Kaizen model, the term *quality* is more closely defined than it is in common usage (Tuckman 1995). Notions of quality-as-excellence are elided as these models focus on quality as 'fitness for purpose' (Deming 1982) or 'conformance to specification' (Crosby 1979), although there is reference to quality-as-value in Imai's writing. The emphasis is on a form of quality that can be measured in ways that are "visible, visual, simple and understandable, even to the casual observer" (Schonberger 1982, p.7), and that is standardised both before and after improvement activity (Imai 1997).

Operatives may be held responsible for product[12] quality, and, although they are acknowledged as experts in the processes involved in delivering that product, they are not the experts in quality. The experts, or authorities, in Kaizen-quality are those who are permitted to set the standards and specifications. Workers can identify instances of poor quality or scope for quality improvement, but their voice and activity are constrained by the specifications. These specifications supposedly derive from customer requirements and are interpreted by professional managers and management consultants[13] (Wilkinson et al. 1992). But the customers do not know what quality is, because they do not know the extent of possibilities, so the experts (management) must also show them "by providing goods and services at quality levels higher than those offered by the competition" (Hutchins 1992, p. 6) and through marketing and advertising (Morgan 1992). Hence the drive for quality leads to increasingly higher specifications, such as cars with compact disk players, advanced braking systems and central locking as standard features.

Kaizen-quality is, then, linked closely with standardisation. While Crowan's air-end assembly unit was promoted as an example of a successful Kaizen project, the fitters were certain that quality had deteriorated as a direct result of the 'improvements'. Within the

discourse, however, product quality had to be better because the processes had be 'Kaizened'; workers could claim that quality was poor only if the problem could be quantified according to the specifications or the standard operating procedure.

Clearly the concept of quality, as it taken up within the praxis of Kaizen, is a discursive object. It has a surface of emergence (the financial imperative); authorities of delimitation (managers as the 'experts' who define the standards by which quality is measured); and offers an explicit set of clear ideas about what quality is or is not (grids of specification).

Kaizen contains other discursive objects that are subject to the same rules. In particular the notions of waste, as taught to workshop participants, and the forms of employee involvement in Kaizen teams will be addressed here.

Waste

The discursive formation of Kaizen propounds a specific set of definitions of waste. Practice-orientated, 'how-to-do-Kaizen' texts list the seven (Ohno 1988) or eight forms of waste (Imai 1986, 1997), but do not include, for example, a notion of waste through over-specification. Waste is operationalised, using the Japanese term *muda*, to refer to "any activity that does not add value" (Imai 1997, p. 75). Within the workshops, operators in both companies were taught that value represents income for the company, so muda can be seen to emerge from the financial imperative in the same way that, within this particular discursive formation, quality does.

As with quality, the arbiters of what is waste are professional managers who will approve or reject a proposed improvement as with, for instance, the 5S activity at Crowan's. While sceptics within the company (especially the industrial engineers) argued that the cost of

materials and overtime payments was inherently wasteful, senior managers and the management consultant felt that the activities were intrinsically good because they would make other forms of muda more visible (to management). While professing that the operatives (fitters and toolmakers), as the 'experts', were best placed to identify areas for improvement, managers retained control over the content and method of workers' activities and the degree and nature of their involvement, through a specific set of definitions of quality and waste.

As a discursive object, waste (muda) addresses a series of precise definitions, or grids of specification, that arise from the financial imperative (surface of emergence), and that are controlled (delimited) by the authority of managers. It obeys the same 'rules for the formation of objects' that govern the object of Kaizen-quality and, therefore, must be part of the same discursive formation.

Employee Involvement

Employee involvement is an umbrella term used to describe a range of managerial practices for including workers in managerial decision making. These can range from information giving *post hoc* to co-determination (Holden 1997). During the 1990s the rhetoric has been one of 'empowerment', signalling attempts to "transform control-orientated organisations to commitment driven ones in response to competitive pressure" (Cunningham et al.1996, p. 143). The form of involvement advocated by proponents of Kaizen has been described as bottom-up problem-solving (Marchington 1995), as it is intended to tap into employees' manifest and tacit knowledge to increase efficiency, and also aims to increase loyalty and commitment. It is not, however a form of industrial democracy (Poole 1986) for employees are not empowered to contribute to the managerial

decision making process (Cunningham et al.1996). Rather, the level of involvement is constrained by management-defined goals (Rees 1999), that are principally the improvement of quality and the elimination of waste. While employee involvement may take many forms, in the participating companies the term has been tightly specified to limit its application to activities that might increase productive efficiency; while retaining, or reinforcing, management control by immersing employees in the logic of the market, so that they are "thus more likely to be convinced of the legitimacy of company decisions." (Wilkinson et al.1992, p.17).

Despite the rhetoric of employees as experts, managers retain authority (and expertise) over employee involvement, because they define the circumstances whereby employees can become involved. Those circumstances are limited to the identification and solution of problems relating to product quality and muda, as they have been previously defined by managers according to their interpretation of customer requirements. Consequently, employee involvement is formed, as a discursive object, by the same authorities and specifications that describe quality and waste and, like those objects, it also emerges from the financial imperative. From the two case studies at Crowan's and Bulberry's, at least three discursive objects can be identified[14]. Archaeological analysis reveals that, despite a range of possible meanings, quality, waste and employee involvement each have specific forms; that those forms are defined and delimited by particular authorities (management); and they arise from the financial constraints that are inherent to the 'logic of the market'.

These objects exist within a particular discursive formation that, within the studies, is known as Kaizen. Given the derivation of Kaizen, it may be that that discursive formation actually consists of a wider field of praxis known generally as 'Japanese Management'; or,

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as the scope for interpretation of their many meanings is so wide, that Kaizen and Japanese

Management are synonymous. Within the participating companies everyone, excepting

Bulberry's director, uses the term *Kaizen* and, as those companies are the focus of this

analysis, that is the term that will be retained here.

Having demonstrated, by archaeological analysis, the rules of discursive formation (for the

formation of objects) of Kaizen, this discussion will continue with a genealogical study to

demonstrate the how Kaizen operates as a technology of power relations, and tracing its

historical conditions of possibility.

TOWARDS A GENEALOGY OF KAIZEN

As a discursive formation Kaizen has taken up the themes (objects) of quality, waste and

employee involvement, and reconstituted them in a particular way. It serves a vital social

function by constructing a framework that relates "the organisation to the outside

environment and the different groups and parts of the organisation to each other" (Knights

and Morgan 1990 p. 476). Kaizen puts forward its own version of truth, and the effects of

that truth inveigle subjects, organisations, and even societies, by its disciplinary

mechanisms, to create a specific set of power/knowledge relations.

The claim by Crowan's tools dispatcher that he had 'been doing Kaizen before it was called

Kaizen', is an exemplar of those truth effects. While his physical activities (in ordering his

workspace) have equivalents in the 5Ss of Kaizen, it was never his intention to 'Kaizen' the

area for he did not know about Kaizen. Kaizen and its related activities could not exist for

him until they had been named and described within the discourse. To aver that Kaizen

was his intention indicates that the 'naturalness' of the discourse of Kaizen has become

accepted as common-sense or obvious. The discourse is putting its own limits on how that dispatcher thinks about his work within the organisation, which he rationalises as 'Kaizen before it was called Kaizen'.

Even where resistance is encountered from, for instance, workers who use Kaizen as an excuse for overtime work or from the industrial engineers who demand more planning, the truth effects of the discourse continue to operate. Those who resist continue to observe the rules of discursive formation; they frame the objects (quality, waste, participation) in the same way as those who claim that Kaizen is the way forward.

Technologies of Power.

In both companies, the introduction of Kaizen began with special training for the workers, the 'experts' who would identify problems and provide the means and mechanisms for their solution. Indeed, according to the training rhetoric, these workers already knew the problems and they needed only the right tools (for quantitative measurement) to recognise them and to set about making improvements (Jacques 1995). The mechanism is simple and subtle for, by framing the task in terms of time, distance and area, Kaizen (as power/knowledge) is able to identify the 'problems' and create a discursive space of resistance for itself to operate as the solution to those problems[15].

The rhetoric surrounding the problem emphasises the need for swift action through the use of rich military metaphor, such as with Fred's claim that: "It's a war out there and the Japanese are winning" or Hutchin's (1992, p. 132) suggestion that "After years of indoctrination in an open warfare world, some will feel that they are handing their rifle to the enemy". More insidiously, with the declamation 'just do it', the syllabus of the training

workshops gave participants no time for reflection. The 'tools' were put to immediate use to demonstrate their direct relevance. Change projects in both firms were proposed, initiated and, in a few instances, completed before teams had given any serious thought to the extent of the 'problem' or the consequences of proposed courses of action. Kaizen thus contains a range of practices, or technologies, to circumvent possible sources of resistance.

Novel forms of dividing practices are introduced[16] as process and function are distinguished. From this comes the need to "define the process, monitor its performance and to forecast the required inputs and desired outputs" (Townley 1998, p. 18). The distinctions between blue- and white collar workers, and between management and employees, continue to operate inasmuch as they are so frequently denied in the practices of multi-functional teams and in descriptions of single-status organisations (e.g. Wickens 1987). Equally steadfast is the, occasionally blurred, demarcation between strategy and operations. Kaizen teams are certainly better informed about strategic matters (whether or not they want to be) than in previous times but strategic decision making is firmly retained within the domain of management (Legge 1995; Townley 1994, 1998; Jacques 1995). Team activities and thinking remain limited to the practicalities of getting the job done and those practicalities are linked in rhetoric and praxis to quantification.

Within a paradigm which holds that quality can be measured, measurement becomes the key to improvement. If improvement is to be continuous then the measurement, too, must be constant. As project teams subjected their work to the tape measure and the stop watch they established bench-marking criteria against which new goals might be set and progress towards those goals assessed. They also established a means for comparison within both the company and the industry. The technique (Foucault's taxonomia and mathesis) allows

that teams can be compared with teams, and processes with processes, though not necessarily like with like. Furthermore the (semi-) public display of the resulting charts, objectives and results exposes the processes, and their operators, to the panoptic gaze. As Townley (1998, pp. 197-198) recognises:

> "Measures of activity and performance capture individuals, individual units and processes within a form of visibility, a gaze, ... These simple devises are disciplinary techniques, micro-technologies to enhance governmentality through constructing a more manageable and efficient entity. ... They are, however, disciplinary technologies, ordering a population and their activities, rendering them known in a particular way, thereby opening them to intervention and management. They introduce the more specific practices of taxinomia and mathesis, whilst at the same time incorporating subjective dimensions of empowerment or accountability, in the attempt to redefine the individuals' understanding of their own subjectivity production."

Measurable targets simultaneously provide the means of success and of failure. Statistical methods of quality control define the parameters of specifications and these are always open to adjustment so that the product or service that is sold can fit the specification. However, if the product or service does not, or cannot, reach the specified target[17] failure is inevitable. The realistic possibility of the target is not a consideration, but its existence is a constant spur (stressor), urging subjects to constantly re-examine their work, and seek out new areas for improvement (Graham 1994). Thus, the technologies of the panopticon are extended for, as the individuals, teams and the collective of the organisation are compelled to behave as though some invisible overseer is present and assessing their achievement (Foucault 1977), "they control themselves on behalf of others" (Deetz 1998, p. 168)

Those activities, of measuring and timing of individual processes and activities, involved workers in their own objectification through the technologies of examination and confession. Each individual's activity is demonstrated (confession) and subjected to minute scrutiny (examination) prior to documentation. Information which had previously been

private (to the individual, group or, even, trade) is converted into a potential means of control, as records that are made and stored. As the tools of Kaizen operate to systematically make abnormality more visible, they operate as technologies of power/knowledge; while the overtime game being played out at Crowan's stands as a tacit monument to the potential for resistance.

As power/knowledge creates new processes for its operation so, inevitably, resistance finds novel forms. Hence in response to the expansion of panopticism, workers at Crowan's exhibit 'resistance through persistence' (Collinson 1994), by making demands for facilities in the name of Kaizen, relying on the control mechanisms being exerted upon their managers by the corporation. Similarly, attempts at work intensification are countered by using Kaizen projects, for 'resistance through distance' (ibid.), as a plausible excuse for extending the 'overtime game'. Where Kaizen training and subsequent managerial activity attempts to "immerse employees in the logic of the market" (Wilkinson et al.1992, p.17), there is at least one instance of unorganised 'resistance through defiance' (Clegg 1994) as the air-end fitters declared that "they keep telling us about how the orders are going, but we don't get paid enough to worry about all that sort of thing".

A reverse effect is also apparent. Labour combination is a stark source of (organised) resistance that power must counteract. Managers at Crowan's, which operates a pluralist system of employment relations, met this potential by ensuring that employees who are officers of their union were included in the earliest Kaizen workshops. Meanwhile, at Bulberry, the employee involvement that is inherent to the Kaizen concept was viewed as a mechanism to bolster other forms of sophisticated personnel management (Sisson 1989a) in

attempts to maintain a unitarist system[18] which is under threat from forthcoming legislative changes.

The dialectic of power and resistance is not, of itself, negative or destructive in its effects. Outcomes can be positive, creative and beneficial as was the case with Bulberry's scratched panels. There, the interplay of power and resistance between management and workers, and between the company and their suppliers, led to an outcome that was advantageous to all parties. Nevertheless, as a discourse, Kaizen, and its associated practices, create and maintain a web of power relations that, although unrecognised by the various actors, captures everyone in its operations. The rhetoric of Kaizen provides managers with a rational argument for persuading employees to bring about desired changes in production methods, while the practices increase the time that workers spend in direct value-adding activities and concentrates managerial attention to that goal. The formation of discursive objects provides commonly recognised (but not necessarily commonly-held) meanings, for terms such as quality and waste, which reinforce or supplant pre-existing cultural artefacts to augment the sense of 'belonging'. Meanwhile the management prerogative is upheld as managers retain the expertise and authority to define what is quality, waste and value-added activity. By emphasising process rather than function the technologies of Kaizen disguise controlling mechanisms. As Kaizen presents the logic of the market and competitive pressures as problematic, it offers itself as a tool for surmounting those problems and provides further mechanisms for resistance to operate.

Kaizen and its constituent objects did not exist before they could be implicated in discourse, but they seem so natural that it is difficult to imagine a time when they did not exist, yet the discursive formation that is Kaizen emerged from a distinct set of historical

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possibilities. Genealogical analysis aims to understand the present status of the discourse by tracing those historical possibilities. Here, four such possibilities have been identified, as shown if Fig 6, and the discussion now turns to their exposition.

Historical Possibilities

ASCENDANCY OF THE MARKET

Before Kaizen could emerge as a 'solution', it needed a problem (or set of problems) to address. Kaizen is presented as a tool for improving productivity and competitiveness, which indicates that those issues are perceived to be problematic as, indeed, they must be within a world-view that is dominated by the 'rational logic' of the Market.

There is no universally accepted explanation of how and when the Market became the dominant concept of social and economic life. Over many years, or even centuries, an almost universal logic has become established whereby every aspect of human life is seen to have an exchange value or price, and price has become the key element in deciding the allocation of competing resources (Donaldson and Farquhar 1988). The market system is an artificial construct that eschews the human impulse for protection and emphasises discipline. "Competition is about discipline and conformity, not freedom" (Rankin 1998), and it operates discursively, as Haskell and Teichgraeber (1996, p. 2) commented:

FIG. 6: WESTERN KAIZEN – SOME HISTORICAL POSSIBILITIES

Managers' professional project

Market logic

Commodification of management knowledge

Management gurus

Specialist management degrees

Business schools

Management consultants

Managerial strategy

multi-national enterprise

Differentiation

Global competition

Management fashions

Quality concerns

Cost and Price concerns

Neo-liberalism

Functional Flexibility

Unitarist employee relations

HRM

Western Kaizen

Zaibatsu/ Kieretsu structures

Fiscal Policy

Corporate culture

Japan's economic 'miracle'

Work teams

Compliant workforce

Homogeneous 'employees'

Confucianism

Redefinition of Japanese as allies

Buddhism

Japanese Kaizen

General Unions

Trade Unions

Labourers as workers

Pluralist employee relations

Artisans as tradesmen

Scientific Management

U.S. Quality gurus

Cold war

Factory Systems

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"There often appears to be a nonvicious circularity between the pre-conditions for market activity and the consequences of that activity, as if markets, like powerful disturbances in the atmosphere, can in some degree be self-reinforcing, helping to create the very sorts of people and ways of life that they need in order to function effectively."

The means are less important than the fact that the logic of the Market has established itself as a 'natural' mechanism, to such an extent that it is difficult to imagine societies operating without it. It is beyond the control of political ideology, for both (neo) liberalism and socialism are founded in the same logic, that social action primarily serves economic interests, and "Between them, they all but obstructed an over-all view of market society" (from Polanyi (1957) *The Great Transformation*, quoted in Rankin 1998). However, as Tuckman (1995) notes, changes in political economy and ideology in the West, during the 1980s, contributed to the acceptance of Japanese management techniques as being rational and 'common-sense'. The growth of neo-liberalism, especially in Britain and the USA, and the rejection of Keynesian politics reinforced concepts of the Market as both the logic and the mechanism for commercial success.

Through the apparent inevitability of economic reasoning, and the deterministic leverage of market forces, capital is seen to be acting in the only way that is rationally possible (Ehrenesal 1997) by its ceaseless search for profit in the face of global competition. In the process, profit has been tightly defined. It used to be that profit was an add-on to production costs, used to determine the selling price of a product or service. A company would sell its wares for the best price it could get, the price being determined by the buyer. Anything over manufacturing costs (which includes duties and taxes) was profit (SOED). Within the discourses of global competition, as Fred emphatically repeatedly during the workshop at Crowan's, "selling price minus production costs equals profit". This re-

definition changes the way companies operate for, instead of aiming to maximise price they must seek to minimise costs. The successful company is the one that can produce an acceptable standard at the lowest price.

This market mechanism also gave credence to the emergent 'positioning school' of strategic management (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel 1998). These writers (notably Porter 1985, but also, for example, Andrews 1971, Ansoff 1987; Hatten and Schendel 1977) contend that firms must fight to establish and maintain their competitive position either through cost leadership or some other form of differentiation. Low-cost quality, as advocated by Kaizen, offers differentiation on both cost and quality and thus can, allegedly, provide the means both for Bulberry to remain competitve during enormous expansion and for Crowan's to reverse their fortunes in the face of threats from overseas markets (and corporate directors).

Global enterprise represents an extended form of managerial capitalism whereby businesses enhance their productivity and profitability by exploiting the "ownership advantages" of foreign direct investment (Jones 1994, p. 1), such as economies of scale, superior technologies, and reduced trade restraints. Business historians tell how the first multi-national companies, such as Singer and Siemens, were beginning to appear by the mid-nineteenth century (Jones 1994) and, indeed Crowan's provides an example of a company expanding its operations on a global scale. It was not until the 1960s, however, that the term 'multinational' began to be used or that it is was considered necessary to issue statistics on the extent of foreign direct investment.

By the early 1980s, a trend for mergers and acquisitions emerged[19] (Ehrenesal 1997) and the business press propounded the, economically rational, need for 'efficiency'.

Restructuring was necessary to fend off the assault of more competitive foreign rivals, although such militaristic discourse obscured the direct benefit to financial speculators and the social costs of restructuring (Barlett and Steele, 1992). Restructured and re-organised firms were to benefit from economies of scale (as Crowan's did with the formation of IAI) thereby becoming more efficient and enhancing their competitive abilities. By the middle of the 1980s, commentators in the business press switched their focus from efficiency to the new problematic of 'global competition' (Barlett and Steele, 1992).

Discourses that address a 'problem' of global competition alter individuals' perceptions of the nature and conditions of their organisation. The firm is not longer simply an employing organisation, nor a manufacturer of products; but it is merely an actor on the global economic stage. In order to compete on a global scale, commercial enterprises need to match, or better, the best technologies, skills and products that are available in the developed nations while, simultaneously reducing their labour and plant costs to equal or undercut those of less developed countries. Within these discourses, it is the 'inevitability' of economic forces, or the successes of distant competitors, that has brought about restructuring and redundancies, rather than the deliberate actions of the boss (Ehrensal 1995); competitive pressures, and not incompetent management or uncooperative unions, can be blamed for poor profit margins and falling dividends.

This discourse masks several important points. First, it fails to acknowledge that the firms who used global competition as an excuse for restructuring were themselves often large multinational enterprises, such as Sturme, that were already quite successful global competitors (Ehrenesal 1997). Secondly, it ignores the evidence which shows that, during their restructuring, many Western companies under-invested in research and development,

as well as in new plant and equipment (ibid.). Further, it neglects the long-term requirement for commercial enterprise to retain, or otherwise safeguard, a pool of skill and personnel to ensure that, when it occurs, increased demand can be met.

'Global competition' represents an extreme form of the circularity and self-sustaining properties of the Market mechanism, whereby competition exists because there is competition. It encourages a short-term vision; for long-term investment reduces short-term profit, dividends and shareholder confidence, leaving firms susceptible to hostile take-over.

Here, then, is a possible 'problematisation of existence' for Kaizen to address. In neo-classical terms 'the logic of the Market' presents an ideal form, or model, of economic behaviour; it embodies a fear that companies could cease to exist unless they heed its demands; it alludes to a stereotypical self-interest that is indifferent to the organisation's needs; and it presents a 'model of abstention' for employees to forsake personal time (e.g. slack within the working day) and energy, for the sake of a common good, in the face of threatened redundancies or closure.

COMMODIFICATION OF MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

A second precondition for Kaizen was that commercial organisations should acknowledge management as a craft that could be learned, overturning of the tenet that 'managers are born and not made'. It was necessary for managers to recognise that others may know of theories and techniques that were pertinent in their own areas of control; that such knowledge was valuable; and that it might be bought via universities, business schools, management consultants or, even, other companies.

Schmitz (1993) offers a three stage model to show how businesses pass from personal, through entrepreneurial, to managerial forms of control, and the three cases in this study offer examples of each. In the final stage there is a complete divorce between control and ownership[20], so that responsibility for strategy, function and operations falls entirely upon salaried managers, while equity is held by investors who take no role in the daily running of the business.

In Britain this final transition became common-place in the 1940s, largely echoing the earlier evolution of business in the USA, whilst in other countries, such as Germany and Japan, distinct national forms of managerial control emerged. The concern here is not why ownership became separated from control, but its effect on beliefs about the nature of management and managerial knowledge. Once management emerged as a distinct occupation there arose a growing need, or perhaps demand, to identify, codify and publish specialist (or professional) knowledge. As managers pursued their professional project, and as corporations strove for the Utopia of competitive success, the knowledge that might achieve either (or both) of these goals became precious and those who (claimed to) possess such knowledge held a valuable commodity. Here, three streams of such knowledge are identified as: the development of business-related courses within universities; the growth of generic schools of business, especially the Harvard Business School; and the separate spread of theories of managerial practice by management consultants.

In the USA, where the 'American Dream' promoted the ideal of individual enterprise (Jacques 1995) and industrial capitalism (Wilson 1995) careers in business and business administration attracted a level of social acceptability, for elite groups, that British managers did not enjoy. In Britain, the few institutions[21] that began the earliest business-

related courses struggled against the British cult of the amateur that upheld an antipathy toward professional education and training (Wilson 1995). Consequently, although both nations followed similar patterns of development, management theory and the education of managers advanced more quickly in the USA than in Britain. While business-related courses were offered to graduates from the late nineteenth century, the earliest schools had to walk a fine line between attracting business interest (sponsorship, as well as students) and offering subject matter that was consistent with the traditional university objectives of providing 'liberal education' (Aaronson 1992). This difficulty was, and continues to be, compounded by the diversity of specialisms within the field of management; so that many schools chose to offer specialist courses, taught by academic specialists, such as financial accounting and industrial relations, rather than generic modules. Thus university courses, and research, were replicating the specialisms to which they were already committed.

A special case was the development of Harvard Business School (HBS) which, although affilitated to the most prominent university in the USA, was academically independent and could, therefore, eschew the ideal of providing 'liberal education', allowing that any worthwhile undergraduate programme would lay that foundation[22]. Through its, then, unique teaching tool of the case study, the school offered a curriculum that emphasised integrated concepts of management. This approach was popular with the business world and, in the post-war years the School's reputation for high-quality, relevant teaching and its close involvement with the business world ensured that HBS became the most influential business school in the USA. By 1947, fifty per cent of US MBAs were awarded at Harvard[23]. HBS became an autopoietic phenomenon, reproducing "the trend towards managerial capitalism which had been developing its own momentum from the activities of large-scale corporations" (Wilson 1995, p. 68). As other business schools, in Britain as

well as the USA, tried to emulate the success of HBS they began to adopt its teaching methods and course design. When Harvard offered new courses in corporate strategy (Moore 1992) and human resource management (Beer et al.1984), others followed suit. Soon the Harvard lexicon became the vocabulary of management so that, when Harvard took notice of Japanese management, so did the business community.

As British businesses developed increasingly into the managerial form, the need for the specialist education of managers was recognised but there were opposing views over the form that it should take. Some universities continued to offer specialist courses or individual modules while others, beginning with London and Manchester in 1965, opened Harvard-style business schools to offer post-graduate and executive MBA programmes, which continue to be an important source of income for the schools as well as for their parent institutions. Many corporations, however, retained a preference for in-house training to develop their own managers[24] and purchase places in business schools for those they wish to develop further.

While universities were teaching, conducting research and generating theories *about* management, the development of theories *of* management was left to practitioners[25], on both sides of the Atlantic, such as Fayol, Taylor and Barnard, who "tried to distill their experiences and observations for use by others" (Wren 1994, p. 350)[26]. This dichotomy between theoretical and practical knowledge continues so that academic texts speak to academics (Broekstra 1998) in erudite terms, while managers inform their own practice through specialist, practitioner-orientated and, often pedagogic journals[27].

The harsh environment of corporate business, leaves managers scant time for reflexive activity; yet quick, quantifiable and impressive results are required. With their continuing

careers at stake, it is unsurprising that managers will welcome the advice, teaching and rhetoric of those who offer the means and methods for improving efficiency, productivity and profit. There have been two effects of managers' quest for fast and positive results. First is the development of fads or fashions (Shapiro 1996; Parker 2000) for 'new' forms of management (V. Smith 1997) that promise to transform organisations into leaner, fitter enterprises; even though many of them are no more than an "outburst of modern Taylorism" (Broekstra 1998, p. 154).

Second, has been an increasing prominence of management consultants. Dominant among these are 'gurus', such as Peters and Waterman; Hammer and Champy; Handy; and more recently, the prophets of Japanisation such as Womack and Jones; Ouchi; and Imai[28], who have published widely and can command substantial fees for leading seminars. Others, like Fred Phillips at Crowan's and the Production UK consultants at Bulberry's, are managers who for whatever reason have chosen (or have been obliged) to leave the practice of management and to earn their livings, instead, by teaching others how to manage.

To summarise, the development of managerial capitalism gave rise to a demand for knowledge of, and about, management. That demand has been variously met by universities, business schools, management gurus and consultants, which each have an interest, financial or ideological, in meeting and maintaining that demand. In the process managerial knowledge, which includes the 'tools' and techniques of Kaizen, has become a commodity which can be bought by companies in the pursuit of the business bottom line, and sold by providers in pursuit of profit.

Even so, the dominance of Market logic, and the commodification of management knowledge were not sufficient historical cause for the emergence of Kaizen as a discursive

formation. If Japan had not presented the international business world with an impressive success story, it is unlikely that Western eyes would have turned to the Far East for an answer to their own economic problems. The third example of historical possibilities is, then, the so-called economic miracle wrought by post-war Japan.

JAPAN'S 'ECONOMIC MIRACLE'

The popular assertion that post-war Japan has produced an economic miracle, that can be attributed to industrial management techniques, is an essential part of the discourse of Kaizen, as is the convention that Japanese management techniques are portable and can be adopted in Western businesses. To understand how Kaizen emerged as a set of practices that Western companies would want to emulate, this section explores some of the origins of Japan's 'economic miracle' and suggests certain factors that would allow the USA and, later, other Western countries to accept Japanese methods.

In 1945, Japan emerged from nearly eighty years of continuous war as a defeated and impoverished country but her economy recovered more quickly than expected. To attribute that success to some supernatural influence, as the term 'miracle' implies, is to overlook nearly forty years of national effort that was based on the three pillars of: a strong inter-linked business structure; political will with active government intervention; and a co-operative workforce that was willing to subordinate personal objectives to the national good.

Partly due to its geographical and cultural isolation, Japan industrialised much later than other economies and business structures developed differently from the earlier, Western patterns (e.g. Schmitz 1993; Wilson 1995). The form which Wilson (1995) describes as 'collective industrial capitalism' retained the family firm ethos while allowing the

development of massive Zaibatsu[29] which dominated the business scene and encouraged long-term financial planning. Although these Zaibatsu were disbanded by the occupying forces in 1945 their form and function was soon mimicked by the formation of Keiretsu[30], huge business groups that linked traders, manufacturers and banks through reciprocal stock-ownership. The Keiretsu were able to undercut their rivals, foreign and domestic, and pursue a goal of long-term growth and market share, rather than short-term profit (Crawford 1998). When the Western economies eventually relaxed their protectionist policies, and as offshore markets developed (Soros 1998), the largest Japanese corporations were quick to exploit opportunities for direct investment and to circumvent resource limitations within their own country, by opening manufacturing plants in the United States and in Europe.

The Japanese government was active in promoting economic and industrial growth. Tax concessions, low interest credit and administrative guidance were offered through the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). In particular, government support was substantial in those industries, such as automobile and domestic appliance manufacture, which had high rates of growth in the West (Crawford 1998).

The Japanese government also indulged in protectionist practices such as adversarial trade policies and an exchange rate that encouraged exports. Smaller businesses were encouraged to link with major banks, forming new Keiretsu, which further contributed to economic growth (Wilson 1995). Some schemes to increase capital reserves, particularly encouraging individual savings, proved to be too successful for economic stability and, by the 1960s, Japanese industry had grown to the point where it was outstripping supplies of energy and labour. The combined pressures of excess capital in the national economy and wage-push inflation provided further stimulus for export activity (Porter 1990).

The range of factors which combined to give rise to industrial practices in contemporary Japan is both lengthy and complex. While there were undoubtedly cultural influences stemming from Japan's prolonged isolation and a particular combination of religious beliefs, notably Confucianism, most structural elements were established during the Showa era[31] (Dower 1995).

While the national effort to re-establish the post-war economy was severely hindered by a lack of natural resources, the country was rich in people who were willing to work hard for long hours and small rewards. A large post-war influx of former agricultural workers provided a huge, if unskilled, labour force which, as Allen (1978) demonstrates, is a prerequisite for large-scale industrialisation[32]; although rapid industrial growth soon necessitated the employment of foreign workers to fill vacancies in the secondary labour market.

It is the primary labour market that wins Western attention, with stories of the dedicated company 'salarymen' who are hired from elite universities, submerged in the company culture, and offered lifetime employment in return for their loyalty to the company and its goals (Crawford 1998). Those who uphold this vision often disregard the elitism, racism and sexism that denies job security to the majority of workers in Japan. The pursuit of economic growth makes enormous demands upon the working population and various authors (e.g. Delbridge 1998; P. Smith 1997; Kamata 1983) have described the adverse effects of TQM and JIT techniques, and the poor quality of life that many Japanese workers have tolerated. It is also, however, easy to view the picture through Western eyes as oppressive, or alienating, and to ignore effects of a culture that, inter alia, suggests that to serve the company is to serve the Emperor. Likewise the need to conserve space and

resources was an established way of life for Japanese people so that "To the Japanese factory worker, JIT/TQC objectives should seem reasonable, proper, and easy to accept" (Shonberger 1982, p. 3 emphasis added).

Following the international oil shock (of 1979) Western businesses turned their attention to the country which seemed to be resistant to international recession. It would, after all, be rational, or common sense, to try to emulate those managerial techniques to which such notable success was attributed[33]. However, only a few years before, Japan and the Allied Forces of the West had been mortal enemies. We need to consider how it became acceptable for Western countries to consider adopting practices that derived from former adversaries. Two mechanisms are suggested here.

According to the terms of surrender, Japan was obliged to renounce "war as a sovereign right" and forbidden to maintain armed forces or any other "war potential" (quoted in Dower 1995, p. 167). Consequently throughout the immediate post-war period Japanese industry was steadily turning 'swords into ploughshares' as former defence manufacturers redirected their skills and technologies into the manufacture of consumer goods. With the advent of the 'Cold War', however, that circumstance created difficulties for US generals who viewed Japan as a strategic position from which to maintain an aggressive stance against China (Porter 1990). While MacArthur's attempts for 'limited rearmament' were heavily resisted by the Japanese government, it was still considered necessary to increase the US presence in Japan, especially during the Korean crisis. Crawford (1998) describes how U.S. propoganda deliberately contrived a "sanitized picture of the nation" (p. 180) emphasising the Japanese values of harmony (wa), duty, hard work and long-term vision.

Reframing eighty years of continous warfare as an "historical abberation" (ibid.) they transformed one-time enemies into anti-communist allies.

A fundamental and not altogether obvious point about Japanese management techniques is that most did not originate in Japan (Graham 1988), for, in the search for greater productivity, improved energy efficiency, and for the means to improve product quality, Japanese industries were vigorous in mimicking practices from other counties, bringing forth a particular collection of techniques that have become accepted as being 'Japanese management' and incorporated within the umbrella term, Kaizen. The story of how Deming was unheeded in inter-war America is but one of the ensuing legends, but it is an important legend for the uptake of 'Japanese' management practices. While the American, Deming, might be regarded as a 'prophet without honour in his own country' it takes little to transform that image, in terms of the American Dream (Jacques 1995), into 'local boy makes good'. In adopting the tenets of Total Quality Management and Just-in-Time (read as Detroit's hand-to-mouth) the USA and, later, other Western countries, were not embracing Japanese notions at all, but simply taking up home-grown American ideas, albeit in a different packaging.

In summary, the presentation of Japan's post-war economic success as miraculous, over-simplifies a complex political and cultural phenomenon that, in turn, has often been attributed to the single cause of managerial practice. Presented thus, Kaizen addresses the demands of global competition and presents a new, and acceptable solution to problems experienced by managers in the West. However, Kaizen also presents a new way of thinking about problems and, particularly, about the employees who are best placed to provide the solutions. The fourth historical possibility that is considered here, concerns the

necessary conditions that allowed 'the employee' to emerge from heterogeneous collectives of crafts-people, semi-skilled workers and labourers.

RE-DEFINITION OF THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONSHIP

To recognise employees as 'experts' in their own field, or to involve employees in operational decision making, it is necessary that there exists a category of people, or subjects, than can be objectified as employees. The notion is so obvious as to appear ludicrous to those living within a society where almost everybody, including senior managers of organisations, is an employee. As Jacques (1995 p. 67) notes, "the term 'employee' is so common that it is difficult to look at it with fresh eyes as signifying a specific form of work relationship, an industrial 'product'."

It would be a grave mistake to romanticise notions of artisans and crafts-workers of the past but it must be acknowledged that the demands of the market and of factory systems of production meant that diverse groups of people needed to forgo many of the long-standing advantages, protections (Dewald 1996) and the sense of autonomy that they might have previously enjoyed. Business historians (e.g. Wilson 1995) describe how many entrepreneurs of the industrial revolution established structures of internal contracting that took skilled workers away from free-lancing occupations and into the factory. Similarly, factory production systems also transformed labourers into 'workers', under the control of artisans. Many of these systems survive in the hierarchies of present-day bureaucratic structures although it was not until the nineteenth century that they were sufficiently established to be seen as natural (Gospel 1983).

A further legacy of the British internal contracting system is the manner by which it contributed to a particular system of industrial relations, for:

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"those skilled workers constituted the bulk of the early trade unionists, combining together as much for the ability to limit entry into their trade as to negotiate wage levels with employers" (Wilson 1995, p. 35, cites Hobsbawm 1964).

As craft, or trade, unionism faced the consequences of increasing technological change – that the pure form would decline through decreasing memberships as new crafts emerged (Coates and Topham 1980) – many unions altered their rules so that semi- and un-skilled workers could claim membership and its associated benefits. With, for instance, saddle-makers, saddle-makers-bottom-knockers, and saddle-makers-bottom-knockers'-mates being represented by a single union, the distinction between the skilled crafts-workers and unskilled labourers became blurred. The process accelerated with the creation of general workers unions and the introduction of collective bargaining. Where employers' agents bargain with employees' agents each of the represented parties can be perceived as an homogeneous group rather than as conglomerates of the constituent specialists. Enterprise unionism, and non-unionism further reinforce the objectification of 'the employee'. Thus, schemes of team-working, autonomous work groups and functional flexibility can be pursued without the resistance, apparent during the 1970s, that might arise from syndicalism and demarcation.

While the creation of the 'employee' was a prerequisite for the introduction of Japanese management practices, the pluralist system of industrial relations was problematic for it was a system that accepted the inevitability of conflict[34].

Systems such as Kaizen, that are based upon Just-in-time arrangements, are particularly susceptible to disruption caused by industrial unrest, at any point along the supply chain. To be successful, such methods of organising manufacture need to remove the threat of

such disruption. In Britain this occurred through several contemporaneous, and possibly inter-related, discourses. The specific form of neo-liberalism which was dubbed 'Thatcherism', framed pluralism as undesirable, and trade unions as destructive, and promoted unitarist relations (Howarth 1995). Concepts of 'corporate culture' (Trice and Beyer 1984; Deal and Kennedy 1982) proposed that, through the manipulation of symbolism, organisations could overcome the limitations of scientific and humanistic forms to align the goals of employees with the goals of the organisation (Ray 1986). The new discipline of Human Resource Management, which transformed the management of people at work into a strategic, rather than support, function, promoted the values of team-working while simultaneously advocating individualised terms and conditions of employment (Townley 1994; Legge 1995).

These changes have not been necessarily rapid, nor have they come about for the purpose of introducing Kaizen. Nevertheless, changes in the nature of employment have brought about an homogeneous category of employee and given rise to discourses that can counter possible sources of resistance. Some of those change mechanisms, that could be problematic for certain techniques that are constituents of Kaizen (e.g. functional flexibility, and just-in-time), have been overcome through the operations of other discourses that present the employee as a valued individual whose personal goals are aligned with those of the organisation.

SYNOPSIS

There will, of course, be other historical conditions that enabled the emergence of the discourse of Kaizen but the preceding section has demonstrated some of the range of historical possibilities. Kaizen, it is argued, could not have occurred if the 'logic of the

Market' had not become problematical for business communities, nor could it gain prominence without management knowledge being perceived as sufficiently valuable that it could be bought and sold. Because Kaizen was perceived to be Japanese, its emergence and acceptability within Western companies required that, firstly, Japan was considered to have achieved something remarkable, within the discourses of the Market; secondly, the techniques needed to be sufficiently non-Japanese that they could be acceptable to former war-time enemies; and thirdly, the Japanese were re-presented to the West as hard-working, friendly people who happen to have a different culture. The final historical possibility, that has been discussed above, was the development of the unitarist concept of employees, as a homogeneous group of process experts who shared the goals of their employers.

Thus far, this chapter has concentrated on Foucaultian analysis of the decisional themes that were operating in the three companies: Viand's, Crowans and Bulberry's. It has been demonstrated that Viands Quality is not a single discursive formation, but several discourses which problematise quality as it pertains to the company's food products. Kaizen quality, however, is an object that operates within a discursive formation that has been recognised, here, as Kaizen. Using the analytic tool of archaeology, the rules of discursive formation have been identified, revealing that Kaizen emerges from the financial imperative, uses particular definitions of its constituents objects, of quality, waste and employee involvement, and that expertise is claimed and held by managers within the (two) companies that are utilising the discourse. Genealogical analysis (which can probably never be complete) has identified the technologies of power through which Kaizen operates as a disciplinary mechanism, and some of the historical possibilities that enabled Kaizen to emerge as a discursive formation.

From these various analyses, two distinct currents of discourse have been demonstrated, and this discussion now moves on to explore the nature of these discourses further. In particular, this final section will describe how, as discrete phenomena, these discourses are beneficial to the firms in which they operate; but that, in competition, they are potentially destructive.

COMPETING DISCOURSES.

At Viand's the concept of quality, with all its complexities, is embedded within the company culture to the extent that it is the over-riding concern in managerial decision making. It is evident that the concept is championed by the company's owners who, to the greater extent have imposed their own values on the firm. The systems of meanings that are the organisational culture reflect the social milieu in which the owners were raised, and conform to a set of discursive rules which contrast with those that allowed the emergence of Kaizen in the other companies within this study. While the constituent discourses of Viands Quality serve to justify controlling practices over suppliers, customers and workers, they also guide and delimit the nature of decisions relating to product development, brand management and purchasing.

Viands Quality is a costly concept that has caused the company to forgo certain financial advantages, e.g. the use of cheaper supplies, and makes uncompromising demands on managers and workers without regard for trading difficulties or personal inconvenience. It is also a source of pride for the company and has afforded a market advantage for Viands, as the 'guardians of the standard'. They are market leaders in their field, not because they necessarily make more money than other bakery companies but because they set the standard that their rivals must then try to emulate.

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For managers at Bulberry, Kaizen has provided a useful set of techniques for improving productivity and liaison with suppliers, for problem solving at the operational level, and for maintaining non-unionised industrial relations. While its introduction has not been free of difficulties, the financial gains from Kaizen projects has already ameliorated the cost of external training. Neither managers nor employees are conscious of the operations of disciplinary technologies, for that is the nature of a discourse, but they are content that they are meeting production targets and that new ideas have yielded some impressive results. While the financial present has been healthy, the company has long been contending with the uncertainties of the competitive future. Increases in productivity, efficiency (waste reduction), and product quality (as defined within the discourse) have pleased company managers, customers and suppliers, and seem to have secured Bulberry's place in the global market for electronics cabinets. Managers anticipate that major customers will continue to fill their order books, thereby ensuring continuing prosperity for the company (and for suppliers), and job security for its employees.

For each of these two companies, beneficial outcomes have proved the wisdom of their original decision to pursue, respectively, a particular ideal of product quality and to adopt Kaizen as a basis for productive efficiency.

At Crowan's however, an uncomfortable situation exists where the workers' resigned attitudes have replaced the transient enthusiasm and energy that was so evident during the workshop. In spite of the threat of closure, and the attempts of senior management to transform production and increase productivity, bureaucratic dysfunction and traditional forms of resistance persist, craft knowledge is being retained by workers, and organisational members seem set to ride yet another wave of re-organisation. As livelihoods are at risk,

resistant behaviour is difficult to explain solely in economically rational terms. It must, therefore, be based in an alternative form of logic that might be explained discursively.

During analysis the clues came from the air-end assembly fitters when they complained that, since they had 'Kaizened' their area, the quality of air-ends had deteriorated. They could not be talking about Kaizen-quality, for that is part of a particular discourse and could only exist once it had been implicated in the discourse. They were making a comparative statement, comparing recent quality outcomes to some standard that had gone before. Similarly, the shop steward told of how:

> "We used to make things in this company. We used to put a chunk of metal in the machines … and make a finished product. They had real ownership. They made everything"

That earlier concept of quality must have arisen from, or been problematised by, some alternative discourse that pre-existed Kaizen. Other evidence for that earlier discourse comes from the industrial engineers who complained about the lack of any overarching plan to direct work, processes and re-organisation; and from workers' calls for the owners to reciprocate financial gains. Although there is insufficient evidence for a thorough Foucaultian analysis of this alternative discourse (or set of discourses), there are indications that it contains concepts pertaining to managerial control, equity in employee relations, and a form of quality that, like Viands Quality, embraces a range of meanings beyond standards and specifications. It is a discourse that had been established within Crowan's and that persists despite the efforts of owners, directors[35] and management consultants to evangelise Kaizen.

Workers and middle managers are not being deliberately obstructive to the introduction of new work forms, for they would not have been so enthusiastic after the training workshops;

nor are they hankering for the past, for they have lived too long with the realities of global competition to hold illusions about 'the good old days'. It is suggested that the reason that there are problems at Crowan's is that there is a clash between two discourses which uphold different realities and that conceptualise the same concepts in divergent and incompatible ways.

The theme of quality provides a strong exemplar. Within the discourse of Kaizen there is a very tight definition of quality as conformance to specification. However, for the air-end fitters, the term quality engenders a range of meanings, similar to those held at Viands, which include notions of craftsmanship and reliability; meanings that specifications cannot adequately represent. Hence, when the fitters speak of quality they are referring to a set of objects that are not contained within the discourse used and operated by managers. Confusion is inevitable, analogous to the problems of definition that can arise between North Americans and British people over the use terms such as 'first floor', 'mile' or 'suspenders'. The discourse of Kaizen cannot operate properly, to establish truth, where it is being challenged by another world-view; and discourses that problematise quality and similar values cannot tolerate a discourse that delimits and objectifies such problematics. The result is a clash between meanings.

Within a larger company, or one with a more stable pattern of ownership, the effects of such confusion might be less marked as there would be greater scope for meanings to be negotiated, or for people to adjust their thinking over time. However, at Crowan's, the structure of the (many times) reorganised company does not hold sufficient buffering layers of line management (McConville and Holden 1999) to hold the two discourses in tension, or to represent divergent views to senior managers and shop floor workers. The, potentially

lethal, competition between the two discourses must, then, be acted out during the day-to-day operation of the firm as demonstrated by Kaizen teams that are "playing to the referee's whistle" (sales manager), retaining their tacit skills, and trying to use the latest management fad, with its particular systems of meanings, to further their own aims.

CONCLUSION

The evidence from three case studies indicates that two different forms of discourse are operating to present and maintain disparate versions of truth. One can be demonstrated to arise through the problematisation of complex, and abstract, notions of quality. The other presents the logic of the Market as problematic and uses quality, in a tightly defined and controlled sense, as one object within one (at least) of its discursive formations. In each case the technologies of power/knowledge and resistance are manifest even though they are not perceived as such by those who are governed by the discursive practices.

In two companies the particular discourses in operation are serving the function of frames, to generate and maintain a particular reality, and forms of organisational culture, allowing organisational members to make sense of their world, their organisation and their work. Viand's staff can rationalise events and situations in terms of producing quality products, while Bulberry's mangers and operatives perceive their reality as a globally competitive market in which they play their individual parts. In the third company, however, both forms of discourse are evident and are competing with each other for dominance, presenting organisational actors with conflicting and incompatible realities and offering divergent meanings for familiar terms. Neither discourse is necessarily harmful but the conflict between them and the resulting uncertainty is.

The identification of these competing discourses demonstrates the efficacy of Foucaultian methods of analysis in empirical study. While a genealogy of quality, Kaizen or employee involvement might have been derived from existing academic and mangerialist texts, the operation and effects of micro-political technologies could only be accurately apprehended within their sphere of operations. Further, the rules of discursive formation could only have been apprehended in an empirical study, for they were made apparent in the everyday activities and interactions of people at work. The ways in which meanings were made apparent, within language and practice, differentiated between the discursive levels at which those three concepts (quality, Kaizen and employee involvement) operate. In particular, it was the archaeological (rather than genealogical) analysis of discourses *in situ* that revealed the existence of different, and opposing, thematics within the systems of management thought that directed the strategy and operations of the participating companies.

In the final chapter, which follows next, the notion of discursive dichotomy, or competing discourses, will be further developed; to show how discourses relate to the imperatives of commercial organisations; how they affect and are affected by managerial decision making; and the ways in which they might contribute to success and failure in business.

NOTES

1 While the theme of each interview was one or more of the case studies, quality concerns were frequently raised in the context of other aspects of the interview and especially in answer to questions concerning the 'high points' of participants' careers within the company.

2 It is acknowledged that the agenda here may have been driven by some personal developmental need of the trainee. The point is that the suggested change to the recipe directly challenged the Chairman's notion of quality as consistency; a view which overrode other business concerns, and which led to the inevitability in the outcome.

3 Supermarkets' groups regularly conduct their own audits of the bakery and, additionally, conduct their own quality tests on products on the supermarket shelves. Various official bodies, such as public health inspectors and the Association of Meat Manufacturers, also impose their own systems of control, on the Company and its processes, in the name of quality or of hygiene. A reverse situation also holds as Viands will lay down policies for the refrigerated storage and the display of produce which, they claim, will ensure that the products are sold in the best possible condition – another example of quality-as-consistency and quality-as-hygiene operating through the same practices.

4 In other times and cultures there have been other groups of experts, notably the Rabbi in the Judaic tradition.

5 These people do not have the entirety of knowledge ascribed to the microbiologist but their 'expertise', their practice, and their span of knowledge derives from that discipline. They function as adjuncts to the experts in much the same way as nurses might be seen to function in relation to medical practitioners

6 During the fieldwork part of the study I was intrigued to find that the quality controller felt bound to instruct and supervise me in the rituals of hand-washing, even though I had informed him of my prior experience of working in operating theatres. When assisting with the manual unloading of the oven belt, I, alone, was asked to wear gloves even though everybody had observed the same ritual before entering the area. My capacity a 'visitor' or 'student' seemed to negate my expertise in the area of hygienic practice, and my ability to do as I had been shown.

7 Different standards operate in various circumstances. Compare, for instance, the hygiene rituals of an operating theatre in a general hospital with those of a veterinary clinic. To operate on people, the entire team will wear sterile gowns, gloves and masks; yet to operate on a dog, whose hairy coat will multiply the risk of infection, a vet and his assistant will wear sterile gloves and plastic aprons (to protect their own clothes from soiling).

8 In some settings accepting another's dirt is seen to be a sign of acknowledging the worth of the individual, or as an indication of charitable intent. She also points to ancient rituals of cleanliness as being sacred, suggesting that the separation of cleanliness (hygiene) from religious purity is indicative of the supposed advance of a society (also Simoons 1994).

9 The arbitrariness of this arrangement is spoken of only in jest, by reference to intelligent germs that know not to cross the boundary, and which can read the posted notices.

10 All individuals within the organisation are asked to constitute themselves as 'customer' and/or 'supplier' (Townley 1998), and in those roles their performance is exposed to a wider scrutiny. The speed and standard of the 'supplier's' work is dictated by the needs of the customer (and codified in standard operating procedures) while the 'customer's' requirements have been interpreted or assessed and, then, approved by management.

11 This is a direct comparison with Viand's sausage meat where the development of the best possible product was not constrained by price.

12 It is acknowledged that, in tertiary sector organisations, quality would relate to service delivery. Here, as the case studies relate to manufacturing companies, and for ease of comprehension, reference will be limited to products.

13 By analogy, a police officer might make an arrest for behaviour which is perceived to be illegal, but professional lawyers will interpret that behaviour, to determine whether or not a crime has been committed.

14 The studies also hint that other objects, such as profit and productivity, could be identified although there is insufficient evidence here to make a strong claim for them.

15 Knights and Vurbubakis (1994) present this mechanism through a study of the role of IT consultants as the 'agents of change'. The role of management consultants in the current studies was strikingly similar. The potency of the mechanism was especially pronounced where the Bulberry foremen were persuaded by Nissan, that they should 'adopt' a technique that they were already using.

16 These dividing practices are not unique to Kaizen, and they are also contained within the discourses of Total Quality Management and Business Process Re-engineering (Jacques 1995; Townley 1994)

17 For example, a poster seen in Plymouth station (November 1999) declared that Great Western Railways had 'achieved' its target, for trains to reach their destination within five minutes of the advertised time. It further reported (even boasted) that ninety per cent of its services had arrived within the specified time limit. As ten per cent of the services did not meet this target, the operating company can only be deemed to have failed in meeting its quality target.

18 It needs to be noted that non-unionism is not a part of the discourse of Kaizen, nor is it an essential precondition for the operation of Japanese-style management techniques (e.g. Storey 1992). The absence of organised resistance might ease the introduction of new work forms but other kinds of resistance will, and must, exist.

19 It is noted that this trend followed the economic, political and social crises that followed the oil shocks of the 1970s, and that they coincided with a rise of right-wing political ideologies, such as Reaganism and Thatcherism, although no causal link can be implied.

20 As a result there was an increasing independence of managers from their employers (Child 1969), and a divergence of interests between managers and shareholders which brings its own issues for the governance of companies (Wilson 1995)

21 The universities of Birmingham and Manchester, London School of Economics, Henley Management College and The British Institute of Management.

22 The School operated a screening process as part of its recruitment strategy, to test for those traits that were considered useful for business leadership. Thus, business corporations could recruit Harvard men in the assurance that they had been selected for their management potential and groomed to become business leaders (Aaronson 1992).

23 An active alumni programme maintained links between graduates in the business world and their Alma Mater. Associates of the school provided funding for research and development, offered placements for students to gain experience and provided new case study material. Harvard graduates recruited Harvard graduates, as did the faculty.

24 As evidenced by the annual ritual of the university 'milk round' where potential employers try to select the cream of graduates from universities. The subject of candidates' degrees are less important than recruiters' perceptions of their managerial, or leadership 'qualities'.

25 There is a small degree of cross-over where some academic writers have changed their focus to address a different readership (Parker 2000). The intended suggestion is that academics do not read, or write for, practising managers while books and articles intended for the latter group are not widely read by the former.

26 The Bulberry study, in this report, offers a stark example of how theories about management are not being translated into practice. There, the two managers who were responsible for implementing Kaizen had, in spite of their recent university education, failed to anticipate the difficulty that might arise from replacing a rewards-based suggestion scheme.

27 This trend is likely to continue, and is possibly exacerbated, as a result of research assessment being introduced as the basis for funding in universities. If practising managers perceive that academic journals are too dense, or otherwise inaccessible, they will continue to be informed from other sources. While publications in academic journals attract more assessment points than works in practice-related journals, however, the latter will not be attractive media for the dissemination of research findings.

28 Japanese corporations, such as Nissan and Toyota, who charge up to $2000 per head for factory visits (Kaizen Institute 1998) can be included here.

29 Zaibatsu have been defined as 'trading families' or 'money cliques' because they were involved in financial provision (some such as Mitsubishi ran their own banks). The merchant classes achieved a status equivalent to the samurai during the Meiji period (1867-1912).

30 To overstate the role of the Keiretsu would be to underestimate the efforts and contributions of individual managers within the individual units of what were, essentially, multi-divisional companies (Wilson 1995). The competitiveness within and between divisions ensured that managers went to great lengths to avoid losing face; and actively copied and adapted products and techniques from elsewhere. P. Smith (1997) and Crawford (1998) claim that it was this competitive spirit that brought about the development of some of the more widely known (and imitated) production control methods.

31 The Western practice of dividing the twentieth century into pre- and post-1945 is misleading when trying to understand developments in Japan where time is marked by the reigns of successive emperors (Dower 1995). By that reckoning Japan recognises the Showa era of Hirohito's reign (1926-1989) and the current, Hesei period.

32 Allen (1978) makes a point of comparison to show that industrial revolution could not occur without large-scale migration of potential workers from rural areas into cities. In the UK this occurred through the Agricultural revolution and in the US it was by the liberation of slaves (also Jacques 1996). Japan had a two-stage revolution. The first stage was the Meiji restoration (1867-1868) while the second was a direct result of war, in Asia as well as the rest of the world, and the post-war occupation by the US military.

33 Hazama (1993) advises that there are four essential trends to the Japanese business literature pertaining to Japanese Style management. These are the economic ethos, a so called 'Confucian capitalism' (p. 464); the ways in which Japanese management practices may evolve; and the associated problems, such as *karoshi* (sudden death from overworking). The fourth group of works, which is most likely to be translated into Western languages, is that which attributes national economic success to particular business practices such as Just-in-time and Quality Circles. (Since Imai's 1986 publication, Kaizen can be added to that list.) These evangelistic tracts conveniently overlooking the factors discussed here. They fail to acknowledge that the success of 'Japanese' methods has not been universal and that they have not suited Japanese service industries nor the production of the fast-moving consumer goods sold via mass channels such as supermarkets (Porter 1990).

34 One of the important functions of an industrial relations specialist, within a pluralist framework, is to manage conflict, using it to further the aims of the organisation (company or union); trade unions take on an essential function as 'channels of discontent' (Burchill 1992)

35 Compared to the bulk of the workforce, who had worked in the company for many years, Sturme GmbH, the managing director and operations director were all relative newcomers or, even interlocutors.

Chapter 9: Summary and Conclusions

This study began with the intention to assess the feasibility of a Foucaultian analysis as an adjunct to existing theories of managerial decision making. It was proposed that Foucaultian analysis is relevant to a study of the history of enterprises, whether or not organisational members had a strong sense of that history, and despite any on-going change process. It was further proposed that there is a discursive influence upon managerial decisions, elided by orthodox theories of decision making, that are embedded in power/knowledge relations; historical in origin; and that can be apprehended through the analytic techniques of Foucaultian archaeology and genealogy.

The purpose of this final chapter is to demonstrate that those propositions have been upheld and that Foucaultian analysis can offer insights on managerial decision making, that are not contained within existing theories. The first section briefly reviews the research method before presenting a précis of the three individual cases. The next section revisits the theoretical themes that were presented in Chapters 1 and 2, in the light of evidence gathered during this study, illustrating how Foucaultian analysis can enhance the study of managerial decision making. In the final section the concept of discursive dichotomy is elaborated to explain how discourse can contribute to both business success and failure. In closing, areas for potential research are suggested.

A REVIEW OF THE REPORT

The Research Approach

The study of decision making, which is an essential managerial activity, tends to be restricted by the tenets of the particular academic discipline from which research originates. As the principal disciplines are dominated by quantitative methodologies, and located within a rationalistic paradigm, research into managerial decision making

has tended to overlook intangible factors, such as the relations of power/knowledge and tacit systems of rules. It is these, previously unrecognised factors, that Foucaultian analysis of discourse seeks to apprehend, through a deconstructive process known as eventalisation. Archaeology describes how knowledges are established by identifying the rules of discursive formation, and genealogy reveals how individuals are constituted as the subjects of knowledge by tracing the historical descent of practices and identifying the conditions which made them possible.

Discourse is a confusing term for it is operationalised within a range of disciplines to variously describe discrete linguistic events, the formation of language and the symbolic effects of language. For Foucault, 'discourse' refers to a diversity of social practices and concepts, rather than simply language, that contribute to the construction of social reality. Foucault recognised that the construction of meaning is central to the individual sense of self, or subjectivity; and that meaning and reality are created through the dialectic operations of power and knowledge. The Foucaultian paradigm is, therefore, wary of grand theories and offers no precise set of investigative methods. Rather, it offers an inherently flexible approach to research, allowing the individual researcher the scope to adopt whatever methods might provide access to those subjugated knowledges that might reveal the technologies of power/knowledge and the historical antecedents of practices.

As an approach to the study of managerial decisions, the Foucaultian framework can be distinguished in several ways. Firstly, and importantly, Foucaultian analysis allows the research to slip the bounds of rational logic and to apprehend the ways in which that particular mode of thinking become normative, inhibiting creativity and innovation. Second, by accepting that knowledge is a social construct, it allows novelty in the analysis of problems and the ordering of material so as to identify discontinuities in patterns of knowledge and power relations. Thirdly, counter-history, or genealogical

analysis, shifts the focus of study from the individual decision. Instead it locates decision making activity within the longitudinal framework of a business history, to trace the development of managerial thought, and looks beyond the conventional history to develop an understanding of why decisions took a particular form and to explain trends in management practices. Thus, this form of analysis can investigate managerial practice in a manner that is beyond the scope of conventional theories on, e.g., economic utility, labour process or organisational culture, uncovering technologies that are less apparent than the wage-effort bargain; pluralist industrial relations or organisational culture.

Within the investigative strategy of a multiple case study, this research incorporated a hybrid of qualitative methods, tested by pilot study, to investigate managerial decision making within three manufacturing firms in South West England. To increase the prospect of accessing some of the subjugated knowledges as well as the recorded histories, of the companies under investigation, evidence was collected by adapting techniques from the fields of ethnography, historiography, business history and grounded theory. With careful regard for ethical matters, and the conventional concerns regarding reliability and validity, evidence was gleaned from participating companies through an amalgamation of observation, questioning and documentary sources. Archaeological and genealogical analysis was achieved through reflexive activity and, following many false starts, a viable interpretation was developed.

The Cases

VIANDS LTD.

The first case-study in this series concerned the bakery, Viands, which is part of the larger holding group owned by the Strongman family. In some respects the company runs two businesses. A branded range of savoury pastries is sold at a variety of retail

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outlets, while similar recipes, as well as sweet cakes and puddings are produced for major multiple retailers to sell under their own labels. An enduring theme throughout the hundred-year history of Strongman-owned companies has been a commitment to product quality; the ideal upon which the businesses were established, that has sustained their trading position, and that led to opportunities for expanding their product range into own-label lines.

That history reveals how the notion of quality as consistency was imparted to the owners as they learned their trade. It also tells how James and Daniel Strongman were unable to accept the concerns with financial targets that public ownership demanded, and rescinded their control of Midland Meals in order to purchase a company that espoused their ideal of product quality. By tracing the background to a series of events within Viands, and through empirical study, the case demonstrated a concept of quality that is personal, tacit and immensurable. It included notions of product consistency, hygiene and aesthetics as well as, more widely accepted, conformity to specifications. Viands Quality is a hard taskmaster, for it is a standard that subordinates financial concerns (as in the creation of a new sausagemeat) and does not tolerate diminution (for example, attempts to alter the fat-to-lean ratio in fillings). It has been the source of some difficult trading decisions (e.g. the case of intervention beef) as well as providing new opportunities (such as the move to sweet pastry products).

CROWAN BROTHERS

Crowan Brothers, the subject of the second study, grew steadily, from its small beginnings as a brass and iron foundry, into an international business. Its reputation within the mining and construction industries enabled the company to continue trading profitably even during the inevitable shortages caused by the privations of war and the years following. Under private ownership, Crowan's was closely integrated with the

township of St Peters and the owners were active in maintaining a family atmosphere despite the global distribution of their workforce.

Over the last fifty years, as part of Industrial Air International, the company has struggled to overcome its declining economic performance that has been exacerbated by the disadvantages of distance that are characteristic of South West England. Under successive owners and senior managers, a series of restructuring exercises and a variety of management initiatives were introduced to that end. The latest of these initiatives, mandated by corporate directors, was the introduction of Kaizen to utilise the 'wisdom' of those whose daily work concerns the minutiae of production.

This study followed a distinct group of Crowan's operatives, from their initiation into the tenets of Kaizen at a training workshop, through the execution of a Kaizen project. Activities within this group, and in the factory generally, concentrated on the quantification of 'problems' and in the generation of highly visible outcomes; although the commercial benefits of such improvements are questionable. While a great deal of effort and time were invested in the cleaning, painting and reorganisation of workspaces, there were few positive outcomes in terms of improved productivity or quality (which, some operatives claimed, had deteriorated). Early optimism and enthusiasm had waned during the implementation of what many employees came to regard as yet another management fad. Meanwhile traditional forms of resistance prevailed, among operatives and middle managers, and were given new focus in the imperatives of Kaizen.

BULBERRY LTD.

Chapter seven presented the case of the young but successful Bulberry Ltd. Following several years of impressive growth, the company's managers are now trying to cope with the resultant problems concerning productivity and quality. Their attempts to

establish Kaizen, in an effort to address those problems, have produced some remarkable outcomes, saving time, labour and money, and have also brought benefits to customers and suppliers. Other concerns have arisen and, in particular, the established rewards-based suggestion scheme has had to be reviewed, and intermediate line managers have needed to re-assess their roles.

As a form of employee involvement, Kaizen also addressed the managers' secondary concern; that the company should remain a non-union enterprise in spite of forthcoming legislation on union recognition. This stance was costly to the company, in the form of superior pay and benefits, and it was surmised that the managers' reasoning was based upon a logic that differed from the economic rationality that is the presumed basis for business decision making. A brief archaeological analysis demonstrated that non-unionism supports, and is supported by at least two basic concepts. These describe the image of a 'good employer' (who does not need a union to communicate with his employees), and a stereotyped image of Plymothians as awkward and aggressive. Taking these notions as 'problematisations of existence' it was shown how the issue of non-unionism can operate discursively to maintain favourable conditions for workers and to uphold the company director's image of himself as a 'good employer'.

The evidence gleaned from these three cases raises a range of issues that might be covered by the term 'industrial sociology' but it is the decisional themes which emerged, in these three cases, that were the subject of this research. This is not to deny the importance of the work-effort bargain, the distinctiveness of the workplace as a social institution, nor issues concerning coercive power and managerial control, (Thompson and Ackroyd 1995). At some future time secondary analysis of this evidence could provide useful insights but, here, those issues are tangential to the primary topic of managerial decisions.

Foucaultian analysis of the collected evidence paid particular regard to the effects, rather than processes, of decision making in order to apprehend the rules and technologies elided by conventional forms of investigation and analysis. As the next section demonstrates, this novel approach enriched the, predominantly economic, theories of decision making and business history.

A Business Counter-History

Business history is the conventional form for the study of decisions within their general business context, by examining the behaviour of firms in a longitudinal frame, and attempting to locate conclusions within a wider context of markets and the economy. There are three principal approaches.

Most common are the individual company histories, or biographies, that are often produced at the behest of the firms that they describe. They can often provide the foundations for wider generalisations but, because their content can be severely limited by the interests of subject organisations or individuals (Coleman 1987), they are often criticised for lacking academic rigour (Supple 1977a). As an exercise in company history, this project would have nothing new to offer. Indeed, in the first two cases, the studies were partly derived from such chronicles. The rich detail offered in those accounts (Ealing 1951 and Ottery 1997) paint romanticised, even vainglorious, portraits of the honourable gentlemen who, striking off alone, founded Crowan Brothers and Viands. They tell of how their personalities were imprinted onto their respective companies and of the virtuous sense of *noblesse oblige* or, perhaps paternalism, that integrated the companies into the social life of their localities. They do not, however, relate episodes of financial or moral struggles, of business failures, or of simple poor judgement. Those official histories of the Strongman group and Crowan Brothers are comfortable stories that ask the reader only to appreciate that the companies have

thrived, at least up until the time of writing, and not to ask awkward questions of how and why. This study cannot add to such histories and, in the case of Bulberry, it cannot offer one. That company is still young and originates in another country that has its own set of historical, economic and cultural circumstances that are beyond the investigative scope of this research.

Through a Foucaultian reading of such accounts, however, certain clues were recognised that would explain the present in terms of the past. Ottery's (1997) account shows that a prevailing attitude to quality at Viand's is rooted in the personal experiences of the current owners, who are prepared to forgo other market advantages in order to maintain a reputation for product quality. Ealing's (1951) history also revealed that such a reputation (for quality, reliability and/or value) is a factor in developing and maintaining a firm's trading position. Archaeological analysis showed that the exemplar of Viands Quality is not one single discourse but that it contains diverse notions, such as hygiene, aesthetics, and excellence, that problematise quality, each giving rise to a series of power/knowledge technologies.

A more useful form of business history has been the orthodox approach; studies of entrepreneurship concerned with the links between specific incidents of risk-taking behaviour and economic performance. However such histories have become less valid as, over time and especially in the post-war years, changing patterns of ownership (Davies 1978) that disrupted conventional forms of financial involvement have limited the available opportunities for direct comparison. If this project were such an orthodox business history it would have been concerned with the activities of the various company founders as actors within the wider economy. Comparing the development of an established business, such as Crowan's, with much younger enterprises might be a fascinating exercise but, with so many uncommon factors influencing the individual companies, it could never be more than simply interesting.

By contrast, a comparative study of how businesses are operating in the present, despite their individual histories, contributes to an understanding of the nature and operation of the social influences that impact upon those companies regardless of their respective stages of economic development. By tracing the descent of the, seemingly innovative, managerial practice of Kaizen, this study has shown how a host of historical possibilities had a part in forming the constituent objects that, within the current epistémé, could be combined into a new discursive formation to generate and maintain particular truth effects. These truth effects create and maintain the relations of power/knowledge that allow creativity and innovation to operate, but only within their own terms, by limiting the ways in which people can envisage, for instance, quality, waste and profit.

The most rigorous of the three customary perspectives on business history takes a comparative approach to examine the links between structures and policies, in the business world, and wider economic performance (e.g. Alford 1973). This is an approach that offers enormous scope but is principally concerned with 'big businesses' that have the greatest impact upon, and are most affected by, the activities of other economic actors. Also, consistent with their origins in the Harvard Business School tradition, such studies have been predominantly Americo-centric and may not be directly applicable to the British business scene. This has not prevented Harvard scholars from judging British industry (Hannah 1976), and finding it lacking the ability to rise to the challenge of international competition, according to their own criteria.

By investigating phenomena at the workplace level, rather than focusing upon organisational governance or accepting conventional modes of enquiry or interpretation, this study has demonstrated that, in each company, the whole firm is caught up in a web of power relations that are discursive in origin. Within a counter-history, or genealogy, of the functions of power/knowledge, analysis has suggested that the pre-occupation

with competitive practices, which is the essence of the comparative approach, is rooted in a set of discourses that problematise Market logic. This perspective on business history can, then, be seen to share some of the historical possibilities that gave rise to discourses such as Kaizen, managerial strategy, marketing and human resource management. Hence, the self-perpetuating nature of such discursive phenomena is demonstrated, for, by assessing industrial practice according to its ability to meet the 'challenge' of global competition, this approach to business history reasserts competition as being problematic. It creates a space in which discourses, that problematise the same concept, can operate and advances the criterion for judging success or failure.

It was further shown how the specific discourse of Kaizen, that problematises Market logic, operates to reassert the managerial prerogative by providing managers at Crowan's and Bulberry's with a logical-rational argument to bring about desired changes in production methods, and to intensify work in the form of 'value-adding activities'. While advocating the role of the worker as 'expert' it upholds managers' authority to define what is quality, waste and value-added activity. But it also creates new spaces for the operation of resistance as, by increasing employees' awareness of the value of their work, it provides an equally rational argument for improved benefits.

As a sub-discipline of economics, business history has been dominated by a logical-rational paradigm that has interpreted company histories, entrepreneurship and competitive behaviour within its own terms. This study has shown that the Foucaultian perspective offers a viable fourth approach. As a counter-history it has reached beyond the bounds of conventional histories, rejecting the constraints and truth effects of 'rational' thought, to demonstrate that there are covert, historically-based systems of managerial thought that construct organisational realities in their own terms and maintain those realities through the operation of discourses. In the next section, the

discussion will consider some of the ways in which those discursive operators have acted upon the decision making processes.

Counter-History and Decision Analysis

Research into decision making has permeated most of the disciplines of organisational studies. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, it continues to be dominated by economics which, as the science of choice, presents decision making as a rational, cyclical process of individual choice making (e.g. Stoner and Freeman 1992). That definition and its underlying paradigm are both limiting and, while the model is logical and simple (or, rather, simplistic), it cannot fully explain the decision making behaviour observed in this research. The Viands study demonstrates that the quest for quality over-rides any economically rational argument. Being based in a deep-rooted ideal, that is indefinable in purely financial terms, quality is set as a standard from which the company refuses to move despite any financial argument. In the case of Crowan's, it is difficult to reconcile the claim to rationality, within the classical model, with the company's decision to adopt Kaizen, which is a system that comprises many of the alternative techniques, such as TQM and JIT, that the company has already tried and found to be wanting. Meanwhile Bulberry's Director is resolute in maintaining an anti-union stance that is actually expensive to uphold in order to maintain his self-image as a good employer.

While the managers in each of these companies is able to explain their decisions in apparently rational terms, there is no indication that any of them undertook the 'rational' exercise of searching for, and evaluating alternatives. Theories of bounded rationality (Simon 1976) suggest that this would be because of the cognitive limitations of decision makers. Within such theories, the decision for Kaizen, on the part of Crowans' directors, for example, might be described as a process of successive limited comparisons (Lindblom 1959); for there is no denying that their new 'solution' was

found in the vicinity of old (if aborted) ones and, taking account of the availability heuristic (Tversky and Kahneman 1973), it is a relatively small change to replace TQM and JIT with Kaizen. Perhaps, though, Kaizen simply represented a systematised 'search for slack'(Singh 1986). Alternatively, or additionally, the same decision might be an example of escalating commitment (Staw 1981), as the Sturme Corporation has already invested substantially in the effort to reverse Crowan's financial performance.

Foucaultian analysis has shown how, by its discursive operation, Kaizen could be claimed to be the 'obvious' solution to the firm's problems. Firstly, it could, apparently, intensify work and, hence, output within a Taylorist system but it is claimed to also maintain or improve quality (in a tightly defined sense) which scientific management could not. Secondly, champions of Kaizen claim that it can exploit the tacit skills of crafts-workers which were previously a means of resistance against managerial controls. Hence, and thirdly, Kaizen maintains the management prerogative by upholding the manager as expert and authority.

The same discursive mechanisms are in operation at Bulberry's, where the company's anti-union stance also defies explanation in terms of economic rationality until other, unquantifiable factors, such as power relations and control mechanisms are taken into account. In that study it was seen that, as well as addressing concerns of productive efficiency, one of the discursive objects within Kaizen is a particular form of employee involvement that the company can propound as an alternative to systems of collective representation. However, the absence of the Japanese *andon* system demonstrates that, as a discursive object, employee involvement has been transformed according to the needs of this particular company. Operating as a device of power/knowledge, the discursive formation of Kaizen exposes employees to the logic of the market (a world view that might be challenged by a trade union) thus providing a rationale for managerial decisions as logical and lucid responses to environmental contingencies.

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Bounded rationality cannot, either, adequately explain Viand's quest for quality. That was certainly not a satisficing decision (Simon 1976) because 'good enough' was neither satisfactory nor sufficient for the Strongman bothers. The company's history demonstrates that there is no adjustment of goals (March 1997) in the face of adverse trading conditions and, rather than limiting risk (e.g. Shapira 1995), directors were prepared to jeopardise their market position in pursuance of their self-appointed role as 'guardians of the standard'. This supports Payne's (1997) view, that the consequences of decisions are likely to be judged according to the values of a particular arbiter. In this case the arbiter is the company chairman and the value is product quality which, as was demonstrated in the previous chapter, is a concept that gives purpose to its constituent discursive formations. Those discourses have their own rules for the formation of objects, arise from (and maintain) particular power/knowledge relations, and support a particular set of controlling practices that are exerted upon managers, employees, suppliers and customers.

In contrast to theories that present decisions as discrete, rational and individual choice-making activities, sociological studies recognise decisions as collective activities that occur within a social context. From such theories it can be recognised that Viands Quality and Market logic operate as decision rules (Hickson et al.1986; 1989) that determine which issues are matters for decision making, and then guide decision makers as to the appropriate course of action.

Students of organisational culture (e.g. Pettigrew 1979; Deal and Kenndy 1982; Trice and Beyer 1984) might explain these decisions in terms of the creation of shared meanings through the use of stories, symbols and rituals. However, Viand's history shows that the concepts of quality that were evident in the bakery pre-existed the current ownership. These concepts coincided with the views that the Strongmans had acquired from their particular environments and, the evidence suggests, were also apparent in

earlier times at Crowan's. Theories of organisational culture are not sufficient to explain how firms that have been separated by time and distance could develop the same 'culture'; nor why companies, like Bulberry and present-day Crowan's, should adopt the same set of techniques to deal with quite different problems.

By diverting attention from the obvious topic (the decision incident) and concentrating, instead, on the effects of decisions, the Foucaultian approach has revealed the discursive formations, and expounded their implicit rule systems, that govern concepts of quality. By examining the wider environment it apprehended some of the conditions that simultaneously permit and constrain decision; and considered the role of decision making in creating and recreating those conditions.

Archaeological analysis disclosed that quality, as it is operationalised within Viand's bakery, is not a single discursive object but that it contains a variety of objects which have different rules of formation. It was suggested that Viands Quality operates at a supra-discursive level and, it might been seen to serve a meta-decisional function (Mintzberg et al. 1976). Hence, by investigating the wider historical and political factors that control and circumscribe decision processes and outcomes, Foucaultian analysis supports theories that hold decision making to be part of a broad and complex system of power, rules and identities. The analysis of hygiene as one such object, revealed how it problematised quality; and disclosed the rules of discursive formation that create a specific version of reality (that hygiene is a quality issue) and that justify a range of disciplinary practices to address this aspect of the problem of quality.

Through the elucidation of a similar, though distinct, system of rules, it has been shown how Kaizen puts forward an alternative version of truth. By constructing and reconstructing its constituent objects in a particular way, and, by its appeal to 'common sense' Kaizen creates a perception of naturalness to maintain a sense that it had always existed, even though it had not previously been named or described.

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Systems of rules have been shown to provide context for decision making activity (Burns and Flam 1987; March and Olsen 1989), and it has been recognised that individuals have to negotiate identities and understandings, within such systems, as part of the decision making process. However, the constitution of the individual, as a subject of knowledge, is among the truth effects of discourses. Identity, then, is not negotiated but is imposed by the effects of power/knowledge. Kaizen, for instance, present the crafts-worker as the expert in a discrete set of processes (but not in Kaizen), who is empowered to identify problems (provided that they can be quantified), and offer solutions to improve quality (which is tightly-defined as conformance to specifications). Discursive formations, then, act as rules systems for establishing identities as well as other aspects of knowledge.

Discourses, like decisions, are part of the way that organisational actors make sense of their environment. Conventional studies of decision making treat premise as an antecedent of decision, assuming that decisions lead to action that is both rational and consistent in terms of a pre-existing premise (March 1994). However, such assumptions inhibit the investigation of those premises, while the supposition of rational thought and behaviour pre-determines the way in which decisions will be investigated and understood. By operating beyond the bounds of what is accepted as rational thought, this study has shown how discourses exert their own versions of reality that shape, and are maintained by, decision making activity. By framing a rational premise to support decisions for work intensification, Kaizen also presented a sensible reason for continued resistance on the part of employees. Similarly, by problematising product quality, the various discourses operating within Viands made sense of decisions (such as the issue over intervention beef) that in economic or financial terms might be considered irrational. Just as decisions are both inputs to, and outcomes of, sense-making processes

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so, too, discourses construct the antecedents of premise, and act *a priori* to make sense of the decision outcome.

The eventalisation of quality was pivotal in the analytic activities of these three studies. Recognition that the operationalisation of quality in Kaizen was so distinctly different from Viands Quality led to the apprehension of discursive dichotomies that were present and active, for good or for ill, in the three businesses. While Foucault (1972) allowed that thematic choices are evident in the formation of discourses, his own works changed focus before he had further developed this theory. This study, however, offers a vivid account of how thematic choices have formed new discourses, and of the benefits and problems arising from the transition. The final offering of this thesis is an exposition of the archaeology of the competing discourses that were recognised from the evidence in this research.

AN ARCHAEOLOGY OF COMPETING DISCOURSES

In the last chapter it was surmised that two channels of discourses were operating to create and recreate competing versions of the truth, and to generate and maintain particular technologies of power/knowledge. As a conclusion to this thesis, the archaeology of those particular discursive forms will be discussed in further detail to demonstrate the explanatory value of Foucaultian analysis in the area of managerial decision making, and to indicate how this interpretation might be generalised.

In order to operate, companies need to purchase supplies and pay their workers, plant and equipment needs to maintained and updated, while many firms must finance research and development in their operations. Governments and public service organisations are financed by taxation, charities through contributions and, whatever their underlying purpose, private concerns need to generate at least enough profit to provide an income for their owners. This principle holds for small owner-managed

businesses and not-for-profit organisations, as well as for major multi-national enterprises. The generation of income and the control of resources are, then, fundamental to the purpose of businesses (Cyert and March 1992). This is not some great Marxist truth, identifying a covert motive, but is an elementary detail of business operations.

Given that underlying drive for earnings, organisational members will assess and interpret their environment according to a particular world-view, or truth. Truth, as Foucault determined, is a temporally-located, social construct that is created and sustained by the operation of discourses. By the archaeological analysis of discourses in three participating companies, this study has demonstrated that at least two major channels of discourse are in operation, each deriving from differing problematisations of existence, or actuators[1]. Discourses in the first channel, such as Kaizen, marketing and human resource management, are actuated by Market logic, while discourses within the second channel problematise a particular value, precept or standard which, within this project was Viands Quality, although the evidence within the studies alludes to others such as democracy and culture-specific ideals from Japan.

Discourse and Market Logic

The 'free market' is just one system of organising the production and allocation of resources at local, national or international level[2] but, it is the system that has become accepted as desirable in Western economies. Free-market trade has become the goal for most second-world countries, since the decline of the Communist regimes, and for third-world nations that need to deal with wealthier states.

The essence of the model is the price system whereby buyers and sellers (of any commodity) are free to enter into contracts at whatever price and quantity they choose; being premised upon the existence of freedom of choice for buyers and sellers and the

existence of private property. The model is conditional upon complete knowledge of pricing systems and 'perfect competition' which demands that the Market is allowed to function without interference or control by third parties, such as the State.

Theoretically, if those *ceteris paribus* conditions are met, a point will be reached where the price, that is asked and paid, maintains an equilibrium between supply and demand. When the demand for a commodity exceeds the supply buyers may be prepared to pay a higher price to ensure that they get the desired quantity. If the effect is widespread, then the price will tend to rise which will firstly, stimulate an increased supply in the likelihood of higher profits for the seller and, secondly, force buyers to reconsider their demands and, possibly search for substitutes. Thus the higher price will stimulate supply and curtail excess demand.

As a model, this picture of the free market is a simplification of a complex situation. Numerous modifications have been devised to explain how it relates to, for example, derived demand, substitution of products and the effects of inelastic pricing. Despite criticisms that it favours the rich buyer and the powerful seller, the image of the free market has become an accepted device to explain myriad economic problems from unemployment to airline surcharges, and has given rise to a particular argument that:

> "The solution [to economic difficulties] does not lie in grand national planning nor in a new mercantilism, but in fostering competition, removing protectionist barriers, and stimulating persons, organizations, and industries to compete fairly and efficiently" (Wren 1994, p. 436).

Over time this form of argument has supported a reification of the 'logic of the Market', constituting it as a naturally occurring force, akin to the laws of physics. Once established as a common-sense notion, 'Market logic' can begin to act discursively: to appoint itself as an ideal for the conduct of trade; or a 'model of abstention' for policy-makers; to solicit fear in those who might tamper with Market mechanisms; and to

produce a stereotypical image of the results of such tampering (Foucault 1985, pp. 15-20).

As a discursive actuator, Market logic gives rise to discourses that support its operation, for instance global competition (Ehrensal 1995), HRM (Townley 1994), managerial strategy (Knights and Morgan 1991) and marketing (Morgan and Willmott 1992). It is such discourses that give rise to axiomatic imperatives such as: 'a company must adapt to a changing environment if it is to survive' (e.g. Clark 2000; Andrews 1980; Wilson 1992), and the militaristic phraseology used by, for example, Fred Phillips.

These are forms of discourse that emphasise productivity, profit and efficiency in response to competitive pressure. Their disciplinary technologies, using quantitative representations of performance indicators such as quality and output, provide the means of comparison against cost (or price) so that individuals, departments and organisations can be assessed, or known, according to their ability to produce profits, consonant with the imperatives of the Market forces. For companies that need to satisfy shareholders or major creditors, and which must subject their accounts (performance) to public scrutiny, these discourses are likely to be dominant; for the continuing survival of these businesses depends on producing financial returns, year on year.

A discourse is, at its simplest, a device for interpreting the social environment and, if everybody within an organisation is agreed upon such interpretation, the operation of power/knowledge and resistance is both creative and fruitful, as the case of Bulberry Ltd. demonstrates. There, the problematisation of the global market has led to remarkable, continuing growth, innovative management and, in return for their flexibility and commitment, to superior pay and benefits for employees.

For companies, such as Bulberry's, where such discourses operate, market leadership is a financial objective that is quantified in terms of output, turnover and profit. By

contrast, for firms where prevalent discourses are actuated by precept (e.g. Viands), market-leadership is established by setting an industrial standard (such as product quality) which competitors must then strive to achieve.

Discourse and Precept

In contrast to the first, this second channel of discourse, is situated within the realm of what Foucault calls 'morality':

> "By 'morality,' one means a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies such as the family (in one of its roles), educational institutions, churches and so forth. ...
>
> ... But morality also refers to the real behaviour of individuals in relation to the rules and values that are recommended to them: the world thus designates the manner in which they comply more or less fully with a standard of conduct, the manner in which they obey or resist an interdiction or a prescription; the manner in which they respect or disregard a set of values." (Foucault 1985, p. 25).

The actuators for these discourses are located within personal value sets[3] concerning what is good, correct or ethical behaviour. Hence discourses might problematise democracy (giving rise, inter alia, to a discourse of industrial democracy), equity (in legal or health care settings), some religious ideal (e.g. in the Quaker enterprises of the nineteenth century) or, as in the case of Viands, product quality.

Discourses that establish, for instance, 'quality as excellence', are not easily reconciled with discourses such as 'productivity' and 'global competition' because they contain different objects (even if some have the same label) and are subject to different conditions of existence. This is not to imply that the need to generate profit is negated by such discourses, but it does connote that the relationship to the Market is different. Quality-as-excellence, quality-as-aesthetics, and related discursive formations defy market forces by leading change rather than responding to it; and by creating and maintaining a role in setting the standards that in alternative discourses, e.g. TQM, are

translated into specifications. In the process power/knowledge encourages innovation and creativity, in pursuit of the problematised ideal while the disciplinary technologies become elaborated (Foucault 1995 p. 27) constituting and stimulating ethical behaviour.

Although discourses on Market logic are becoming dominant, companies that function within precept-led discourse can still perform successfully. Viands maintains a strong trading position at national level, even though it might not be a 'globally competitive' business. Within Britain it holds a substantial share of the market, for both branded and own-label products; financial results are satisfactory, and the business continues to expand (into a group of small companies). Discourses on Viands quality demand and sustain a long-term vision that is upheld by the continuing presence and firm management style of the Strongman brothers. Some link between ownership and discursive stance is an attractive notion but there is insufficient evidence to assume such a connection, and it would difficult to reconcile with the knowledge that Bulberry's is also in private (though foreign) ownership.

Thus far, two channels of discourse have been described. Bulberry's and Viands, two thriving companies, have been located within them as examples of how either pattern can lead to commercial success. In the next section, the discussion moves to consider the discursive stance of Crowan's, with its long-standing problems, and to arrive at an explanation for Kaizen as a discursive formation.

New Discourses and Old

The long history of Crowan's describes an internationally-successful company that, until the 1960s, remained in the control of its founding dynasty. The firm's precepts concerned quality, innovation and safety in their service to mining industries. Additionally the founder and his heirs had a high regard for the welfare of workers, for the company's contribution to the local community, and a firmly held notion of the

Crowan 'family'. The company prospered while discourses based on those precepts were in operation. Its local reputation for quality, reliability and innovation, spread throughout the British Empire (later, the Commonwealth) with the emigration of Cornish miners but, sadly for those who rely on the company for their living, that success has ended.

There are several possible points of discontinuity. Supply problems in the post-war years restricted the firm's ability to maintain market leadership, in terms of innovation and product development, as the company's various factories struggled to maintain production. Floatation of the company and, later, the formation of Industrial Air International separated ownership and control, and added a new financial imperative; while the resignation of the last of Crowan's descendants ended the company's links to its founder. More recently, the end of the Cornish mining industry has isolated the company from its market.

Crowan's is now a small division of a multi-national company that, elsewhere, is globally competitive and responsive to market changes. Within the company, however, is a workforce that still embraces the values that were set by the Crowan family. The company's owners are operating to a world-view that is formed by the discourses of Market logic, but meanwhile operatives and middle managers understand their environment in terms of precept-led discourses. The two sets of discourse are in conflict. For instance, senior management who interpret product quality in terms of statistical specifications cannot include intangibles, such as craftsmanship, within that meaning; while the workers, who have a strong sense of the value of their labour will be unable to reconcile increased profit with a reduction (in real terms) in their pay and benefits.

The conflict is compounded by the way in which certain words, notably quality, have been taken up within the different discourses; so that one signifier relates to divergent concepts within the different modes of discourse.

For as long as such conflict remains, the company is likely to experience problems as managers seek new methods to control their workforce and workers respond with new forms of resistance. Given the power relations generated and maintained through discourses of Market logic, it seems likely that that is the version of reality that will prevail. A key (but unrecognised) task for management will, therefore, be to help their workforce to make the transition from one set of discourses to the other. How they might do that is beyond the scope of this study, although a properly-implemented Kaizen[4] might have been one possibility.

As Foucault (1970; 1972) recognised, discourses that shape the way people understand the social world change over time. The rules for the formation of concepts allow that discursive objects can be taken up by other discourses and transformed into new objects and so contribute to new discursive formations. Within that new discursive formation, the objects have been altered so that they are no longer the same objects, even if they hold the same label or name.
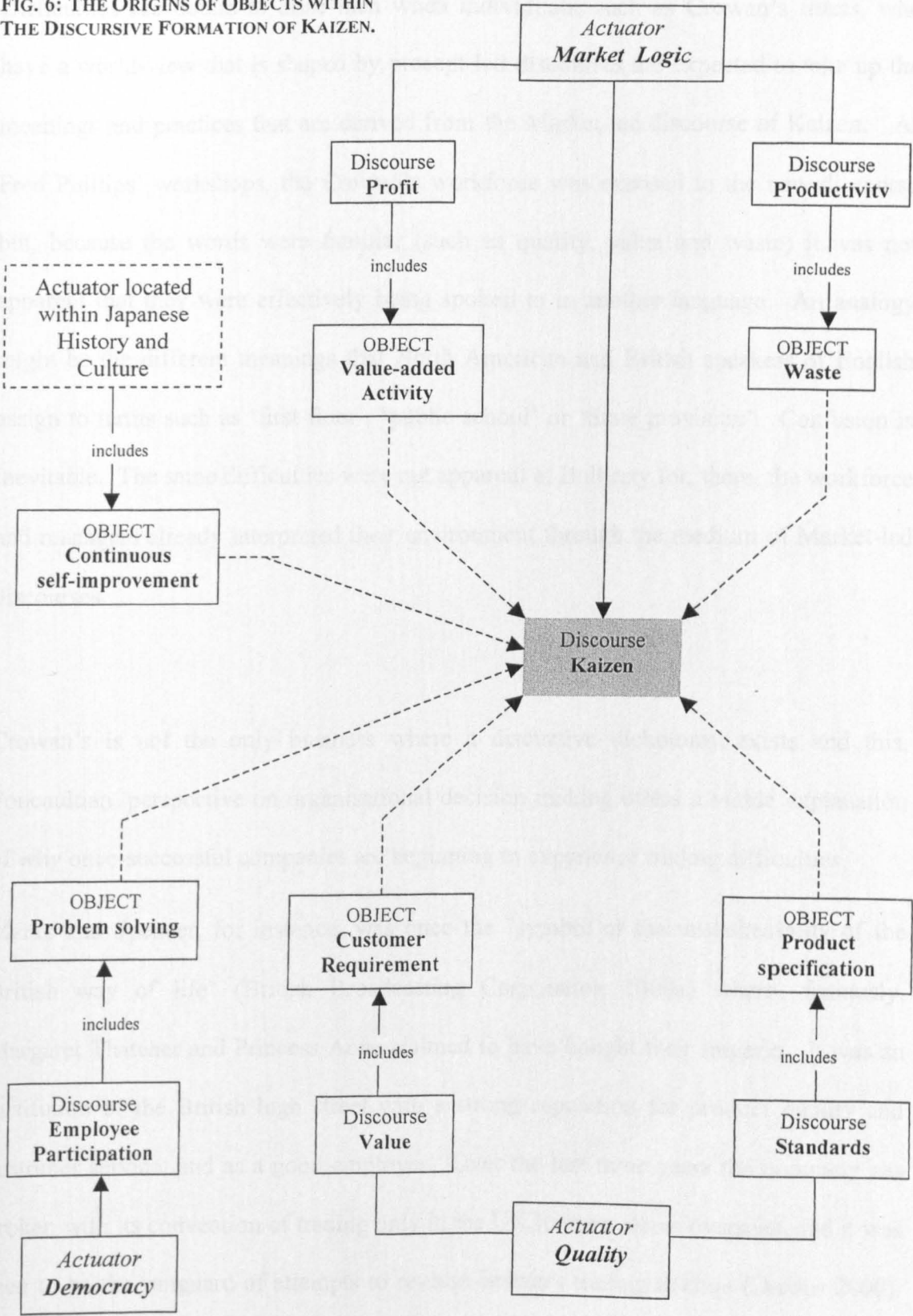
The discourse of Kaizen, holds several such objects (Fig. 6), that derive from various currents of discourse but have been taken up within the new discursive formation, which continues to problematise Market logic. Discourses actuated by the precept of quality hold objects such as *customer requirements* (from quality-as-value) and *product specification* (quality-as-standard) while discourses that problematise market logic contain, for example, *value-added-activity* and *waste* as objects within the discourse formations of profit and productivity. Elsewhere, the objects of *continuous self-improvement*, from the Japanese Buddhist tradition, and *employee involvement* (an object of industrial democracy) can be identified. When historical conditions were

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right, it is these objects, among others, that were taken up, and changed, to form a new discourse that, in turn, gives new meaning to the Japanese concept of Kaizen.

The diagram at Figure 6 suggests, inter alia, how Kaizen has taken up a single object from the possible discourses on quality. As a discursive actuator, quality (at the bottom of the diagram) holds several discourses. Among those discourses is quality-as-standards (also suggested earlier, in Figure 4). That contains a range of objects that includes quality-as-conformance to specification. For an individual, or group, holding to those discourses the single word, 'quality' will signify the full range of meanings, so that conformance to specification will be only part of the meaning.

As historical conditions allowed, the actuator of Market logic (top of diagram) gave rise to a new discursive formation that, here, is known as Kaizen. Among its constituent objects, Kaizen has adopted and adapted the concept of quality as conformance to specification in order to address the problematic of market logic. Within the rhetoric and praxis that this discourse upholds, the single word 'quality' takes on a precise meaning and range of associated practices.

Actuator
Market Logic

Discourse
Profit

Discourse
Productivity

includes

includes

Actuator located within Japanese History and Culture

OBJECT
Value-added Activity

OBJECT
Waste

includes

OBJECT
Continuous self-improvement

Discourse
Kaizen

OBJECT
Problem solving

OBJECT
Customer Requirement

OBJECT
Product specification

includes

includes

includes

Discourse
Employee Participation

Discourse
Value

Discourse
Standards

Actuator
Democracy

Actuator
Quality

Difficulties are bound to arise then when individuals, such as Crowan's fitters, who have a world-view that is shaped by precept-led discourses are expected to take up the meanings and practices that are derived from the Market-led discourse of Kaizen. At Fred Phillips' workshops, the Crowan's workforce was exposed to the new discourse but, because the words were familiar (such as quality, value and waste) it was not apparent that they were effectively being spoken to in another language. An analogy might be the different meanings that North American and British speakers of English assign to terms such as 'first floor', 'public school' or 'State provision'. Confusion is inevitable. The same difficulties were not apparent at Bulberry for, there, the workforce and managers already interpreted their environment through the medium of Market-led discourses.

Crowan's is not the only business where a discursive dichotomy exists and this, Foucaultian, perspective on organisational decision making offers a viable explanation of why once-successful companies are beginning to experience trading difficulties.

Marks and Spencer, for instance, was once the "symbol of the unshakeability of the British way of life" (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000a) where, famously, Margaret Thatcher and Princess Anne claimed to have bought their lingerie. It was an institution of the British high street with a strong reputation for product quality and customer service; and as a good employer. Over the last three years the company has broken with its convention of trading only in the UK to open stores overseas, and it was seen to be the vanguard of attempts to reverse Britain's trading decline (Davies 2000). Supply links with long-standing clothing manufacturers were also broken as contracts were awarded to cheaper, overseas firms, which brought problems in responding to customer demands and, suggests Clark (2000), product quality. Following a sharp decline in profits and, even, speculation of a hostile take-over by the down-market

Tesco group (British Broadcasting Corporation 2000a) or by overseas investors (Waller 2000), Marks and Spencer is having to re-launch its brand image and regain the goodwill of its customers.

While the economic effects of, for instance, a strong pound cannot be ruled out, the various discontinuities suggest that there has been a shift in the way the company's leaders perceive their environment. Marks and Spencer had ceased to be a market leader, in terms of setting standards for others to emulate, and had begun to follow the market; to respond to the demands of 'Market logic' by reducing costs and by diversifying into other (overseas) markets and products (financial services). There is a possibility of coincidence, that the company's fortunes turned, by happenstance, at the same time that its global presence increased. However, there are other examples, from Laura Ashley (Internet 2) to Rolls-Royce (Buerkle 1999) of similar changes that might be linked to discursive discontinuities.

A particularly stark example is the effect of the introduction of quasi-markets into public service institutions. In schools, for instance, Gorard (1997 para. 2.9) reports that managers are "aiming to follow majority trends, and none is ... providing a distinctive kind of school". McConville and Holden (1999) describe the role dissonance that middle managers experience as they try to maintain a link between the differing expectations of health care workers and senior management in the National Health Service; while Annison (1998) tells of the confusion among probation officers as they try to identify their role within a judicial system that labels offenders as customers.

The notion of discursive dichotomy might also be extended to account for high failure rates among new businesses. In one year alone (Dun and Bradstreet 1997) the USA saw 83,384 businesses close and most of those were in their first two years of trading (Meadors 1997). Business failure is not only a catastrophe for the founder of an enterprise, who must face the stigma of bankruptcy and the disillusion of broken

dreams. Employees must cope with the consequent upheaval, while creditors and shareholders must bear the economic burden. Poor management and economic difficulties are often imputed as the cause yet, "the entrepreneurial act of business creation is part of a process that will be affected by many historical factors as well as the opportunities arising from economic change" (Deakins 1999, p. 16). The evidence from this study suggests that the development of discourses is among those historical factors.

Of course, there are many businesses which began as small family firms, dedicated to achieving a reputation for quality, reliability and/or good service that would appear to have successfully made the transition between these distinctive discourses. The firm of Cadbury, which began as a small enterprise in central Birmingham (Williams 1931), has grown into an international player, buying up associated companies such as Bassetts and Schweppes (Rowlinson 1995), and now presents a serious threat to other multi-nationals such as Coca Cola (Internet 3). Similarly, Black and Decker, Kelloggs, and Heinz are just a few of the, now large, businesses that have been cited as meeting the demands of the market on their own terms (Belasco 1990). It is infeasible, however, that a proper assessment of the reasons for their sustained success could be made without the benefit of a reasonably comprehensive history (or counter-history) of those companies.

These matters, then, are issues for future research. This study has identified at least two competing currents of discourse but, if post-structural forms of analysis are to serve, as well as describe, business management, then further investigation is needed to locate the origins and effects of the range of discourses that create and uphold their particular versions of power/knowledge.

This study was begun with the intention of assessing the feasibility of a Foucaultian approach to the study of managerial decision making. The outcome of the investigation is that, through a combination of archaeology and genealogy, two principal currents of discourse are identified as operating, either separately or in competition, in the three participating companies. This suggests that Foucault's analytical approaches can, as proposed, reveal the operation and effects of discourse in creating and recreating meaning in the business environment. It also gives rise an agenda for future research.

Primarily, further research is needed to apprehend the range of actuators that give rise to the manifold discursive formations; and to distinguish the truth effects and disciplinary technologies of those discourses. Discursive operations might affect, for example, the goals of organisational sub-units (Cyert and March 1992), the allocation of internal resources (ibid.) or the way in which issues become part of the decision making agenda (Dutton 1986).

Comparative studies would identify companies where a dominant discourse is contributing to business success, or where competing discourses are contributing to trading difficulties. Action research studies could usefully assess change management programmes, within a range of organisations, to appraise the impact of new discourses in those processes.

Given the range of national differences in industrial structures (e.g. Casson 1998; Wilson 1995), interpersonal relations (Graham 1988) and employment practices (e.g. Hyman and Ferner 1994), future research might also address the formation of business discourse across cultural (and temporal) boundaries. Correspondingly, longitudinal study would be valuable in recognising the points of discontinuity where there is a discursive shift, which might be associated with changes in the stage of business

development, such as the shift from private to public ownership or simply the loss of association with the founding entrepreneur.

A particularly useful development would be to identify companies that have been successful in accomplishing the transition for, in studying such firms, lessons might be learned for companies that experience rapid growth, for the managers of merged businesses, and for the management of change in general.

For academics, this new research agenda includes a range of studies to apprehend the mechanisms whereby market-led discourses have become dominant, and to determine whether the co-existence of such incompatible discourses, as have been identified here, is signalling a more fundamental change in managerial thought as some postmodernists (e.g. Linstead et al. 1996; Clegg 1990) would suggest.

In a field, such as management studies, that is pre-occupied with quantitative data and results, the philosophical and complex insights of Foucaultian analysis do not seem to be immediately relevant to the practical concerns of directing and controlling business organisations. The findings of this study suggest otherwise, indicating that discourse can be implicated in establishing the power/knowledge mechanisms by which organisational actors interpret and respond to their environment. Discourse would appear to be, therefore, an important factor in business success, or failure, and in the management of change and organisational culture. Meanwhile the full range of managerial practice from administration to professional development represents a terrain that is largely unexplored by Foucaultian analysis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

As proposed in Chapter One, this study has shown that Foucaultian analysis is a relevant medium for the study of organisations, that it can be applied to the history of organisations, even where there is a weak sense of that history; and to enterprises that

are in a state of change. As a counter-history of business, the thesis has demonstrated that there are social factors that influence managerial decision making, that are not contained within current theories of decision making, and that those factors are historical in origin; are embedded in power/knowledge relations; and can be apprehended through discursive analysis.

By exploring and describing systems of thought, within the participating companies, expounding their *a priori* rules and describing their effects on managerial decisions, this study has offered a further perspective to existing literature on decision making. While recognising that the value of the findings lies in their explanatory, rather than predictive capacity, this thesis has challenged conventional views of management thought. It has revealed how the logical-rational model not only constrains imagination and innovation in decision making processes, but that it also operates to construct and maintain its own paradigms as the basis for investigating those processes.

1 Foucault's term, 'problematisation of existence' makes for difficult reading and complicates the description of concepts. For ease of reference, henceforward, the term 'actuator' will be used to imply the underlying concept which gives purpose to, and is problematised by, particular discursive formations.

2 For example, the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* issued by Pope Leo XIII (Darring 1996) suggests a response to industrialisation that is aligned with Christian tenets; while the co-operative movements, notably the Mondragon community in Spain, represent other alternative systems.

3 As codes of ethical behaviour, these actuators (or problematisations of existence) are, like any other discursive phenomena, amenable to genealogical analysis. Foucault explains the process in *The Uses of Pleasure* (Foucault 1985).

4 Kaizen, as a discourse, cannot and will not, be blamed for misadventure. The truth effects and panoptic technologies ensure that failure is the responsibility of those in control, i.e. the managers who did not implement the concept 'properly'.

Appendix A: Focus Groups Topic Guide

Personal background: Ask each participant to introduce themselves and to state their job, section and training, and their history within the company.

Working with company: What makes the company a good/bad place to work in? Ask for stories of highlights or low points.
Is there anything that makes participants regret their choice of workplace?

Why Kaizen?   Why do participants think the company decided on Kaizen?
What events, do they think, led to the decisions? Do they see that the company had other options? Such as?
Perceptions of Kaizen prior to workshop.

Workshop/training   Informants expectations of the workshop/training
What did they learn?
Attitudes at end of training period

Working with Kaizen What projects is everyone involved in? How are they progressing?
What did or didn't work and why?   Ask for examples of good/bad projects
What benefits do participants see or anticipate
What, if any, are the problems?
What will be needed to make it work?

Where next?   Other comments, general discussion leading from interview agenda.

Kaizen is....   Ask everyone to complete the sentence, in their own words.

Appendix B: Interview Topic Guide (for interviews at Viands Ltd.)

Personal background   Role and qualifications of informant
Career history before and with this company?
Why did they choose to work for this company?

Highlights   What were the best/worse things that have happened during time in the company?

How did company come to a strong a quality culture?
Ask for individuals' opinions of how the theme emerged and progressed
Critical incidents of benefits and disadvantages of stressing quality

The Company's cases   Ask for personal account of specific cases
– How did the idea come about and develop
– What benefits and problems have resulted?

Where next?   Other comments, general discussion leading from interview agenda.

Quality is....   Ask informants to complete the sentence, in their own words.

Appendix B (cont.): Interview Topic Guide (for interviews at Crowan Brothers and Bulberry Ltd.)

Personal background   role and qualifications (briefly!),
Career history before and with this company?
why did they choose to work for this company?

Highlights   What were the best/worse things that have happened during time in the company?

Why does the company need Kaizen?
Ask for individuals' opinions of how the theme emerged and progressed
Were there any other viable options?
Why were consultants/ outside trainers engaged

How did the workshop go?   What was informant's expectation of the training workshop
Perceptions of Kaizen, prior to training
Ask for personal opinions about the training.
What projects are underway?
– deriving from workshop/training?
– originating from workforce?

Working with Kaizen   How is informant personally involved with Kaizen project(s)?
What benefits do informants see or anticipate (critical incidents)
What are the problems? (Critical incidents).
What resources will be needed to make sure it works?

Where next?   Other comments, general discussion leading from interview agenda.

Kaizen is….   Ask informants to complete the sentence, in their own words.

Appendix C: Extract from a Thematic Matrix
(Case 2: Crowan Brothers)

THEME		
Experts	**Planning**	**Just do It**
Speaker	*Tools shop foreman*	
Q. did anyone ask your opinion? Well, X and Y did come to me, but afterwards, and I did go to the presentation. Y's been a tools fitter for years and he knows about building tools.	It's a case of we'll do this and we'll do that. And I think with Kaizen there should be a reckoning period rather than do it like that.	You just do it. Just do it.
It's using experts. We're using the people that do the job. The one's that do the job. That is the most positive thing	If we sat down for a week and started talking about it I don't think you would have achieved the desired effect. I think that there's a spurt thing. It's not really spur of the moment because you've all had loads of ideas for ages. I think you've got to start on that course – actually do something towards the project.	I think the cooling off period's the right idea. I think on that day [the end of the workshop] everybody's raring to go and the adrenaline's running. I think if you had a cooling off period it takes that away.
Speaker	*Shop steward*	
Even with the Kaizen teams they're saying that 'we've been saying these things for years, you're not listening to us'. Some blokes were refusing to go on the Kaizen because of this.		I think now with Kaizen, whatever we come up with – whether its right or wrong – they'll look at it and say 'OK go for it'. The thing is, if the guys are involved in the team then they'll make it work. Then they'll say, 'yeah, we'll try something else'. There's not sort of failure, so it can only be progress really
Speaker	*Operations Director*	
If they're going in the wrong direction they'll soon realise it and when they come round and start going in the right direction it'll be their idea. Far better than me walking in an say 'hey, guys, this is the right way'.	I've never been involved in no project or strategic plan that has gone anything like to plan. From the moment you say 'we're starting' something always gets in the way. And if you're so focused on the plan that you can't come up with anything flexible, then you're stuck, and the time spent trying to plan something accurately is a waste of time. You might as well get on and try it, and then it'll evolve.	At the moment this is where some of the middle layers of managers are struggling, is that I'm happy to let people have a go even if, maybe, it's not the way that think it ought to go.

It's about using your common sense. And backing it up. [*Q. And who's doing the backing?*] The back-up's my job. That's my role and that's how I've always seen it.	I guess the ones where I'm disappointed are the ones where there are groups of managers involved and the bloody things aren't moving. They're all debating it. Or they're saying 'I must get on and do these reports'. There's not enough rebels actually, and that's a reflection on the past. They weren't allowed to be rebels.	We're now at the second stage of the air end assembly project, which is planning to move it out of the building, to where it ought to be at the end of the assembly line. That's where some people are saying we need a long term strategy and all the rest of it. But I say 'let's just get on and move it. Find out what goes wrong'.
Speaker	*Production manager (industrial engineer)*	
If you take the team of experts which the Kaizen team should comprise, it gives experts in a specific field. If you take the analogy of the assembly line and you've got two or three people who are concentrating their efforts in a very specific area. So they are the experts that are improving that area; but that area is part of an overall manufacturing flow line that is part of a manufacturing strategy. And if one was going to be critical then the experts – as in that specific area- are only aware of the symptoms but not the reasons behind them.	The operator will know the detail of his job. He will not know the details of the next process. The industrial engineer will. He'll know the details of all the processes, and the strategy that the company wants to adopt – the business regime that the company's got, and the direction its going. And his job will be to ensure that that strategy is met while developing the processes throughout the site.	It all seems to be that there is no planning, so it's a case of just do it. It's becoming very costly because you do it again. And that may mean taking out some of the things you've already sorted. Take the case of the air-ends. We put in £300 to put an air-line in, and them within a week they moved it, and cut the air line off and we had to re-route it to another site, which costs us another £300. Now, within the space of a few weeks they want to move the air-end assembly down onto the line. All the money they spent on the top area, now they're going to re-spend in another area, for no gain.
Speaker	*Work Study Engineer*	
Kaizen as I understand it is meant to be applied, as basically a tool in the tool box. It's a marvellous tool; it involves the people who are on the job – the experts within that specific area, and they've got more knowledge 'cause they're on the job every day. So there's scope for them to improve the layout of the area, the way they operate, the way things are laid out. So there should be within – the confines of that area – an improvement.	At the moment we've got cells going in every direction, and nobody's joining up to share their ideas.	The only thing is it's a 'let's do it' technique. You don't sort of get involved with all the red tape and the structured approach and the systematised approach; but that is only acceptable if it'd done within the parameters of an existing system.

We ended up [after previous rationalisations] so disorganised. We lost a lot administrative expertise, actually in the admin block. And as we know with Kaizen you actually transfer it back to the people that do the job. We'd lost our way. I thin Kaizen is the thing that'll pull us back.	The easy bit is to pick up something from there and move it to there, but how do you support it and what effect does it have on the rest of the company and the system by doing that move?	The philosophy of just do it is OK as long as you're aware of the implications of 'just' doing it.

Focus group

(tools fitter)	(dispatcher)	(Sales Manager)
We're not fools on the shop floor – they might think we are – and when we've done the workshop it's given us perhaps the opportunity to voice an opinion. But whether that opinion is being acted upon is another matter.	I don't think that the managing director has the right, or is not allowed, to manage this company the way he wants to. Not just to the detriment of the company, but to his own detriment. Because what is happening is he's telling us one thing, his plans to do so-and-so, and then the poor old sod is having his legs took away from underneath him form somebody above him.	Kaizen should have been a tool running in parallel while the business carried on. Kaizen has become the be-all-and-end-all and a lot of the resources have gone into Kaizen, rather than actually keeping the business going in parallel.

(storeman)	(Sales Manager)	(tools fitter)
They tend to treat us a little bit like imbeciles sometimes. Like, 'he's only a storeman, what does he know'. But some of us know a little bit more than what they think. It's given us a chance to have our say, a bit. But it's not a new thing is it? I mean, the Japanese and Germans have been doing this for a long, long time.	And I think that that's one of the things we learnt from this, is that you've got to have somebody looking at the overall thing. 'Cos while you've got lots of fired up very motivated teams, you haven't got somebody seeing to the overall wider picture. While some teams might be saying 'we need to put this there, that there, and this there' what they have done sometimes is actually make the situation worse, because they haven't seen a wider picture, how their changing that activity over-spills into the neighbouring activity. There's been a lack of overall co-ordination even though the Kaizen thing has been totally focused and fired up.	They'd already planned it out that we're going to have five teams of five and they'd said 'Let's see, we really need to look at that, that, that.

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Appendix D: The Kestrel Company Principles

1. The determined cooperation of all our employees represents our company assets.

2. We know the value of integration, of qualification, motivation and success of the company. We encourage and sponsor our employees in training and further education, and our employees share in the overall success.

3. We regard our customers as partners who decide for the success of our company :

   - We must meet our customer's wishes and solve their problems, for they are the guarantors of our future.

   - Our products must offer clear advantages and benefits to our customers, in particular with regard to quality, engineering, range and availability.

4. We must be faster and better than our competitors. We must prove this to our customers every day, over and over again.

5. Our ideas and creativity will secure our advantage, i.e. we must make a continuous effort to give new impetus and ideas, and to translate these into logical and professional action!

6. Perfect mastery of our daily business secures our existence and enables us to meet the challenge of the future.

7. Our aim is to build up a long-term relationship with our suppliers, based on partnership. The essential precondition is a competitive attitude toward quality, delivery, price and speed in resolving any problem.

8. We concentrate all our energies toward perfect and economic production, to market professionally and to supply reliably.

9. We are aware of the responsibility we bear towards the environment and the world in which we live. We want to take part in shaping and improving it!

10. Switch to perfection – our motto and commitment!

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