



**Towards the measurement of
organisational culture**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with methodological issues in understanding organisational culture. Its main aim was to investigate what would be required to develop a measure for organisational culture that would be practically useful, while at the same time capable of capturing the complexity of the phenomenon. The research was carried out in two divisions of a large automotive manufacturing firm in South Australia. Data were collected over a period of three years during which time the researcher maintained a consistently high level of involvement with the research setting and subjects. Following is a brief summary of this research in terms of its review of the relevant literature and the three studies that were conducted.

The literature review began with an exploration of the concept of organisational culture. Attention was drawn to the confusion between the 'essence' of organisational culture and its surface level manifestations. The question of organisational culture versus organisational subcultures was addressed and a brief review was provided of attempts to classify organisational cultures and their elements. This was followed by a discussion of the linkages between organisational culture and the related concepts of organisational climate and social representations. The second part of the literature review explored the origins of the contemporary study of organisational culture and its popularisation, particularly as a practical means for understanding and improving organisational performance. The third and final part of the literature review considered the extant approaches to the study of organisational culture. In particular, it was argued that, while qualitative methods are better suited to tapping the deeper levels, or 'essence', of culture than quantitative methods, they are very time consuming to use properly and hence are limited in terms of what they can practically provide. It was also argued that quantitative methods, while they provide a more systematic and economical means for assessing and comparing organisational cultures, seriously over-simplify the concept and, at best, provide insights into the surface aspects of culture only. Accordingly, it was proposed that some combination of these methods might offer a practically useful means of assessing organisational culture which could push beyond the surface level manifestations of the phenomenon to provide insights into its deeper level aspects.

The first study was entirely qualitative and was designed to assist in the validation of subsequent studies involving both quantitative and qualitative methods. A major part of the first study involved in-depth and largely unstructured interviews of approximately one and a half hours duration with each of twenty respondents from the firm's tooling division. These data were supplemented with data from observations of work behaviours and practices, as well as from informal conversations between the researcher and divisional members at all levels of the hierarchy. 'Diary' data of this latter kind were gathered (from both of the participating divisions) over the entire course of the research project and were used to validate aspects of the method through all stages of its development. On the basis of a thematic content analysis of both interview and 'diary' data, some thirty common themes were identified which reflected divisional member experience in relation to a range of issues. These issues included critical events in the history of the division, communication and decision-making practices, the division's operating reward system (including promotional criteria) and its system of performance appraisal. Within each of these areas, it was possible to make some tentative hypotheses about underlying beliefs and assumptions that might constitute part of the division's culture with respect to the above issues. It was found that these beliefs and assumptions could most usefully be classified using the typology proposed by Schein (1985). In particular, there was good evidence provided for beliefs and assumptions in Schein's Category 3 - 'The Nature of Human Nature' - which, at an organisational level, is concerned with the way in which workers and managers are viewed. McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions about the nature of workers also appeared to be particularly relevant in so far as this division seemed to be predominantly Theory X in its orientation. Finally, Study I provided good support for the view that context, in particular the historical context, plays an important role in shaping the current, and even anticipated future, experience of organisation members.

Insights obtained from Study I informed the development of questions for a semi-structured interview that was piloted in Study II. On the basis of the type of information that the subject group seemed most able to provide, the interview was designed to investigate respondents' beliefs and assumptions about the 'role of workers' and the 'role of supervisors'. The interview combined open-ended and closed questions, thereby enabling both qualitative and quantitative data to be collected. Open-ended questions were used to further explore the role of context in understanding organisational culture. Specifically, respondents were asked about their perception of

the respective roles of the workers and supervisors in their division (i) at the present time, (ii) in the past, and (iii) in the anticipated future. They were also asked about their knowledge of the roles played by workers and supervisors in other organisations. Finally, in an attempt to gain insights into respondents' beliefs about what the role of workers ideally should be, they were asked to describe the 'best' and 'worst' worker with whom they had ever worked in their division. Closed questions took the form of forced-choice rating questions that required respondents to rate particular aspects of the role of workers and the role of supervisors which had emerged as being important in Study I. With respect to the former, respondents were required to (i) rate the role of workers in their division at the present time on a scale from 'very active' (Theory Y) to 'very passive' (Theory X); (ii) rate their degree of satisfaction with the current role of workers; and (iii) rate the effectiveness of workers in this role. With respect to the latter, respondents were required to (i) rate the role of supervisors in their division at the present time on a scale from 'very consultative' (Theory Y) to 'very directive' (Theory X); (ii) rate their degree of satisfaction with the current role of supervisors; and (iii) rate the effectiveness of supervisors in this role.

At this stage, subjects were available from two divisions of the company, the tooling division and a production division involved in the manufacture of plastics components. This provided a means whereby, in addition to exploring questions of methodology, the possible existence of organisational subcultures might also be investigated. Individual interviews of approximately one and a half hours each were conducted with six subjects from each of the participating divisions. The findings from Study II served to highlight a number of strengths and weaknesses of the method. It was found, for example, that responses to the rating questions (in particular, the question asking respondents to rate the role of workers as more or less active or passive, and the role of supervisors as more or less consultative or directive) varied considerably and that this variability seemed to be a result of differences in respondents' interpretations of the questions and associated response categories. It was also found that much of this interpretive inconsistency could be understood when contextual data (in the form of respondents' accounts of the role of workers and the role of supervisors in the past, the anticipated future and in other organisations) were taken into account.

In Study III, a revised version of the interview schedule used in Study II was administered to thirty one respondents, twelve from the tooling division and nineteen from the production division. Interviews lasted for approximately two hours each. In

the revised protocol, the focus of questioning was narrower in that information was sought about respondents' views regarding the 'role of workers' only. In this case, however, the role of workers was investigated in terms of two separate sub-topics. The first of these was concerned with what workers do (that is, their duties and activities), and the second was concerned with the defining characteristics of 'good' workers. While the previous approach of combining open-ended with closed questions was retained, in the revised protocol, the closed questions took the form of a series of prompts about particular activities which could potentially be used to describe the role of workers. These questions were designed to stimulate a more in-depth analysis of the role of workers than had been achieved using the previous rating scales. Another key feature of the revised protocol was that it sought more specific information about context. Not only were respondents asked about their experience of the role of workers in the present context, the past context (both in their current and in other organisations), the anticipated future context, and the 'ideal' context, but they were also asked to comment on the timing, and perceived cause(s), of any changes from one context to another which they reported. Finally, there was an explicit focus in the revised protocol on the use of qualitative data (in the form of respondents' elaborations on, and clarifications of, their responses) to give meaning to quantitative data (in the form of responses to closed and forced choice questions).

The overall findings of Study III suggested that the method developed offered a potentially useful basis for assessing deeper-level aspects of organisational culture, which would be more economical to use than traditional qualitative methods. In particular, it was concluded that, in order to infer a group's cultural beliefs and assumptions, it is essential to have information about the context of the group's experience. It was found, for example, that information of this kind revealed important differences between the two divisions that were not apparent from the analysis of present-time data only. The analysis of attributional data, in the form of respondents' explanations for changes from one context to another, also served to highlight important differences between the divisions that would not otherwise have been apparent. A second important conclusion suggested by the findings of Study III was that, in order to understand the complexity of organisational culture, any attempt to measure it should include a facility for tapping the 'meaning', or interpretive dimension, of organisation members' experience. In this sense, it was argued that an integrated approach such as

that developed (in which qualitative data are used to give meaning to quantitative data) is likely to be superior to approaches which rely solely on quantitative methods.

STATEMENT

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

Signed

Date 13/11/00

DEDICATION

To all of the management, staff, and employees of Holden motor company who participated in, or in any way supported, this research. I am indebted to you for giving so generously of your time, and so sincerely of your views.

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CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

1.1 The concept of organisational culture

1.1.1 Definitions of organisational culture

A first encounter with the organisational culture literature can leave the reader who is new to this area feeling understandably confused about what exactly it is that organisational culture research is concerned with. There is no single universally accepted definition of the concept of organisational culture and researchers differ considerably with respect to the particular aspect(s) of organisational culture which they emphasise in their research. A brief glance at the following definitions of organisational culture serves to highlight the lack of clarity surrounding the concept:

The culture of a factory is its customary and traditional way of thinking and doing things, which is shared to a greater or lesser degree by all its members, and which new members must learn, and at least partially accept, in order to be accepted into the service of the firm (Jacques, 1951, p. 251);

...culture [is] the source of a family of concepts. The offsprings of the concept of culture I have in mind are symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual, and myth (Pettigrew, 1979, p. 574);

A set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people. The meanings are largely tacit among group members, are clearly relevant to the particular group, and are distinctive to the group (Louis, 1985, p. 74);

....a coherent system of assumptions and basic values which distinguish one group from another and orient its choices (Gagliardi, 1986, p. 119);

Culture can be defined as the shared philosophies, ideologies, values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes, and norms that knit a community together (Kilmann, Saxton, & Serpa, 1986, p. 89); and

[Culture] represents those patterns of social behaviour and normative expectations that become characteristic of an organisation's functioning, without its members consciously choosing them (Allen & Kraft, 1982, p. 4).

From these definitions, it can be seen that organisational culture has been variously conceptualised as collectively held assumptions, beliefs, ideologies, values, meanings, expectations, attitudes, and norms; organisational myths, symbols, rituals and other forms of patterned behaviour have also been subsumed under the label of 'organisational culture'. While it might be argued that there are some common themes which unite these definitions (eg. the notion of culture as a collective or group

phenomenon, which is largely implicit, and which gives a group its distinctive identity), and while some of the elements identified in these definitions might be seen to bear a 'family resemblance' (Barley, 1983), the conceptual and interpretive latitude represented by these, and other, definitions of organisational culture is such that the boundaries as to what constitutes a legitimate focus for organisational culture research, and what does not, are very unclear.

As some commentators have suggested, the variability that one finds in definitions of organisational culture is hardly surprising since the concept was borrowed directly from anthropology where there has been a consistent lack of consensus about its meaning (Alvesson, 1993; Brown, 1995; Smircich, 1983a). The point has also been made (Alvesson, 1993) that the study of organisational culture by researchers from a variety of different disciplines which support different research traditions – for example, management, communication, sociology, psychology, anthropology, and folklore – is another factor contributing to the lack of clarity surrounding the organisational culture concept.

A further source of confusion associated with conceptualisations of organisational culture – apart from the lack of agreement that exists about the content of culture (ie. its key elements) – lies in the distinction that can be drawn between researchers who view culture as a variable (something that an organisation *has*) and researchers who view culture as a metaphor for thinking about, and understanding, the phenomenon of organisation (Smircich, 1983a). As Smircich notes, these two perspectives give rise to quite different research agendas. The basic assumption underlying the 'culture-as-variable' view is that culture is somehow related to organisational performance. Advocates of this view are more pragmatic in their orientation than advocates of the 'culture-as-root metaphor' view in the sense that one finds in their work a more or less explicit concern with understanding the effects of organisational culture (ie. how culture impacts upon organisational performance and organisational responsiveness to change) (see, for example, Bate, 1984; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Schein, 1985; Rousseau, 1990b).

In contrast to the 'culture-as-variable' perspective, the 'culture-as-root-metaphor' perspective treats organisational culture, not as something which an organisation *has*, but rather as something which an organisation *is* (Smircich, 1983a). According to Smircich, the research agenda which derives from this perspective is, broadly speaking,

“to explore the phenomenon of organization as subjective experience and to investigate the patterns that make organized action possible” (p. 348). From this perspective, pragmatic concerns are subordinated to an interest in gaining a deeper level understanding of organisational life in terms of its “expressive, ideational and symbolic aspects” (Smircich, 1983a, p. 348). Indeed, questions about cause-effect relationships may not even arise since, from this perspective, there is nothing in the organisation which is ‘not culture’ and, hence, there is nothing to which culture can meaningfully be related (Alvesson, 1993). While the treatment of organisational culture as a root metaphor has given rise to several quite different approaches to organisational analysis – these approaches reflecting different conceptualisations of culture within anthropology – Smircich (1983a) cites, as some notable examples of research consistent with this perspective, the work of Harris and Cronen (1979), Argyris and Schön (1978), Manning (1979), and Van Maanen (1973, 1977).

Alvesson (1993) makes the important point that, while the ‘culture-as-variable’ and ‘culture-as-root-metaphor’ distinction drawn by Smircich (1983a) is a very valuable one – it helps to make explicit crucial differences in the assumptions which underlie approaches to the study of organisational culture – the two perspectives should not be regarded as necessarily incompatible. For example, deeper level understandings (the domain of research conducted from a ‘culture-as-root-metaphor’ perspective) can be used to inform decisions about effective courses of action (the domain of research conducted from a ‘culture-as-variable’ perspective). Alvesson (1993) also notes that there are many studies of organisational culture which cannot easily be classified as fitting neatly into either a ‘culture-as-variable’ or a ‘culture-as-root-metaphor’ perspective; that is, there are many studies which can best be classified as falling somewhere between the two perspectives. According to Alvesson, the problem for researchers committed to a ‘culture-as-variable’ perspective is that many of the elements of organisational culture (basic assumptions, values, rites, rituals, symbols etc.) are difficult to quantify and do not lend themselves readily to “strict variable thinking” (Alvesson, 1993, p. 15). As a result, research from this perspective often makes use of qualitative methods and this necessarily serves to weaken the ‘variable’ bias in much of this work. The problem for researchers committed to a ‘culture-as-root-metaphor’ perspective is that, in practice, it is very difficult to interpret every aspect of an organisation’s functioning in symbolic terms. There are some dimensions of

organisational life (eg. the organisation's economic performance) which are more tangible (though no less important) than others and which cannot easily be captured by this perspective. Thus, as Alvesson notes, there are many researchers who, while they treat culture as a metaphor, also address 'non-cultural' aspects of organisations in their work.

Alvesson's arguments are particularly apposite to an understanding of the approach taken in the present research. The overall aim of this research was to develop a method for understanding organisational culture which would be capable of providing deeper level insights into culture, at the same time as being practically useful (in the sense of enabling questions about cause-effect relationships to be addressed). While the treatment of culture adopted in this research is more consistent with a 'culture-as-variable' perspective than a 'culture-as-root-metaphor' perspective, the emphasis on practical concerns does not preclude a recognition of the importance of deeper level understandings. For example, qualitative methods are used (in combination with quantitative methods) to provide important insights into the meanings which organisation members attach to those aspects of their experience about which they are asked. In this sense, then, the approach taken in the present research can be seen to combine elements of both a 'culture-as-variable' and a 'culture-as-root-metaphor' perspective.

Brown (1995) and others (see, for example, Siehl & Martin, 1990) make the important point that, given the lack of clarity surrounding the concept of organisational culture, the way in which one chooses to define organisational culture (and indeed the broader conceptual treatment of culture which one adopts) will have important implications for how one goes about studying the phenomenon. It is appropriate at this point, therefore, to inform the reader that the conceptual treatment of organisational culture which has been most influential in guiding the present research is that provided by Schein (1985¹). In the following section, Schein's treatment of organisational culture – which is arguably one of the most comprehensive – is discussed in some detail. Reference is also made to conceptualisations of culture which have been proposed by other researchers, but only in so far as these have some bearing on Schein's conceptual

¹ While Schein first described his conceptual framework for understanding organisational culture in an article which was published in the *Sloan Management Review* in 1981, his book *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (the first edition of which appeared in 1985) represents his most comprehensive treatment of the subject.

treatment (whether in the sense of drawing on, or extending it, or alternatively, posing a challenge to it).

1.1.2 Schein's conceptual treatment

Culture as a multi-layered phenomenon

Schein argues that organisational culture can best be thought of as a multi-layered phenomenon. He differentiates three interrelated levels of organisational culture, based on the 'visibility' and accessibility to the researcher of the various elements of which organisational culture is thought to be comprised. Each of these levels is described briefly as follows:

Level 1. This is the most visible and accessible level of an organisation's culture. According to Schein, at this level culture comprises *artefacts and creations*, examples of which may include the physical layout and formal structure of the organisation, its technological output, the written and spoken language used by organisation members, the organisation's formal and informal control systems, artistic productions², and the overt behaviour of organisation members.

Level 2. Culture at this level manifests itself in an organisation's *values* – its "sense of what 'ought' to be, as distinct from what is" (Schein, 1985, p. 15). In the sense that values cannot be observed, culture at this level is less accessible than culture at the level of artefacts and creations. However, as Schein points out, many of an organisation's values, because they serve the normative function of guiding organisation member behaviour, are articulated explicitly and can therefore be asked about, or read about.

Level 3. This is the deepest, and hence least accessible, level of organisational culture. Culture at this level comprises *basic assumptions*, that is, taken-for-granted and often unconsciously held ways of perceiving and thinking about their experience which organisation members have come to share. Basic assumptions can neither be observed directly, nor asked about directly. Importantly, basic assumption constitute, for Schein, the "essence" of organisational culture, that is, "what culture really is" (Schein, 1985, p. 14).

Schein's three-level model is recognised as being one of the most useful typologies for classifying the various different elements thought to make up the content of an

² While Schein does not provide any examples of 'artistic productions', organisational stories and myths would constitute common examples of artefacts of this kind. A nice example of an 'artistic production' from the present research was a series of cartoons which were produced surreptitiously by employees from one of the research divisions, and which depicted the division in decline.

organisation's culture (Brown, 1995; Ott, 1989). As Ott (1989) notes, a number of researchers have acknowledged and used this model in their own analyses, albeit with some adaptations. For example, Martin and Siehl (1983), in their case study investigation of culture and counterculture in General Motors, draw on Schein's distinction between artefacts, values, and assumptions, but propose that management practices (such as training, performance appraisal, the allocation of rewards, selection and recruitment etc.) – which are treated as artefacts in Schein's model – make up a separate, fourth category of cultural elements. The main argument of these authors is that management practices may or may not be accompanied by the expression of more obvious artefactual elements (eg. the telling of organisational stories or the use of organisational ceremonies to give closure to practices such as training).

Similarly, Sathe's (1985) conceptual treatment of organisational culture draws heavily upon Schein's three-level model. In fact, the modifications to Schein's model which Sathe proposes appear to be more cosmetic than substantive. In Sathe's treatment, Level 1 (which includes essentially all of the same elements that one finds in Schein's Level 1) is denoted by the term *organisational behaviour*; Level 2 is labelled *justifications of behaviour* (similar to Schein's notion of 'espoused values'³); and Level 3, comprising shared assumptions (also referred to by Sathe as internalised beliefs and values), is simply called *culture*. The only difference of any real significance between Sathe's treatment of organisational culture and that of Schein is that, for Sathe, Level 3 can include consciously held, as well as unconscious or taken-for-granted, shared assumptions.

Apart from specific applications of Schein's (1985) three-level model, there appears to be good support in the literature for the general distinction that Schein draws between the surface-level manifestations of organisational culture (which, for the most part are readily accessible) and the 'essence' or deeper-level of culture (which is more difficult to access). In other words, conceptual treatments of culture – whether or not they are grounded in Schein's framework – frequently emphasise this distinction. For example, in Trice and Beyer's (1985, 1993) conceptualisation of organisational culture, a distinction is drawn between what the authors call the *substance* of organisational culture and its *forms*. The substance of culture (similar to Schein's notion of the

³ Interestingly, in the second edition of *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, Schein (1992) uses the term 'espoused justifications' as a summary term to describe the cultural elements contained within his Level 2.

'essence' of culture) comprises organisational ideologies, defined as "relatively implicit sets of taken-for-granted beliefs, values, and norms" (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 2). The forms of culture – including symbols, language, narratives, and practices – are its concrete (or surface-level) manifestations. They are the "observable entities, including actions, through which members of a culture express, affirm, and communicate the substance of their culture to one another" (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 2). In a similar vein, Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990), drawing on the work of Deal and Kennedy (1982), distinguish between what they call the *core* of culture, which comprises values that are often unconsciously held, and the observable manifestations of culture, or cultural *practices*, which include symbols, heroes, and rituals.

An important characteristic of Schein's model is that the three levels of culture which he differentiates – artefacts and creations, espoused values, and basic shared assumptions – are considered to be interrelated. Artefacts and creations, for example, can be regarded as the most visible or observable manifestations of deeper level culture; they constitute what Berger and Luckmann (1966) call the 'legitimizing apparatus' of an institution's social reality. An organisation's values may also reflect its basic assumptions. In his discussion of the link between values and assumptions, Schein describes the process by which the beliefs of a single individual can become transformed into collective beliefs, and ultimately collective assumptions, through the medium of values. He illustrates this process using the example of a leader of a young business who believes that the way to deal with declining sales is to increase advertising. When sales begin to decline for the first time in the firm's history, the leader – consistent with his/her conviction about what to do in a situation such as this – instructs the members of his/her sales team to increase advertising. At this stage, the members of the sales team do not share the leader's belief that advertising always improves sales, since they do not yet have any experience to validate this belief. For them, the leader's belief has the status of a value only – a statement about what should be done, or might be done, when faced with declining sales – and as a value, it is open to debate and confrontation. If, however, increased advertising does improve sales and if, over time, this solution continues to work (at least as perceived by the members of the sales team), then the value gradually becomes transformed into a collective belief (which, for the most part, is accepted without question) and, ultimately, a collectively held assumption (that is, a belief which has come to be so taken-for-granted by group

members that it has dropped out of awareness). To summarise, the central idea which is illustrated by this example is that if a group's experience over time is such that it consistently affirms the 'correctness' of individually held beliefs – initially interpreted by the group as statements of individual value orientations – then those beliefs will eventually acquire the status of collective beliefs and, ultimately, shared basic assumptions.

While the surface levels of organisational culture can be seen to be related to culture at a deeper level, Schein argues strongly against making inferences about organisational culture based solely on an analysis of its surface level manifestations. For example, while artefacts can be fairly readily observed, it is difficult to know what they mean without some understanding of the deeper level cultural patterns which may have given rise to them. Similarly, while an organisation's values may be consistent with its underlying assumptions, one cannot assume that this will necessarily always be the case. As Schein notes, the distinction which is drawn by Argyris and Schön (1978) between 'espoused theories' and 'theories-in-use' is a valuable one in this regard. It draws attention to the fact that the values which are espoused by an organisation (and which are likely to be articulated in public documents such as the organisation's mission statement, policy statements, job descriptions etc.) may not necessarily be the same values as those which guide organisation member behaviour on a day-to-day basis. A good example of this distinction is provided by Reynolds' (1987) account of the discrepancy between a computer company's espoused commitment to quality (which was backed up by a public quality drive) and the actual behaviour of senior company personnel who allowed defective products to pass inspection in order that production schedules could be met.

The important point being made by Schein (1985) is that accounts of organisational culture which are based solely on an analysis of its surface level manifestations – whether these be overt patterns of behaviour (see, for example, Trice and Beyer's (1985) work on organisational rites) or the core values espoused by an organisation (see, for example, Peters and Waterman's (1982) study of the core values of America's top performing companies) – are likely to be, at best, incomplete and, at worst, inaccurate. Schein argues that, in order to really understand organisational culture, and in order to be able to accurately interpret its surface level manifestations, it is necessary to push to the deeper level of shared basic assumptions. While surface level elements might be

used to confirm inferences about an organisation's culture (which are based on a deeper level of understanding of the culture), they should not, according to Schein, be used as the sole source of inferences about the culture.

Defining the 'essence' of organisational culture

According to Schein, organisational culture at its deepest level – that is, the 'essence' of organisational culture – can be defined as:

...a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (1985, p. 9).

This definition draws attention to a number of important characteristics of organisational culture including:

1. Sharedness of basic beliefs and assumptions. Central to Schein's conceptualisation of organisational culture is the idea that culture comprises beliefs and assumptions which are shared by the members of a given group. These shared beliefs and assumptions are synonymous with what Bate (1984) has referred to as 'internalised social constructs' and what Downey and Brief (1986) have called 'consensual implicit theories'. It is this feature of culture which gives a group its distinctive identity, or personality, and which is captured in Baker's (1980) description of organisational culture as "the social glue holding the company together" (p. 8).

2. Organisational culture as a product of group learning. According to Schein (1985), organisational culture evolves as the members of a given group attempt to collectively deal with, and solve, what are essentially problems of survival. These problems of survival fall into two broad categories: problems of external adaptation, on the one hand, and problems of internal integration, on the other. The former concern the group's need to define itself and establish its identity in relation to its external environment (for the group to survive it must reach consensus on its overall purpose, the means by which to achieve its purpose, the criteria by which it will determine how well its purpose has been achieved etc.). The latter concern the group's definition of how to organise relationships among the members of the group in order to achieve internal integration (for the group to survive it must develop a common language and common conceptual categories, shared criteria for group membership, consensus about the allocation of power in the group etc.). The important point is that, viewed in this way, organisational culture comprises beliefs and assumptions which, to use Harré's

terminology (Harré, cited in Farr, 1990, p. 49)⁴, are ‘collectively realised’, rather than ‘distributively realised’. In other words, culture is not simply the aggregation of beliefs and assumptions which happen to be similar; rather, the beliefs and assumptions of which culture is comprised are the product of group processes which reflect the group’s attempt to collectively ‘make sense of’ its experience and cope with the fundamental (ie. common to all groups) problems of external adaptation and internal integration.

3. Taken-for-granted beliefs and assumptions. Schein’s conceptual treatment emphasises the taken-for-granted, and often unconscious, nature of cultural beliefs and assumptions. The idea here is that, just as certain behaviours (eg. driving a motor vehicle) can become habitual through repetition, so too can certain ways of thinking about, and interpreting, their experience (certain ‘solutions’ to the problems which they encounter) – to the extent that they are perceived by organisation members to work repeatedly over time – come to be taken-for-granted and drop out of conscious awareness. A nice illustration of the taken-for-granted nature of beliefs and assumptions is provided by Kantrow (1987). He argues that, while most people will be able to say whether or not they think a particular court decision is fair, and while they will probably also be able to say why they think the decision is or is not fair, they are likely to be far less certain in their response if asked to explain how they came to think about the notion of fairness to begin with. In other words, and as Kantrow puts it: “We are not sure how we know what we know” (p. 27).

4. The historical character of beliefs and assumptions. The importance of a time perspective is implied in Schein’s (1985) conceptualisation of the ‘essence’ of organisational culture. As Schein argues, in order for a group to develop a shared view, or a shared set of beliefs, it must have some history in time:

When people with different interpersonal styles, emotional makeups, and cognitive styles interact, they cannot build shared meanings out of the immediate interaction. It takes time and common experience to build a communication system in which all parties have the same sense of the “meaning” of events (pp. 169-170).

A further condition for the development of cultural beliefs, according to Schein, is that the particular view or interpretation of events that the group adopts must be seen, by the

⁴ The reference here is to work carried out within the social psychological tradition of social representations. In a subsequent section, attention is drawn to some of the main similarities between the concept of social representations and the concept of organisational culture.

group, to work repeatedly over time. In this way, cultural beliefs come to be taken-for-granted and unconsciously held.

5. Organisational culture as socially transmitted. According to Schein, socialisation and social communication play an important role both in the evolution of cultural beliefs and assumptions and in their transmission to newcomers to the group. An important idea here is that cultural beliefs and assumptions do not have to be 'reality tested'. Direct experience is not necessary for group members to learn that a particular way of thinking about, and responding to, events is 'correct'; rather, this is something which they can learn through their day-to-day interactions with one another. In his study of the impact of organisational culture on organisational problem-solving, Bate (1984) provides evidence to suggest that some organisations support cultural orientations which produce in their members a sense of futility and powerlessness which is evident in members' thinking "long before they enter the problem-solving arena" (p. 59). He coined the term 'socialized helplessness' to describe this condition which he regarded as similar to Seligman's (1975) notion of 'learned helplessness', but without the latter's dependence upon direct experience.

One implication of the view that organisational culture is socially transmitted is that cultural beliefs and assumptions might be able to be inferred from studying what it is that newcomers to the organisation are taught. However, Schein (1992) advises against this practice, arguing that a focus on "the rules of behaviour taught to newcomers" (p. 13) is likely to reveal surface aspects of the culture only. In order to reveal deeper-level cultural beliefs and assumptions, researchers should instead seek an understanding of *how* newcomers learn and the *process* by which socialisation occurs. The present author's interpretation of this argument is that, among other things, it draws attention to the importance of distinguishing between an organisation's formal socialisation practices and its informal socialisation practices.

6. Cognitive and affective influence of cultural beliefs and assumptions. Included in Schein's (1985) definition of the 'essence' of organisational culture is the idea that cultural beliefs and assumptions exert a powerful influence on the way in which organisation (group) members perceive, think about, and feel in relation to, the situations and problems which they encounter. Stated more simply, culture can be thought of as "a set of filters or lenses" (Schein, 1985, p. 83) through which organisation members interpret their experience.

In emphasising this characteristic of organisational culture, attention is drawn to a second important function of culture. As Schein argues, apart from helping to solve problems of external adaptation and internal integration, culture serves the even more basic function of reducing the anxiety that organisation members experience when they are faced with cognitive uncertainty or overload. In other words, organisation members develop common conceptual categories – a common framework within which to interpret their experience – because this provides them with a way of sorting out what is, and what is not, important from the mass of stimuli which they encounter. Of course, the tendency for organisation members, when faced with uncertainty, to rely on what they have come to regard as ‘conventional wisdom’ (Kantrow, 1987), rather than on their more objective judgement, can have disastrous consequences for organisations. For example, in his account of how the Japanese outperformed their American counterparts in the automotive industry, Halberstam (1986) argues that, because of their belief in their inherent superiority – a belief which had been reinforced over many years of success in the market place – American automotive executives failed to take seriously the threat of the 1973 oil crisis and its implications for their continued manufacture of fuel-inefficient vehicles. He says of these executives:

Powerful, successful, and conventional, typical of the corporate class, they believed that tomorrow would be like today because it has always been like today and because they wanted it to be like today. In their view, if the price of oil went up, it would go up slowly over many decades. They had controlled the oil world – and thus the price of energy – in the past. They would control that world and the price of energy in the future (p. 8).

Although the illustration above suggests that cultural beliefs and assumptions have behavioural, as well as cognitive and affective consequences, Schein (1985) warns against making inferences about deeper-level culture solely on the basis of an analysis of overt behaviour. Behaviour, according to Schein, is likely to reflect the combined influence of cultural predisposition and the situational contingencies which arise from the external environment at any given time. Thus, one can never be certain that some observed regularity in organisation member behaviour is the product of cultural (ie. shared) learning; it may just as well be the result of individual learning, that is, learning which is based on separate, but in this case similar, individual experience and which manifests itself in a common response to a particular situational stimulus arising from the environment (Schein, 1992). It is for this reason that Schein’s definition of the

'essence' of organisational culture does not include an emphasis on the behavioural influence of cultural beliefs and assumptions.

1.1.3 An alternative perspective

While Schein's (1985) conceptualisation of the 'essence' of organisational culture is not dissimilar from treatments of the concept by other researchers – for example, many culture analysts view culture as a shared phenomenon, which is implicit in the minds of organisation members and which has a strong foundation in the organisation's history (see, for example, Louis, 1983; Pettigrew, 1990; Trice & Beyer, 1993; and Wilkins, 1983) – agreement about the core characteristics of culture, as described by Schein, is by no means universal. Perhaps the most significant challenge to Schein's treatment of organisational culture can be found in the work of Martin and Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992). These researchers describe three distinct perspectives on, or paradigms for thinking about, organisational culture: the *integration* perspective; the *differentiation* perspective; and the *fragmentation* perspective. These perspectives are differentiated in terms of their treatment of (i) the issue of consensus (specifically, whether or not cultural beliefs and values must be shown to be widely shared among organisation members); (ii) the issue of consistency (whether or not cultural phenomena within a given organisation must be shown to be consistent with one another); and (iii) the role of ambiguity (whether ambiguity and dissensus should be excluded from, or embraced, in definitions of organisational culture).

From an integration perspective, organisational culture is viewed very much as a unified phenomenon. Not only is there an emphasis on the organisation-wide sharing of beliefs and assumptions (the idea that culture captures something about the organisation as a whole), but it is also assumed that the elements which make up culture (including, for example, basic assumptions, values, behavioural norms, stories, rituals etc.) are consistent with, and hence reinforce, one another. A third defining characteristic of the integration perspective is that it denies ambiguity. From this perspective, culture is that which is clear; indeed, as Schein (1985) has suggested, culture helps to reduce the anxiety that organisation members feel when they are confronted with ambiguity and uncertainty.

The point should be made that, while Schein is never explicitly classified as an integrationist by either Martin and Meyerson (1988) or Martin (1992), it is clear from the number of citations to Schein which appear in their discussions of the integration

perspective that the authors consider his treatment of organisational culture to be more closely aligned with this perspective than with either the differentiation perspective or the fragmentation perspective. It is clear also that the authors regard the integration perspective as a particularly limiting one. They point to the naivety of the expectation that organisational contexts, in which conflicts of interest are endemic, should be characterised by consistency and consensus. Moreover, they are critical of research carried out from this perspective on the grounds that the empirical support for claims of consistency and organisation-wide consensus is often very weak. They argue that this can, in part, be attributed to problems with selective sampling (specifically, an over-reliance on 'high-ranking informants') and insufficient time spent by researchers in the research setting. And finally, the integration perspective is criticised on the grounds that it overstates the role of leadership. From this perspective, leaders are regarded as highly influential in terms of both shaping organisational culture and changing it (Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Martin, 1992).

In contrast with the integration perspective, the differentiation perspective does not require the demonstration of organisation-wide consensus. Rather, it views consensus as most likely to occur within the boundaries of organisational subcultures. These subcultures may originate in the organisation's structure (and be associated, for example, with departmentalisation, differences in seniority etc.) or they may reflect differences among organisation members which are imported from outside of the organisation, such as differences in gender, occupation, or class (Dunford, 1991). Importantly, whereas the integration perspective emphasises harmony, the differentiation perspective acknowledges that the relationships between organisational subcultures may be characterised by conflict. Thus, from this perspective, ambiguity is not denied but rather, to the extent that it does exist, it is likely to be found in the interstices between subcultures. The authors talk about the 'channelling of ambiguity' and draw an analogy between this process and the way in which "swift currents create channels around islands" (Martin and Meyerson, 1988, p. 112).

There are two other defining characteristics of the differentiation perspective. Firstly, there is no requirement, as there is in the integration perspective, for consistency among the elements of culture. This perspective allows for the possibility that cultural manifestations, even within subcultural boundaries, may be inconsistent with one another (so that, for example, managers could be found to say one thing, and do

another)⁵. Secondly, the differentiation perspective is less 'leader-centred' than the integration perspective in that it recognises the critical role that influences other than leadership (eg. national, industrial, and occupational influences) can play in shaping and changing culture (Martin & Meyerson, 1988; Martin, 1992).

The third, and most radical, of the perspectives described by Martin and Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992), is the fragmentation perspective. As the authors note, this perspective remains virtually unexplored by organisational culture researchers. In contrast with the two previous perspectives – the first emphasising the monolithic nature of culture and the second viewing culture as essentially pluralistic and comprising many different subcultures – the fragmentation perspective offers *no* level of analysis at which a shared and integrated (ie. consistent) set of cultural elements can be identified. Rather, it acknowledges the possibility that cultures can evolve around ambiguity, so that the only common theme to emerge from an analysis of culture would be an awareness of this ambiguity. From this perspective, ambiguity is regarded as the 'essence' of culture, the 'way things are' and not, as in the previous two views, a temporary state which motivates organisation members to change in ways which will reduce the ambiguity. This cultural perspective accepts ambiguity as an inevitable part of organisational life, so that there are some viewpoints which organisation members share, others which they disagree on, and still others about which they are largely ignorant or to which they are largely indifferent. In other words, this perspective views consensus, dissensus, and confusion as coexisting (and not in any kind of organised fashion, but rather in a fluid or fluctuating state) and this, of course, makes it difficult to delineate stable cultural or subcultural boundaries.

The authors use the metaphor of a web to describe culture viewed from a fragmentation perspective. Individuals are represented by nodes in the web and, for any given individual, the pattern of connections that (s)he has with surrounding nodes (ie. with other individuals) will fluctuate and change depending upon the salience, for that individual, of the issues which (s)he encounters. According to the authors, the fragmentation perspective is particularly relevant for understanding the cultures of new and/or unusually innovative organisations since, in such organisations, complexities and lack of clarity are likely to be the rule rather than the exception. The point is also made

⁵ While inconsistencies of this kind could arguably lead to the experience of uncertainty and ambiguity, it is not clear how the authors reconcile this view with their argument that, from a differentiation perspective, ambiguity resides outside of, and not within, subcultural boundaries.

that, in some occupational subcultures (eg. academic research), acceptance of ambiguity may be essential for the survival of the subculture.

As Martin and Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992) suggest, the three cultural perspectives which they describe have important implications for how one should go about studying culture in organisations. Working from an integration perspective, the researcher would focus only on those manifestations of culture that are consistent with one another. Moreover, from this perspective, consensus would be sought at the level of the organisation as a whole. Working from a differentiation perspective, the researcher would be alert to cultural differences that exist between organisational subgroups. Since the unit of analysis in this instance is much smaller, the demonstration of consensus among the members of organisational subgroups is an acceptable (indeed expected) outcome of research carried out from this perspective. Finally, working from a fragmentation perspective, the researcher would focus on inconsistencies, contradictions, and paradoxes that appear in cultural manifestations. Unlike the integrationist, who would be likely to regard a lack of consensus as evidence of a weak culture, or perhaps even no culture at all, the researcher working from a fragmentation perspective would interpret a lack of consensus as evidence of a culture that was highly supportive of ambiguity.

There is no doubt that the work of Martin and Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992) makes an important contribution to our understanding of some of the complexities involved in the utilisation of the concept of organisational culture. In particular, it draws attention to the critical role of the researcher's perspective in influencing the outcome of any culture analysis and it highlights the interesting possibility – as yet untested – that, rather than rely on single-perspective approaches, organisational culture research could benefit considerably from the adoption of a multiple-perspective approach. It is also the case, as Dunford (1991) notes, that the delineation of alternatives to the more popularist integration perspective⁶ brings into sharper focus the limitations of the “at times almost crass assimilation of the concept into mainstream organisational discourse” (p. 7). Despite its clear contribution, however, this work is not without its flaws. For example, in the present author's opinion, Martin and

⁶ Dunford (1991) observes that the integration perspective “lends itself to shorthand descriptions of culture, for example, as ‘market-driven’ or ‘entrepreneurial’” (p.4). In this sense, this perspective can be seen to be best represented by popularist treatments of culture such as those which can be found in the work of Deal and Kennedy (1982), Hickman and Silva (1984) and Peters and Waterman (1982).

Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992) seriously misrepresent the work of Schein in their implied classification of him as an integrationist. Contrary to the integration perspective, Schein does not regard organisational culture as a monolithic phenomenon. Instead, he acknowledges that a single organisation (particularly if it is a large organisation) may support numerous subcultures and that these subcultures may be quite independent of, and even conflict with, one another (see Schein, 1985, 1990, 1992). Furthermore, there is no requirement in Schein's treatment of organisational culture that the elements which make up culture should be consistent with, and reinforce, one another. On the contrary, Schein (1985, 1990, 1992) draws attention to the inconsistencies that often exist between the surface-level manifestations of organisational culture and its deeper-level elements, and he warns against making inferences about the latter from observations of the former.

The point can also be made that it is perhaps somewhat of an oversimplification to regard Schein's treatment of organisational culture as one which denies, or has no place for, ambiguity. While it is true that Schein emphasises the anxiety reduction function of organisational culture (culture is that which creates clarity), this does not preclude the possibility that a culture may be characterised by disharmony and conflict. In fact, one of the cases which Schein (1985) uses to illustrate his definition of the concept describes just such a culture. In the organisation in question, it was found that member attitudes (for example, about the value of committees and meetings) were often highly ambivalent and that their behaviour was characterised by high levels of conflict, interpersonal confrontation, and argumentativeness. The important point made by Schein is that, at a more basic level (ie. at the level of basic beliefs and assumptions), this particular way of thinking and operating was regarded as entirely legitimate by group members, who saw it as the means by which to achieve more effective problem-solving and decision-making.

As this case illustrates, a critical issue for Schein concerns the level of analysis, that is, how deep one's analysis of the culture is. Schein's argument – and this is a view which is shared by other scholars in the area (see, for example, Trice and Beyer, 1993) – is that one cannot make inferences about *any* culture (whether it is one which supports ambiguity and conflict or one which is characterised by harmony and a lack of conflict) unless one can demonstrate that, at some level, organisation (group) members hold a consistent and consensual view of their world. Of course, the difficulty is how to 'push'

to the level at which consensus exists, when many of the manifestations of culture that one encounters are seemingly diverse and inconsistent. While the ambiguity perspective proposed by Martin and Meyerson (1988) and Martin (1992) rejects this requirement for at least “some core of consensus” (Trice & Beyer, 1993, p. 15), arguing instead that ambiguity, fragmentation, and confusion may describe the very ‘essence’ of culture, their empirical demonstration of this view is far from convincing. In fact, the data which are presented in support of all three perspectives (these take the form of verbatim comments by interviewees) give little indication that the researchers have attempted to go beyond a superficial level of analysis and to demonstrate the existence of consensus, or dissensus, at a deeper level (that is, at the level of organisation members’ basic beliefs and assumptions). A related point is that, since the ambiguity perspective does not require the demonstration of consensus at *any* level (whether surface or deep), it can be illustrated, and claims can be made about its validity, on the basis of very little data. In other words, expressions of uncertainty and confusion by a minority of organisation (group) members only would appear to suffice⁷. A cynical response to this – particularly in view of the authors’ criticism of integrationists on the grounds that they fail to convincingly demonstrate claims about consensus – is that the ambiguity perspective is one which, methodologically at least, lets the researcher ‘off the hook’ rather easily.

1.2 Organisational and occupational subcultures

Most serious scholars of organisational culture reject the idea that any given organisation can adequately be described in terms of a single unified or homogeneous culture, and argue instead that, in reality, organisations (in particular, large organisations) are likely to support numerous distinctive subcultures (see, for example, Louis, 1985; Morgan, 1986; Ott, 1989; Pettigrew, 1990; Schein, 1985; and Trice & Beyer, 1993). It is worth noting that, in his treatment of the concept, Schein (1985) suggests that the term ‘culture’ can legitimately be applied to “any size of social unit

⁷ For example, in her book-length account of this research, Martin (1992) illustrates the ambiguity perspective by describing the confusion and uncertainty that organisation members reported feeling in relation to three major issues or ‘content themes’: egalitarianism, innovation, and concern for employee well-being. In the case of ‘innovation’, the views of three interviewees only are represented. To put this in context, the reader is informed at the beginning of the book that the research was carried out in the headquarters of a Fortune 500 company employing more than 80,000 people worldwide. Moreover, while the number of participants in the study is never specified, the reader is also told that the sample comprised a “wide range of employees from various functional areas, hierarchical levels, and demographic groups” (Martin, 1992, p.23).

that has had the opportunity to learn and stabilize its view of itself and the environment around it" (p. 8). Thus, according to Schein, one can meaningfully talk about culture at the level of entire civilisations, countries, ethnic groups, occupations or professions, organisations, and organisational subunits.

Possibly one of the most comprehensive treatments of the subject of organisational subcultures is that provided by Trice and Beyer (1993) in their book *The Cultures of Work Organizations*. These authors argue that organisations are particularly susceptible to the development of subcultures because they are designed in such a way as to facilitate the differential interaction of organisation members with one another. For example, factors such as the size of an organisation, its geographical dispersion, the nature and extent of its departmentalisation, the hierarchies of authority which it supports, and the occupational mix and demographic characteristics of its workers will all contribute to the likelihood that some organisation members will engage in interactions with one another more frequently than they do with other organisation members. A nice empirical illustration of the importance of differential interaction for the development of organisational subcultures is provided by Rentsch (1990) in her study of an accounting firm. Rentsch showed that interaction groups that were meaningful to members of the firm – these were variously formed on the basis of friendship ('friendship interactions'), the need to complete work ('workflow interactions'), and the need to clarify what was happening in the firm and why ('reality-testing interactions') – constituted an appropriate level of analysis for the delineation of subcultures (sites of collectively held meanings) within the firm.

Apart from differential interaction, Trice and Beyer (1993) identify two other conditions which will facilitate the development of organisational subcultures. The first of these, which has been shown to be necessary for the development of culture more generally (see Section 1.2.2 above), is shared experience. This is simply the idea that, in order to develop a shared view of their world, it is necessary for organisation (group) members to have shared a significant number of important experiences which require them to confront, and deal with, what Schein (1985) refers to as problems of external adaptation and internal integration. One practical implication of this emphasis on the need for shared experience is, as Trice and Beyer (1993) note, that the development of subcultures is more likely among organisation members who work in close proximity with one another and/or who perform interdependent tasks than it is among organisation

members whose work situations provide only limited opportunity for interaction. The second condition identified by Trice and Beyer concerns the personal characteristics of group members. The authors suggest that the development of subcultures will be facilitated in groups whose members share the kinds of personal characteristics – for example, age, ethnicity, occupational training, education, and social class – that tend to be associated with broader differences in culture. The idea here is that members who are similar with respect to such characteristics are able to find common ground with one another without having to compromise their personal beliefs and values to any great extent.

In their treatment of organisational subcultures, Trice and Beyer draw an important distinction between subcultures that are specific to an organisation, in the sense of being encompassed within its boundaries, and subcultures that transcend organisational boundaries. The former have their origins in both the formal and informal groups which the organisation supports. Examples of formal groups (that is, groups designated by management for the purpose of accomplishing organisational goals) which the authors suggest are likely to provide fertile ground for the development of subcultures include task groups (reflecting job design characteristics), groups created by departmentalisation and the organisation's hierarchy of authority, and groups which have their basis in line and staff distinctions. Examples of informal groups (that is, groups which arise spontaneously, without direction from those in authority) include friendship groups (which engage members' personal interests and satisfy their need for social intimacy) and cliques and coalitions (the formation of which are usually politically motivated).

As Trice and Beyer (1993) note, in contrast with organisation-specific subcultures which have their origins in the organisation, subcultures which transcend organisational boundaries originate in the environment and are imported into the organisation. These subcultures are further differentiated from organisation-specific subcultures on the grounds that they draw their wider membership from the environment and tend to derive their main support from resources and ideologies that are part of that environment (rather than being unique to the particular organisation). The authors provide examples of a number of different types of imported subcultures including occupational subcultures, managerial subcultures, and subcultures formed on the basis of fields of knowledge (eg. scientific specialties and management-related fields of inquiry) and demographic groupings (eg. age, gender, ethnicity, and social class). Given that

occupational subcultures are of some interest in the context of the present research, and given Trice and Beyer's view that occupational subcultures constitute the "most highly organized, distinctive, and pervasive sources of subcultures in work organisations" (1993, p. 178)⁸, it is appropriate at this point to draw attention to some of the additional characteristics which, according to the authors, differentiate occupational subcultures from subcultures which are specific to the organisation.

As Trice and Beyer suggest, an important distinguishing characteristic of occupational subcultures is that their influence can be felt even in the absence of ongoing face-to-face interaction among members. In other words, within a given organisation, the members of a particular occupational subculture can still be influenced by their subculture even though they may be relatively few in number and relatively isolated from their colleagues. The authors attribute the potency of occupational subcultures in this regard to the nature of members' socialisation into occupations. In many occupations (the authors cite as notable examples, medicine, law, and accounting), members receive intensive and lengthy socialisation into the beliefs, values, norms, and practices which give the occupation its distinctive character. The point is also made that, in modern societies, occupation often constitutes an important source of personal identity and social status for the individual – one only has to observe how common it is for individuals, when they first meet, to exchange information about their respective occupations. A third factor which the authors suggest contributes to the potency of occupational subcultures is that, while members may have little contact with one another in the workplace, their contact outside of work can be considerable. This can take the form of membership with occupational or professional associations, or involvement in what can be quite extensive social networks. With respect to the latter, the authors note the tendency for the members of some occupations to "spend leisure time together, live near one another, link their families through marriage, and encourage their children to follow the same occupation" (p. 184). It is by virtue of extramural linkages such as these that the members of occupational subcultures are able to maintain their identities and ideologies.

⁸ A further indication of the primacy accorded to occupational subcultures by the authors is that, in *The Cultures of Work Organizations*, they devote an entire chapter to the subject. Moreover, they inform the reader that, in preparing this chapter, they drew heavily on Trice's book-length treatment of the subject – *Occupational Cultures in the Workplace* – which was published later in the same year.

Another distinguishing characteristic of occupational subcultures – apart from their ability to influence members' behaviour 'from a distance' as it were – is that, because they develop around work-related issues, they are likely to compete with organisation-specific subcultures and, perhaps more importantly, with management, for control over members' work-related thinking and behaviour. According to Trice and Beyer, a critical factor influencing the ability of occupations to constrain managerial power and authority is that management typically does not provide the training that members of occupations need in order to perform their work. As a result, management has no direct control over the work procedures that workers learn, nor over the values and ethical principles with which they are likely to be inculcated in the course of their training.

Finally, it is worth drawing attention to the finding that, although conflicts may arise between occupational and organisation-specific subcultures and between occupational subcultures and management, it is not the case that membership with an occupational subculture necessarily dilutes an individual's allegiance to his/her employing organisation. In fact, as Trice and Beyer note, there is good evidence in the research literature to suggest that individuals can simultaneously be committed to their occupations or professions and their employing organisation. Reference is made to a study by Ritzer and Trice (1969) which found a positive relationship between the organisational and occupational commitments of personnel managers, and also to a study by Fukami and Larson (1984), which found a positive relationship between union and organisational commitments among unionised workers in both a newspaper and a pharmaceutical company. Research in this area also suggests that, where competing allegiances are reported, these tend to be a function of a more general climate of conflict in the organisation rather than an indication that individuals are somehow inherently incapable of dual loyalties.

In the discussion thus far, consideration has been given to some of the main factors thought to influence the development of subcultures in work organisations and also to some of the major differences which have been identified between occupational and organisation-specific subcultures. The final topic to be addressed in this section – and this is a topic which receives some attention in most commentaries on organisational subcultures – concerns the nature of the relationships between an organisation's various subcultures and the overall organisational culture within which they are embedded. An important, and frequently acknowledged, contribution in this regard is Martin and

Siehl's (1983) classification of subcultures into three distinct types: enhancing subcultures, orthogonal subcultures, and countercultures. Each of these types is described briefly below.

According to Martin and Siehl, an *enhancing* subculture would exist in an organisational group or enclave in which the core beliefs and values of the dominant organisational culture were adhered to more intensely than they were in the rest of the organisation. One might expect such a subculture to develop among an organisation's senior management, for example, or among an organisation's longest serving employees. An *orthogonal* subculture is one in which members adhere to the core beliefs and values of the dominant culture while simultaneously subscribing to a separate and unconflicting set of beliefs and values which are particular to themselves. As the authors suggest, an organisation's functional departments are likely sites for the development of orthogonal subcultures. Employees working in a research and development department, for example, are likely to endorse the values of their organisation's dominant culture while at the same time maintaining a commitment to the importance of innovation, creativity, and experimentation – values which are specific to their occupational identity. Finally, a *counterculture* is a subculture in which members' beliefs and values represent a direct challenge to the core beliefs and values of the dominant culture. On the basis of their case study analysis of the development of a counterculture in one division of General Motors, the authors provide some interesting insights into this type of subculture. They argue, for example, that if a counterculture is to survive within the context of a dominant culture, then the 'deviance' which it supports must be "carefully calibrated to remain within, but test the limits of, the dominant culture's latitude of acceptance" (p. 62). The point is also made that countercultures can serve the useful functions of "articulating the boundaries between appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and providing a safe haven for the development of innovative ideas" (p. 63).

An interesting extension of Martin and Siehl's classification of subcultures is suggested by Bloor and Dawson (1992). In their case study analysis of professional culture in an Australian home care service for the elderly, these researchers found evidence for each of the subcultural types described by Martin and Siehl, in addition to identifying two further subcultural groupings: a deferential subculture and a dissenting subculture. While a *deferential* subculture is similar to an enhancing subculture in that

it is compatible with the organisation's dominant culture, the members of a deferential subculture (in this case, they were paramedical aides) defer to, rather than strongly endorse, the beliefs and values of the dominant culture. A *dissenting* subculture is one in which, rather than rejecting the core values of the dominant culture (as in a counterculture), members support these values, but believe that the way to realise them is through alternative methods and work practices. The authors show how, compared with their counterparts in the medical profession (around which the organisation's dominant culture was formed), social workers believed that client self-determination was an important means by which the organisation's core values of professionalism and client rehabilitation could be realised.

While the above treatments of organisational subcultures assume that, in most organisations, there will be an identifiable overall culture (in addition to a number of subcultures), this of course may not be the case. In their discussion of the differentiation perspective, Meyerson and Martin (1986) cite the work of Gregory (1983) as being representative of this perspective at its most extreme. Gregory argues that organisations which are large, internally differentiated, subject to rapid change, and which command only part-time commitment from their members, are essentially microcosms of the complex society of which they are a part. They are multicultural and they reflect and amalgamate many of the characteristics of their surrounding cultures, including national, occupational, and ethnic cultures. From this perspective, the organisation is viewed simply as "an arbitrary boundary around a collection of subcultures" (Meyerson & Martin, 1986, p. 8). In the end, the question of whether or not an organisation supports an overall organisational culture is one which, as Schein (1992) suggests, can only be handled empirically. In other words, in order to make claims about an overall organisational culture, one must be able to show that there are certain beliefs and assumptions which are common across all organisational units and which can be attributed to members' shared experiences within the organisation.

1.3 Typologies of organisational cultures and their elements

An important assumption underlying any attempt to describe organisational cultures in terms of a finite number of types, or to classify the elements of cultures (whether basic assumptions and beliefs, values, norms etc.) in terms of generic categories, is that *all* organisational cultures hold certain properties or features in common. While there are many organisational culture scholars who subscribe to this view – as indicated by the

proliferation of such typologies and classifications in the literature – there are others (see, for example, Alvesson, 1993; Barley, 1983; Gregory, 1983; Van Maanen, 1973) who argue that organisational cultures and their elements are so unique and context-specific that it would be quite wrong to try to generalise the findings of research conducted in one organisational setting to any other organisational setting.

As Trice and Beyer (1993) note, the controversy over whether or not cultures are composed of universal, as opposed to distinctive, properties⁹ can be broadly represented by the distinction which has been drawn between an *etic* and an *emic* orientation toward research. Research which emphasises an etic orientation views the organisation from outside. The researcher adopts an independent and objective stance in relation to the subjects and setting of the research and attempts to understand the organisation through the application of existing typologies and the exploration of previously developed concepts. Typically, this research is conducted using quantitative methods such as questionnaires and structured interviews. In contrast, research which emphasises an emic orientation views the organisation from within. The researcher becomes immersed in the research setting and, through the use of qualitative methods such as observation and unstructured interviewing, seeks an understanding of the setting from the perspective of ‘insiders’. The researcher tries hard not to impose his/her own categories of meaning onto the research setting, seeking instead to bring to the surface categories of meaning that have relevance for the organisation members themselves (Jones, 1988; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Trice & Beyer, 1993).

While the etic/emic distinction described above is a useful one, it would be an oversimplification to suggest that the development and application of typologies of organisational cultures, or classification schemes for categorising the elements of culture, implies an *exclusively* etic orientation. For example, many of the typologies and classifications which have been advanced in this area reflect an emic orientation in the sense that they were either devised using qualitative methods (see, for example, Bate, 1984), or suggested by the researcher on the basis of his/her extensive (qualitative) experience – often as a consultant – of work organisations and their cultures (see, for example, Deal & Kennedy, 1982). Some of these typologies and classifications further reflect an emic orientation in the sense that, once accepted or applied, they are intended

⁹ This controversy has a long history in anthropological inquiry and has subsequently also polarised opinion among organisational cultures scholars.

simply to provide a framework within which the researcher is able to proceed with a qualitative study of the organisation's culture (see, for example, Schein, 1985).

In this section, three organisational culture classification schemes – namely, those advanced by Schein (1985), Bate (1984), and Harrison (1972) – are reviewed. The point should be made that this review does not seek to represent the enormous diversity and lack of consensus that characterises attempts to classify organisational cultures (and their elements). On the contrary, the above three schemes were selected for inclusion in this review because (i) they are (in the present author's opinion) good examples of some of the more sophisticated work that has been done in this area; (ii) they focus on culture at a deeper level and can, therefore, be compared in terms of the major themes which they address; and (iii) they are illustrative of different approaches to the blending of the etic and emic orientations described above.

Schein's (1985) typology of basic assumptions

The typology proposed by Schein (1985) focuses on basic assumptions (the 'essence' of organisational culture) and groups these into five universal themes or broad categories. While this typology had its origins in Kluckhohn and Stodtbeck's (1961) massive comparative study of community cultures in the southwestern United States¹⁰ (a point which Schein himself acknowledges), Schein drew on his own experience (as an organisational consultant) to modify and reconceptualise the dimensions suggested by this earlier anthropological work in order to make them more relevant for the analysis of cultural assumptions in organisational settings. Schein's typology is broader than most in the sense that the five categories which it includes are intended to represent the entire range of basic assumptions which might be supported by any organisation's culture. Furthermore, while the universality of the five categories is emphasised, organisational cultures are expected to differ (and manifest their uniqueness) in terms of the particular profile of assumptions which they support with respect to each of these categories. Schein's five categories are described briefly as follows:

1. Humanity's relationship to nature. Schein (1985) argues that in all organisations, as in all societies, cultural assumptions will evolve which reflect the way in which the organisation, or group, views its relationship to the environment. Organisations will

¹⁰ Trice and Beyer (1993) question the 'universality' of the themes identified in this research on the grounds that the population studied was a "rather unusual and localised" one (p.41). It consisted of a number of very different kinds of social units – for example, an off-reservation settlement of Navaho Indians, an on-reservation community of Pueblo Indians, and a village of Mormon emigrants – all of which were located within a relatively small geographic area.

differ in the extent to which they assume that (i) they are capable of dominating and changing the environment; (ii) they must coexist in, and harmonise with, the environment; and (iii) they must subjugate themselves to the environment and be controlled by it. As Schein suggests, assumptions in this category can, in a sense, be seen as the organisational counterpart of what Rotter (1966) described for the individual as 'locus of control'. The point is also made that assumptions in this area form the basis of an organisation's overall strategic orientation.

2. The nature of reality and truth. Assumptions in this category underlie the organisation's (group's) approach to decision making. These assumptions become particularly important when decisions lie in the domain of 'social', as opposed to 'physical' reality, since such decisions can not be verified through objective criteria but require some kind of social judgement to establish their validity. Organisations (groups) can differ substantially in their assumptions about what constitutes 'truth' and how decisions should be arrived at. For example, in some organisations, 'truth' is arrived at by deferring to tradition (eg. what worked in the past) or the authority of the organisation's formal leadership. In other organisations, formal rules and procedures are seen as providing the appropriate basis for decision-making. In still other organisations, 'truth' is assumed to be that which survives conflict and debate. And finally, there are organisations in which the pragmatic criterion of 'if it works' is used to establish 'truth'.

Assumptions about time and space are also included in this category. With respect to the former, organisations (groups) are likely to differ in terms of (i) their basic orientation to time – whether past, present, or future; (ii) whether or not time is viewed as monochronic (ie. linear, such that only one thing can be done at a time) or polychronic (ie. as a space in which several things can be done simultaneously); and (iii) their assumptions about what constitutes an appropriate unit of time in relation to given tasks (eg. Should planning be conducted on a yearly, monthly, daily, or hourly basis?). Assumptions about space will develop in relation to the organisation's physical environment (ie. What is the meaning of the physical arrangement of objects in the organisation?), as well as in relation to its social environment (ie. How should organisation members orient themselves spatially in relation to one another?). The physical layout of an organisation (eg. whether open space or separate offices), the way in which space is used and allocated (eg. whether the best views and locations are reserved for high status personnel), and the prevailing norms of 'distance' (including,

for example, norms about the appropriate distance for formal and informal status relationships), will all provide clues as to the organisation's (group's) assumptions about space.

3. The nature of human nature. At the organisational level, assumptions in this category are concerned with the way in which workers and managers are viewed. As Schein suggests, McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions offers a useful framework for the analysis of assumptions in this category. For example, in some organisations (groups), individuals may be regarded as being fundamentally lazy, lacking in ambition and self-direction, and motivated primarily by economic self-interest (Theory X), whereas in other organisations individuals may be viewed as self-directing, seeking responsibility, and motivated by higher-order esteem and self-actualisation needs (Theory Y). Assumptions in this category will be reflected in the organisation's incentive and control systems, as well as in its criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion and performance appraisal.

4. The nature of human activity. Assumptions in this category – essentially, assumptions about how to act – are closely related to Category 1 assumptions (concerned with 'Humanity's relationship to nature'). Three different orientations to action are described: (i) a proactive or 'doing' orientation (reflected in the attitude that 'If there is a problem, do something about it'); (ii) a 'being' orientation (reflected in a more fatalistic approach to work life and the idea that, since one cannot change things, one should accept and enjoy what one has); and (iii) a 'being-in-becoming' orientation (in which there is an emphasis on self-development and self-actualisation through discipline, denial, and control)¹¹. Also included in this category are assumptions about the importance of work activity relative to other activities. For example, do organisation (group) members see work as primary, or do they see it as less important than the family? Is the promotion of self-interest regarded as more important than success in achieving an integrated lifestyle?

5. The nature of human relationships. As Schein (1985) notes, at the core of every culture will be assumptions about how the members of the group should relate to one another in order to ensure the optimal functioning of the group (both in a psychological sense and in terms of group productivity). There are many dimensions along which

¹¹ Schein (1992) suggests that this orientation to action can be observed in organisations in which there is an emphasis on hierarchy, rules, and clearly defined roles, and in which the expression of emotion is discouraged.

organisations (groups) can differ with respect to their assumptions in this category. For example, organisations may differ in the degree to which they foster individualism and competition among members, as opposed to cooperation and collaboration. Differences may also exist with respect to the degree of participation considered appropriate. Some organisations are highly autocratic in terms of their communication and leadership styles, some are paternalistic, and others are democratic. With respect to role relationships, differences may be detected in the degree of emotionality that is encouraged, the extent to which individuals are given special treatment based on their personal circumstances (as opposed to being treated on the basis of universalistic criteria), and the extent to which individuals get ahead on the basis of 'who they know', rather than 'what they know'.

It is important to note that Schein's categories are not intended to represent discrete categories. Rather, they should be seen as overlapping and interlocking, and dealing with basic assumptions that are often mutually reinforcing and highly interdependent (Brown, 1995). For example, and as suggested above, the degree of emotionality which an organisation supports will reflect its basic assumptions about how to act (Category 4), as well as its basic assumptions about how to relate (Category 5). A related issue concerns Schein's conceptualisation of 'strong' cultures as those in which basic assumptions (across all five categories) can be shown to be compatible and consistent with one another. The absence of a coherent pattern in an organisation's basic assumptions would, according to Schein, constitute evidence that one was dealing with an absence of culture or an as yet unformed culture, or alternatively, that the organisation supported several conflicting subcultures.

Schein's typology has been criticised by Trice and Beyer (1993) on the grounds that the assumptions with which it deals are too general and that, as such, they fail to capture the everyday concerns and preoccupations of organisation members. While it is true that some of the anthropological dimensions on which Schein draws appear to be less readily translatable into organisational contexts than others¹², it is this author's view that the generality of Schein's assumptions, rather than being a limitation of his typology, actually constitutes one of its main strengths. The typology is so broad as to make possible the framing of almost any study of organisational culture, regardless of the

¹² One example which comes to mind is the 'being-in-becoming' orientation which Schein discusses in relation to his Category 4 assumptions ('The nature of human activity'). Even here, however, the issue may be more one of labelling than of relevance.

particular content themes (or issues) which the study is seeking to address. Most other typologies of organisations (and organisational culture) simply do not offer this kind of scope. They tend to deal with assumptions which, as Schein notes and as the following review of a number of other typologies demonstrates, can be subsumed under one, or a subset, of the categories included in Schein's typology¹³.

A further advantage of Schein's approach is that, as suggested above, it blends aspects of both an etic and an emic orientation. His approach is etic in the sense that he promotes a view of all organisational cultures as developing around the same set of basic assumptions or common themes, and in the sense that the categories which he proposes were, to a very great extent, developed elsewhere (ie. through research carried out in community, as opposed to organisational, cultures). His approach is emic in the sense that he is a firm advocate of the use of qualitative methods – prolonged exposure to the research setting and subjects, unstructured and semi-structured interviewing, contact with informants etc. – for inferring an organisation's assumptions with respect to these categories. As Trice and Beyer (1993) have argued, the value of a middle-ground approach, such as this, is that it provides a framework for analysing and comparing cultures (and given the pervasiveness of cultural beliefs and assumptions, there are clear advantages in making use of some kind of analytical framework), while at the same time offering a deeper level understanding of what makes a given culture unique.

Bate's (1984) typology of cultural orientations

Bate's typology, like Schein's, is not a classification of broader cultural types, but rather a classification of the substance of organisational culture (defined, in this case, as the shared meanings of organisation members). This typology had its origins in action research which the author conducted in three large manufacturing firms in the United Kingdom – a footwear company, a chemicals company, and a dairy products company. The research was broadly focussed in the area of organisational change and development, and used qualitative methods – including observation (eg. of company meetings), interviewing, and analysis of formal company documents and other written communications – to identify cultural impediments to change in the participating organisations. On the basis of a content analysis of the data collected (which, according

¹³ Schein observes that organisation theorists have directed most of their attention to assumptions pertaining to his Category 5 ('The nature of human relationships') and that this area has "spawned the most varied typologies of organizational phenomena" (Schein, 1985, p.104).

to Bate, included almost 400 hours of tape-recorded interviews and almost 200 hours of tape-recorded meetings), Bate identified six cultural orientations, or cultural traits, which he argued constituted severe impediments to effective organisational change and problem-solving. Each of these orientations is described below.

1. Unemotionality. This orientation reflects the extent to which open displays of feeling and emotion are discouraged in the organisation. When unemotionality is high, organisation members rarely express their real views, problems tend to be internalised or dealt with 'at arm's length', interpersonal trust is low, and conflict is avoided.

2. Depersonalisation. This refers to the extent to which problems are attributed to non-human factors (eg. outdated machinery, production pressures, or design difficulties) or to factors outside of the organisation's control (eg. the economy, government regulations, or market competition). The underlying assumption here is that to ascribe responsibility for things that go wrong to a single individual, or to a group of individuals (each of whom is named), is unkind, unprofessional, and is likely to be destructive rather than constructive. The human factor contributing to an organisation's difficulties is never specified, but rather it is depersonalised into 'management', 'Head Office', 'the unions', or some other group, depending upon one's standpoint. When depersonalisation is high, this kind of avoidance behaviour is widely practised and accepted and, as a result, the organisation fails to diagnose and deal directly with its problems.

3. Subordination. Integral to Bate's definition of this orientation is the idea that subordinates should not challenge those in authority. It is also not legitimate for subordinates to initiate change or take responsibility for solving problems, even if the problems are of their own making. Problem-solving and decision-making are primarily management responsibilities and, if subordinates are unhappy with the outcomes of these processes, they will simply "suffer in silence, or grumble quietly amongst themselves" (Bate, 1984, p. 54). This behaviour has the effect of reinforcing more directive styles of management and, in the absence of any significant input from subordinates, managers remain unaware of the existence of problems and, therefore, do nothing to search for solutions.

4. Conservatism. This orientation reflects the extent to which organisation members believe that things will never change, along with an associated scepticism that, if change were to occur, it would make things worse rather than better. When

conservatism is high, problem-solving will be approached in a half-hearted way, with little more than a superficial analysis of the relevant issues.

5. Isolationism. This orientation reflects the degree to which the organisation adopts individualistic, as opposed to participative, approaches to decision-making and problem-solving. An organisation high in isolationism would be characterised by individuals solving their own problems (or, at most, solving problems on a one-to-one basis), an absence of effective teamwork, and high levels of potentially destructive internal competition. Among the negative consequences of isolationism that Bate identifies are the withholding of information, the under-utilisation of available expertise, decision-making that reflects one point of view only, and the perpetuation of long-standing differences between organisation members.

6. Antipathy. This orientation refers to the level of intergroup conflict within an organisation. Organisations high in antipathy lack overall cohesion and tend to be fragmented into many competing interest groups and alliances. Bate (1984) observes that the relationships between these groups are “belligerent, distant, and untrusting” (p. 57), and that they are rooted firmly in a ‘them’ and ‘us’ tradition. Moreover, important issues are assumed by group members to be of a ‘win-lose’ nature, so that what one group gains, another loses.

While Bate is somewhat guarded in his claim about the universality of his cultural orientations, he suggests that these orientations can be seen as solutions (or, more accurately, ‘attempted solutions’) to certain fundamental problems, or issues, with which all organisations must contend. For example, according to Bate, all organisations must deal with questions about how emotionally bound up with one another members should become, and about the appropriate way for members to respond to differences in position, role, power and responsibility. In this sense, one can expect to find each of the six cultural orientations – unemotionality, depersonalisation etc. – present, at least to some degree, in every organisation. Bate also cites research by others (eg. Crozier, 1964; Child, 1981; and Hofstede, 1980) which he indicates provides empirical support for the wider existence of four of his cultural orientations, namely, unemotionality, depersonalisation, subordination, and isolationism. For example, he draws attention to the similarity between Hofstede’s (1980) ‘Power Distance’ and ‘Individualism’ dimensions, and his subordination and isolationism dimensions.

What is particularly noteworthy about Bate's typology, however, is that, as he himself acknowledges, it represents an extension, and an organisational adaptation, of Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck's (1961) fifth value orientation, concerned with the nature of human relationships¹⁴. If we turn now to a comparison of Bate's typology with that advanced by Schein, the former can be seen to be narrower in its scope than the latter and dealing with a sub-set of the basic assumptions identified by Schein. Apart from the very clear link with Category 5 assumptions (to which reference has already been made), it might also be argued that Bate's depersonalisation and conservatism orientations – orientations to causality and change respectively – have a bearing upon Schein's Category 1 assumptions ('Humanity's relationship with nature') as well as his Category 4 assumptions ('The nature of human activity').

Finally, in terms of the etic-emic distinction drawn above, Bate can be seen to have adopted the same kind of middle ground position as that adopted by Schein. His approach is etic in the sense that his typology of six cultural orientations can be used as a general framework for the assessment of cultural impediments to change in any organisation; it is emic in the sense that the methods he advocates for exploring an organisation's particular profile with respect to these cultural orientations is qualitative.

Harrison's (1972) typology of organisation ideologies

According to Harrison (1972), an organisation's character, or culture, is firmly rooted in its ideological orientation. Four distinct, and competing, types of organisation ideologies are postulated, namely, (i) a power orientation, (ii) a role orientation, (iii) a task orientation, and (iii) a person orientation. While Harrison does not make it clear how he arrived at these 'types', it appears that they have some basis in the author's experience – both as a researcher and a consultant – of organisations undergoing change. Harrison observes that, while these types are unlikely to exist as pure types in organisations, most organisations will tend to be dominated by one type or another. Thus, Harrison's typology, in contrast with the two typologies previously discussed, offers a classification of an organisation's culture as a whole. For example, an organisation's culture might be described as being predominantly power-oriented, or it might be described as being predominantly person-orientation. Each of Harrison's four ideologies is described below:

¹⁴ The point should be made that Bate's research was published one year before the publication of Schein's major work on organisational culture and, hence, one might reasonably assume that he was unaware of Schein's development of the Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck typology.

1. Power orientation. As Harrison notes, the power-oriented organisation is one in which there is an emphasis on dominance and control. The organisation's view of itself vis-à-vis the environment is that it can dominate and change the environment. It does this by jealously guarding its territory (whether markets, land area, product lines, or access to resources) and also by pursuing strategies of expansion which often involve the exploitation of weaker organisations. The themes of dominance and control also characterise relationships within the organisation. Those in positions of authority strive to maintain absolute control over their subordinates, and they work hard to promote their own interests and goals over those of their peers.

Harrison suggests that a strong power orientation can be observed in "some modern conglomerates" (p. 121) – in today's vernacular, probably the equivalent of 'corporate raiders'. These organisations pursue growth for growth's sake, they treat other organisations and their employees as commodities to be bought and sold, with little regard for the human and social consequences of their actions, and they support highly politicised, 'dog-eat-dog', internal environments. Harrison also draws attention to a more benign form of the power orientation, namely, that which can be found in old, established firms with a history of family ownership. While power in these organisations still rests with a centralised authority – the owner or manager – it tends to be exercised in a more paternalistic and personalised manner.

2. Role orientation. The role ideology is most clearly seen in the bureaucratic form of organisation. The emphasis in this kind of organisation is on rationality and orderliness, brought about by adherence to formal rules and procedures. Roles or positions are given primacy over the individuals who occupy them and authority is of the 'legal-rational' type (ie. endowed by position in the hierarchy). As Harrison notes, in the role-oriented organisation, the competition and conflict characteristic of the power-oriented organisation are regulated, or replaced, by agreements, rules and procedures. Adherence to procedure also governs the specification, and allocation, of rights and privileges. The tendency for the role-oriented organisation to give priority to procedural correctness, often at the expense of task effectiveness (a problem which Blau (1955) has referred to as 'goal displacement'), gives this type of organisation a certain rigidity, and helps to explain why it is often slow to respond to change. In general, the role-oriented organisation functions best in times of stability, when its environment is fairly predictable; it functions less well when innovation and flexibility are required.

3. Task orientation. According to Harrison, the task-oriented organisation is one in which achievement of the task is valued above all else. Nothing is allowed to stand in the way of task accomplishment. If, for example, established authority is a problem, it is challenged; if roles, rules and regulations are outmoded, they are changed; if employees have inadequate skills or technical knowledge, they are retrained, or replaced; and if personal needs and social considerations are incompatible with task accomplishment, they are suppressed in the interests of 'getting the job done'. Authority in the task-oriented organisation is regarded as legitimate only if it has its basis in knowledge and expertise – there is no automatic recognition of authority based solely on rank, as there is in the role-oriented organisation. Moreover, in contrast to the mechanistic structure of the role-oriented organisation, the task-oriented organisation adopts a more organic structure (Burns & Stalker, 1961), thereby ensuring that it is sufficiently flexible to meet the requirements of the task, should conditions change.

Harrison observes that the task ideology can most readily be found in small organisations – he gives as examples social service organisations, research teams, and high-risk businesses – whose members have come together because of a shared value, task, or goal. It can also be found in the project teams and task forces which are established by many larger organisations to help them remain competitive in highly unstable and unpredictable product markets and technological environments.

4. Person orientation. The person ideology challenges the traditional view that the individual is there to serve the needs of his/her employing organisation, and argues instead that the organisation exists to serve the needs of the individual. The person-oriented organisation comprises individuals who have come together because they recognise that they can satisfy their needs (and the emphasis here is on growth needs, as opposed to power needs) more easily as a group than if acting alone. It may be, for example, that the group offers opportunities for its members to work, and collaborate, with those of like mind. There is also the practical advantage of banding together for the purpose of sharing resources, such as, office space, administrative assistance, and equipment.

The person-oriented organisation lacks any clear, formal structure. To the extent that there is a structure, it exists only to serve the needs of the individuals within it. The role of authority is similarly played down in the person-oriented organisation. While the use of some authority – assigned on the basis of expertise – may be deemed necessary on

occasions, the usual practice is for members to influence one another “through example, helpfulness, and caring” (Harrison, 1972, p. 123). A further characteristics of the person-oriented organisation is that member commitment to the organisation is very transitory and members will show little hesitation in exiting the organisation when it no longer provides them with the means by which to satisfy their personal goals and interests. Harrison observes that, while the person-oriented organisation is fairly rare – it is probably best represented by small professional practices (eg. doctors, lawyers, and architects) – there is evidence to suggest that today’s workers are increasingly embracing a person ideology and, as such, seeking work which provides them with opportunities for growth and development.

Harrison’s typology of organisation ideologies offers a framework for analysing differences among organisations in how they deal with certain fundamental issues. Harrison articulates these issues in his discussion of the main functions which he believes are performed by an organisation’s ideology. Briefly summarised, these functions include: (i) providing the organisation with direction about how it should deal with the external environment and what its primary goals should be; (ii) specifying the qualities and characteristics that should be valued in members and how member behaviour should be controlled; and (iii) specifying how members should relate to one another and to the organisation. It can be seen that there is considerable overlap between the basic issues which Harrison’s typology seeks to address and those of interest to Schein (1985). Specifically, the above issues correspond almost exactly to assumptions represented by three of Schein’s categories: Category 1 (‘Humanity’s relationship to nature’), Category 3 (‘The nature of human nature’), and Category 5 (‘The nature of human relationships’), respectively. It is worth noting that, while Schein’s typology is, overall, broader than Harrison’s, it does not explicitly deal with assumptions concerning the relationship between the organisation and its members – commonly referred to as the ‘social’ or ‘psychological contract’ which specifies “what the organisation should be able to expect from its people and vice versa” (Harrison, 1972, p. 120)¹⁵.

¹⁵ Given the present author’s understanding of Schein’s work, these assumptions might be seen to be an extension of assumptions in Schein’s Category 3 (‘The nature of human nature’) or Category 5 (‘The nature of human relationships’). For example, the degree of individualism which an organisation supports, and its orientation with respect to McGregor’s (1960) Theory X/Theory Y assumptions (Theory X giving priority to the organisation’s needs, and Theory Y emphasising the mutual satisfaction of the individual’s and the organisation’s needs) are sub-sets of the assumptions represented by Schein’s

Harrison (1975) devised an instrument for the assessment of his four organisation ideologies. This takes the form of a forced choice questionnaire comprising 15 items designed to tap respondent perceptions and beliefs with respect to the basic issues described above. Each item is presented as a series of four statements, with each statement corresponding to one of the four organisation ideologies: power orientation, role orientation, task orientation, and person orientation. Respondents are required to rank order these statements, first of all to indicate their perception of which orientation is dominant in their organisation, and then to indicate their personal belief about which orientation ideally should be dominant. This provides a measure of the gap between the organisation's dominant ideology (culture) and the individual's preferred ideology (culture).

In the context of the present discussion, there are a number of points that can be made about this instrument. Firstly, in terms of its broad content themes, it can be seen that almost all of the items in the questionnaire are concerned with the nature of workers/managers (Schein's Category 3) and the nature of relationships (Schein's Category 5). For example, with respect to the former, there are questions about the qualities and characteristics of a 'good boss' and a 'good subordinate', and questions about what motivates work performance and how organisation members are controlled and influenced. With respect to the latter, there are questions about the organisation's (individual's) orientation to collaboration, competition and conflict. There are two other broad content themes which can be identified in the questionnaire, but these are much less well-represented. Specifically, there is one question which deals with the basis of organisational decision-making (Schein's Category 2), and one question which deals with the nature of the relationship between the organisation and its external environment (Schein's Category 1). Thus, in terms of its broad content themes, Harrison's questionnaire (like his analysis of the functions of organisation ideologies) can be seen to deal with a sub-set only of themes identified in Schein's framework.

A second point concerns the wording of items in this questionnaire. In some cases, the statements associated with each item are so long, and so elaborate in terms of the amount of detail which they attempt to cover, that many respondents (including managers) might be expected to have difficulty interpreting them and relating them to

Category 3 which will clearly have a bearing on assumptions about the nature of the relationship between the organisation and its members.

their particular circumstances. Consider, for example, the following statement from item 14 of the questionnaire, which asks about the organisation's (individual's) position regarding the most appropriate control and communication structure:

Information about task requirements and problems flows from the centre of task activity upwards and outwards, with those closest to the task determining resources and support needed from the rest of the organization. A co-coordinating function may set priorities and overall resource levels based on information from all task centres. The structure should shift with the nature and location of the tasks.

While this feature of the questionnaire design – a problematic feature in the present author's opinion – is difficult to explain, one suspects that it is a result partly of Harrison's attempt to reduce what are essentially very broad and very complex themes (issues) to a small number of items in a questionnaire. Indeed, as will be argued in a subsequent section, this is a problem with questionnaire measures of organisation culture more generally.

A third and final point is that the use of a structured questionnaire of this kind, along with the application of an a priori set of categories for classifying organisational cultures (ideologies), makes Harrison's approach more exclusively etic than either Schein's or Bate's approach.

As indicated, a characteristic which is common to the above typologies is that they all focus on organisational culture at a deeper level. For Schein (1985), the emphasis is on shared basic assumptions, for Bate (1984) it is on shared meanings, and for Harrison (1972) it is on organisation ideology. These typologies can be contrasted with others which have been advanced in which the treatment of organisational culture is notably more superficial. Deal and Kennedy's (1982) typology is one such example. It offers a classification of organisational cultures into four generic types – the tough-guy, macho culture, the work hard/play hard culture, the bet-your-company culture, and the process culture – which are determined by two factors, namely, the degree of risk associated with the organisation's core activities and the speed at which the organisation and its members get feedback about their performance. In delineating these four cultural types, the authors give examples of the kinds of organisations which best 'fit' each type, they describe the members of each type (the 'heroes' and the 'survivors') in terms of characteristics such as personality, attitudes, and behaviours, and they comment on some of the main rites and rituals associated with each type. The problem is that Deal and Kennedy's analysis never really goes beyond mere description. Thus, while we are

told that members of the 'tough-guy, macho' culture learn to be aggressive, competitive, and 'not to cry', and that members of the 'bet-your-company' culture are persistent, take time to make decisions, and don't waver from their convictions, there is no attempt to explore the deeper level meanings and themes which might underlie these behaviours. Moreover, the notion that differences in organisational cultures can be accounted for by two dimensions only – and the 'risk' and 'feedback' dimensions proposed are not cultural dimensions, but rather dimensions which reflect characteristics of the organisation's core activities and business environment – seriously over-simplifies the culture concept and brings into further question the value of such a typology as a framework for analysing and comparing organisational cultures.

The typology advanced by Sethia and Von Glinow (1985) can be criticised on similar grounds. Four generic types of organisational cultures are proposed – the apathetic culture, the caring culture, the exacting culture, and the integrative culture – which reflect the extent to which the organisation's human resource orientation emphasises a concern for people, as opposed to a concern for performance. Each of these types is described in terms of how it is manifested in the organisation's reward system, with particular attention given to the kinds of rewards that dominate (whether money, security, opportunities for growth, more interesting work etc.) and the primary criteria for reward allocation (eg. in terms of expected work behaviours and performance outcomes). Examples are also given of actual organisations thought to 'fit' each type. It can be seen then that, like the Deal and Kennedy typology, this typology focuses on observable behaviours and practices (rather than on organisational culture at a deeper level) and it offers a similar two-dimensional framework for the analysis of differences between organisational cultures. One final point that can be made is that Sethia and Von Glinow's work is very reminiscent of Blake and Mouton's (1969) work on managerial styles which was carried out some fifteen years earlier¹⁶. While Sethia and Von Glinow make no reference to this earlier work, the framework which they propose is very similar to that proposed by Blake and Mouton and seems to be a simple adaptation of the latter's concepts and ideas for use in the study of organisational cultures.

¹⁶ Blake and Mouton (1969) proposed five contrasting management (leadership) styles which reflected the differential emphases which managers (leaders) placed on a concern for people and a concern for production.

1.4 Concepts related to organisational culture

In this section, consideration is given to two concepts which, while they can be shown to have significant linkages with the concept of organisational culture, developed quite separately from it and gave rise to quite separate literatures and quite different primary research agendas. The first of these is organisational climate, with its roots in North American industrial and organisational psychology, and the second is social representations, with its roots in European social psychology.

1.4.1 Organisational climate

Interest in the concept of organisational climate, as an important area for organisational research, predates interest in the concept of organisational culture by some twenty years. While the major introduction of the climate concept into the organisational sciences was in the early 1960's, the organisational culture concept did not gain prominence until the early 1980's (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). Despite their emergence at different points in time, one can however find quite early indications in the literature of there being an affinity between these two concepts. For example, as noted by Reichers and Schneider (1990), Argyris (1958) used the term *climate* interchangeably with the term *informal culture* in his study of organisational climate in a bank. Katz and Kahn (1966) also used the terms *climate* and *culture* interchangeably in their explication of the concept of organisational climate as a major component of an organisation's social system. In fact, the conceptual treatment of organisational climate offered by these authors bears a number of striking similarities with conceptual treatments of the more recent organisational culture concept (see Section 1.1 above). For example, Katz and Kahn describe climate as being made up of norms and values; they suggest that organisations develop distinctive climates which differentiate them from one another; and they propose that an organisation's climate is shaped by the organisation's history. With respect to this last point, it is argued that, like societies, social organisations can be seen to possess "distinctive patterns of collective feeling and beliefs [that are] passed along to new group members" (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 66).

Given the early indications of a link between organisational climate and organisational culture, it is perhaps somewhat surprising that one finds virtually no overlap in the research literatures associated with these two concepts. Research into organisational culture did not extend the earlier work on organisational climate but rather, it developed quite separately from it. Thus, as noted by Schneider (1985), the

most significant early writing on organisational culture (see, for example, the *Administrative Science Quarterly* and *Organizational Dynamics* 1983 special issues on organisational culture, and the book *Organizational Symbolism*, published in 1983 and edited by Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge), contains almost no reference to previous organisational climate research. Schneider makes the further point that the two concepts appeared to be “in opposite patterns of descendance and ascendance” (p. 595), with interest in organisational climate being in decline at the time when organisational culture was coming into vogue.

It is also worth mentioning that, despite a number of comprehensive (and one might argue, long overdue) attempts, in recent years, to explicate the relationship between organisational climate and organisational culture (see, for example, Denison, 1990, 1996; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schneider, 1985), research into organisational culture has continued to develop as a separate field “apart from any real connection with climate research and history” (Reichers & Schneider, 1990, pp. 29-30). Indeed, even in some of the major texts on organisational culture which have appeared in recent years, the concept of organisational climate receives only the most cursory treatment. This is frustrating to say the least, since these are arguably sources which one might expect readers to consult for some clarification of the climate-culture relationship. For example, in his book *The Organizational Culture Perspective*, Ott (1989) devotes two paragraphs only to a discussion of organisational climate. He concludes by suggesting that organisational climate can be thought of as “an amalgamation of feeling tones, or a transient organizational mood” (p. 47), and arguing that, while it is a related phenomenon, is not an element of organisational culture. Brown’s (1995) treatment of the climate concept in his book *Organisational Culture* is equally superficial. He devotes a single short paragraph to the concept in which he suggests that organisational culture and organisational climate are concerned with essentially the same aspect of organisations, but that the survey questionnaires used by climate researchers were inadequate to the task of tapping the construct. Interestingly, apart from this short paragraph, every other topic which the author indexes under ‘organisational climate’ appears in the text as a reference to organisational culture.

The following discussion provides a brief overview of current thinking about some of the main similarities and differences between the organisational climate and organisational culture perspectives, in terms of the way in which they have

conceptualised the phenomenon of interest, their dominant methodologies, and their respective intellectual and theoretical foundations. Also discussed are some of the main arguments in favour of, and against, making a distinction between these two concepts.

Just as organisational culture is a contentious concept, so too was the concept of organisational climate before it. As the following commonly cited definitions of organisational climate illustrate, writers in the area agreed on some its attributes and disagreed on others (Poole, 1985):

Climate is the relatively enduring quality of the total environment that (a) is experienced by the occupants, (b) influences their behaviour, and (c) can be described in terms of the values of a particular set of characteristics (or attributes) of the environment (Tagiuri, 1968, p. 25);

[We] might define climate as a set of attributes specific to a particular organization that may be induced from the way that organization deals with its members and its environment. For the individual member within the organisation, climate takes the form of a set of attitudes and expectancies which describe the organization in terms of both static characteristics (such as degree of autonomy) and behavior-outcome and outcome-outcome contingencies (Campbell, Dunnette, Lawler, & Weick, 1970, p. 390); and

Climate perceptions are psychologically meaningful molar descriptions that people can agree characterize a system's practices and procedures. By its practices and procedures a system may create many climates. People perceive climates because the molar perceptions function as frames of reference for the attainment of some congruity between behavior and the system's practices and procedures. However, if the climate is one which rewards and supports the display of individual differences, people in the system will not behave similarly (Schneider, 1975, p. 474).

When considered as whole, however, conceptual treatments of organisational climate (which have given rise to these and other definitions) can be shown to have much in common with conceptual treatments of organisational culture. Some of the main similarities which have been identified by writers seeking a synthesis of the two concepts (eg. Denison, 1990, 1996; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schneider, 1985) include:

1. Both organisational climate and organisational culture are *molar constructs* in the sense that they capture a property, or properties, of the whole system (whether an organisation or organisational sub-unit). Moreover, by acknowledging that organisations can be described in terms of global characteristics – patterns of behaviour, value systems, philosophies etc. – the climate and culture perspectives shift the focus from the individual, to the organisation, as “a viable behavioral unit of analysis” (Schneider, 1985, p. 597).

2. Broadly defined, both organisational climate and organisational culture are concerned with the *social context* of work environments.

3. Both constructs are thought to have some *stability over time and across different situations*.

4. Both constructs are thought to function as '*sense-making*' devices, in that they help organisation members to give meaning to their experience of organisational life. In organisational climate, where the focus is on shared perceptions, the link with meaning is implied through the recognition of perception as an active, rather than a passive process, whereby individuals (and groups) impose meaning on their environment (Reichers & Schneider, 1990).

5. The notion of *sharedness* is central to both organisational climate and organisational culture. That is, for an organisation (or organisational sub-unit) to be characterised as having a climate, or a culture, there must be some consensuality in member perceptions (beliefs, values etc.).

6. Both organisational climate (as shared perceptions) and organisational culture (as shared basic assumptions) are thought to *set the boundaries for*, or form the basis of, *organisation member behaviour*. They are not, however, sole determinants of behaviour which will also be influenced, at any given time, by situational demands and contingencies.

7. Both constructs are thought to be the *product of group learning*. However, while the role of social interaction in the formation of organisational culture has always been acknowledged, an interactive approach to the formation of organisational climate is a relatively recent development within this field (Moran & Volkwein, 1992). A more traditional view of organisational climate was that it was an objective manifestation of the organisation's structure, which existed independently of the perceptions and social interactions of organisation members (see, for example, Guion, 1973 and Indik, 1965, cited by Moran & Volkwein, 1992). An interactive approach to the formation of organisational climate, or organisational culture, also emphasises the *role of socialisation* in the transmission of climate, or culture, to newcomers.

8. Both constructs have been shown to have "a tendency toward differentiation" (Rousseau, 1988, p. 150). Thus, within a given organisation, there may exist a number of distinctive *sub-cultures* or *unit-specific climates*. It is also the case that climates and cultures have been shown to form around specific content areas, with researchers having

identified, for example, 'a climate for service' (Bowen & Schneider, 1988, cited by Denison, 1996) and 'a culture of absence' (Nicholson & John, 1985, cited by Denison, 1996).

In addition to the considerable overlap that one finds in conceptual treatments of organisational climate and organisational culture, it is also the case that writers in each area have struggled with some of the same basic theoretical issues. For example, as Denison (1996) notes, both the climate and culture perspectives are faced with the problem of having to explain the reciprocal process whereby an organisation's social context simultaneously shapes, and is shaped by, the social interaction of organisation members. According to Denison, while theorists have attempted to understand this entire process, they typically do better at explaining one part of it, or the other. A second theoretical issue which has been debated by writers in each area concerns how 'general' the construct of interest is. In other words, can the construct be described in terms of an omnibus set of dimensions that will be more or less the same across all organisations, or is the construct so context-specific as to preclude analysis using any kind of generalisable scheme? Representatives of each perspective can be found in both the organisational climate and organisational culture literatures. With respect to the former, Poole (1985) contrasts the work of Litwin and Stringer (1968) whose climate dimensions (including structure, reward, and support) have been widely adopted as general dimensions, with that of Schneider (1975), who proposed the existence of numerous organisational climates, with the content of a given organisation's climate reflecting the particular practices that are most salient in that organisation. In the organisational culture literature, one might contrast Schein's (1985) approach to classifying organisational culture along five universal themes (see Section 1.3 above) – with the uniqueness of a given organisation's culture being indicated in its particular profile with respect to these themes – with the approach of scholars such as Smircich (1983b) and Van Maanen (1973, 1977), whose work reflects the influence of the symbolic anthropology of Hallowell (1955, cited by Smircich, 1983a) and Geertz (1973, cited by Smircich, 1983a). From this perspective, it is not possible to generalise beyond a single culture since this would involve taking cultural elements out of the social context which give them their meaning (Trice & Beyer, 1993).

While the above account of some of the similarities between the climate and culture perspectives is far from comprehensive¹⁷, it does serve to illustrate the considerable overlap that exists between these perspectives, particularly in terms of conceptual treatments of the construct of interest. Despite this overlap, however, most commentators on the link between the two perspectives stop well short of arguing that organisational climate and organisational culture are identical constructs. One important distinction which has been drawn between the two constructs, about which there is reasonable agreement, is that organisational climate constitutes more of a surface-level phenomenon than organisational culture (Moran & Volkwein, 1992; Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Schein, 1985; Schwartz & Davis, 1981). Thus, in terms of Schein's (1985) model of cultural levels, organisational climate can be thought of as constituting a surface-level manifestation (ie. operating at the level of creations and values) of the deeper-level beliefs and assumptions which, for Schein, make up the 'essence' of culture. Similarly, in terms of Trice and Beyer's (1984) distinction between the *substance* of culture (ie. the networks of meanings contained in ideologies, norms, and values) and its *forms* (ie. the practices whereby these meanings are expressed, affirmed, and communicated to organisation members), organisational climate can most accurately be understood as operating at the level of cultural forms. This depiction of organisational climate as a surface-level, as opposed to deeper-level construct, renders it more palpable, more immediately accessible (it exists at a more conscious level of awareness than organisational culture), and more readily decipherable than organisational culture (if one defines the latter in terms of its 'essence' or 'substance'). The point might also be made that, given the metaphor associated with each construct (meteorological in the case of organisational climate, and anthropological in the case of organisational culture), a distinction between the constructs in terms of their operation at surface versus deeper (more implicit) levels of awareness has, at the very least, quite strong intuitive appeal.

Apart from the above somewhat broad distinction, attention has been drawn to a number of other, not unrelated, differences between organisational climate and organisational culture. For example, while both constructs are thought to have some stability over time and across different situations, a number of writers have suggested

¹⁷ For a more detailed treatment of the areas of convergence in the organisational climate and organisational culture literatures, the reader is referred to Denison (1996).

that organisational culture is *more* stable and *more* enduring than organisational climate (Moran & Volkwein, 1992; Schwartz & Davis, 1981). Thus, as Moran and Volkwein (1992) note, while short-term fluctuations and variations in an organisation's internal and external environment (they give as examples, changes in key staff and budgetary cuts) are likely to be registered by, and affect, the organisation's climate, they are unlikely to have an immediate, discernible impact on its culture. This is not to say, however, that the organisation's culture will remain unchanged, should such occurrences become a more regular feature of organisational life. A further important point made by Moran and Volkwein is that, because of its links with the more durable elements of organisational culture, organisational climate is prevented from becoming "an entirely transitory phenomenon that is transformed with each new situational contingency" (p. 40).

Advocates of the view that organisational culture is a more stable and enduring phenomenon than organisational climate also argue that organisational culture evolves more slowly and is more difficult to manage explicitly than organisational climate. With respect to the first point, while the passage of time clearly has a role to play in the formation of both organisational climate and organisational culture (sharedness, whether in relation to perceptions or basic assumptions, is not something which develops spontaneously), the conceptualisation of organisational culture as a shared view which has "worked for long enough to have come to be taken-for-granted and to have dropped out of awareness" (Schein, 1985, p. 7), implies a more significant role for history in the formation of culture than of climate. In this sense, it is conceivable that in relatively newly formed groups, members may experience a climate, but not yet be part of a culture. The second point really follows on from the first. In other words, to the extent that organisational culture builds up more slowly than organisational climate and is more strongly embedded in the organisation's past, it is also likely to be more resistant to explicit attempts to change and control it than organisational climate. As Schwartz and Davis (1981) argue:

[Whereas climate is] manageable over the relatively short term, culture is usually long-term and strategic. It is very difficult to change. Culture is rooted in deeply held beliefs and values in which individuals hold a substantial investment... (pp. 33-34).

While there is some lack of agreement about whether or not the climate and culture perspectives are dealing with fundamentally different concepts, most writers do agree on

a distinction between the two perspectives on methodological grounds. Organisational climate research has, for the most part, been carried out using nomothetic¹⁸ quantitative approaches, whereas organisational culture research has, at least up until fairly recently, been dominated by the use of qualitative case study approaches (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). With respect to the former, climate measures typically take the form of questionnaire surveys which ask about respondent perceptions of their organisation's policies, practices, and procedures (see, for example, measures developed by Jones & James, 1979; Litwin & Stringer, 1968; and Stern, 1970). Like most research using quantitative methods, organisational climate research adopts an etic perspective. This means that the organisation is viewed from outside and that the researcher, whose role is primarily that of a detached observer, imposes his/her own meaning on the data that are gathered (Jones, 1988; Reichers & Schneider, 1990). A central aim of much organisational climate research has been to compare organisations on a standard set of climate dimensions (typically these dimensions are researcher-derived and developed a priori) and then, on the basis of these comparisons, to try to explain why some organisations function more effectively than others (Reichers & Schneider, 1990).

As indicated, in contrast to organisational climate, organisational culture has been studied using predominantly qualitative methods¹⁹. Sometimes referred to as 'organisational ethnography' (Van Maanen, 1979), a qualitative approach to the study of organisational culture typically combines a number of different interpretive techniques, including participant observation (perhaps the most important tool of the organisational ethnographer), unstructured and semi-structured interviewing, and analysis of organisational documents. In contrast to the etic perspective adopted in organisational climate research, culture research emphasises an emic orientation. From this perspective, the organisation is viewed from within and the researcher, instead of being a detached observer, becomes 'immersed in' the culture of the group being studied. Also, from this perspective, meaning is not imposed but rather it is allowed to emerge from the actual context in which it is embedded (Jones, 1988; Reichers & Schneider, 1990). A central concern in organisational culture research has been to understand

¹⁸ The term 'nomothetic' has been defined in Huczynski and Buchanan (1991) as meaning "law setting or giving" (p.122). Some of the main characteristics of a 'nomothetic' approach, as summarised by these authors, include: (i) it has a positivist bias; (ii) it is generalising and attempts to discover laws of human behaviour; (iii) it is based on the statistical study of groups; and (iv) it uses objective questionnaires.

¹⁹ A detailed treatment of the methods used in organisational culture research is provided in a subsequent section.

meaning and action 'in context'. Thus, organisational culture studies tend to be highly descriptive case study accounts of single organisational (or organisational sub-group) settings. As Reichers and Schneider (1990) have suggested, whereas *effectiveness* has been a dominant issue in organisational climate research, the issue of *description* has been far more central to the concerns of organisational culture researchers. At the same time, however, the authors acknowledge attempts by practitioners (and one assumes, also popularist writers on culture) "to make culture an effectiveness issue" (p. 20), that is, to seek to differentiate 'effective' from 'ineffective' cultures.

The above differences between the climate and culture perspectives, particularly in terms of their research methods and primary research agendas, are better understood if one considers the different origins of these two fields of study. As Denison (1996) notes, the study of organisational climate has its roots in the field theory of Kurt Lewin (1951). Lewin was a psychologist whose work was very much influenced by his admiration for 'hard' science, in particular physics (Rose, 1988). The basic argument of his field theory, as summarised by Rose (1988), was that an individual's behaviour was a product of the forces acting upon him/her and that, in social situations, the individual him/herself was a force exerting reciprocal influences. By quantifying these various forces, one could make fairly accurate predictions about social behaviour. Lewin proposed the simple equation $B = f(P,E)$ – in which B = behaviour, E = the environment, and P = the person – to express his conceptualisation of the nature of the relationship between individuals and their social environments. What is important about this formulation in the context of the present discussion is that, as Denison (1996) notes, it assumes that the various components of the social world which it describes (ie. the Bs, Ps, and Es) can be treated as objective and quite separate phenomena. In studying organisational climate from a Lewinian perspective, the individual is therefore considered to exist separately from the social context (ie. the climate) within which (s)he works. (S)he is affected by the climate, but does not create it²⁰. This treatment of individuals and their social environments as objective and separate phenomena closely parallels the treatment of physical entities by 'natural' scientists. Not only does it disregard (or at least have great difficulty in accommodating) the view that "human action can be calculated and voluntary" (Rose, 1988, p. 170), but it also fails to take

²⁰ Denison (1996) makes the further point that, while there is an assumption in the climate literature that management, as the 'agents' of the organisational system, create the climate in which others have to work, this is a group which is seldom studied directly in organisational climate research.

account of the process by which social environments are constructed by the individuals who comprise them (Denison, 1996). Given the theoretical foundations of the study of organisational climate, it is therefore not surprising that research in this area has been dominated by the use of quantitative methods and that researchers have been primarily concerned, not with understanding the evolution of social contexts, but rather with understanding the impact that social contexts have on their members (ie. how climate affects employee behaviour and performance).

While the study of organisational climate comes almost linearly from Lewinian applied (social) psychology (Reichers & Schneider, 1990), the contemporary study of organisational culture has quite heterogeneous intellectual roots. It does not constitute one branch of a single discipline area, but rather it amalgamates several points of view and reflects the influence of different schools of thought within anthropology, sociology, and social psychology (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). For the purpose of the present discussion, however, it will suffice to comment briefly on just two schools of thought – namely, symbolic interactionism and social constructionism – which Denison (1996) argues had a major impact on the approach taken to the study of organisational culture.

Symbolic interactionism originated with the ideas of a group of social psychologists and sociologists working at the University of Chicago during the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's (Rock, 1996). Although Mead (1934) is regarded as “probably the most influential of the early symbolic interactionist thinkers” (Bryman, 1988, p. 54), his student and a major interpreter of his work, Herbert Blumer (eg. 1969), has provided the clearest articulation of the major tenets of symbolic interactionism. According to Blumer (cited by Bryman), symbolic interactionism rests on three major premises. First, human beings act toward things (physical objects and other people) on the basis of the meanings these things have for them. Human action (behaviour), in this sense, is not simply a response to some objectively defined stimulus. Second, the meaning of such things derives from, or arises out of, the social interaction that individuals have with one another. And third, these meanings are established, and modified, through an interpretive process which the individual uses to deal with (make sense of) the things which (s)he encounters. The term ‘symbolic interactionism’ reflects the view that social interaction (broadly speaking, communication) is symbolic since people communicate via language and other symbols (Blumer, cited by Schwandt, 1994).

Research from a symbolic interactionist perspective emphasises the need to 'see the world' from the perspective of those whom one studies, that is, to understand subjects' own interpretations of their social reality (Blumer, cited by Bryman, 1988). This cannot be achieved from a position of detachment but, rather, requires the researcher to become immersed in the "life-world of the researched" (Chua, 1988, p. 62). While participant observation is the method of data collection that is most consistently associated with a symbolic interactionist approach – some regard it as the 'pivotal strategy' (Rock, cited by Bryman, 1988) – other methods include individual and group interviewing, and documentary and conversational analysis (Chua, 1988; Bryman, 1988).

Social constructionism is a more recent development (at least within the social sciences) than symbolic interactionism. It owes a major debt to the work of sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1966) who have been credited with popularising the concept of the 'social construction of reality' (Thompson & McHugh, 1990). While the two perspectives are very closely related, they differ somewhat in terms of the major concerns which gave rise to them. Whereas symbolic interactionism had its main argument with efforts to "develop a natural science of the social" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125), social constructionism took issue with the objectivist notion that the world is made up of 'facts', and that these 'facts' exist independently of individuals (observers) and can be discovered through 'rational' inquiry (Gergen, cited by Schwandt, 1994). From a social constructionist perspective, there is no such thing as 'objective' knowledge or truth. Knowledge and truth are created (ie. they are socially constructed), they are not discovered by mind (Schwandt, 1994). Social constructionism rejects the idea (as does symbolic interactionism) that individuals can be separated analytically from their social environment (cf. Lewinian field theory) and argues instead that, at the same time as they are a product of their environment, individuals are also 'self-producing' and create their environment through their own meaningful activity (Stam, 1998).

The methodological implications of social constructionism are the same as those for symbolic interactionism. That is, research from this perspective places the same emphasis on the importance of understanding social reality "as it is lived, felt, [and] undergone by social actors" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 125). The methods of data collection which are most consistent with a social constructionist perspective are, therefore, qualitative and not quantitative. It is also the case, as Denison (1996) notes, that the

symbolic interactionist and social constructionist perspectives share similar research agendas. In the research literatures associated with both perspectives, the primary topic of interest is often defined as “the recursive dynamics between the individual and the system” (Denison, 1996, p. 635). Put another way, research from both perspectives has as its central focus the ‘how’ of social reality. It is more concerned with understanding the evolution of social contexts – how they are experienced, organised, perceived, and constructed (Denzin, cited by Chua, 1988) – than it is with understanding the impact that social contexts have on their members.

On the basis of the above discussion, it can be seen that an understanding of the different theoretical lineages of the organisational climate and organisational culture perspectives can provide some insight into why there has been relatively little overlap between the research literatures associated with these two perspectives²¹. The point should be made, however, that although the climate and culture literatures can be broadly differentiated in terms of the quantitative-qualitative divide described above, one can find within each field of study, examples of approaches that run counter to those traditionally advocated. For example, there have been calls in the climate literature for researchers to ground their data collection techniques in the perspectives of the people being studied (Payne & Pugh, 1976; Poole, 1985; Reichers & Schneider, 1990). Given the centrality of meaning to climate theory, it is argued that researchers who study organisational climate using researcher-derived questionnaires are “omitting the crux of the construct when they view climate only from their own remote perspective” (Poole, 1985, p. 105). Poole cites as one example of an approach which is more valid in this regard, a study done by Albrecht in 1979 in which multi-dimensional scaling was used to derive subjects’ collective representations of organisational climate.

In a similar vein, there has been an increase, in recent years, in the number of studies of organisational culture which have been carried out using quantitative techniques, either alone or in some combination with qualitative techniques (see, for example, Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991;

²¹ Of course, this is one explanation only. As Reichers and Schneider (1990) have suggested, there is a “very real pressure” in science to differentiate, rather than seek a synthesis of, similar concepts and ideas (p.30). This arises not only from the disciplinary demand to define concepts with a high degree of precision (thereby giving importance to even small distinctions between an established concept and a potential new idea), but it is also, to some extent at least, a product of the self-interest of individuals and groups who hope to build careers by having their names associated with ‘new ideas’.

Rousseau, 1990b; Sheridan, 1992; and Siehl & Martin, 1988)²². The use of questionnaires and other such standardised instruments for assessing organisational culture has been argued on the grounds that measures of this kind make it possible to address centrally important theoretical questions about culture – concerning, for example, the issue of consensus (How widely shared does a particular belief or value orientation have to be for it to constitute a cultural phenomenon?), the nature of differences between the cultures of different organisations and organisational sub-groups, and the nature of culture change over time – which are exceedingly difficult to answer using qualitative methods (Siehl & Martin, 1988). Quantitative methods also offer the important practical advantage of being less onerous to use than qualitative methods. They tend to be more resource efficient in terms of the time taken both for data collection and data analysis (Bryman, 1991; Reichers & Schneider, 1990).

Whether or not ‘counter’ developments, such as these, signal a trend toward some kind of future amalgamation of the organisational climate and organisational culture perspectives (Reichers & Schneider, 1990) is a question that remains to be answered. While there appears to be reasonable support for at least establishing a closer dialogue between the two literatures, opinion remains divided as to whether or not the two concepts should be differentiated, or treated as synonyms. A strong advocate of the latter view is Denison (1996) who argues that the climate and culture literatures are dealing with essentially the same phenomenon, only viewed from different perspectives. He draws attention to the considerable overlap that one finds in the two literatures in terms of conceptual treatments of the phenomenon of interest as well as in terms of the theoretical issues which have been central to the concerns of researchers in each area. Denison also seems to regard as particularly apposite to his argument the emergence in the culture literature of an increasing number of studies in which quantitative methods – similar to those used in climate research – have been used to assess organisational culture. The emphasis placed on this latter development could, however, be seen to be somewhat misguided. Denison seems to be suggesting that, if the methods used to operationalise organisational culture and organisational climate are similar, then the concepts must be similar and this, of course, ignores the crucial question as to what it is that existing quantitative measures of organisational culture are actually measuring.

²² As above, a detailed treatment of the methods used in organisational culture research is provided in a subsequent section.

In arguing that the climate and culture traditions should be seen as differing, not with respect to the phenomenon of interest, but only with respect to the perspective taken on that phenomenon, Denison also draws attention to the negative consequences which he believes have resulted from the ongoing disjuncture between the two traditions. These include: (i) a tendency among researchers (who are often motivated by career-minded self-interest) to highlight differences between the perspectives that are more apparent than real and to give more attention to extreme, rather than integrative, points of views; (ii) a lack of legitimacy for research using integrated approaches (this is the idea that studies which combine qualitative and quantitative methods, because they don't 'fit' easily into either tradition, can experience difficulty gaining acceptance within each); and (iii) a tendency for researchers to become increasingly distanced from the phenomenon of interest because of their preoccupation with debates about epistemology and methodology (rather than with the actual study of the phenomenon).

Denison's position can be contrasted with that of Moran and Volkwein (1992) who argue emphatically for a separation of the organisational climate and organisational culture constructs. These authors suggest that, in the absence of a clear distinction between the two constructs, the more recent culture construct is likely to suffer the same fate as the earlier climate construct, namely, that it will become "so all inclusive that it loses an identifiable conceptual meaning" (p. 22)²³. Moran and Volkwein view climate and culture as distinctly identifiable but related constructs and they assert somewhat boldly that they are "perhaps the two most potent constructs available to researchers for understanding the expressive, communicative, human dimensions of organizations" (p. 22). The value of a distinction between the two constructs is realised, in part, in Moran and Volkwein's proposal for a cultural approach to the formation of organisational climate. Essentially, this approach argues that an organisation's culture sets the boundaries for, or determines the nature of, the intersubjective processes which give rise to the organisation's climate. Climate, from this perspective, can be regarded as:

...the way in which the deep structures of culture are manifested (or operationalized) in the interplay between situational contingencies, interacting group members, and ultimately the culture itself (Moran & Volkwein, p. 40).

²³ With respect to this point, it is interesting to note that, while Denison draws attention to conceptual treatments of climate and culture which emphasise the multi-layered nature of the phenomenon (and which distinguish, for example, between its manifest and latent elements), it is not clear that he sees any particular value in this approach. On the contrary, he supports the view (Weick & Roberts, cited by Denison, 1996) that more attention should be directed towards integrating the different levels of culture (climate), rather than distinguishing between them.

This is not to say that the culture is static. On the contrary, and as the authors note, it too is likely to change, albeit more slowly, “with the outcomes of this interplay” (p. 40).

Moran and Volkwein suggest that an important practical implication of their conceptualisation of how organisational climates form is that, while managers might be well-advised to direct short-term change interventions at the organisation’s climate, rather than its culture (climate being both more accessible, and more malleable, than culture), interventions to change climate should not proceed without some consideration being given to “the deeper patterns embedded in an organization’s culture” (p. 43). What is needed in this regard is a much clearer understanding of the precise nature of the relationship between organisational climate and organisational culture and it is to this end, argue Moran and Volkwein, that future research efforts should be directed.

While there is merit in the arguments associated with each of the above contrasting positions, it is perhaps too early, particularly given the relative immaturity of the culture concept (compared with the climate concept) and the fact that there still does not exist a solid body of empirical research on organisational culture (Reichers & Schneider, 1990), to accept Denison’s (1996) view that the climate and culture perspectives are dealing with essentially the same phenomenon. In other words, there does seem to be a case for conducting research which could help to empirically establish whether or not organisational climate and organisational culture are constructs which can be meaningfully differentiated. Certainly it is not difficult to imagine practical scenarios in which a distinction between climate and culture (or between ‘surface’ and ‘deep’ culture) may be very useful. Following on from Moran and Volkwein’s (1992) comments about the value of a distinction for understanding organisational change, one can imagine how the failure of an organisation to effectively manage change – the initial impact of which is likely to be registered at the level of the organisation’s climate – could have longer-term deleterious consequences for the organisation’s culture. The current context of restructuring and downsizing within Australian universities provides a good example. While this change might be expected to impact negatively upon the climate within universities²⁴, whether or not university culture is also deleteriously affected is likely to depend upon how the change is managed (that is, whether or not consultative processes are adopted, whether or not change agents are sensitive to the

²⁴ Indeed, in their 1995 survey of the climate of Adelaide University, Jarrett and Winefield (unpub.) found that, among academic staff, levels of strain were high and levels of job satisfaction were low.

concerns of organisation members affected by the change etc.). One final point that can be made is that, regardless of the position that one adopts in relation to the above debate, there can be no question about the need for, and potential value of, a closer dialogue between the organisational climate and organisational culture perspectives. It is only through such a dialogue that the potential contribution that each can make to the other will be able to be realised.

1.4.2 Social representations

While the link between organisational culture and organisational climate has been the subject of considerable debate in recent years, the same cannot be said of the link between organisational culture and social representations. With the exception of some preliminary work by the present author and a colleague (Kummerow & Innes, 1994), there has been no discussion whatsoever about the relationship between these two concepts. This is perhaps not surprising given their very different intellectual origins – organisational culture owes its principal debt to North American sociology and social representations has its roots in European social psychology – and also given differences in the size of the social unit with which each is concerned – organisations, in the case of organisational culture and the wider society, in the case of social representations. Despite these differences, however, it can be shown that there is sufficient overlap between the two concepts to warrant some attempt to formally link them and to explore the ways in which a consideration of each might contribute to an understanding of the other. The treatment of this subject which is offered here is necessarily brief and, for a more detailed exposition of the relationship between organisational culture and social representations, the reader is referred to Kummerow and Innes (1994).

The theory of social representations was proposed by European social psychologist Serge Moscovici in 1984. In the same way that the organisational culture perspective developed as a reaction against mainstream sociology (it rejected the ‘rationality’ of sociological research which dominated at the time)²⁵, so too was the evolution of social representations theory a departure from mainstream social psychology. Moscovici was critical of social psychology’s preoccupation with behaviour and cognitions at the level of the individual and emphasised the need for analysis at the collective level. He defined social representations as:

²⁵ A detailed discussion of the development of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory is provided in Section 2.1.

...a set of concepts, statements and explanations originating in daily life in the course of inter-individual communications. They are the equivalent in our society, of the myths and belief systems in traditional societies; they might even be said to be the contemporary version of common sense (1984, p. 181).

A comparison of conceptualisations of organisational culture and social representations reveals a number of striking similarities, including:

1. In both cases, the issue of sharedness is emphasised. In organisational culture, the emphasis is on *shared* beliefs and assumptions, while in social representations, the objects of study are *social* (ie. shared), as opposed to individual, representations. One attraction of an organisational culture perspective for social representations researchers is that it deals with shared belief systems that are more bounded (ie. organisational rather than societal belief systems) and, therefore, possibly more measurable and interpretable than those which have traditionally been of interest to social representations researchers.

2. Social representations, like cultural beliefs and assumptions, are thought to be the product of group learning and experience. As suggested previously (see Section 1.1.2, p. 10), Harré's distinction between 'collectively' and 'distributively' realised representations, and his argument that social representations are, by definition, 'collectively' realised, is as applicable to the concept of organisational culture as it is to the concept of social representations. He argues:

Something may be social because it is distributively realised in a group, that is each member has "it" but the "it" that each member has is like the "it" of every other individual member. But something may be social because it is collectively realised in a group. For instance, each member may have part of what is required, but the "it" does not come into existence until the group comes together, intercommunicates, assigns roles and rites of display and so on (Harré, 1985, cited in Farr, 1990, p. 49).

3. In the same way that cultural beliefs and assumptions are thought to be taken-for-granted and unconsciously held, so too is it argued that people may be largely unaware of the social representations, or conventions, which shape the way in which they think about, and respond to, the situations and events which they encounter. Instead, they attribute their thoughts and behaviours to 'common sense'.

4. Both concepts have an historical dimension in the sense that both depend for their development on the passage of a certain period of time. In considering the role of communication in the evolution of shared (social) representations, Sperber (1990) argues that only those representations which are repeatedly communicated and

minimally transformed in the process will end up becoming part of the culture. Notions of time and repetition over time are clearly implied, if not stated explicitly, in this view.

5. Both organisational culture and social representations are thought to serve a basic anxiety reduction function. 'Representation' is the act by which the unfamiliar is rendered familiar and Moscovici (1984), like his counterparts in the organisational culture tradition, notes the tendency for people, when they are faced with the unfamiliar, to refer back to 'conventions and memories' rather than to rely on more objective judgement.

6. Conceptual treatments of social representations and organisational culture similarly emphasise the role of socialisation and social communication in the evolution of beliefs and representations, and their transmission to newcomers to the group.

7. Finally, Moscovici's (1984) view that social representations may be, but need not be, anchored in objective reality is one which resonates with much current thinking about organisational culture. Thus, in the same way that societies can support representations which are widely shared but completely inaccurate in the face of objective information (Moscovici gives the example of the widespread belief among Nazis during World War II that Jews were racially inferior), so too can organisations support shared beliefs and assumptions which are inaccurate in the sense of being unreceptive to important environmental cues. Organisational cultures of this kind are often implicated in the failure of firms and, in this sense, research on organisational culture offers a potentially rich, and readily accessible, source of information about precisely the kinds of 'inaccurate' representations which are of interest to social representations researchers.

Apart from the conceptual similarities noted above, the organisational culture and social representations perspectives share some common ground in terms of their primary research agendas and the methodological approaches which they adopt. With respect to the former, while social representations research has been almost entirely driven by conceptual and theoretical concerns, such concerns have also constituted an important focus for organisational culture research. In social representations research, questions about the origin of representations (how they evolve and what functions they serve), their structure, and their internal dynamics, have dominated the research agenda. Similarly, in organisational culture research, considerable attention has been given to questions about how organisational culture forms and how it is transmitted, its basic

structure (ie. key elements), and the extent to which it can be managed and changed. Unlike social representations research, however, there is also a clear practical orientation in much organisational culture research. Researchers in this area have sought to understand the impact of organisational culture on organisational performance and adaptability to change, and have considered strategies for changing an organisation's culture so that it better suits the needs of the organisation and its members (see, for example, Bate, 1990; Denison, 1984; Sheridan, 1992).

With respect to methodological approaches, a distinguishing feature of both organisational culture research and research into social representations is the methodological diversity which characterises empirical investigations in each area. Thus, in each area, one can find studies which employ qualitative or interpretive techniques, studies which use quantitative techniques, and studies which use a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques (though studies of this third kind are not yet well-represented in either the organisational culture or social representations literatures). The point can also be made that, in both areas, qualitative techniques have constituted the preferred, or dominant, approach. Interestingly, however, the qualitative methods which are used by social representations researchers tend to be more economical than those used by organisational culture researchers. In particular, social representations researchers have made use of a number of interesting projective-type techniques (see, for example, De Rosa, 1987; Di Giacomo, 1980; and Hewstone, Jaspars & Lalljee, 1982) which are considerably less demanding on the researcher (in terms of time required in the research setting and the need for involvement with participants in the research) than are the extensive ethnographic inquiries that are carried out by some organisational culture researchers (see, for example, Gregory, 1983; Hanford 1988; and Van Maanen, 1973, 1975)²⁶. It may be that organisational culture researchers could benefit from an understanding of the techniques used by social representations researchers which, with some modification, might usefully be applied to the study of 'representations' in the organisational context.

In conclusion, the above commentary on the relationship between organisational culture and social representations, while brief, serves to highlight some of the main points of convergence between these two perspective. Attention has been drawn to the

²⁶ While Bryman (1991) is justifiably critical of 'ethnographic' studies of organisational culture on the grounds that researchers spend insufficient time in the field, these studies nevertheless require a commitment to fieldwork which studies of social representations, such as those cited above, do not.

considerable overlap that exists in current conceptualisations of organisational culture and social representations, and also to linkages associated with the aims and methods of research in each area. Several points of dissimilarity have also been identified, including differences in the conceptual/theoretical, as opposed to practical, orientation of research in each area, and differences in specific data collection techniques. Clearly, a closer investigation of these various points of departure is necessary in order to more fully appreciate the specific ways in which developments in social representations research can contribute to an understanding of organisational culture and vice versa. The insights above simply lay the groundwork for such an investigation.

1.5 Origins of the contemporary study of organisational culture

Despite the fact that a concern with 'cultural' phenomena in organisations can be traced back as far as the 1930's with the pioneering work of Chester Barnard and other classical philosophers of organisation theory (Ott, 1989), it was not until the late 1970's and early 1980's that the concept of organisational culture really took hold and began to receive serious attention as an important area for organisational research in its own right. A number of commentators (see, for example, Morgan, 1986; Ouchi & Wilkins; 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1993) have argued that an important contributing factor in this development was the rise of Japan in the late 1970's as a leading industrial power with which Western economies, that had up until then dominated the international marketplace, now had to contend. Japanese firms (particularly in the electronics and automotive manufacturing industries) had begun to outperform their American counterparts and there was no immediately obvious explanation for why this was the case. Organisational scholars who sought an explanation in terms of firms' structural properties (this was a dominant focus of organisational research at the time) were unable to demonstrate consistent differences between Japanese and western firms in this regard (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985). As a result, scholars began to explore the possibility that cultural factors might in some way account for the superior performance of Japanese firms. Essentially, this was the idea that national culture was likely to be a powerful shaper of organisational culture, so that the work cultures of Japanese and American firms might be expected to differ in important ways, reflecting differences in the national cultural contexts in which they operated.

As Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) note, there were several early studies, notably Ouchi's (1981) *Theory Z* and Pascale and Athos's (1981) *The Art of Japanese Management*,

which gave credence to this idea. The typical Japanese work culture was described as supporting values of interdependence, collaboration, and cooperation, in contrast with the typical American work culture which placed more emphasis on values of competition and individualism. Following on from the view that there were national differences in the cultures of work organisations, it was conceptually only a small step to the idea that, within the same national boundary, there might be differences in the cultures of different organisations. In this way, attempts to explain the economic success of Japan can be seen as having helped to bring the already existing concept of organisational culture to the centre stage of organisation theory and research. It has been suggested (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985, p. 458) that, during the 1980's, the study of organisational culture constituted "one of the major domains", perhaps even the "single most active arena" of organisational research.

1.5.1 Development of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory

As a paradigm for thinking about and understanding organisations, Ott (1989) makes the important point that the organisational culture perspective did not simply appear spontaneously within organisation theory, but rather it evolved over a long period of time and was influenced by, and built on, the various schools of thought which had preceded it. In this section, a brief review of the historical development of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory is offered. The point should be made that this review draws heavily (but does not rely solely) on the very comprehensive treatment of the subject provided by Ott.

According to Ott, the earliest theoretical grounding for the organisational culture perspective was provided by the classical philosophers, most notably Chester Barnard. Barnard's book *The Functions of the Executive*, which was published in 1938, challenged many of the precepts of the classical perspective which had dominated organisation theory since the late nineteenth century. For example, it depicted organisations as human and social systems, rather than mechanical systems; it emphasised the importance of the informal organisation; it drew attention to the critical communication role of managers; and it implied a symbolic role for leadership with its emphasis on the need for managers to shape and manage a system of shared values in the organisation.

Another classical philosopher whose work helped to shape the organisational culture perspective was Elton Mayo. While Mayo barely rates a mention in Ott's review, he has been credited elsewhere (Trice & Beyer, 1993) with having conducted the first systematic research into the influence of social (cultural) factors on the performance and behaviour of work groups. Mayo led the now famous Hawthorne studies which were conducted over a ten-year period (starting in 1927) at the Western Electric Company's Hawthorne Works in Chicago. While this series of studies originally set out to examine the relationship between productivity and various aspects of the physical work environment (eg. the level of illumination in the workplace), attempts to explain the anomalous findings of the very first studies that were conducted led the researchers to shift their attention away from the physical setting of work (as a determinant of productivity) to the social and psychological setting of work. Mayo and his colleagues provided the first empirical evidence of the influence of the informal work group, with its unique social codes and implicit norms of behaviour, on workers' behaviour. They also drew attention to the value of human leadership and the role of management in "administering a social system", as opposed to a purely technical system (Roethlisberger, cited by Clutterbuck & Crainer, 1990, p. 44). And they provided evidence that workers were motivated by more than just economic self-interest – this was a view which was strongly advocated by classical theorists such as Taylor (1911) – and that other motivations, such as "the desire to stand well with one's fellows" (Mayo, cited by Clutterbuck & Crainer, 1990, p. 44), were also critical.

In the context of the present discussion, the Hawthorne studies are also noteworthy because of the methods which they employed to understand the phenomena being investigated. One influential member of the Hawthorne research team was a cultural anthropologist by the name of Lloyd Warner. As noted by Trice and Beyer (1993), Warner introduced the methods of anthropological fieldwork, namely observation and interviewing, into the Hawthorne studies and it was through the use of these methods that cultural explanations for workers' behaviours began to emerge. With respect to the more recent study of organisational culture, the point can be made that, at least initially, the qualitative methods of cultural anthropology constituted the principal approach to data collection in this area.

Following on from the classical philosophers, the next major positive influence on the development of the organisational culture perspective, according to Ott (1989), came

from the neoclassical school. Ott makes the important point that the neoclassicists did not propose a bona fide theory of their own, but rather they attempted to modify classical theory in order to deal with some of its limitations. For example, Herbert Simon, a key figure in the neoclassical school, was critical of the 'one best way' prescriptions of the classical theorists and advocated research into the conditions under which different principles might be applicable (Simon, 1947)²⁷. Some years later, March and Simon (1958) challenged the classical view that organisations always seek to optimise decision-making (ie. make the 'best', most rational, decisions for the organisation), arguing that it was more often the case that decision-makers selected among a number of satisfactory alternatives (ie. decisions that were just good enough, rather than optimal).

While Simon is noted for his outspoken criticism of the classical school, Ott credits two other neoclassicists, namely Elliott Jacques and Philip Selznick, with having had the most significant influence on the development of the organisational culture perspective. Jacques's major contribution in this regard was his detailed study of Glacier Metals, a medium-sized British manufacturing company. The study was conducted under the auspices of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations and was published in 1951 in the book, *The Changing Culture of a Factory*. Ott highlights a number of similarities between Jacques's treatment of organisational culture and the treatment of the concept in more contemporary works. For example, he notes similarities in the way in which culture is defined and the key elements of which culture is generally thought to be composed (eg. attitudes, customs, habits, values, and unconscious conventions and taboos). He also draws parallels between current thinking about organisational culture and Jacques's emphasis on the importance of socialisation processes, and the role of culture in setting the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. Ott credits Jacques with the first published use of the term 'culture' in an organisational context, and considers his contribution to the development of the organisational culture perspective to be so significant as to warrant honouring him with the status of 'founder'. It is perhaps also worth mentioning that, at the time of its publication, Eric Trist (a contemporary of Jacques and one of the founders of the Tavistock Institute) judged *The Changing Culture of a Factory* to be 'far-reaching' in its

²⁷ As noted by Robbins and Barnwell (1994), Simon's ideas foreshadowed the later emergence of the contingency approach.

consequences and visionary in the sense that it was “a decade ahead of any form of organisational development” (Trist, cited by Clutterbuck & Crainer, 1990, p. 118).

As Ott points out, Philip Selznick’s contribution to the development of the organisational culture perspective closely parallels that of Chester Barnard. Like Barnard, Selznick rejected the classical notion of organisations as rational instruments and, instead, depicted them as social entities which he argued were “infused with values” (Selznick, cited by Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 99). Selznick proposed a distinction between the terms ‘organisation’ and ‘institution’, arguing that the latter more adequately captured the notion of an organisation as possessing a distinct identity, or character, which reflected the shared values of its members. Like Barnard, Selznick also drew attention to the role of leadership in shaping and maintaining the organisation’s system of shared values. This treatment of organisations and organisational leadership bears a striking resemblance to the later treatment of these concepts by the organisational culture perspective. While Selznick was clearly influenced by the earlier work of Barnard, he also made his own unique contribution to the organisational culture perspective. For example, as indicated in the following excerpt from his book *Leadership in Administration*, published in 1957, Selznick anticipated the notion of ‘strong cultures’ and provided valuable insights into their essential character:

Where institutionalization is well advanced, distinctive outlooks, habits and other commitments are unified, coloring all aspects of organizational life and lending it a social integration that goes well beyond formal coordination and command (Selznick, cited by Peters & Waterman, 1982, p. 99).

Selznick also wrote about the important function of myth (as opposed to more formal means) as a vehicle for the diffusion of shared values within an organisation (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Finally, attention might also be drawn to the methodological link between Selznick’s work – he relied on long-term observation and interviewing to generate his insights – and the later development of the organisational culture perspective (Ott, 1989).

While the organisational culture perspective may have originated in the early work of the classical philosophers and the neoclassicists, Ott suggests that it owes its major debt to the human relations school, which dominated in the late 1950’s and throughout the

1960's²⁸. In terms of its opposition to the classical perspective, the human relations school can possibly be regarded as being the most extreme of all of the schools (including those that preceded it and those that came after it) within organisation theory. It opposed the rational and economic prescriptions of classical organisation theory and, instead, emphasised the importance of understanding the social nature of workers (their needs and motives, their relationships with one another, the impact of group norms on their behaviour etc.). Ott suggests that the clearest statement of the philosophical underpinnings of the human relations perspective (and its radical departure from classical organisation theory) can be found in the work of Douglas McGregor, a key figure in the human relations movement. McGregor (1960) argued that all managers make fundamental assumptions about the nature of workers and that these assumptions influence the way in which they manage workers. He distinguished between two types of managerial assumptions. The first he called Theory X assumptions and these he regarded as being synonymous with the assumptions of the classical perspective. Briefly, managers who hold Theory X assumptions believe that workers have an inherent dislike of work, that they are lazy, that they dislike responsibility, and that they are motivated primarily by economic self-interest. From this perspective, workers need to be coerced into performing and managers can do this by relying on their position of authority and the associated control that they have over the allocation of rewards and punishments. The Theory X view also regards workers' needs as being separate from, and subordinate to, the needs of the organisation.

Theory Y assumptions constituted the second type of managerial assumptions identified by McGregor. Assumptions in this category articulated McGregor's interpretation of the philosophical basis of the human relations perspective. According to McGregor, managers who hold Theory Y assumptions believe that, under the right conditions, work can be a source of satisfaction. In other words, dislike of work is not regarded as an inherent human characteristic, but rather as the consequence of experience. Given the right conditions, workers will also seek more responsibility and will be self-directing rather than needing direction and control from those above them. Managers who hold Theory Y assumptions believe that workers are motivated by more

²⁸ Of course, in terms of the development of organisation theory more generally, the human relations perspective, itself, can be shown to have strong links with these earlier perspectives. For example, Barnard and Mayo – both classical philosophers of organisation theory – are usually considered to be the 'founders' of the human relations approach (Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990).

than just economic self-interest and that the satisfaction of higher-level needs (eg. the need for self-esteem) will also be important in motivating worker performance. Finally, in the Theory Y approach, the emphasis is on the integration of workers' needs with the needs of the organisation. From this perspective, the role of the manager and the key to organisational effectiveness, therefore, lies in the creation of a work environment in which workers can satisfy their own needs, whilst in the service of organisational objectives.

There is no denying the influence that the human relations perspective had on the subsequent development of the organisational culture perspective. The human relations school served to synthesise and bring to maturity ways of thinking about, and understanding, organisations which had originated in earlier perspectives and which became integral to the organisational culture perspective. The human relations school gave legitimacy to a focus on the 'soft' properties of organisations (the 'informal' organisation) and, during the human relations era, there was a proliferation of research and theory in the areas of attitudes (eg. job satisfaction), motivation, group dynamics and group processes (eg. communication and leadership). As suggested by Ott, evidence of the impact of the human relations school on the development of the organisational culture perspective can be seen in the fact that virtually all of the organisational culture perspective's concepts (ie. patterns of behaviour, values, and basic beliefs), along with their theoretical and empirical bases, have been adopted almost entirely intact from the human relations perspective. It is also the case that many of the human relations perspective's tools for organisational change – for example, grid training to develop 'team' leadership, team building, self-managing work groups, and survey feedback (French & Bell, 1978) – are precisely those tools used to bring about changes in organisational culture. Finally, Ott notes that many of the scholars associated with the human relations school subsequently went on to become leading writers within both the organisational culture perspective, and the closely related power and politics perspective. He cites as examples Allen and Kraft (1982); Davis (1984); Deal (of Deal & Kennedy, 1982); Kilmann (1984, 1985); Pfeffer (1981a, 1981b); Sathe (1985); and Schein (1981, 1984, 1985).

Despite the solid grounding of the organisational culture perspective in the human relations perspective, there are nevertheless a number of important differences between the two perspectives. As Ott notes, the human relations perspective was much more

optimistic, in terms of its basic philosophy, than was the later organisational culture perspective. It rested on the assumption that through the effective management of human relations in the workplace, it would be possible to optimise both organisational outcomes (ie. productivity) and individual outcomes (ie. job satisfaction). This assumption has, of course, never been verified. Research into the relationship between job satisfaction and productivity has failed to find any consistent relationship (Vroom, 1964), and it is now believed that the satisfaction-productivity issue is much more complex than is suggested by the earlier belief that 'A happy worker is a productive worker'. Questions have also been raised about the human relations perspective's assumption that all workers seek opportunities for freedom and self-development at work. This assumption denies the possibility that some workers may, by choice, adopt an instrumental orientation to their work (ie. see work as a means to an end), and seek opportunities for self-development through their experiences outside of work (Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990).

In contrast with the human relations perspective, the organisational culture perspective is far less sanguine about the possibility of achieving organisational objectives through the 'humanisation' of the workplace and the creation of a work environment in which workers' higher-level needs can be satisfied. The culture perspective argues that the way in which organisation members perceive, think about, and respond to, their experience of organisation life will be influenced by the organisation's culture (Schein, 1985, Smircich, 1983). An important implication of this view is that organisation members will not *naturally* embrace the more participative approaches prescribed by the human relations perspective but, rather, their responsiveness to such approaches will be culturally determined. If the organisation's (group's) culture supports values that are consistent with such approaches, then these approaches are likely to be accepted; if not, then resistance is likely to be encountered. The idea that culture is a critical factor influencing organisation member behaviour and organisation member responsiveness to change, is convincingly argued in accounts of early experiments with the introduction of quality circles (a Japanese management innovation) into western firms (Meyer & Stott, 1985; Wells, cited in Blunt, 1986). According to the authors of these accounts, the failure of quality circles (with their emphasis on employee involvement, participative styles of management etc.) to produce the positive organisational outcomes that were anticipated was due primarily to a

cultural mismatch between the values implicit in initiatives of this kind and the values which, at the time, dominated the cultures of firms in the west.

A second important difference between the human relations perspective and the organisational culture perspective lies in the orientation of each to the environment. In the human relations perspective, the organisation is typically considered in a vacuum (Silverman 1970) and no attention is given to the broader environment in which the organisation operates. In contrast, the organisational culture perspective acknowledges the role of the broader (national) culture, as well as the organisation's business environment in shaping culture at an organisational level (Ott, 1989).

In the discussion above, attention had been drawn to some of the major *positive* influences on the development, within organisation theory, of the organisational culture perspective. Links have been established between the culture perspective and the work of the early classical philosophers, most notably, Chester Barnard and Elton Mayo; reference has been made to the influence of scholars from the neoclassical school, in particular, Elliot Jacques and Philip Selznick; and there has been some discussion of the very strong grounding (both theoretical and empirical) that the organisational culture perspective has in the human relations school. While the significance of these various positive influences is indisputable, the point should be made that the organisational culture perspective owes its development, not just to 'contributions by acceptance' (to use Ott's terminology), but also to 'contributions by rejection'. In other words, the organisational culture perspective did not evolve simply as a result of the cumulative influence of schools of thought with which it was largely compatible, but its development was also spurred by competing perspectives, that is, by schools of thought whose basic assumptions it strongly opposed. In his overview of the historical development of the organisational culture perspective, Ott reviews the 'contributions by rejection' of three schools of thought, namely, (i) classical organisation theory which dominated from the late nineteenth century into the 1930's, (ii) 'modern' structural (ie. classical) organisation theory which dominated in 1960's and 1970's, and (iii) the systems and contingency perspectives²⁹ which emerged in the late 1960's and constituted the mainstream of organisation theory through the 1970's and early 1980's.

²⁹ Ott groups these two perspectives together, as do many other commentators on organisation theory (see, for example, Silverman, 1970; Morgan, 1986).

In contrast to the organisational culture perspective, in which the emphasis is on the human or 'irrational' aspects of organisational life, each of the perspectives above adopts an essentially rational and mechanistic view of organisations. Classical organisation theory and 'modern' structural theory are the most closely related of these perspectives, in terms of their basic assumptions³⁰. For example, as highlighted in Ott's analysis, both perspectives assume that organisations are essentially rational institutions which exist to accomplish production-related and economic goals. Both perspectives advocate the use of a clearly defined system of rules and regulations, as well as the exercise of formal authority by management, in order to achieve rational organisational behaviour. It is also the case that, central to both perspectives, is a concern with organisational structure. Both classical organisation theory and 'modern' structural theory regard organisational structure as the key to organisational success and both assume that there is a 'best' structure for organisations. In classical organisation theory, this 'best' structure is represented by Weber's bureaucratic 'ideal' type, which was considered to be the most efficient form of organisation regardless of the nature of the enterprise (Morgan, 1986). Classical theorists also advocated a 'one best way' to design individual jobs using Taylor's principles of scientific management (Morgan, 1986). In 'modern' structural theory, there is no single 'best' structure for *all* organisations, but rather a 'best' structure for each organisation depending upon factors such as the nature of the organisation's operating environment, the nature of its products and services, and its dominant technology or system of production (Ott, 1989). Associated with their emphasis on organisational structure, classical organisation theory and 'modern' structural theory also share the view that production efficiency can be maximised through specialisation and the division of labour.

The organisational culture perspective differs from the above perspectives in a number of important ways. For example, in focussing on the human side of organisations, the culture perspective draws attention to organisation members' subjective experience of organisational life. It does not disregard the 'hard' or 'rational' properties of organisations (such as organisational structure) but rather it argues that, in order to fully understand their significance and their impact on organisational behaviour, one must understand the subjective meanings which they have for organisation members

³⁰ This is because, as Ott (1989) notes, 'modern' structural theory was essentially an attempt to revive classical organisation theory, albeit with modifications reflecting the influences of schools of thought which immediately preceded it, such as the neoclassical and human relations schools.

(Morgan, 1986). The culture perspective also implies quite a different way of thinking about the role of management. In contrast with classical organisation theory and 'modern' structural theory, in which the emphasis is on managers' formal authority, the culture perspective draws attention to the symbolic significance of managerial activity and emphasises the critical role that managers have in shaping the organisation's system of shared meanings (Pfeffer, 1981; Schein, 1985). A third difference between the culture perspective and the classical and 'modern' structural perspectives concerns the way in which organisational change is viewed. Whereas the latter perspectives view change as essentially a problem of changing organisational structure (in order to achieve the 'optimal' structure), the organisational culture perspective argues that change efforts should also be directed at effecting changes in the shared values and shared interpretive schemes which guide the actions and behaviour of organisation members (Morgan, 1986).

While the contributions of both classical organisation theory and 'modern' structural theory to the development of the organisational culture perspective have been almost entirely 'contributions by rejection', Ott does point out that the culture perspective has gained from the 'modern' structural approach in so far as it has adopted a number of important concepts from the latter, in particular, the concepts of differentiation and integration. These concepts, as used by the 'modern' structuralists, refer to the fundamental, but opposing requirements for organisations to, on the one hand, differentiate their activities (both internally and externally) and, on the other, to coordinate or integrate these activities to achieve unity of effort and purpose (Lawrence & Lorsch, cited by Robbins & Barnwell, 1994). As Ott notes, one can see a similar application of these concepts in Schein's (1985) argument that cultural beliefs and assumptions serve the basic purpose of helping organisations to solve what are essentially problems of external adaptation (differentiation), on the one hand, and internal integration, on the other.

The third, and most recent, theoretical perspective which Ott argues was important to the development of the organisational culture perspective – in the sense that it served "primarily as a focus of theoretical, empirical, and emotional dissatisfaction" (Ott, 1989, p. 159) for the latter – was the systems theory. The systems theory originated in the biological sciences where it was proposed as an explanation for the survival and adaptation of living organisms (Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990). Systems theory, as applied

to the study of organisations, argues that organisations, like living organisms, are made up of a complex set of dynamically related and interdependent parts. Each part contributes to, and receives something from, the whole and a change in one part inevitably necessitates changes and adaptations in other parts (Ott, 1989; Silverman, 1970, Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990). A systems perspective on organisations views organisations as 'open', rather than 'closed' systems³¹. Organisations are 'open' to their environment in the same way that living systems are. They depend upon their environment for the satisfaction of their needs and, in order to survive, they must be able to adjust to changes in the environment. In this way, the organisation itself (and not just the parts of which it is composed) is seen as an interdependent part of a much larger whole (Wilson & Rosenfeld, 1990). It acquires inputs from the environment, it transforms these inputs, and then returns them (in changed form) back to the environment.

As Silverman (1990) notes, the main questions which organisational systems theorists have sought to address have been concerned with: (i) the nature of the relationships between the various systems and sub-systems identified for study (eg. between the organisation and its environment, between various groups or departments within the organisation, between the organisation's social and technical sub-systems etc.); (ii) the extent to which these inter-relations contribute to system effectiveness (ie. the extent to which they satisfy the needs of the organisation as a whole); and (iii) the dynamics of the system (ie. the forces that shape and change the behaviour of the system and its constituent parts).

While the organisational culture perspective is similar to the systems perspective in that it also depicts organisations as open systems (it acknowledges the role of the broader context in which organisations exist in shaping organisational culture), any similarity between the two perspectives really ends here (Ott, 1989). The culture perspective can be seen as being fundamentally opposed to a systems approach on a number of grounds. First, it rejects the systems view that organisations have an inbuilt tendency towards integration and self-regulation (Silverman, 1970). This is the view that, on the basis of feedback suggesting a discrepancy between the organisation's desired and actual states (for example, feedback suggesting that the organisation is 'out-

³¹ The application of a 'closed' system model can be seen in classical organisation theory and in the human relations perspective.

of-fit' with its environment), the organisation will be naturally inclined to correct this discrepancy, thereby restoring the equilibrium of the system. This tendency towards self-regulation has been described as being analogous to the functioning of the human body (Huczynski & Buchanan, 1991), or the functioning of a mechanical device such as a thermostat (McKelvey, cited by Ott, 1989). From this perspective, failure of an organisation to self-correct (ie. organisational dysfunction) is attributed to a faulty feedback and information system. One needs only to improve the latter in order to ensure more adaptive organisational system behaviour.

In contrast to the above, the organisational culture perspective argues that, rather than being naturally adaptive and responding rationally and as required, to the changing demands of the environment, organisations are more likely, particularly in the face of uncertainty, to be guided by the particular patterns of thinking and behaving which have worked for them in the past (ie. by their cultural traditions) (Kantrow, 1987). From a cultural perspective, the natural impulse is to 'keep things the same', rather than to make the changes that might be required to ensure the longer-term survival of the system. In this sense, it is naive to think that the key to controlling and predicting organisational system behaviour lies in the development of improved information and feedback systems. As Ott (1989) notes, while organisational systems are needed to reinforce and effect changes in organisational culture, if there is a conflict between systems and culture, it is culture that will usually prevail.

A second, and related, difference between the organisational culture perspective and the systems perspective concerns the latter's assumption that, as for organisms in the natural world, all parts of an organisational system work together as a unified whole (Morgan, 1986). The emphasis is very much on consensus and harmony, with conflict regarded as an aberration – something that is essentially harmful to the system. The organisational culture perspective (and, even more so, the related power and politics perspective) rejects this view, arguing that, within a given organisation, a number of separate and unique sub-cultures can exist which may, or may not, support the beliefs and values of the dominant organisational culture (Martin & Siehl, 1983). From this perspective, the emergence of a counterculture (a sub-culture whose beliefs and values are antagonistic to those of the dominant culture) does not necessarily signal organisational dysfunction. On the contrary, countercultures can be seen to have important positive consequences for the organisation such as "providing a safe haven for

the development of innovative ideas” (Martin & Siehl, 1983, p. 63). In the language of systems theory, the organisational culture perspective (like the power and politics perspective) also allows for the possibility that some parts of the system (eg. the managerial sub-culture) may be more dominant than others (eg. the worker sub-culture), in terms of their influence on organisational system behaviour as a whole.

A third important difference between the organisational culture perspective and organisational systems theory concerns the basic way of seeing organisations and their environments which is encouraged by each. As Morgan (1986) notes, in adopting the organismic or biological metaphor, the systems perspective encourages a view of organisations and their environments as concrete, objective phenomena – they are viewed in the same way that phenomena in the natural world are viewed. In contrast, the organisational culture perspective sees organisations and their environments as socially constructed phenomena – they are the product of the creative actions of human beings (Morgan, 1986; Silverman, 1970). From this perspective, organisations and their environments cannot be treated as concrete aspects of some ‘objective’ reality, neither can they be viewed as having an existence which is independent of the individuals (groups, organisations) who populate them. Moreover, from an organisational culture perspective, one cannot understand organisational system behaviour through mere observation (as might be the case for organisms in the natural world), but rather, one must seek an understanding of the subjective meanings which the people who make up the system attribute to their behaviour.

Finally, the organisational culture and organisational systems perspectives differ markedly in terms of the methods which they use to carry out research in organisations. As Ott (1989) notes, research from a systems perspective has been dominated by the use of quantitative methods. A central focus of much of this research has been on organisational decision-making and how organisations process and use information in making decisions. Researchers have sought to optimise organisational decision-making through the development and application of models which specify the various steps involved in the decision-making process and offer a quantitative basis for choosing among various decision alternatives (see, for example, Harrison, cited by Robbins, 1996). Ott (1989) and others (eg. Ouchi and Wilkins; 1985) have made the important point that the dominance of quantitative methods during the organisational systems era can be attributed, in no small part, to the impact of computer technology which by the

end of the 1960's was widely available for use in the social sciences. In contrast to the organisational systems approach, the methods used by organisational culture researchers have, at least up until recently, been predominantly qualitative (Denison, 1996; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1993). The main argument from the organisational culture perspective is that, in order to understand a phenomenon as complex and context-specific as an organisation's system of shared meanings, the researcher needs to 'get close to' the subjects and the setting of the research. This is simply not possible using the more detached methods of quantitative research (Jones, 1988; Ott, 1989; Van Maanen, 1979).

One last development within organisation theory which is included in Ott's (1989) analysis is the power and politics perspective. As Ott points out, this perspective developed in parallel with the organisational culture perspective (both perspectives began to assert themselves within organisation theory in the late 1970's) and is very closely related to it, in terms of its basic assumptions. The central theme of the power and politics perspective, as outlined by Pfeffer (cited by Morgan, 1986; Ott, 1989; Robbins & Barnwell, 1994), is that organisations are essentially political entities, comprising individuals and groups (coalitions), each with their own interests (beliefs, values, motives etc.), who are in competition with one another for limited resources (funds, status, career advancement etc.). From this perspective, organisational decision-making is not rational and goal-oriented (in the sense suggested by classical and systems theories), but rather it is a political process designed to serve the self interests of those who are in power at any given time (ie. the dominant coalition). Also, from this perspective, conflict is viewed as an inevitable and ineradicable feature of organisational life which, if managed properly (ie. through collective bargaining and negotiation), has potentially positive consequences for the organisation. Conflict is not viewed (as it is in classical theory and organisational systems theory) as something which is inherently 'bad' and which managers should seek to eradicate.

As suggested, the overlap between the power and politics perspective and the organisational culture perspective is considerable. As noted by Ott, both perspectives are strongly opposed to the assumptions of organisational rationality which underpin the classical and 'modern' classical schools, and the systems theory of organisations. For example, both perspectives reject the notion of rational behaviour in the face of organisational uncertainty; they do not regard organisations as necessarily goal-oriented,

in a rational sense (ie. in the sense that organisational members seek common goals which are in the best interest of the organisation); they reject the view that organisational control necessarily rests with those in positions of formal authority; and they believe that, rather than being subordinate to the interests of the organisation as a whole, the personal preferences (values, beliefs etc.) of organisation members vitally affect organisational behaviour and organisational decision-making. Ott further suggests that, to the extent that there are differences between these two perspectives, they would appear to be differences more of emphasis and semantics, rather than fundamental differences. For example, where the power and politics perspective talks about coalitions, the culture perspective talks about sub-cultures; where the power and politics perspective talks about conflict, the culture perspective talks about cultural perpetuation and transmittal³². In a similar vein, Morgan (1986) has suggested that, while both perspectives agree that organisations (and their environments) are constructed, or enacted, by the social actions and interactions of organisation members, they differ in the degree of autonomy which they accord organisation members in this process. Whereas the organisational culture perspective sees enactment as essentially a voluntary process, which is under the direct influence of the individuals involved – this is a view for which the culture perspective has been criticised (see, for example, Morgan, 1986; Rose, 1988; Silverman, 1970) – the power and politics perspective draws attention to the role of organisational power structures in facilitating or constraining social action.

Finally, in commenting on the links between the organisational culture and power and politics perspectives, Ott makes the point that a number of leading contemporary organisation theorists have written from both perspectives (he cites Kanter, Mintzberg, and Pfeffer as examples) and he speculates about the possibility of a merging of the two perspectives at some time in the near future.

In this section, the development of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory has been reviewed. While this review draws heavily upon the treatment of the subject offered by Ott (1989) – for example, it adopts the same broad groupings of theories as suggested by Ott – several other sources have also been fairly widely consulted (in particular, Morgan (1986), Ouchi & Wilkins (1985), Silverman

³² It is not entirely clear, to this author, what Ott is implying by this link. Is he saying that conflict is a perpetual and endemic part of organisational life in the same way that culture is? Or is he saying that conflict may well be an inevitable result of efforts to perpetuate and transmit culture?

(1970), and Wilson & Rosenfeld (1990)). One important point that this review has sought to illustrate is that the organisational culture perspective was an evolutionary, rather than a spontaneous, development within organisation theory. Its development can be seen as reflecting the cumulative (though, as Ott points out, non-linear) influence of the various schools of thought that preceded it. As indicated, the impact of these earlier schools took the form of contributions by acceptance, on the one hand (ie. from schools whose basic assumptions were compatible with those of the culture perspective) and contributions by rejection, on the other (ie. from schools whose basic assumptions the culture perspective opposed).

This characteristic of the development of the organisational culture perspective reflects a more general characteristic of the development of organisation theory as a whole, namely, that while cumulative, it has oscillated between perspectives which emphasise the explicit and rational properties of organisations, on the one hand, and perspectives which emphasise the implicit and nonrational properties of organisations, on the other (Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Ott, 1989). The emergence of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory (and the related power and politics perspective) can, therefore, be seen as predictable – it is simply the latest of a series of ‘pendulum swings’ or, as Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) put it, the “latest turn in the struggle” (p. 462) between two widely divergent ways of looking at organisations. Moreover, as these authors note, the culture perspective, like the developments which preceded it, can also be expected to ‘have its day’, after which it will “recede in importance, to rise yet again in modified form” (p. 462).

Finally, the important point should be made that organisation theories do not develop in a vacuum, but rather they are shaped by, and reflect, the societal culture of their time (Ott, 1989). Thus, in the same way that the times were right for the emergence of the human relations perspective (Ott describes the 1960’s as a decade of ‘optimism for humanism’), and for the emergence of the systems perspective (the rapid development of computers during the late 1960’s and 1970’s led to a belief in the value of high technology, models, quantitative methods etc. for solving society’s basic problems), so too was the social and cultural milieu of the 1980’s right for the emergence of the organisational culture and power and politics perspectives. In Ott’s own words:

The 1980’s have been years of uncertainty, change, and of questioning basic values, institutions, national economic and military strength, and our ability to solve fundamental problems *at all*. The organisational culture perspective fits the

current national mood. Who says rational views have solved our problems or have led us to understand organizations? (Ott, 1989, pp. 167-168).

1.5.2 Popularisation of the organisational culture concept

While the emergence of the organisational culture perspective within organisation theory can be seen to have been quite a predictable development, and while the times were certainly 'right' for such a development, a number of commentators (see, for example, Martin & Siehl, 1983; Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985; Trice & Beyer, 1993) have suggested that the culture perspective was assisted in its rise to ascendancy by the publication, in the 1980's, of a number of popular books on the subject, in particular, Ouchi's (1981) *Theory Z: How American Business Can Meet the Japanese Challenge*, Pascale and Athos's (1981) *The Art of Japanese Management*, Deal and Kennedy's (1982) *Corporate Cultures*, and Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. These books, while written by academics, were directed primarily at professional managers and, as such, they helped to establish a broad base of interest in the organisational culture concept, which extended beyond academic circles to the wider business community. Moreover, the interest generated was more than just passive interest. The popularisation of the concept led to the birth of a 'corporate culture' consulting industry, numerous articles on corporate culture appeared in the business press (in publications such as *Business Week*, *Fortune*, and the *Financial Times*), and corporate managers joined their academic counterparts in debating the subject at conferences on organisational culture (Smircich & Calás, 1987; Dunford, 1991). It has been suggested that the concept "entered common parlance" more quickly than any other within organisational analysis (Dunford, 1991, p. 1) and, in management circles, its use as a "convenient catch-all explanation for why things happen or do not happen in a particular way in a firm" (Vecchio, Hearn, & Southey, 1992, p. 575) continues even today.

Of the texts cited above, the one which has possibly attracted the widest readership among non-academic audiences is Peters and Waterman's (1982) *In Search of Excellence*. In the context of the present discussion, it is appropriate, therefore, to provide a brief commentary on this work. *In Search of Excellence* distils the findings of a major research project which was undertaken by the authors and which sought to identify the key characteristics of high-performing American companies. Forty three

companies were included in the study³³ and these were selected from six industry categories, namely, high technology, consumer goods, general industrial, service, project management, and resource based. All of the companies were large companies (the majority had annual sales of in excess of one billion dollars), and all met the authors' specified criteria for 'excellence' (companies were evaluated in terms of their prestige in the business world, their financial performance over an extended period of time, and their innovativeness). Data collection was by way of interviewing of senior company personnel (for twenty one companies, the interviews were 'in-depth', whilst for the remaining twenty two, they were less intensive)³⁴ as well as documentary analysis of company annual reports and press coverage. On the basis of their analysis of these data³⁵, the authors identified eight key attributes which they argued were common to their 'excellent' companies. These were:

1. *A bias for action* (essentially 'getting on with' the task at hand and not allowing analysis to impede action);
2. *Close to the customer* (a willingness to listen to, and learn from customers, combined with a commitment to top quality);
3. *Autonomy and entrepreneurship* (fostering innovation through the development of a climate in which 'practical risk taking' is encouraged);
4. *Productivity through people* (essentially, recognising the value of the firm's human resources by treating employees with respect and listening to what they have to say);
5. *Hands-on, value driven* (developing a set of 'guiding beliefs' or 'shared values' and communicating these to all levels of the hierarchy through managerial action, such as, 'walking the plant floor');
6. *Stick to the knitting* (staying close to the business that you know);
7. *Simple form, lean staff* (a preference for simple organisational structures and systems); and

³³ The original sample comprised seventy five companies. Thirteen European companies were subsequently dropped from the sample, as were a further twenty six companies that failed to meet all of the author's specified criteria for 'excellence'. The resulting sample was then increased to forty three companies with the addition of seven privately held companies or subsidiaries.

³⁴ The authors provide no information about the numbers of interviews conducted, the duration of the interviews, the questions asked etc.

³⁵ The reader is also left to wonder about how the data were analysed and the findings corroborated.

8. *Simultaneous loose-tight properties* (allowing employees maximum autonomy and responsibility, while at the same time as maintaining centralised control over core values).

In Search of Excellence was received with enormous enthusiasm by the business community. The book received highly favourable reviews in the business press, it quickly became a best-seller (dominating the best-seller lists for most of 1983), and the authors were profiled in newspapers and magazines, and received numerous invitations for speaking engagements (Carroll, 1983). The appeal of the book was such that it was judged, at the time, to be "one of the great business publishing successes of recent years" (Carroll, 1983, p. 78).

There are two main reasons which have been given for why *In Search of Excellence* had such an impact and created such enthusiasm and anticipation in the business community (Carroll, 1983). The first concerns the communication style adopted by the authors. The book is written in an 'easy-to-read' and informal style, and the research findings and 'lessons' to be learned are conveyed via lively anecdotes and quotations from the leaders of the 'excellent' companies. There is little doubt that this approach helped to make the contents of the book more accessible to, and more engaging for its readership than might have been the case had the authors adopted the more formal and analytical style characteristic of much 'academic' writing. A second major reason for the book's appeal lay in its highly prescriptive nature. By identifying the core attributes of high-performing companies, Peters and Waterman offered managers the tantalising prospect that the solution to all of their organisational ills lay in getting a 'new' culture that looked more like the cultures of the 'excellent' companies described by the authors. The point has been made (Carroll, 1983) that this prospect was all the more appealing, and the book's success all the more likely, given the depressed business climate in which the book first appeared. Its publication followed a decade of economic instability and takeovers of American firms by foreign companies and American business managers were desperate for the kind of panacea that Peters and Waterman seemed to be offering.

Of course, the notion that there is a single 'best way' of doing things, or a 'single best' organisational culture, has subsequently been strongly criticised. For example, Schein (1985) argues that an organisation's culture is effective, or functional, to the extent that it allows the organisation to accommodate, or overcome, the demands of its

external environment, while at the same time maintaining its internal integration or cohesion. There is no 'single best' culture for all organisations, neither is there a 'single best' culture for any given organisation. Rather, what constitutes an effective culture, at any given time and for any given organisation, will change depending upon changes in the internal and external contingencies with which the organisation must contend. In a similar vein, Kilmann (1987) warns against the tendency to assume that the principles and practices which ensured the organisation's success in the past will automatically ensure its success in the future. On the contrary, an organisation's continued reliance on past principles and practices, in the face of changing circumstances, may actually contribute to its downfall. Kilmann ventures the possibility that the assumptions underlying Peters and Waterman's eight principles for business success may be outdated, in which case the insights about 'excellent' companies contained within the book would be rendered "more an interesting lesson in history than a valuable prescription for success" (p. 3).

Apart from its 'one best way' prescription for business success, *In Search of Excellence* has been fairly severely criticised on a number of other counts. Shortly after its publication, Carroll (1983) reviewed the book in an article with the telling title *A Disappointing Search for Excellence*. Carroll's appraisal of the book is almost entirely negative and he takes the authors to task on virtually every aspect of their research endeavour. For example, he is critical of the fact that the research sample included only 'excellent' companies and suggests that, in the absence of a comparison with, say, companies experiencing difficulties, the claim that the eight attributes identified are distinctive to 'excellent' companies is unfounded. He poses the question "...is the running of a successful company more taxing of management excellence than the retrieval of Chrysler, Baldwin United, or Firestone?" (p. 79). Carroll also draws attention (as does the present author) to the paucity of information provided about how the research data were collected and analysed. One important omission which he identifies in this regard is that there is no information about whether or not Peters and Waterman (or other members of their research team) spent any time in the research organisations. If they did, what was the nature of their involvement and how extensive was it?

In addition to the above concerns, Carroll raises a number of questions about the reliability of the data gathered by Peters and Waterman. For example, he questions

whether the leadership of the 'excellent' companies necessarily constitutes the most accurate and reliable source of information about what has happened in these companies; he questions the reliability of anecdotal data gathered from sources such as former employees of the 'excellent' companies (in one case, this was a business executive who had worked at McDonalds – one of the 'excellent' companies – as a seventeen-year-old high school student); and he questions the extent to which the views of single individuals about a given 'excellent' company adequately represent the views of the company's wider membership. Carroll also criticises the authors for their tendency, in reporting the results of their research, to make claims (eg. about the value, or otherwise, of particular organisational practices) for which they give no supporting evidence whatsoever.

A further criticism that Carroll makes of Peters and Waterman's research is that it is too narrowly focussed on managerial effectiveness as a determinant of organisational success, and fails to take into account the important role that non-management variables – technology, finances, government policy, raw materials etc. – have in sustaining corporate 'excellence'. Thus, as suggested by Carroll, if a computer company does not have access to some sort of proprietary technology, or an oil company access to low cost supplies, the company will be likely to experience difficulties regardless of how well its management implements the eight lessons identified by Peters and Waterman. As it is, the book places all of the onus for organisational success on managerial behaviour and, in this sense, it sets up "unreasonable expectations of, and for, management" who may be seeking to make their companies more like the 'excellent' companies (Carroll, 1983, p. 88). Among his other criticisms of *In Search of Excellence*, Carroll finds fault with the overly enthusiastic and 'even sermonical' tone in which much of the book is written (in particular, the chapters devoted to an exposition of the eight attributes), and he expresses his dissatisfaction with the book's failure to go beyond mere description and seek answers to critical questions suggested by the research, such as, why favourable cultures develop in some companies but not in others, and why companies lose their positive attributes. It is only through inquiry of this kind, argues Carroll, that the research can have any practical value for "those who aspire to excellence" (p. 88).

Overall, Carroll can be seen to have offered a very thorough critical review of *In Search of Excellence* in which he raises some very important questions about the book's conceptual underpinnings, its research base, and its main conclusions. One might be

forgiven, however, for feeling that Carroll's review is almost too disparaging. It appears that he can find nothing in, or about, the book to redeem its faults and his summary evaluation that "management and the management literature were not moved further toward excellence by this book and may even have been needlessly delayed" (p. 88) seems unduly harsh. Despite the 'academic' flaws that one might find in the work, Peters and Waterman are surely deserving of some credit for bringing to the attention of management practitioners the symbolic impact of their behaviour and the fact that some behaviours (eg. treating employees with respect and 'walking the plant floor') are likely to be more effective than others, if not in influencing the financial bottom line, at least in contributing to workers' job satisfaction?

Apart from Carroll's review, there have been a number of empirically-based evaluations of *In Search of Excellence*. For example, Hitt and Ireland (1987) conducted a study in which they compared the financial performance and core competencies of 185 companies, including 23 'excellent' companies from Peters and Waterman's (1982) study, and 162 companies drawn from the industrial sector of America's Fortune 1000 companies. Financial performance was measured using market returns, calculated for each of the participating companies for the period 1975-1979. Companies' core competencies were assessed using a questionnaire survey which was administered in 1980 and which asked about the strategic importance of 55 competence activities. Sixteen of these activities corresponded to Peters and Austin's (1985) four 'excellence' attributes of (i) leadership; (ii) close to the customer; (iii) autonomy and entrepreneurship; and (iv) productivity through people³⁶. Interestingly, Hitt and Ireland found that only three of the 'excellent' companies did better than the average of the general sample in terms of these measures. Moreover, there were several Fortune 1000 companies which outperformed all of the 'excellent' companies on these measures. These findings led the authors to conclude that *In Search of Excellence* "may be based more on advocacy than on science" (p. 91). In a similar vein, a re-examination of the performance of Peters and Waterman's 'excellent' companies just a few years after the publication of *In Search of Excellence* showed that some of these companies were experiencing serious difficulties (Business Week, 1984). This finding recalls the

³⁶ In their book *A Passion for Excellence*, Peters and Austin (1985) propose a model which comprises only four 'excellence' attributes rather than eight, as in Peters and Waterman's (1982) original framework. As indicated, however, three of these attributes (the exception is 'leadership') derive from the original framework.

argument above that there is no 'single best' culture for an organisation and that a culture which is adaptive for an organisation at one point in time may, at another point in time and in changed circumstances, act to impede the organisation's growth and well-being.

Based on the above reviews, it can be concluded that while *In Search of Excellence* was instrumental in bringing the concept of organisational culture to the attention of non-academic audiences (a significant accomplishment in itself, it might be argued), the book did not fare so well when subjected to 'academic' scrutiny. Moreover, the book is perhaps ultimately disappointing even from a practitioner's point of view. In the final analysis, it was unable to deliver the outcomes that practitioners, perhaps somewhat naively, had hoped it would. There was more to business success than adherence (no matter how faithful) to Peters and Waterman's eight lessons.

Finally, the point should be made that, while the popularisation of organisational culture undoubtedly gave a big impetus to research in the area, there were some academics who were sceptical about this development and warned about the danger of organisational culture becoming just another 'management fad'. Kilmann (1987), for example, drew attention to the fact that, every few years, there was some new approach which came into vogue and which promised to develop organisations to their fullest potential. The appeal of each new approach was that it offered management a 'quick fix' or a 'simple solution' to what, inevitably, were very complex problems. In the 1940's, human relations training was considered to be the key to organisational success; in the 1950's it was management by objectives; in the 1960's decentralisation; in the 1970's corporate strategy; and in the 1980's organisational culture came into vogue. Commenting on this latest 'fad', Salmans (cited in Kilmann, 1987) wrote:

Now corporate culture is the magic phrase that management consultants are breathing into the ears of American executives (p. ix-x).

From a somewhat different perspective³⁷, but in a no less sceptical tone, Smircich (1983a) wrote:

The talk about corporate culture tends to be optimistic, even messianic, about top managers moulding cultures to suit their strategic ends. The notion of 'corporate

³⁷ Smircich (1983a) draws a distinction between organisational culture research in which culture is treated as an internal variable (ie. something that an organisation *has*) and organisational culture research in which culture is treated as a 'root' metaphor (ie. something that an organisation *is*). She argues that the former, which is more closely aligned with management interests than the latter, is particularly susceptible to the dangers of 'faddism'.

culture' runs the risk of being as disappointing a managerial tool as the more technical and quantitative tools that were faddish in the 1970's (p. 346).

1.6 Applications and measures

1.6.1 Major claims

While practitioners have, understandably, always treated organisational culture as an effectiveness issue, Trice and Beyer (1993) note that, over time, academic researchers also began to show an interest in the relationship between organisational culture and organisational performance. A review of some of the writings on this subject (by both practitioners and academics) suggests that the practical consequences of organisational culture may indeed be far-reaching. For example, organisational culture has been implicated in the financial success (and failure) of firms. As indicated previously (see Section 2), early comparisons of Japanese and American firms (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981) attributed the superior financial performance of Japanese firms to the cultural characteristics of these firms (such as, the value placed on lifetime employment, collective decision-making, and a concern for the general welfare of employees). In a similar vein, Peters and Waterman (1982) argued that there were certain cultural configurations (eg. a bias for action, a commitment to customer service, an emphasis on autonomy and entrepreneurship etc.) that distinguished successful, from unsuccessful, firms in the U.S. Claims have also been made about a link between organisational culture and performance at an individual level. For example, Schein (1985) draws attention to the prevalence, in many work groups, of norms which function to restrict output or productivity. Nicholson and Johns (1985) describe the phenomenon of the 'absence' culture and argue that absence is a 'culturally mediated' event, rather than an individual event. And Sheridan (1992) conducted research which showed that employees were less likely to turnover voluntarily in firms with people-oriented cultures than in firms with task-oriented cultures (though the magnitude of the effects in this study was very small).

A third practical consequence of organisational culture, about which much has been written, concerns its presumed impact on an organisation's ability to adapt to, and cope with, change. Attention has been drawn, for example, to problems associated with the introduction of innovations such as quality circles into firms whose cultures do not support the kinds of humanistic values upon which such innovations are founded. Equivocal results with quality circles have been reported in both the Australian context (Blunt, 1986) and the American context (Meyer & Stott, 1985). Similarly, change

efforts which involve the implementation of new strategies are thought to depend for their success on a receptive cultural context. According to Gagliardi (1986), strategic change is unlikely to be successful if the values postulated by the new strategies are antagonistic to the organisation's traditional values. Problems with integrating new technologies have also been attributed to cultural factors. Schein (1985) argues that, with the introduction of sophisticated computerised information systems and automation, subordinates can now have access to key information and skills that would previously been the exclusive domain of more senior organisation members. Such a change, argues Schein, can significantly challenge an organisation's basic beliefs and assumptions about the appropriate way to allocate power and status in the organisation.

While the above claims (about the practical implications of organisational culture for organisational and individual performance, and for organisational responsiveness to change) seem reasonable, it is important to point out that there is very little empirical support for such claims. More often than not, the relationship between organisational culture and various indices of organisational effectiveness is an assumed relationship, or one that is supported by anecdotal evidence only. Where empirical studies have been carried out (and these are relatively rare), the methodological shortcomings of these studies are such that the conclusions reached must be viewed with some caution. In their comprehensive review of the published empirical research claiming a link between organisational culture and organisational financial performance, Siehl and Martin (1990) draw attention to some of the more serious of these methodological flaws. For example, they note a strong sampling bias in this research toward higher-level employees (typically executives), with few studies taking account of the views of lower-level employees. This practice is criticised on the grounds that it treats "the subculture of the single most powerful group in the firm ...as equivalent to a unitary, firmwide culture" (Siehl & Martin, 1990, p. 253). The failure of some studies to include appropriate groups for comparison is a further criticism of this research. For example, Peters and Waterman's (1982) study considered only high-performing companies – there were no comparisons of these companies either with less successful companies or with companies with different cultural characteristics. A third methodological flaw to which Siehl and Martin draw attention concerns the use, in some studies, of standardised questionnaires to measure organisational culture (they cite research by Denison, 1984 and Gordon, 1985). As the authors suggest, these measures, which may or may not have

been developed specifically for organisational culture research, are highly susceptible to social desirability responding – they provide information, not about what actually happens, but about what employees say happens – and they impose a priori researcher-derived, categories of experience which may or may not have relevance in the particular cultural context under investigation. The point is also made that these measures are inadequate for tapping deeper-level, preconscious assumptions, the assessment of which may be critical for an understanding of the link between organisational culture and organisational financial performance³⁸. Finally, this research is criticised on the grounds that it fails to adequately address the question of causality. As the authors suggest, in the absence of longitudinal studies of both organisational culture and organisational financial performance, it remains unclear as to whether culture influences financial performance or whether financial performance influences culture (the main argument in the latter case being that high-performing firms can ‘afford’ to support strongly humanitarian cultures, whereas low-performing firms cannot).

On the basis of their evaluation of the methodological problems associated with this research, and also taking into account the actual results of the studies reviewed, Siehl and Martin (1990) conclude that “...the promise of a link between organizational culture and financial performance is empirically unsubstantiated” (p. 241). This is not to say, however, that no such link exists. Indeed, it is ‘common sense’ to suppose that a phenomenon as pervasive as organisational culture will, in some way, influence organisational performance (Alvesson, 1993, p. 40). The problem is that this relationship is one which is inordinately difficult to investigate. For example, as Siehl and Martin (1990) note, a reasonable sample size is necessary in order to make generalised statements about a link between organisational culture and financial performance and yet it is almost impossible, given the time required, to gather in-depth cultural information on a large number of organisations. This difficulty is compounded by the need, referred to above, to carry out longitudinal research, that is, to collect these kinds of data, not at a single point in time, but at a number of different points in time. Such research is necessary, not only to determine the direction of causality in the culture-performance link, but also to answer questions about the appropriate time frame for studying this relationship. It may be, for example, that the link between culture and

³⁸ In the following section, the limitations of questionnaire measures of organisational culture are discussed in more detail.

financial performance becomes evident only in the longer-term and that there is a significant time lag between the adoption of a new cultural direction and its impact, if any, on financial performance. Siehl and Martin identify a number of other problems associated with conducting research in this area, but it is beyond the scope of the present discussion to provide a detailed commentary on these. Suffice it to say that, in addition to the problems outlined above, the authors also consider the methodological implications of a contingency view of the link between organisational culture and financial performance, they highlight problems associated with the conceptualisation and measurement of 'organisational performance', and they suggest the possibility that organisational culture may impact financial performance, not directly as much of this research has assumed, but indirectly through variables such as employee morale, commitment, and job satisfaction.

Given the difficulties inherent in examining the culture-performance link, there is no question that this line of research is a complex and challenging one. Whether or not it is also a worthwhile one is a point about which organisational culture scholars disagree. On the one hand, there are those who share Bate's view that, if the organisational culture concept is to survive, then it must be able to "demonstrate its capacity for useful application in practice" (1990, p. 83). For these scholars, it is imperative that efforts to explicate the relationship between organisational culture and organisational performance should continue. On the other hand, there are those who, like Siehl and Martin (1990), believe that the use of the organisational culture concept as "yet another determinant of performance-related outcomes" (p. 271) diverts attention away from potentially more interesting and innovative avenues of inquiry (involving, for example, the exploration of organisations as systems of shared meanings – their creation and communication). These scholars adopt a view of organisational culture, not as a variable, but as a metaphor for organisational life and, as indicated previously (Section 1.1), this view gives rise to a research agenda in which questions of interpretation and description take precedence over questions of function and causality. The point has also been made previously that the present research, while it combines elements of both the 'culture-as-variable' and 'culture-as-root-metaphor' perspectives, ultimately sits most comfortably within the functionalist tradition. In other words, an important driving force in this research has been a concern to enhance the practical utility of the organisational culture concept. The issue of measurement – which is addressed in some detail in the next

section – is critical in this regard since, without more sophisticated measures for organisational culture it will, in this author's view, be difficult to advance research into the culture-performance link much beyond its current questionable status.

One final point that can be made in the context of the present discussion is that, if it is accepted that there is some kind of relationship between organisational culture and organisational performance, then the question arises as to whether or not organisational culture can be explicitly managed and changed. Martin (1985) suggests that responses to this question are likely to differ along a continuum, with the views of 'cultural pragmatists' at one extreme, and the views of 'cultural purists' at the other. Cultural pragmatists, according to Martin, see culture as a critical factor in an organisation's success and argue that culture can be, should be, and has been managed. The optimism of some cultural pragmatists is such that they have developed specific guidelines for the management and change of an organisation's culture (see, for example, Kilmann, 1982 and Sathe, 1983). Cultural purists, on the other hand, reject the idea that organisational culture can be deliberately managed and changed. The argument here is that, since culture emerges spontaneously (from the informal interactions of organisation members), then changes in culture must also emerge spontaneously (Dorson, cited by Trice & Beyer, 1993). Moreover, as Martin (1985) notes, the view of organisational culture from this perspective as "an expression of peoples' deepest needs, a means of endowing their experiences with meaning" (p. 95) raises serious questions about the ethics of culture management. Even if culture in this sense could be managed, it is argued that there is something fundamentally immoral about efforts to deliberately manipulate peoples' thoughts and emotions, particularly if these efforts are motivated solely by the desire for increased profits.

Finally, while the functionalist underpinnings of the present research imply a certain optimism about the possibility of managing organisational culture, the lessons of experience suggest that organisational culture may be much more difficult to manage and change than the cultural pragmatists, with their 'quick fix' prescriptions for cultural change, would have us believe it is. With respect to the question of ethics, it will suffice to say that any human resource management intervention which seeks to enhance organisational performance, regardless of its intellectual underpinnings (ie. whether it has its roots in the organisational culture, or some other perspective) is potentially open to criticism on ethical grounds. It is therefore the responsibility of every change agent to

consider the ethical implications of the intervention(s) which (s)he is proposing. As Deetz (1985) suggests, the guiding ethical question should always be:

If we innovate in this way, if we manage in this way, if we create this kind of product, what kind of people will we become? (p. 257).

1.6.2 Deciphering organisational culture

There is considerable variability, among organisational culture researchers, in the methods which they use to decipher and understand organisational culture. A common explanation for this is that it is a result of the lack of agreement that exists about what organisational culture actually is – without consensus on how to define organisational culture, it is impossible to have agreement on how it should be studied (Siehl & Martin, 1990; Ott, 1989). While this line of thought seems perfectly reasonable, it perhaps overstates the extent to which confusion about the concept has given rise to problems with its measurement³⁹. There is no question that definitions of organisational culture leave the boundaries as to what constitutes a legitimate focus for its study quite unclear (see Section 1.1). At the same time, however, most scholars agree that, at its deepest level, organisational culture comprises shared meanings and assumptions which are, for the most part, implicit in the minds of organisation members. The construct of organisational culture is one which is, by its very nature, difficult to access. In this sense, the methodological diversity which characterises empirical work in this area might be seen to be as much a consequence of the difficulties inherent in tapping a construct of this kind, as it is of the lack of agreement about how to define organisational culture.

While organisational culture researchers have traditionally advocated qualitative methods for the study of organisational culture, there has been a growing body of research in recent years which makes use of quantitative methods (see Rousseau (1990a) and Ashkanasy and Broadfoot (1999) for a review of questionnaire measures of organisational culture). In addition, a small number of studies have appeared which use some combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to decipher organisational culture (see, for example, Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Rentsch, 1990; Siehl & Martin, 1988). In the present section, each of these three approaches to the study of organisational culture is described. The main advantages and disadvantages of

³⁹ In the present context, the term 'measurement', which some organisational culture writers avoid because of its strong positivist connotations, is used in its broadest sense.

each are identified and examples are given of research which has been carried out using each approach.

(i) Qualitative methods

Qualitative research into organisational culture makes use of a range of interpretive techniques, the most common being participant observation, unstructured and semi-structured interviewing, and analysis of organisational documents and archival material. These various techniques make up an approach to organisational analysis which is sometimes referred to as organisational ethnography and which has its origins in anthropological inquiry (Van Maanen, 1979, 1982). Of course, qualitative studies differ with respect to the particular combination of the above techniques they adopt, and a few studies make use of a single technique only. For example, Kabanoff (1993) studied the organisational cultures of 88 Australian firms, by content analysing the values espoused in the firms' annual reports, mission statements, and internal magazines. In many qualitative studies of organisational culture, interviewing is the main method of data collection. Interviews typically take the form of loosely structured discussions in which 'insiders' (interviewees) are encouraged to speak openly about any aspect of their experience of organisational life which has salience for them (see, for example, Christensen, 1988; Martin, 1992). The role of the interviewer in these encounters is to facilitate discussion (eg. by seeking clarification and probing for more information), rather than to direct the course of the interview through the use of leading questions. An alternative to completely unstructured interviewing is interviewing in which the researcher seeks information about a number of key themes or topics (usually specified by the researcher). For example, in his semiotic analysis of organisational culture in a funeral home, Barley (1983) conducted interviews with the home's directors which were designed to provide information on general topics such as the directors' careers, the history of the business, the nature of the home's clientele, and the nature of the home's key tasks. An even more structured approach is for the researcher to use a number of specific questions to guide interviewing. For example, in his study of culture change in an aircraft factory, Snyder (1988) used interviewing to generate answers to specific questions about the nature of the interviewee's role in the organisation, significant events in the organisation's history, and changes in managerial style over time (including the nature of these changes, how they had been brought about, and the values on which they were founded).

Some degree of participant observation is also common to many qualitative studies of organisational culture. This involves the researcher, or research team, being based in the research setting for varying periods of time for the purpose of gaining first-hand knowledge of the setting. Unfortunately, information about the nature and the duration of the researcher's involvement in the field is often omitted from the research report. For example, the reader is rarely informed about the exact nature of the researcher's role as a 'participant observer'. In terms of the classification scheme offered by Gans (1967, cited by Bryman, 1988), it is rarely made clear whether the culture analyst is acting as: (i) a total researcher or 'silent observer', who participates only minimally; (ii) a researcher participant who may participate fully, but always as a researcher and not as an equal, albeit temporary, group member; or (iii) a total participant who responds spontaneously to group members as if having equal status with them. Information about who, and what, is observed when the researcher engages in participant observation is also lacking in many qualitative accounts of organisational culture.

While many qualitative studies of organisational culture carry out some kind of documentary analysis, this method of data collection rarely appears as the central strategy. Information is often scarce about the nature and number of the documents analysed and the approach taken to data analysis. The impression is that the data generated using this method are used as a supplement only to data generated using the more central techniques of interviewing and observation. There are however, exceptions, as Kabanoff's (1993) work cited above serves to illustrate.

The point should be made that a lot of organisational culture research which qualifies as 'organisational ethnography' bears a superficial resemblance only to the kind of sophisticated ethnographic research which Whyte (1943) carried out in relation to his *Street Corner Society* study. Although it has been suggested that Whyte's research offers a benchmark for how qualitative studies of organisational culture might be conducted (Bryman, 1991), it has also been recognised that, in organisational contexts, there are often practical considerations which make it difficult to meet the standards for good ethnography set by Whyte's research. In particular, due to time constraints on the research and also problems with gaining access to organisations for long periods of time, it is difficult for organisational culture researchers to have the kind of sustained and prolonged involvement in the research setting which was possible in Whyte's case (the research for *Street Corner Society* was carried out over a period of some three

years)⁴⁰. Not surprisingly, therefore, qualitative studies of organisational culture typically employ more economical methods of data collection than those used by Whyte. As indicated above, interviewing is a central strategy in qualitative studies of organisational culture and, in many cases, interviews adopt some degree of structure (by identifying, in advance, the broad topics for discussion or even the specific questions to be asked). This contrasts markedly with Whyte's almost total reliance upon observation in the collection of data for *Street Corner Society*⁴¹.

A good example of an organisational culture study which makes use of all three of the above data collection techniques – that is, interviewing, observation, and documentary analysis – is Sackmann's (1991) study of cultural knowledge about organisational innovation, which was carried out in a medium-sized electronics manufacturing firm in the United States. As Sackmann indicates, her main objective in designing an appropriate methodology for this research was to “strike a balance between an extensive ethnography and a pragmatic instrumentation approach” (p. 180). A central strategy for data collection was, therefore, the use of an issue-focussed interviewing technique. Specifically, respondents (there were 52 in all) were asked to identify, and talk about, three innovations which they considered to be important in their organisation. The interviews were designed to explore a range of issues related to (i) the introduction of each innovation (why it was introduced, the organisational context, the people involved etc.); (ii) problems encountered during the implementation phase; and (iii) perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the process (including respondent views as to how it could be improved). Interview data were supplemented with observational and archival data. With respect to the former, the researcher made observations of the non-verbal behaviour of respondents during interviewing, the physical setting of work, and employee behaviours and interactions at work. The sources of archival data included the company's policy manual, the employee handbook, annual reports, and publications about the company. All of the data for this research were collected over a

⁴⁰ The fact that there are certain impracticalities associated with doing good ethnography in business organisations does not excuse the production of ‘shoddy’ research. There are many qualitative accounts of organisational culture which provide scant information only, or no information whatsoever, about important aspects of their research methodology, such as, the duration of the researcher's involvement in the research setting and whether or not this involvement was continuous or spasmodic, the number and seniority of ‘insiders’ interviewed and the duration of interviews, and the approach to data analysis (whether interview data, observational data, or documentary data).

⁴¹ This is not to say that interviewing is not a legitimate ethnographic technique. As Bryman (1991) notes, there are many modern ethnographers who, in contrast with Whyte, prefer to conduct formal interviewing, as well as collect other data in conjunction with this.

period of some three months, during which time the researcher's involvement with the organisation was intermittent, rather than continuous. With respect to data analysis, Sackmann used a thematic content analysis to determine the content of respondents' cultural knowledge about innovation in three different categories: (i) dictionary knowledge (that is, definitions and descriptions of the innovation); (ii) directory knowledge (information pertaining to how the innovation came about); and (iii) recipe knowledge (statements about improvement or repair strategies). Content themes were further analysed to provide information about their structural properties (eg. their generality or specificity) and their primary location (division, hierarchical level etc.) in the organisation.

In the context of the present discussion, mention should also be made of Schein's (1985, 1992) approach to deciphering organisational culture. While Schein utilises all of the above methods of data collection (with in-depth interviewing being the focal strategy), an important characteristic of his approach, which sets it apart from many other qualitative approaches, is its emphasis on a clinical (as opposed to ethnographic) perspective. In Schein's approach, the role of the researcher is essentially that of a clinician, or helper, who engages in a joint inquiry with a 'motivated insider' to arrive at a common understanding of the organisation's culture. According to Schein, this approach offers two main advantages. Firstly, a perceptive and collaborative insider is able to correct inaccuracies in the researcher's interpretations of events, thereby reducing the likelihood that the results of the inquiry will be influenced by researcher bias. Secondly, the researcher, in the role of a clinician, is able to work with the insider to bring to the surface cultural meanings and assumptions which the latter has previously taken-for-granted and unconsciously held. In this sense, then, the relationship between the researcher (clinician) and the insider is a mutually advantageous one. Consistent with the clinical perspective which he advocates, there is also an important practical agenda underlying Schein's approach to the study of organisational culture. Thus, as Ott (1989) notes, whereas description is the primary purpose of organisational culture research carried out from an ethnographic perspective, in Schein's approach it is "only an important beginning step toward explanation and organisational action" (p. 123).

In terms of the content of qualitative studies of organisational culture, it is important to point out that qualitative researchers vary considerably – indeed, much more so than

quantitative researchers – in what they study (and what they ask about) when they claim to be studying organisational culture. Siehl & Martin (1990) offer a useful classification of the content of organisational culture studies (whether using qualitative or quantitative methods) in terms of three aspects of organisational life: formal practices (for example, as indicated in the organisation's structure, job descriptions, and formal, written policies), informal practices (reflected in behavioural norms), and artefacts (such as rituals, stories, special jargon, humour, and physical arrangements). Qualitative research into organisational culture has focussed on all of these aspects – in some cases, within the bounds of a single study. The product of this research is typically a description of the culture in terms of a number of content themes which, as Siehl and Martin observe, can range from those which are very superficial and value-laden to those which represent deeper-level assumptions and meanings (Schein's (1985) work being an example of the latter).

Having described some of the specific data collection techniques which are utilised in qualitative studies of organisational culture, and commented briefly on the content of these studies, we turn now to a consideration of the main advantages and disadvantages of a qualitative approach to the study of organisational culture. With respect, first of all, to the advantages, advocates of a qualitative approach defend their position by arguing that one cannot understand a phenomenon as complex as an organisation's culture – which is highly context-specific and which, to a large degree, is implicit in the minds of organisation members – without experiencing that culture and somehow becoming 'immersed' in it. The aim is to understand events, actions, etc. from the perspective of the people being studied (that is, to 'see the world through their eyes'), and to make inferences about what these events and actions mean within the social and historical context in which they occur. To do this, the researcher must 'get close to', not be detached from, the subjects and situation under investigation (Jones, 1988; Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Smircich, 1983a).

While there are few scholars who would dispute the above arguments – the essence of which is that qualitative methods are better suited to tapping *deep* culture than quantitative methods – in practice, qualitative researchers rarely achieve a level of analysis which is consistent with that which would seem appropriate given their conceptualisation of organisational culture. For example, as indicated above, researchers (for whatever reason) typically do not have the level of involvement in the

research setting which is seen as desirable for 'good' ethnography. When a researcher spends only a short period of time in the research setting, and this on a non-continuous basis, one is left to wonder about how 'immersed' in the culture of the setting (s)he has been able to become. In a similar vein, Rousseau (1990a) draws attention to the inconsistency of researchers who promote a view of organisational culture as "a highly subjective unconscious process" (p. 164), and who then study culture by focussing solely on its surface-level, or artefactual, elements. One might also question the extent to which many qualitative studies of organisational culture satisfy the criteria of understanding events etc. from the perspective of insiders and generating context-specific understandings. With respect to the former, there are some studies (in particular, those which are based on the analysis of cultural artefacts, such as organisational symbols and organisational rites and rituals) in which the researcher's interpretations of events, and not the interpretations of insiders, seem to predominate. With respect to the latter, while respondent experience might be studied 'in context', there is often little analysis of how particular aspects of context (for example, the historical context) might have shaped that experience⁴².

The above problems aside, and assuming that exemplary qualitative research is more achievable in practice than it sometimes appears to be, there are still a number of important disadvantages associated with the use of qualitative methods for studying organisational culture. Firstly, as suggested above, qualitative methods are very time consuming to use properly. Given the nature of managerial work (Mintzberg, 1973), and the fact that there are typically time constraints on managerial decision-making, such methods are, therefore, not well-suited to meeting the needs of practicing managers. The point can also be made that, given the rate of change confronting many organisations today, it is not inconceivable that, in the course of a protracted investigation into a particular organisational phenomenon (such as, organisational culture), the phenomenon itself may change. A second limitation of qualitative methods is that they are generally difficult to repeat in the sense that a second, independent researcher can replicate exactly the methods used by the first investigator (Jones, 1988). While the problem of repeatability is exacerbated by the fact that qualitative researchers often provide very little information about how they actually carried out their research

⁴² See Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin (1991) and Jones, Moore, & Snyder (1988) for some examples of studies which can be criticised on the above grounds.

(in terms of the methods used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation) (Trice, 1991), it is still the case that qualitative techniques, such as participant observation, are more likely than quantitative techniques to produce findings that are somewhat idiosyncratic and difficult to replicate (Blalock, 1970, cited by Bryman, 1988). This, of course, raises doubts about the validity and reliability of the findings reported. A third, and related, disadvantage of qualitative methods is that they provide no means by which to make *systematic* comparisons of the data available. As Siehl and Martin (1988) note, this leaves many centrally important theoretical questions unanswered. For example, it is difficult to determine the degree of 'sharedness' of any given organisation's culture, since this requires the responses of individual organisation members to be compared; similarly, it is difficult to identify cultural differences between, and within, organisations without some means of systematically identifying and comparing the value orientations of different groups; and finally, without the means to make analytic comparisons, it is exceedingly difficult to answer questions about how organisational culture changes over time, and to test claims about the relationship between organisational culture and organisational productivity, profitability, and adaptability to change.

A fourth, and final, disadvantage of qualitative methods, to which attention is often drawn, is that they are more susceptible than quantitative methods to the problem of researcher bias (Beach, 1993; Rentsch, 1990; Trice, 1991). There is some support for this view in the anthropological literature. As Bryman (1988) notes, restudies of the same social context by different ethnographers, while few in number, have produced inconsistent and sometimes quite contradictory accounts of the culture of the group being studied. This result, argues Bryman, is disconcerting since the common aim of these studies, namely "to see through the eyes of those whom one studies" (p. 74), leads one to expect at least some degree of consistency of findings.

(ii) Quantitative methods

As indicated, in recent years, organisational culture studies which make use of quantitative research methods have become increasingly well-represented in the literature. While this development might be regarded as a somewhat anomalous one – as Denison (1996) observes, it "appears to contradict the epistemological foundations of culture research within organisation studies" (p. 620) – it is not all that surprising when one considers the potential benefits of such methods, and also the difficulties associated

with the proper use of qualitative methods. Quantitative measures of organisational culture typically take the form of structured questionnaires in which questionnaire items and response categories are formulated in advance. Other techniques have also been used including Q-sorts and highly structured interviews (Rousseau, 1990a). While the content of these measures varies, norm indicators (which are designed to assess expectations about how organisation members should behave and interact with one another) are perhaps better represented than measures which focus on other aspects of organisational culture, such as, organisational values and beliefs, and organisation ideology. For the purpose of illustration, a brief description is now provided of two quantitative measures of organisational culture – the Organizational Culture Inventory (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986) and the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) (O'Reilly, Chatman & Caldwell, 1991) – which can be regarded as being relatively well-established in terms of the research supporting their psychometric integrity (Rousseau, 1990a). In addition, some examples are given of research which has been carried out using these measures.

The Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) is perhaps one of the most widely used, and well-developed, quantitative measures of organisational culture. It is a norm indicator consisting of 120 statements which describe some of the thinking and behavioural 'styles' that members of an organisation might be expected to adopt in carrying out their work and interacting with others. Respondents are required to indicate on a scale from '1' ('not at all') to '5' ('to a very great extent') the extent to which the behaviour or thinking style described by each statement helps people to 'fit in' and 'meet expectations' in their organisation. The OCI provides a measure of twelve interrelated cultural styles, with each style being assessed by ten statements. The twelve styles are: Humanistic/Helpful, Affiliative, Approval, Conventional, Dependent, Avoidance, Oppositional, Power, Competitive, Perfectionistic, Achievement, and Self-Actualization. The degree of association between each of these styles is represented visually by their proximity around a circumplex or 'clock'. Thus, styles which are considered to be relatively similar to one another (eg. the Humanistic/Helpful and Affiliative styles) are placed next to each on the circumplex, while styles which are more distinct and independent (eg. the Humanistic/Helpful and Power styles) are placed further apart.

According to Cooke and Lafferty, the twelve cultural styles which the OCI assesses reflect two underlying dimensions, a 'task' versus 'people' dimension and a 'satisfaction' versus 'security' dimension. The former derives from the leadership literature (see, for example, Blake & Mouton, 1964) and differentiates between cultural styles that reflect a concern for people versus those that reflect a concern for the task. The latter draws on Maslow's (1954) work on human needs and differentiates between styles that focus on higher-order need satisfaction versus those that are directed more towards the fulfilment of lower-order security needs. On the basis of various combinations of these different orientations, or styles, three generic types of organisational cultures are identified: (i) *Constructive* cultures (ie. team-oriented cultures which emphasise the higher-order need satisfaction of members); (ii) *Passive/Defensive* cultures (ie. people/security cultures which focus on control in interpersonal relationships) and (iii) *Aggressive/Defensive* cultures (ie. task/security cultures which focus on control in task-related activities).

The OCI can be administered individually or in groups, and it can be used to generate individual profiles (showing how individual members perceive their organisation's culture) or composite profiles (showing how members, collectively, view the culture of their organisation). Composite profiles can be generated by averaging individual scores for each of the twelve cultural styles; alternatively, individual scores can be plotted separately to provide a visual representation of the degree of consistency/inconsistency in individual perceptions of their organisation's culture. According to Cooke and Lafferty, inconsistent individual profiles are suggestive of a weak organisational culture, while consistent individual profiles are suggestive of a strong organisational culture. Finally, with respect to the psychometric properties of the OCI, Rousseau (1990a) cites research which suggests that the scale satisfies both reliability and validity requirements. Interestingly, however, in a review of the OCI by Alexander (1995) which appears in *The Twelfth Mental Measurements Year Book*, Cooke and Lafferty are criticised for failing to provide any corroborating evidence for claims about the reliability and validity of the scale, which they make in the manual accompanying the scale.

The OCI has been used to assess cultural norms in a variety of research settings including commercial business firms, not-for-profit service organisations, military units, and schools and universities. Cross-sectional studies have been conducted comparing the cultural norms of different organisations and organisational sub-units (Cooke &

Rousseau, 1988) and the impact of normative beliefs on organisational performance and individual level responses (eg. job satisfaction) has also been investigated (Rousseau, 1990b).

The Organizational Culture Profile (OCP) (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991) is a Q-sort instrument which assesses values regarding organisational, and individual, priorities and preferences. It consists of 54 value statements which the developers identified on the basis of their "extensive review" of both the academic and practitioner-oriented literatures on organisational values and organisational culture (O'Reilly et al., p. 495)⁴³. Examples of value statements included in the scale are: 'Being innovative', 'Being rule oriented', 'Confronting conflict directly' and 'Being socially responsible'. Respondents are required to sort the value statements into nine categories, ranging from 'most characteristic' to 'least characteristic' of their organisation's values (to provide a measure of perceived organisational culture) and from 'most desirable' to 'least desirable' (to provide a measure of individual preferred organisational culture). In both instances, sorting is designed to produce a bell-shaped distribution, with respondents being required to locate less statements in the extreme categories than in the central, more neutral categories. The resulting profiles (of perceived culture and individual preferred culture) can be correlated to provide a measure of person-culture fit.

O'Reilly et al. appear to have carried out a reasonably comprehensive evaluation of the psychometric properties of the OCP. For example, they provide data to suggest that the scale possesses good inter-rater and test-retest reliability. With respect to the validity of the OCP, the authors carried out factor analytic research which showed that the profiles for perceived culture and individual preferred culture were very similar in terms of their underlying dimensionality (a finding which, it is argued, helps to establish the validity of the person-culture fit concept). Specifically, there were five factors that were shown to be common to both profiles: innovative, outcome orientation, aggressiveness, detail orientation, and team orientation. Moreover, evidence that these dimensions were psychologically meaningful was suggested by the finding that the individual preferred culture dimensions were associated with characteristically different personality types. Thus, for example, respondents with a high need for autonomy indicated a preference for innovative cultures and considered cultures which emphasised

⁴³ While the initial item pool consisted of 110 value statements, this number was able to be reduced significantly following empirical work which identified items that were redundant, irrelevant, or difficult to understand.

teamwork as less desirable. The authors also carried out research into the predictive validity of the OCP which showed that person-culture fit was a significant predictor of individual outcomes such as organisational commitment, job satisfaction, and propensity to stay with the organisation. It is perhaps worth mentioning that, as yet, there appears to have been no independent review of the OCP, such as that which might appear in *The Mental Measurements Year Book* (Conoley & Impara, 1995, 12th edition).

Apart from the research reported in O'Reilly et al. (1991) – which was associated with the development of the scale and which was carried out in accounting firms and business school settings – numerous other studies have been conducted which have used the OCP to measure organisational culture. For example, Sheridan (1992) used the OCP to examine the relationship between organisational culture and employee retention in accounting firms. Chatman and Jehn (1994) carried out research in the US services sector which explored the question of how characteristics of the industry in which an organisation operates (specifically, technology use and opportunities for growth) might influence the uniqueness of the organisation's culture. In this study, the OCP was used to measure the value systems (ie. cultures) of the participating firms. And Windsor and Ashkanasy (1996) conducted a study in which they related organisational culture perceptions, as measured by the OCP, to the independence of auditors' decisions.


In terms of an overall evaluation of quantitative methods for studying organisational culture, measures such as the OCI and the OCP have the advantage of being able to compensate for some of the limitations of qualitative methods, described above. For example, they are more resource efficient (in terms of the time required for data collection and analysis) than qualitative methods, and hence more practical to use (Beach, 1993; Reichers & Schneider, 1990). They also offer a degree of comparability not provided by qualitative methods. Specifically, they provide a means whereby the cultures of different organisations, or organisational subgroups can be systematically compared; they provide a means whereby changes in organisational culture over time can be systematically evaluated and whereby the linkages between organisational culture and various organisational and individual outcomes can be systematically explored; and they allow for the assessment of multiple member perspectives which, in turn, enables the issue of 'sharedness' to be dealt with much more convincingly than it is in descriptive (ie. qualitative) accounts of organisational culture (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Siehl & Martin, 1988). Quantitative methods are also advocated on the grounds

that they are less prone to researcher bias than qualitative methods (Jones, 1988) although, as Ott (1989) and others (see, for example, Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991 and Van Maanen, 1982) have argued, no organisational research, whether it is conducted within a quantitative or qualitative research tradition, can ever be entirely value free.

Given the benefits of quantitative methods, it is easy to understand the appeal which they have had for an increasing number of organisational culture researchers. At the same time, however, there are some serious disadvantages associated with the use of such methods for studying organisational culture, and it is to a discussion of these disadvantages that our attention is now turned.

First of all, in contrast to qualitative methods, quantitative methods are more obviously limited with respect to their ability to tap 'deep' culture. Measures such as the OCI and the OCP can access only information that exists in the conscious awareness of respondents, that is, information that is fairly readily observable or that respondents can be asked about directly (pertaining, for example, to the prevalence, or absence, of particular behavioural norms in their organisation). While it has been argued by some (eg. Ott, 1989; Rousseau, 1990a) that different levels of organisational culture are amenable to different research methods – with quantitative methods seen as appropriate for the study of the more explicit and observable manifestations of culture, and qualitative methods seen as necessary for penetrating deeper level beliefs and assumptions – the fact remains that the 'levels' issue is frequently not addressed in actual studies of organisational culture. Thus, in the case of quantitative research, researchers often do not specify that they are investigating surface level aspects of organisational culture, as opposed to 'deep' culture (for an exception, see Kabanoff, 1993). Instead, the term 'culture' is used generically to describe whatever it is that is being measured.

The point can also be made that, while much of this research assumes a link between 'surface' and 'deep' culture – Rousseau (1990a), for example, argues that indicators, such as normative beliefs, are "intrinsically linked to culture" (p. 449) – the exact nature of this link remains unclear. This, therefore, raises doubts about the validity of using "surface" or "proxy" indicators of culture (Ott, 1989, p. 117) as a basis for making inferences about core cultural assumptions. It cannot automatically be assumed, for example, that organisation members who report compliance with particular behavioural



norms (say, in responding to an instrument such as the OCI) necessarily also hold basic assumptions about the inherent 'correctness' of these norms. If such an assumption were justified then, given the non-confrontable and non-debatable nature of basic assumptions, one could reasonably predict that any attempt to change the normative conditions in the target organisation would be met with considerable resistance. That this does not appear to be the case, in practice, is suggested by Rousseau's (1988) observation that organisation members can readily differentiate between the behavioural and thinking styles which they adopt in different organisations, and in relation to different organisational roles. In other words, there appears to be a degree of flexibility in organisation member responding to changes in 'surface' culture (eg. organisational norms) that is not evident in their responding to changes in 'deep' culture. The reader is reminded again of Schein's (1985) caution regarding the use of surface indicators of organisational culture, namely that they are appropriate only for confirming hypotheses about culture (which are derived from a more in-depth inquiry), and not for generating them.

A second important limitation of quantitative methods for studying organisational culture is that they are generally ill-equipped to capture what is unique and context specific about an organisation's culture. In contrast to qualitative methods, where categories of meaning are allowed to emerge (Jones, 1988), quantitative methods make use of a priori, researcher-derived, categories (for example, norms or groups of norms) which are assumed to be, but which may not be, relevant in the particular context being investigated (Ott, 1989). Opponents of the use of quantitative methods object strongly to this practice, arguing that it is at best presumptuous, and at worst unethical (Schein, 1984, cited by Rousseau, 1990a), to imply that one can know the relevant dimensions of an organisation's culture without some first-hand knowledge and experience of that culture.

A third, and related, limitation of quantitative methods is that, as with measures of the related concept of organisational climate (Rentsch, 1990), they provide no insight into the meaning or interpretative framework within which respondents formulate their responses. For example, while a respondent might indicate that it is a norm in his/her organisation or work group for new ideas to be encouraged (an item from the 'Kilmann-Saxton Culture-Gap Survey' (Kilmann & Saxton, 1983)), the actual meaning that the respondent, or the researcher for that matter, attaches to this behaviour remains unclear.

Does it imply an active effort on the part of supervisors to solicit the ideas of shopfloor workers or does the mere existence of some sort of 'suggestion scheme' constitute 'encouraging new ideas'? Given the centrality of 'meaning' to the whole concept of organisational culture, this limitation of quantitative methods such as norm indicators, is one that should be given much more emphasis than it typically is.

A fourth limitation of quantitative methods concerns the practice, referred to previously in relation to the OCI, of aggregating individual data to infer a group, or unit-level, phenomenon. This practice can be seen as problematic on a number of grounds. Firstly, it assumes that respondents' interpretations of scale items are comparable. As suggested above, however, this is an assumption which may prove empirically very difficult to uphold. Secondly, given the general interpretation of a 'group' phenomenon as something which is "greater than the sum of its parts" (Sodowsky, 1995, p. 721), the question remains as to whether or not such a phenomenon can be accurately represented by aggregate information about a sample of respondents. This is a question which organisational climate and culture researchers alike have had to address (see, for example, Cooke & Rousseau, 1988 and Poole, 1985) and, in both cases, it has been argued that the use of aggregated individual data to infer a group, or unit-level, phenomenon is justified if the following two criteria are met: (i) low within group variation in individual scores and (ii) significant between group differences in mean scores. The problem remains, however, that even if an instrument such as the OCI satisfies both of these criteria – such that it can then be claimed to be indexing a property of the group (organisation) – there is still no way of knowing whether the group's shared perceptions are the product of (in this case) cultural processes within the group (ie. social interaction among members), or simply an artefact of selection (reflecting the systematic selection of certain types of people for group membership). Advocates of the use of instruments like the OCI reject the latter view without, however, offering empirical data to support their claim that the demands of organisational roles and organisational reward systems, experienced collectively by group members, are more influential than selection practices in shaping members' thinking and behavioural styles.

A sixth limitation of quantitative measures of organisational culture, to which the above comments draw attention, is that such measures typically ask only about organisation member experience at the present time and provide no information about

the historical context which may have shaped that experience. In order to convincingly demonstrate that consensus is a product of cultural processes, and not just an artefact of selection, historical data are needed which show that group members not only share a similar past (as a group), but that their interpretations of past experiences are also similar.

A final limitation of quantitative measures is that, even if one accepts that they are valid for the assessment of certain aspects of an organisation's culture, they can be regarded as useful only for the assessment of those cultures which are manifested in significant sharedness *at a surface level*. One of the main criteria for validating the OCI as a measure of organisational culture is the demonstration of intra-group consensus (Cook & Rousseau, 1988). The recommendation is that, prior to testing any hypothesis using data generated by the instrument, one must first show that there is some degree of consensus in members' perceptions, as reflected in their OCI profiles. A lack of consensus, it is argued, would indicate that the instrument is not providing an effective measure of organisational culture, since the notion of 'sharedness' is fundamental to the concept of culture. This begs the question, however, as to how one should deal with those cultures, described by Martin and Meyerson (1988), which are characterised, not by consensus, but by ambiguity and diverse beliefs. If one fails to demonstrate perceptual agreement through the use of the OCI, does one conclude that there is no culture (as is likely to be the case in an evolving social unit), or that the instrument is inadequate for probing the deeper levels of awareness at which cultural consensus is to be found?

(iii) Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

In recent years, a number of organisational culture scholars (eg. Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Rousseau, 1990a) have drawn attention to the potential value of conducting culture research using a combined emic/etic strategy. The essential argument is that such an approach would allow researchers to draw on the complementary strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods, while at the same time minimising their weaknesses⁴⁴. Despite its obvious promise, however, this strategy is

⁴⁴ The acceptance of hybrid approaches in organisational culture research is not an isolated event, but rather should be viewed as part of a more general trend in the social sciences towards making choices about research methodology on the basis of technical, rather than epistemological concerns. As Bryman (1988) notes, the heated methodological debates engaged in by advocates of qualitative methods on the one hand, and quantitative methods on the other, have begun to give way to more pragmatic concerns about which method is best suited to answer the particular research question.

one which, to date, has been used by a handful of organisational culture researchers only. Moreover, the studies which have applied this strategy tend to be investigative studies (designed to address certain theoretical questions about culture), rather than attempts to provide a generic means for assessing organisational culture. The most common approach to combining qualitative and quantitative methods in these studies is to conduct an initial qualitative inquiry and then, on the basis of insights generated by this inquiry, construct a questionnaire or other instrument which is used for subsequent quantitative research.

The present section provides a critical review of three studies of organisational culture – namely, those conducted by Siehl and Martin (1988), Hofstede et al. (1990), and Rentsch (1990) – which utilise qualitative and quantitative methods in combination. The main focus of this review is on methodological issues, not research findings. For each study, the methodology is first described, followed by a discussion of its main strengths and weaknesses.

Siehl and Martin (1988)

In their study of organisational socialisation Siehl and Martin (1988) used an integrated methodology to investigate the effects of time with the organisation, and participation in a training programme, on the acquisition of certain kinds of cultural knowledge by new employees. The study was conducted in a large (Fortune 500) electronics firm⁴⁵ and involved two main phases of data collection. In the first phase, which spanned a period of three months, qualitative methods were used to gain an understanding of the culture of the organisation. These methods included: (i) observation of employees (the daily activities of five employees of a branch office were observed over a period of twenty days, in addition to which observational data were gathered at a one week off-site retreat attended by top management, middle managers being groomed for more senior roles, and high performing sales people); (ii) interviews (with 50 longer-term employees from different levels of the organisational hierarchy)⁴⁶; and (iii) analysis of organisational documents (such as, sales reports, annual reports, and company newsletters). The main focus of data collection and analysis in this initial qualitative phase was on espoused values and on the various cultural forms and practices associated with these values.

⁴⁵ The actual size of the firm is not specified.

⁴⁶ Neither the duration, nor the content of these interviews is specified.

The second phase of the study involved the administration of a questionnaire which was developed on the basis of information gathered in phase one. The questionnaire comprised five main sections, each of which is described briefly below.

1. Espoused values. Respondents were presented with five values that were espoused frequently by top management and other company employees in phase one. They were asked to rate the importance of these values to the company, on the one hand, and to themselves personally, on the other. This provided a measure of the degree of correspondence between organisational ideology, as perceived by organisation members, and members' personal ideologies.

2. Jargon. Respondents were presented with twenty examples of company jargon identified in phase one of the study. They were asked to define these jargon words or phrases, which were either technical terms or examples of company colloquialisms.

3. Organisational stories. This section of the questionnaire comprised four organisational stories, selected because they were recounted without prompting by employees who participated in phase one. After reading each story, respondents were asked to indicate how much of each story they had heard. In addition, they were presented with three morals for each story, all of which were plausible, but one of which was deemed 'correct' by longer-term employees interviewed in phase one. Respondents were asked to choose the moral that they considered to be the most appropriate. According to Siehl and Martin, cultural learning is indicated if newcomers' interpretations are the same as the interpretations of longer-term employees.

4. Tacit knowledge. This part of the questionnaire required respondents to fill in the missing words, omitted (for the purpose of the exercise) from an extract of a letter written by the company president to shareholders, and published in the annual report. Success in this task, it is argued, indicates that participants have some knowledge of "the subtleties of language used to communicate this company's corporate objectives and philosophy of management" (Siehl & Martin, 1988, p. 88).

5. Practices. This section of the questionnaire contained five statements describing managerial practices which were taken from published material about the company. An important numerical fact had been left out of each statement and participants were required to complete the statement by selecting one of two alternative responses presented to them in multiple choice format. Participants were unaware of the fact that both alternatives were incorrect, one reflecting a pro-company bias (that is, presenting

the company in a more positive light than was warranted) and the other an anti-company bias (presenting the company in a more negative light than was warranted). According to Siehl and Martin, a significant increase in the number of pro-company errors over time can be interpreted as evidence of successful enculturation of employees.

Participants in phase two of the study included twenty new sales people (hired by the company during the same two month period). All participants completed the questionnaire on two separate occasions, the first during their first week of employment and the second, eight weeks later. In addition half of the participants attended a 10-day technical training programme, conducted by the company towards the end of their first eight weeks of employment. Briefly summarised, the results of phase two of the study provided support for the author's conceptualisation of enculturation as a process in which different types of cultural knowledge are acquired by newcomers at different stages of their socialisation. It was found, for example, that while espoused values and company jargon were learned relatively quickly, other forms of cultural knowledge, such as knowledge of the meaning of organisational stories and tacit knowledge, were acquired more slowly. Moreover, there was evidence to suggest that training facilitated the acquisition of some cultural information (in particular, familiarity with, and interpretation of, organisational stories).

Siehl and Martin's study can be regarded as a particularly innovative attempt to achieve a more systematic assessment of organisational culture, while at the same time retaining a commitment to understanding what is unique and idiosyncratic about the culture of a given organisation. In advocating the widespread use of their hybrid methodology, the authors argue that it can provide much-needed comparative data to help resolve some of the theoretical problems which continue to impede research progress in this area. For example, it is proposed that such a methodology can provide a systematic assessment of changes in organisational culture over time, thereby facilitating the study of culture as a dynamic process. It is also argued that such a methodology offers a means whereby culture change programmes and explicit efforts to manage culture can be systematically evaluated, and whereby claims about a link between organisational culture and organisational effectiveness can be empirically tested.

Despite the advantages which it is believed to offer, however, the approach advocated by Siehl and Martin can be seen to be limited in a number of ways. Firstly,

there are a number of assumptions underlying the development of the method which may not hold up empirically. For example, in the initial qualitative phase of the study, the authors made no allowance for possible sub-cultural differences among the members of the group studied. Instead, it was assumed that participants in this phase (including employees with different tenure and representing different functional areas, first-line managers, middle managers, and top management) were all part of a single homogeneous culture. Given what is known about organisational and occupational subcultures (see, for example, Trice & Beyer, 1993), this seems unlikely. Questionable assumptions also underlie the development, and use, of both the 'tacit knowledge' and 'practices' sections of the questionnaire. With respect to the former, the requirement that respondents fill in the missing words from a letter written by the company president to shareholders assumes a degree of familiarity between lower-level employees and top management that is very often not borne out in practice (the reader may recall Bate's (1984) finding that, in the organisations which he studied, relationships between management and workers were very often adversarial and firmly rooted in a 'them' and 'us' tradition). With respect to the latter, the argument by Siehl and Martin that an increase in 'pro-company' errors constitutes evidence of successful enculturation assumes that the prevailing culture in any organisation will always be 'pro-company'. The possibility that an organisation's culture may support widely shared 'anti-company' sentiments (again, as suggested by Bate's research) is not accounted for. Finally, there is the assumption that familiarity with certain kinds of cultural knowledge equates with 'enculturation'. This assumption can be challenged on the grounds that organisation members may be able to demonstrate familiarity with various cultural forms and practices, without necessarily having embraced the values and beliefs implicit in them. In other words, familiarity alone does not constitute sufficient grounds for claims about successful enculturation. In the case of organisational stories, for example, the conclusion that successful enculturation has occurred is warranted only if it can be shown that, apart from being known to organisation members, these stories function as scripts which guide the way in which members think about, perceive, and respond to, their experience of organisational life (Smircich, 1983a).

A second limitation of Siehl and Martin's (1988) approach concerns the practical value to managers of the specific measures used and the information which they provide. Given the author's emphasis on the value of their methodology for solving

ongoing theoretical problems, it is perhaps somewhat unfair to draw attention to this limitation. At the same time, however, it is clear that many of the theoretical problems facing organisational culture researchers (concerning, for example, how organisational culture changes over time, and the nature of the culture-productivity link) are of central concern also to practitioners. Consideration therefore needs to be given to the type of cultural information (data) which will be of value to practitioners. A knowledge of organisational stories and what they mean to organisation members may inform the manager about certain aspects of the organisation's value system. However, it is unlikely that all organisations are equally rich in this data source and hence a focus on organisational stories may prove quite limiting in some contexts. Even more questionable is the value to the practitioner of data generated by the tacit knowledge measure. It is hard to conceive of how a manager, who seeks to better understand the culture of his/her organisation, might benefit from knowing that organisation members are able to successfully complete the 'missing-word' exercise.

A third, and final limitation, of this methodology is that, while it allows for the collection of context-specific information, additional design and development work must be carried out for each new context being investigated. In other words, for every new organisation which the researcher undertakes to study, (s)he must carry out an initial qualitative phase of data collection followed by the preparation, according to the insights provided by the qualitative data, of the five questionnaire measures specified by Siehl and Martin. In this sense, one might question again the practical value of this approach.

Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders (1990)

Undoubtedly, the most ambitious study to fall into this category (in terms of its size at least) is that conducted by Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, and Sanders (1990). An integrated methodology was used to investigate the cultures of twenty organisational units from ten different organisations (including private sector manufacturing and service organisations, as well as a number of public institutions) which operated in Denmark and the Netherlands. The participating units were selected for inclusion in the study on the grounds that they had been judged by management (presumably senior management with an ability to comment from an organisation-wide perspective) to be 'culturally homogeneous'. They ranged in size from 60 to 2,500 members.

As the authors indicate, the study sought to address three main research questions, namely, (i) 'Can organisational culture be measured quantitatively?'; (ii) 'If so, what are the dimensions that can be used to measure organisational culture?'; and (iii) 'To what extent is organisational culture pre-determined by factors such as nationality, industry, and task, as opposed to being shaped by unique features of the organisation?'. The approach to combining qualitative and quantitative methods was the same in this study as in the study by Siehl and Martin (1988), with an initial qualitative phase forming the basis of a subsequent quantitative phase.

In the initial qualitative phase, individual interviews (of two to three hours duration each) were conducted with nine respondents from each of the twenty organisational units. Respondents were selected on the basis of differences, rather than similarities, in their organisational status. Hence, each unit was represented by employees from different levels of the organisation hierarchy, with different jobs, and varying tenure with the organisation. An employee representative (such as a shop steward) was also included in the sample for each unit. Interview questions were designed to elicit information about various manifestations of culture, from those which are relatively easy to observe, or ask about directly (including organisational rituals, heroes, and symbols), to deeper level, less accessible, organisational values. The former were classified, simply, as 'practices' and were investigated using questions such as (i) 'What are special terms here that only insiders understand?' (for organisational symbols); (ii) 'What kinds of people are most likely to make a fast career here?' (for organisational heroes); and (iii) 'Which events are celebrated in this organisation?' (for organisational rituals). Information about organisational values was elicited using questions such as 'What things do people very much like to see happening here?' and 'What is the biggest mistake one can make?'. It is worth mentioning that, in contrast with Siehl and Martin (1988) who made use of a number of qualitative data collection techniques, Hofstede et al. (1990) relied solely on in-depth interviewing in this phase of their study.

Phase two involved the administration of a questionnaire which was developed, at least in part, on the basis of insights obtained from phase one. The questionnaire comprised 135 items, including 57 value items, 74 practice items, and 4 items seeking information about the demographic characteristics of the group. Apart from the initial qualitative interviews, questionnaire items were derived from two other sources. Almost all of the value items (52 out of 57) were taken directly from Hofstede's (1980)

previous research into cross-national cultural differences. Fifteen of the practice items were adapted from a questionnaire developed by Reynolds (1986) on the basis of his review of the various dimensions of organisational culture commonly found in research and writings on the subject. Thus, approximately half of the items in the questionnaire developed by Hofstede et al. (1990) were derived from sources other than the initial qualitative interviews.

Questionnaire respondents were selected randomly from three different employee groupings including (i) managers, (ii) non-managers with college qualifications, and (iii) non-managers without college qualifications. Approximately 75 respondents were selected from each unit and, on average, 65 of these returned useable questionnaires. The total number of respondents participating in this part of the study was 1, 295.

Without going into the details, the overall conclusion suggested by the results of this research was that, to the extent that organisations support distinctive cultures, these appear to be associated with differences in organisational practices, rather than differences in organisational values. Two main findings supported this conclusion. Firstly, the practice items in the questionnaire were found to differentiate better among organisational units than the value items. Secondly, where value differences did exist, these were shown to be dependent on demographics (such as member nationality, age, gender, and education), rather than on membership with the particular organisational unit, as such. On the basis of their findings, Hofstede et al. argue that organisational socialisation (enculturation) involves acquiring knowledge about organisational practices (symbols, heroes, and rituals), not values. The latter, it is argued, are acquired primarily during an individual's childhood and early youth, and are transported into the organisation from outside. The fact that different value orientations can be observed in different organisations is, according to the authors, simply a reflection of the different hiring practices of organisations. The authors propose a redefinition of organisational culture as "perceived common practices" (Hofstede et al., 1990, p. 313) and argue (on the basis of factor analytic findings) that there are perhaps five to seven quantifiable practice dimensions (including, for example, a process-oriented versus results-oriented dimension, an employee-oriented versus job-oriented dimension, and a dimension reflecting the extent of the organisation's customer orientation) which might be used to capture differences in organisational cultures.

The main significance of Hofstede et al.'s study is that it presents a clear challenge to the now widely accepted notion that, at its deepest level, organisational culture comprises core values (Deal & Kennedy, 1982) or shared basic assumptions (Schein, 1985) which are the product of organisational (rather than societal) socialisation and which are, therefore, unique to a particular organisational context. However, even if one rejects the controversial conclusion suggested by this research – and it is the opinion of the present author that there are certain methodological limitations of the study which cast some doubt on this conclusion – the research can still be seen as significant in so far as it draws much needed attention to the question of external (ie. broader societal) influences on organisational culture. There is no denying the importance of research which attempts to understand which social processes are predominantly under organisational control and which are not.

We turn now to a consideration of some of the problems associated with the approach to studying organisational culture adopted by Hofstede et al. (1990).

The first problem concerns the treatment, in the qualitative phase of the study, of the twenty organisational units as culturally homogeneous. While the authors are careful to point out that this was an assessment made by management – it was not simply assumed to be the case as in the Siehl and Martin (1988) study – the fact remains that large organisational units, in particular (and it will be recalled that the largest participating unit comprised more than two thousand members), are likely to support a number of different subcultures. Moreover, the approach to sampling in the initial qualitative phase, whereby interviewees were selected on the basis of differences, rather than similarities, in their organisational status could be expected to increase the likelihood of subcultural differentiation within the participating units.

A second limitation concerns the reliance on sources other than the initial qualitative interviews for the identification of items for the questionnaire. The fact that almost all of the value items for the questionnaire were taken from Hofstede's (1980) survey of cross-national cultural differences is a particularly questionable feature of this methodology which provides some basis at least for doubting Hofstede et al.'s (1990) conclusion that organisational values are the product of societal, rather than organisational, socialisation. While the authors argue that the items from the original survey were not deliberately chosen for their potential to discriminate among organisations in different countries – the implication is that they might just as readily

discriminate among organisations in the same country – the generality of many of these items is such that one could hardly expect them to be sensitive to local organisational differences in the work values of employees. Examples of items (taken from the 1980 survey and included in the current questionnaire) which can be seen to be particularly susceptible to this criticism include: ‘Man dislikes work’, ‘When a man’s career demands it, family should make sacrifices’, ‘When people fail in life, it is not their fault’, ‘Most people cannot be trusted’, and ‘Parents should stimulate their children to be the best in the class’. It is perhaps worth mentioning that this problem of the generality of value measures is one which has been recognised previously. Bate (1984) argues that there are certain value measures – he cites as examples measures developed by Allport, Vernon and Lindzey (1960), Caudill and Scarr (1962), and O’Connor and Kinnane (1961) – which, while they purport to measure culture, are “too general to be used in an organisational context” (p. 47).

A third criticism concerns the derivation of the practice items. While the majority of these items (59 out of 74) were reportedly derived from the qualitative interviews – specifically, from responses to questions about organisational symbols, heroes, and rituals – many of these items, as they appear in the questionnaire, appear to have little bearing on these particular manifestations of organisational culture. Where is the connection, for example, between organisational symbols, heroes and rituals and practice items such as ‘Each day brings new challenges’, ‘No special ties with local community’, ‘People’s private life is their own business’, and ‘Organisation contributes little to society’?

A fourth limitation of Hofstede et al.’s (1990) approach, which relates specifically to the questionnaire, is that there is no attempt to control for qualitative variance in the meaning which respondents attach to questionnaire items. As with questionnaire measures of organisational culture, in general (see Section 3.2.2), it is simply assumed that respondents within and across the participating units will interpret any given item similarly. Thus, the value item which asks about the desirability of ‘working in a well-defined work situation’ assumes that all respondents will attached the same meaning to the descriptor ‘well-defined’. It is not difficult to imagine, however, how this could mean different things to different people. In the final analysis, then, one is left to wonder about the difference, if any, between this questionnaire and traditional measures of organisational climate. Moreover, the authors’ conclusion that organisational culture

exists only at the level of work practices (the notion of culture as a system of deeper level meanings is rejected) would seem to further support the argument that this may be an example of 'old wine in a new bottle'.

Fifth, and finally, the factor analytic results which are reported in this study can be questioned on several grounds. Firstly, in analysing the questionnaire data, individual responses to questionnaire items were aggregated into mean scores for each of the twenty organisational units. These units – rather than individual respondents – subsequently constituted the 'cases' for analysis. While the authors argue that the use of aggregate data is appropriate given that they are investigating a collective phenomenon, they provide no evidence to demonstrate that the two criteria considered necessary to justify this practice, namely, (i) low within-group variation in scores and (ii) significant between-group differences in averaged scores (Roberts, Hulin, & Rousseau, 1978), have been met. A second ground for concern is that an examination of the factor solutions which are presented for both the values items and the practices items (Hofstede et al., 1990, Tables 2 and 3) shows that the association between the items representing a particular factor and the name given to that factor is very often unclear. For example, it is not clear how variables such as 'The successful in life should help the unsuccessful', 'When people have failed in life, its not their fault', and 'Living in a desirable area is unimportant' (Table 2, p. 300) reflect the value factor labelled 'Need for Security' (which the authors suggest closely resembles the 'Uncertainty Avoidance' dimension identified by Hofstede (1980) in his cross-national cultural study). Similarly, one might question the representation of the practice factor labelled 'Process-Oriented vs Results-Oriented' (a concern with means versus a concern with goals or results) by variables such as 'Typical member fast', 'Typical member warm' and 'Open to outsiders and newcomers' (Table 3, p. 303). Finally, there is the problem that, in reporting the results of these two factor analyses, the authors provide no information about items which load onto more than one factor. The way in which the results are presented suggests that the items listed have high loadings on one factor only. It is quite possible, however, that several items were factorially complex even though, as the authors indicate, the factors themselves were orthogonal.

One last point that can be made is that the questions raised above, regarding the factor analytic results, can be regarded as being all the more important since the conclusions drawn in the study are based very much on these results.

Rentsch (1991)

Rentsch used an integrated methodology to study the relationship between social interaction and organisational meanings. The specific aim of the research was to determine whether or not organisation members who interacted with one another would interpret organisational events similarly, and whether these interpretations would differ from the interpretations of members in different interaction groups. The study was carried out in a medium-sized accounting firm (employing 66 members in all). As in the two studies described above, this study involved two phases of data collection: an initial qualitative phase followed by a subsequent quantitative phase. The former involved individual, or group, interviews with 27 organisation members⁴⁷. Interview questions were open-ended and were designed to elicit information about the nature, cause, and meaning of organisational events, as perceived by members. Thus, for example, interviewees were asked questions such as 'What happens around here?', 'Why do these things happen?', and 'What does it mean to you that these things happen?'. The interview data were analysed to identify the organisational events which were most frequently cited by interviewees, along with the adjectives most frequently used to convey the meaning of these events. On the basis of this analysis, fifteen events and nine adjectives were selected for use in a questionnaire which was administered in the second quantitative phase of the study. Examples of some of these events include: 'The team concept is employed here', 'Partners are open to new ideas', and 'There is a communications meeting about twice a year'; examples of some of the adjectives used to convey the meaning of these events include: 'professional', 'planful', and 'fair'.

The questionnaire comprised three main sections. In the first section, each of the fifteen organisational events (written as an event statement) was paired with every other event (providing 210 event pairs). Respondents were asked to think about what each event (in each of the pairs listed) meant to them and then rate the similarity of those meanings on an eleven point scale from 'very dissimilar' (-5) to 'very similar' (5). The second section of the questionnaire included the fifteen event statements, along with the nine adjectives presented as nine bipolar seven-point adjective scales (for example, 'professional-nonprofessional', 'planful-unorganized', and 'fair-unfair'). After reading each event statement, respondents were required to indicate the point on each of the nine

⁴⁷ Seventeen interviews in all were conducted, with no information given on the duration of these interviews.

adjective scales that best described what the event meant to them. The third and last section of the questionnaire was concerned with the identification of interaction groups. Respondents were presented with a list of the names of all of the firm's members and asked to indicate who in the firm they interacted with (a) for friendship, (b) to get the job done, (c) to find out what was happening, and (d) to find out why things happened in the way they did. The first of these two interactions were classified as friendship and workflow interactions respectively, and the latter two as reality-testing interactions. All of the firm's sixty six members participated in this second phase of the study and, of these, sixty four returned completed questionnaires.

It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to comment in any detail on the various statistical techniques that were used to analyse the data collected in phase two of this study. Suffice it to say that two main methods of data analysis were employed: network analysis (Burt, 1987, cited by Rentsch, 1990) to identify meaningful interaction groups and multidimensional scaling⁴⁸ to analyse the meanings attached to organisational events by these interaction groups. Overall, the results of phase two of the study provided evidence that members in the same interaction group interpreted organisational events similarly, and that their interpretations differed from the interpretations (of the same organisational events) of members of different interaction groups. An important methodological implication of Rentsch's findings, to which she herself draws attention, is that in order to identify groups for organisational culture (or organisational climate) research, one might usefully focus on interaction patterns among organisation members. In fact, this may prove to be a more fruitful approach than the traditional delineation of groups in terms of member demographics (age, gender, length of service etc.), functional unit, and hierarchical position.

Rentsch's approach can be seen as particularly valuable in so far as it focuses attention on the meanings which organisation members themselves attribute to their experience of organisational life. In other words, it makes no assumptions about these meanings, as does the approach adopted by Hofstede et al. (1990), but rather it explicitly seeks to understand them. Moreover, because it provides for the objective assessment (ie. quantification) of meaning, the method proposed could be used to investigate

⁴⁸ This is a technique which is used to represent psychological dissimilarity as geometric distance (Green, Tull, & Albaum, 1988).

changes in organisational culture (meaning) over time, for example, as well as the impact of intervention strategies on organisational culture (meaning).

With respect to the disadvantages of this approach, as Rentsch herself notes, there is a question about the extent to which the 'meaning' subcultures studied in this research constitute complete subcultures. Rentsch correctly points out that, for the latter to apply, one would need to demonstrate that the members of 'meaning' subcultures, apart from interpreting events similarly, also behaved according to similar norms and shared similar values and basic assumptions. A second disadvantage of this approach is that, as with Siehl and Martin's (1988) approach, the qualitative phase of data collection must be repeated, and appropriate modifications made to the questionnaire, for each new organisation (or organisational unit) that is investigated.

1.7 Conclusion

On the basis of the above review of approaches to the study of organisational culture, it can be concluded that research in this area – whether it adopts a qualitative strategy, a quantitative strategy or a combined qualitative/quantitative strategy – faces considerable methodological problems. While many of these problems would appear to be very difficult to resolve, there is a strong case to be made for why organisational culture researchers should direct more effort towards addressing methodological issues. An important observation in this regard is that, despite the initial impact of the organisational culture perspective – as Denison (1996) points out, it offered new ways of thinking about organisational socialisation, symbolism and change – the influence of this perspective, and its ability to engage the interest of new researchers, can be seen to have been declining steadily over the years. Indeed, as early as the mid-1980's, there was talk of the need to "rekindle the flame" of organisational culture research (Frost, 1985 cited by Denison, 1996, p. 632). Soon after, the question was asked as to whether or not the study of organisational culture was a "failed project" (Smircich and Calás, 1987, p. 229). By the beginning of the 1990's, concerns were being expressed about the lack of empirical research (whether qualitative or quantitative) on organisational culture (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Sackmann, 1991). There was a perception that researchers had become bogged down in epistemological arguments and questions about the nature of the concept (what culture is, and what it is not), and that these preoccupations had been at the expense of more substantial empirical work in the area. Concerns were also being expressed about the limited practical contribution of the

perspective. Bate (1990) suggested that organisational culture was at risk of being “discredited by practical people for failing to ‘deliver the goods’” (p. 84) and he argued that the time had come for the concept to “demonstrate its capacity for useful application in practice” (p. 83).

While there is unlikely to be a simple, or single, explanation for why empirical research on organisational culture is lacking, or why the practical contribution of the perspective has been so disappointing, a major impediment to progress in these respects would seem to be the difficulty associated with trying to decipher, or measure, organisational culture. Ott (1989) makes this point very strongly when he says that:

Some of the most important unanswered questions are methodological, and without methodological advancement, the perspective will not achieve maturity (p. 192).

The present research can be seen as a step towards addressing these unanswered methodological questions. Its overall aim is to make a practical contribution to our knowledge about how best to approach the study of organisational culture. More specifically, the research investigates what would be required to develop a measure for organisational culture that would be practically useful, while at the same time capable of accessing those aspects of culture thought to exist at the deeper levels of organisation member awareness. In attempting to develop such a measure, epistemological sensitivities have been put aside in favour of an approach which seeks to benefit from the advantages that a combined emic/etic strategy can offer (Reichers & Schneider, 1990; Rousseau, 1990). The measure for organisational culture which is proposed is, therefore, one in which qualitative and quantitative methods are combined. Importantly, the validation of this measure, through the various stages of its development, depended to a very great extent, on qualitative insights gained by the researcher over the course of a prolonged, and sustained, period of involvement with the research organisation. In terms of its qualitative component, then, this research seeks to provide the kind of ‘in-depth’ analysis that scholars, such as, Bryman (1991) have advocated and observed to be so critically lacking from many existing studies of organisational culture.

CHAPTER TWO

STUDY I

2.1 Introduction

Study I was an exploratory study which involved the investigation of organisational culture using qualitative research methods. The main hoped-for outcome of this study was that its findings would help to inform the subsequent development of a method for the more in-depth, and more systematic, investigation of organisational culture. In particular, the aim of the study was to identify those aspects, or dimensions, of organisational culture which seemed to be most relevant to the members of the group being investigated, and which might, therefore, constitute an appropriate focus for the measure being developed. It was also hoped that the study would provide some clues as to the specific kinds of questions that one might ask in order to elicit culturally relevant information pertaining to these dimensions.

Before proceeding to the details of Study I, the following brief account is given of the research setting (specifically, two divisions of a large automotive company) and the means by which access to this setting was obtained.

2.2 The research setting: Background information and access

The research for study one was carried out in the tooling division of the South Australian operations of General Motors-Holden's Automotive Limited⁴⁹. At the time of the study, these operations supported a total workforce of more than 4,000 employees. Access to the organisation, and more specifically to the tooling division, or Engineering Toolroom as it was called, was obtained through a work contact. A personal friend and work associate of the researcher – a visiting academic who was teaching at Adelaide University in an MBA class, in which the manager of the Engineering Toolroom was enrolled – arranged an initial introduction with this manager. The outcome of this first meeting was that the researcher was able to negotiate access to the organisation (pending approval from senior company management and the unions, which was subsequently granted) for the purpose of conducting a preliminary study of organisational culture in the Engineering Toolroom. It is perhaps worth noting that the researcher's experience in this regard accords well with Buchanan, Boddy and McCalman's (1988) depiction of how management

⁴⁹ In 1995, the company name was changed to Holden Ltd.

researchers often gain access to the organisations in which they carry out their research. According to these authors, gaining access is more often determined by luck (being 'in the right place at the right time') and having contacts in the field, than it is by the superior negotiating skills of the researcher.

By way of some background information on the Engineering Toolroom, this division was among the oldest in the company, having been in existence since the company's inception in the early 1930's. Its main function was the provision of an 'in-house' tooling service (involving the building and maintenance of press dies, assembly fixtures, and special purpose tools) to the company's fabrication and assembly operations. The division's employees comprised mostly qualified tradesmen, with trade's skills in areas such as drafting, pattern-making, fitting, and tool-making. When the research for Study I commenced, there were approximately 300 employees in the Engineering Toolroom. At the time, however, the division was undergoing a major restructure which involved, among other things, the substantial downsizing of the division – some three years later when the research for a third and final study was drawing to an end, there were only 75 employees remaining in this division – as well as the relocation of the division from its original site at Woodville, South Australia, to the site of the company's main assembly and manufacturing operations, which were based some 15 kilometres away at Elizabeth. The point should be made that this restructure was just one of a number of changes which the division had undergone as a result of a decision, taken by the company in the early 1970's, to contract out many of its major tooling projects to Japan.

It was considered (by both the researcher and the manager of the Engineering Toolroom) that this division would provide a particularly suitable site for a study of organisational culture. Given its long history, and also the tenure of its employees (among the longest serving in the organisation), it was not unreasonable to expect that the division would support a well-established, and hence more readily identifiable, culture. Moreover, it was possible, given the events of recent years, that this was a culture which had experienced, and was continuing to experience, some major challenges to its core beliefs and assumptions.

After some twelve months spent in the tooling division, and with the assistance of tooling division management, the researcher gained access to a second division, the Plastics Operations. While Study I of the present research was carried out entirely in the Engineering Toolroom, Studies II and III were carried out in both the Engineering Toolroom and the Plastics Operations. The three studies which make up this research

were carried out over a period some three years, during which time the researcher spent between two to three days per week in the researcher organisation.

In securing access to the Plastics Operations, the point can again be made that it was not by design, but rather the result of a personal contact – the manager of the Engineering Toolroom was well-acquainted with the manager of the Plastics Operations – that this particular division was included in the research. As it turned out, however, a more suitable second site for the research would have been hard to find. As will be seen below, the Plastics Operations was markedly different from the tooling division and, therefore, provided the potential for an examination of cultural differences between the divisions.

Unlike the tooling division, the Plastics Operations was a production division. It specialised in injection moulding, painting, and the assembly of plastics components, such as bumper bars, consoles, and facia plates for brake lights. Shop floor employees in this division, unlike their counterparts in the tooling division, typically had no formal qualifications. The majority worked as production operators and, as such, possessed general assembly and production skills. The Plastics Operations was established only relatively recently – in the early 1980's – and thus, its members did not share the long history of their counterparts in the tooling division. Moreover, in the context of the organisation as a whole, the Plastics Operations was regarded as being somewhat 'different'. This was because it was the first division in the organisation to implement teamwork on the shop floor (a job design initiative which was trialed in the early years of the division's operations).

The Plastics Operations was based at Elizabeth. During the period over which this research was carried out, the size of its workforce, which numbered approximately 300 employees, remained relatively stable.

2.3 Method

As indicated, Study I was conducted in the Engineering Toolroom. Data collection for this study spanned a period of approximately one year, during which time the researcher spent two to three full days each week as a 'researcher participant' (see Section 1.6.2, p. 90) in the division⁵⁰. Divisional members were made aware of the research via a 'news release' that was posted on the divisional bulletin board. This gave a brief introduction to the researcher, provided summary information about the nature of the study (including a brief definition of organisational culture), and invited divisional

⁵⁰ Thus, the equivalent of six month's full time was spent gathering data for this study.

members to participate in, and support, the research. A “generalist”, rather than a “specialist”, approach to data collection was adopted (Siehl & Martin, 1990, p. 243) with information being sought about a range of manifestations (rather than a single manifestation) of the culture of the division. The study was entirely qualitative and drew on three main sources of data: (i) informal conversations with divisional members (at all levels of the hierarchy) during work breaks; (ii) observations of the behaviour of divisional members in work-related and social interactions with one another; and (iii) open ended, in-depth interviews with a sample of divisional members.

As indicated, there were approximately 300 employees in the tooling division when this study commenced. Given the researcher’s relatively sustained and prolonged involvement with the division during the study, it was possible for her to become closely acquainted with many of these employees. As such, a relatively large cross-section of the division’s membership was represented by the conversational and observational data that were collected. These data were recorded in a diary on a daily basis for the duration of the study⁵¹. Individual interviews, of approximately one hour’s duration each, were conducted with twenty divisional employees. Table 2.1 provides a description of these employees in terms of their demographic characteristics. As indicated, interviewees were all male and included the general manager of the division, seven supervisory staff (from first-line supervisors to a senior superintendent), two non-supervisory staff, and ten shop floor (‘wages’) employees (including three with leading hand status). The average age of interviewees was 47 years (and ranged from 33 years to 59 years), their average length of service with the company was 27 years (ranging from 14 years to 35 years), and their average length of service with the division was 23 years (ranging from 3 months to 35 years). Interviewees came from a number of different sections in the division and, in all cases, they worked on the day (rather than the afternoon) shift.

Interviews were highly unstructured and took the form of “informal conversations” (Patton, 1990, p. 280) in which interviewees were invited to talk with the researcher about their experience of working in the division. While there were no set interview questions, the researcher had drawn on a number of qualitative accounts of organisational culture (see, for example, Barley, 1983 and Snyder, 1988) in order to

⁵¹ The collection and recording of ‘diary’ data continued in Studies II and III, for both of the participating divisions. These data helped to validate aspects of the measure for organisational culture that was being developed in these later studies.

Table 2.1 Demographic characteristics of Study I interviewees.

Interviewee #	Age (yrs)	Years with the Company	Years with the Division	Section	Position	Shift
01	40	23	3 months	Total plant	General Manager	permanent day
02	41	26	24	Die Manufacture	Tradeswages	permanent day
03	49	27	3 months	All manufacturing operations	Manufacturing Manager	permanent day
04	48	24	17	Die Fitting	Foreman	permanent day
05	48	32	22	Pattern Shop	General Foreman	permanent day
06	50	34	34	Pattern Shop	Tradeswages	permanent day
07	33	17	17	Jig Shop	Tradeswages	permanent day
08	55	28	28	Try Out	Tradeswages	permanent day
09	49	34	34	Drawing Office	Staff, supervisory	permanent day
10	42	26	26	Drawing Office	Staff, non-supervisory	permanent day
11	54	29	29	Drawing Office	Staff, non-supervisory	permanent day
12	59	14	14	Prototype	Tradeswages (LH)	permanent day
13	57	35	35	Machine Shop	Superintendent	permanent day
14	39	22	22	Prototype	Staff, supervisory	permanent day
14	40	25	25	Jig Shop	Tradeswages (LH)	permanent day
16	51	26	22	Jig Shop	Tradeswages	permanent day
17	50	34	34	Jig Shop	General Foreman	permanent day
18	50	27	27	Pattern Shop	Tradeswages (LH)	permanent day
19	50	28	28	Machine Shop	Tradeswages	permanent day
20	39	23	21	Machine Shop	Tradeswages	permanent day
	mean=47.2 yrs sd=6.9 yrs range 33-59 yrs	mean=26.7 yrs sd=5.5 yrs range 14-35 yrs	mean=23.0 yrs sd=9.8 yrs range 3mths-35 yrs			

develop a short list of general questions which could be used, if necessary, to get the conversation started or to prompt further discussion. These questions included:

- What kind of work do you do here?
- Tell me what it's like around here? What are the good things about working here? What things are not so good?
- What can you tell me about the history of the organisation?
- What are some of the most important things that have happened since you came here?
- What sorts of things would you like to see changed here?
- How do you see the future of this organisation?

Interviewees gave their written consent for the interviews to be recorded on audio-tape and they were assured, in writing, that their identity would not be revealed in any subsequent reporting of the information which they provided. The transcripts of the interviews ran to some 400 pages.

2.4 Data analysis and Results

Data analysis involved, first of all, acquiring sufficient familiarity with the data to be able to classify them in some way. To this end, the researcher completed several readings of the interview transcripts and diary data. Following this, the data were grouped according to the main subjects or topics that emerged as being of interest to divisional members. This task was done manually since, at the time, the researcher did not have access to a computer programme for analysing qualitative data. It was necessary, therefore, to make multiple copies of the transcripts, so that excerpts of conversations could be cut from the whole conversation and sorted into relevant subject categories. Examples of the kinds of topics that emerged as being salient to participants in the study included: the substantial downsizing of the divisional workforce that took place in the early 1970's and then again in the early 1980's, current promotional practices in the division, the division's operating reward system, the approach to decision making, the relationship between workers and their supervisors, and changes in the status of tradesmen. In all, twenty five such subject categories were identified (see Appendix A1)

The next step in the analysis was to search for commonalities in what participants said, and how they talked about these various subjects. In this way, it was hoped that a first attempt might be made at describing the culture of the division in terms of a number of underlying 'content themes' (Siehl & Martin, 1990, p. 243). Given the

treatment, in this research, of organisational culture as a shared phenomenon, it was considered appropriate that the analysis should focus on commonalities, rather than differences in the data. At this stage of the analysis, it became apparent that, in order to describe the results in a meaningful way, some kind of general analytical framework was needed that could be used to classify emergent themes according to a small number of broad dimensions or categories⁵². A review of existing frameworks for classifying organisational cultures and 'cultural' themes was conducted and this suggested that the results of the present study could be most usefully described in terms of the framework proposed by Schein (1985) (see Section 1.3, pp. 26-29). Of the five categories of basic (cultural) assumptions which are included in Schein's framework, there were two which seemed to be particularly relevant for the classification of emergent themes in this study. These were Category 3 – 'The Nature of Human Nature' – which, at an organisational level, is concerned with the way in which workers and managers are viewed, and Category 5 – 'The Nature of Human Relationships' – comprising assumptions about how group members should relate to one another to ensure the optimal functioning of the group. Of some relevance also, but less strongly supported, was Schein's Category 1 – 'Humanity's Relationship to Nature' – which is concerned with how organisation members view the relationship of the organisation to its external environment (whether in control of, coexisting in, or controlled by). It was also the case that emergent themes from the present study – specifically those pertaining to Schein's Category 3 – could be further classified according to McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y managerial assumptions about the nature of workers. With respect to this analysis, there was good evidence to suggest that divisional practices and procedures, as well as the 'managerial climate' of the division (defined by McGregor (p. 134) as the "psychological climate" of the relationship between superiors and supervisors) reflected predominantly Theory X assumptions.

The remainder of this section is devoted to a discussion of the results of the thematic analysis of Study I data. Themes pertaining to Category 3 of Schein's framework are described first with reference, as appropriate, to McGregor's Theory X, Theory Y classification. Following this, themes pertaining to Category 5, and then Category 1, are described. Within each broad category, themes are further grouped according to the particular domain (ie. subject area) of participant experience (ie. whether experience of

⁵² The subject categories that had been identified were never intended to serve this purpose – they simply offered a preliminary means of sorting the data. Moreover, as was to be expected, it sometimes happened that the same theme emerged in participants' comments about more than one subject.

the division's reward system, its approach to decision making etc.) to which they referred. While excerpts from the data are used to illustrate each of the themes that is discussed, it was not deemed necessary, given the exploratory nature of the study, to provide more than a few illustrative examples in each case.

2.4.1 Themes pertaining to Schein's (1985) Category 3: 'The Nature of Human Nature'

The results of the thematic analysis of data pertaining to four subject areas, namely, (i) promotional practices, (ii) reward and recognition, (iii) performance appraisal, and (iv) superior/subordinate perceptions, provided the basis for making inferences about assumptions in this category. These results are as follows:

Promotional practices

Theme 1: "Required personnel" are not promoted

One of the key themes to emerge from the data in this domain related to the notion of "required personnel". The term was used to describe divisional members who, because of their competence in their current position, were 'required' in that position, and were therefore unlikely to be considered for a promotion to a more senior position, or even for a transfer to another position at the same level. The following excerpts serve to illustrate:

There are some that have tried [for promotion] and have banged their heads against the walls for years, waiting to get out and go somewhere else, into another department and improve themselves. They just weren't allowed to go... They were too clever in their present job. (staff, non-supervisory)

When a job becomes available, there's always a notice on the board: 'There is a vacancy coming up. People who want to apply, have to apply on a form. And let your supervisor know that you're going to apply for this different job'. But if you're a very clever chap in the position you're in, you always get a knock back. (staff, non-supervisory)

He's a great organiser, and work, he knows what he's doing. Now there's a bloke who will never get on. He will never get on with this company... Because they don't want him to. Number 1, he's too good at his job where he is, so to take him out of that job, and have it filled by someone who's not as good... ('wages' employee)

Interestingly, the label 'required personnel' was also seen to work against employees who were seeking early retirement:

Now someone will put in an A.V.O. [Avoid Verbal Orders]⁵³, but he'll be knocked back [from early retirement] because he's considered required personnel. ('wages' employee)

⁵³ The 'Avoid Verbal Orders' form was a standard form which had been designed to encourage divisional members to communicate important matters in writing, rather than verbally.

As suggested by these data, competence or being good at one's job was not perceived as a guarantee of reward. On the contrary, it could lead to the employee becoming 'locked into' his current position, with little hope of advancement. Moreover, this was a practice in which the needs of the division (at least, its immediate, short-term needs) clearly had priority over the needs of individual employees. In this sense, the practice can be seen to be more consistent with a Theory X orientation, than a Theory Y orientation.

Theme 2: Non-performance factors influence promotion

The data in this domain contained frequent references to how to 'get ahead' in the organisation. There was a perception that certain personal factors, not related to performance, significantly influenced one's chances of promotion within the company. Reference was made, for example, to the importance of membership with the Freemasons, knowing the "right" people, owning a four-wheel drive, being apprenticed in the same year as the "boss", being a "yes" person, having "an ability to talk", and engaging in social and sporting activities (eg. fishing, lawn bowls, golf) with the "right" people. The following excerpt provides a revealing illustration of the perception among divisional members that conformity with the group (and its underlying 'rules' for membership) was an important criterion for promotion:

You promote a 'yes' person, not a 'no' person. Individuality is definitely out, not acceptable, and if you had someone like that, well you would not promote him ... or you could see that you have a chance to bring him along your lines and therefore he becomes one of the big group and sings the same songs, and forgets actually what he really is about, puts that in the background. ('wages' employee)

As above for the data pertaining to Theme 1, these data can be seen to be more consistent with a Theory X orientation than a Theory Y orientation. They provide further evidence of a perception among divisional members that the needs and requirements of the group (organisation) take precedence over the needs and requirements of individual members of the group.

Theme 3: Promotion from within no longer the norm

A common concern which was expressed by divisional members was that the past practice of promotion from within the division no longer applied. There was an increasing trend toward the recruitment of divisional managers from other divisions of the company and this seriously undermined members' expectations that, so long as they met certain requirements (eg. being 'next in line for a promotion' and satisfactory performance), they could reasonably expect to advance their position and status within

the division. This change in promotional practices in the division was seen by some divisional members as a consequence of the company's attempt to reduce the overall number of management personnel, while at the same time avoiding lay-offs:

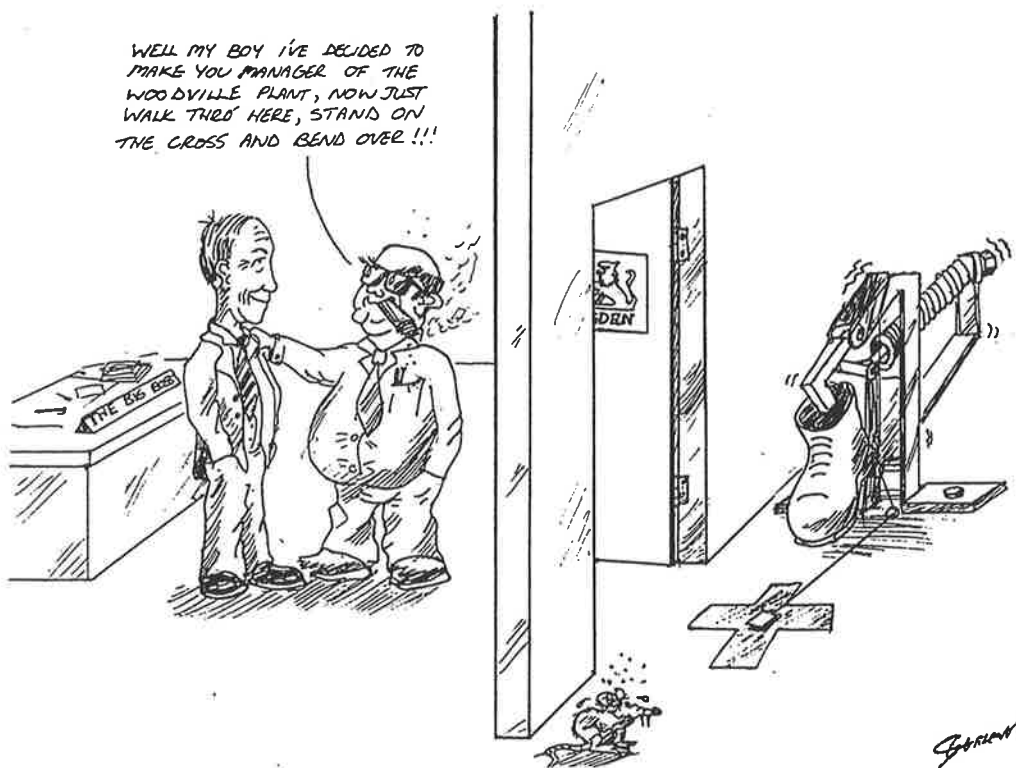
Instead of making them up off the shop floor, they started to bring them in, because they wanted to use the staff they already had [in other divisions] ...if they really desperately needed a staff person out there, they wouldn't make one up because they're trying to lower the amount of staff people now. They would look for some area where they're already paying someone a staff wage, and they'd bring them into the shop. ('wages' employee)

Others were more negative in their interpretation of the change. As they saw it, the division was being used by the company as a convenient 'dumping ground' for poor performing managers from other divisions:

I suppose the 'higher ups' thought they had to do something with [X]. He might have been on a limb in the job he was in before. ('wages' employee)

We feel that we've only been getting what other departments don't want, and that's the general consensus on it. (staff, supervisory)

This latter view is nicely illustrated in the following cartoon, drawn by a 'wages' employee from the tooling division, and depicting the artist's interpretation of what a 'promotion' to this division really meant⁵⁴.



⁵⁴ This was one of a number of cartoons drawn by the same artist, which were circulating among shopfloor employees in the division during this period. Cultural artefacts such as these provided another 'window' into divisional member perceptions of life in the division at the time.

Again, a Theory X orientation, with its emphasis on the organisation's needs taking precedence over the individual's needs, is suggested by these data.

Reward and recognition

While the above data are concerned specifically with member perceptions of promotional practices in the division, numerous other references were made by divisional members to more general aspects of the division's operating reward system. The analysis of these data suggested the following (five) general themes.

Theme 1: *Money a major motivator of work performance*

A commonly held view among divisional personnel was that money constituted the primary, and in some cases, the only benefit of working. Numerous references were made to the higher than average wages which employees in the division received (compared with similarly qualified tradesmen working in other industries) and to the fact there was usually plenty of overtime available which offered a healthy supplement to employees' regular pay. With respect to this latter point, one interviewee (a 'wages' employee) held the view that overtime was "the only thing that makes it worthwhile still working here".

It is interesting in the present context to consider also the views of those divisional members who had left the company at some stage (either voluntarily or because they had been retrenched), taken up work elsewhere, and then subsequently returned because of the better pay and conditions offered by the company. In the case of employees who had been made redundant, their return was in spite of the considerable resentment and antagonism which they reportedly felt toward the company at the time. The following excerpt, in which the comments of both the interviewer (I) and the respondent (R) (a supervisor) have been retained, serves to illustrate:

I: What was your feeling about the company [after being sacked]?

R: If I could've got a bomb I would've blown this place up. It hurt to be put off because since I left school I've never been fired from a job yet, so it hurt.

I: What was your initial reaction to the telegram asking you to return to work?

R: It [the telegram] got screwed up and thrown in the corner. It took me a month from the time I got the telegram to reapply for the job.

I: Why did you come back?

R: Money, money. I was working at [X] and when I went, when I was due to go on annual leave, I'd seen what some of the boys from [X] were getting paid. You'd lost all your demerit money and all the bonuses they paid, and they just paid you out for annual leave on the flat rate and it was awful.

One final point that can be made in relation to this theme is that, consistent with Theory X assumptions, there was a perception among supervisory staff that money and

other tangible rewards and benefits (such as good leave conditions and access to overtime) *should* be sufficient to motivate employee performance. There was little apparent appreciation of the potential motivational value of more intrinsic, less tangible rewards (such as those identified as 'motivational factors' in Herzberg's (1959) Two-Factor Theory of motivation). The following excerpt serves to illustrate:

I've always found this company good to work for, never knocked the company, but it annoys me to hear other people knock the company when they don't really give their lot. They get good conditions, good pay, four weeks leave, plus all the P.D.O's. [Programmed Days Off], plus public holidays. They can take their pick if they want to work overtime and earn extra money. The working conditions are good. (staff, supervisory)

Theme 2: *Use of overtime as control mechanism*

As suggested above, a commonly held view among divisional members (at least at the shopfloor level) was that one of the major benefits of coming to work was the opportunity to supplement one's basic income with overtime pay. There was also a perception that this reliance on overtime served to weaken employee resolve in relation to industrial action in the division (one condition of which was the imposition of overtime bans). As one interviewee observed, overtime pay (or the threat of losing it) was, for many, a more powerful motivator than the possible violation of the principles to which one claimed adherence in supporting strike action:

You know if there's any union trouble here, and it's a matter of banning overtime, you'll find that while the heat of the moment is on, yes, ban overtime, because no-one wants to stand out in a group and say: 'No, I don't believe that.' Afterwards, they'll go around trying to undermine that: 'The overtime's been banned, we've got to stop that, we're losing money.' It doesn't matter what the principle is, or what's happened. ('wages' employee)

Similarly, another interviewee observed:

Actually, as a body, they're [the union] pretty weak. They always have been – they're governed by overtime. If the boss says there's plenty of overtime, you'll never get anybody wanting to do anything. ('wages' employee)

This interviewee went on to suggest that the company (management) used overtime as a mechanism to control the level of industrial action in the division:

As soon as you've got no overtime, [the workers say]: 'Well, do you want to do it [take strike action] now? Yeah, why not?' And as soon as the company gets wind of that, there's a day's overtime comes out.

Theme 3: *Intrinsic value of the work to the individual and pride in skill*

While it was clear that monetary incentives had always been a key element in the division's reward system, there was evidence to suggest that, for some employees at least, their motivation derived from the work itself. References were made, for

example, to the satisfaction derived from “a job well done” and “when something works out” (‘wages’ employee); the enjoyment and challenge associated with “experimental work” (leading hand); and the satisfaction derived from being given “a fair amount of freedom to do and achieve an ultimate result in a job” (leading hand). A closely related theme, and one which no doubt underpinned such views about the intrinsic worth of the work, concerned the tradesman’s pride in his skill. It was apparent that, in the past, there was considerable status associated with being a tradesman. Tradesmen were among the most technically proficient people in the industry and, as one interviewee (a leading hand) noted, a trade in the past was regarded as “an honourable profession” and “an admirable ambition”. While trade qualifications reportedly no longer carried such status, it was evident from comments such as “there’s nothing much that we couldn’t do” (leading hand), “we’ve got a lot of very technically competent people here” (staff, supervisory), and “..the expertise on the floor is still there” (‘wages’ employee) that, within the division, the skill and expertise of tradesmen continued to be held in high regard.

It is interesting to note that, despite views such as the above (which were expressed by supervisory staff as well as shopfloor employees), there was little evidence to suggest that the efforts of individual tradesmen were positively acknowledged by their supervisors. As one employee pointed out:

You never get told that you’re doing a good job, you only get told when you’re doing a bad job. (staff, non-supervisory)

Moreover, to the extent that one derived satisfaction from the work itself, this was regarded as one’s own “personal thing”, regardless of “whether somebody else cares or not” (‘wages’ employee).

Theme 4: *Use non-tangible rewards surreptitiously*

The data in this domain also provided evidence that praise and other non-monetary rewards, to the extent that they were used at all, were used surreptitiously. One interviewee (a supervisor) indicated that, because he was constrained in the use of financial incentives (tradesmen’s wages were fixed by an award), he tried to reward above average performers by making them “feel important” or by giving them “a better or more interesting job”. He indicated, however, that he was careful not to administer such rewards “openly”. This was because, on the one hand:

Management doesn’t like it that you get too sort of pally with them [the workers] because it makes it rather difficult when you have to discipline people.

On the other hand, it was likely that subordinates rewarded in this way would earn a reputation as the “teacher’s pet” and consequently be ostracised by their peers.

Theme 5: Hard work rewarded with more work

Another theme to emerge from the data in this domain concerned a perception among shopfloor employees that, not only was there no longer any incentive for them to work hard – opportunities for promotion were now practically non-existent, the past system of awarding bonuses for good work had been abandoned, and employee wages were now fixed by an award – but there was a positive disincentive for them to do so. As illustrated by the following excerpts, the experience of some employees was that the ‘reward’ for hard work was simply that one was given more work:

Well, I show a lot of interest here, but ten guys won’t, but I do, and that’s why I get all the bloody work. (‘wages’ employee)

But here actually, the only thing you get out of the firm for doing more is that you will also get the next job quicker. While the one that’s not doing anything, he will not even be given a job. (‘wages’ employee)

In a similar vein, there was a perception that skills and experience were no longer necessarily an asset to the individual. For example, one employee complained that, because of the skills and experience which he had acquired as a result of his past efforts to get ahead in the organisation (efforts which were not subsequently rewarded with promotion), he was now relied upon to take on work which he did not necessarily want to accept, but which his less conscientious and less ambitious peers were incapable of performing. In his own words:

I’m still one of those that move around [to different sections] whether I like it or not. And often now the moves aren’t very good... But you can’t go and get the bloke that’s been sitting on his tail in a certain section. You’ll never get him to move, because he just says he doesn’t know how to do it. (‘wages’ employee)

Theme 6: Service incentives no longer valued

Even though employee service with the organisation was no longer valued in the same way that it had been in the past – prior to the major retrenchments which took place in the division in the early 1970’s and then again in the early 1980’s, longer-serving employees could reasonably feel assured of a ‘job for life’ (see Theme 7 below) – the company continued the practice of granting service awards to longer serving employees. Current attitudes towards these incentives, however, appeared to be quite negative, with divisional members criticising them on the grounds that they were no longer of much value financially. Consider, for example, the following excerpt in which the interviewee (a ‘wages’ employee) describes the circumstances surrounding,

and his response to, his receipt of the 'gold watch' service award, for twenty five years' service with the company:

...it was one of those appreciation things, you know, they give you after 25 years. You get a watch and you get a handshake from the manager... They sort of take you into the office and give you a cup of coffee and sort of 'We appreciate your work', and you get a watch and one and a half Scotch Finger biscuits. They put them on your saucer so you can't take two from the middle. You see, that's why I'm wearing my Hungry Jack's watch.

When asked where his gold watch was, the interviewee replied:

In the cupboard. Who needs it? What is a watch today, after 25 years service? What's this? What appreciation is this? This one [he points to his Hungry Jack's watch], I bought a whopper and I got the watch for nothing. That's what you get after 25 years service. Terrific isn't it?

In a similar vein, but in relation to the award granted for fifty years' service:

There has been one [employee] who spent 50 years here, and they gave him a fridge. What would a car cost them? \$5,000? 'Look, here's a nice new car.' What a great incentive that would be for people to stay on. Like we get a clock or a watch for 25 years. I worked it out. It was 20 cents per year that we got out of them. A great incentive! (staff, non-supervisory)

Theme 7: *Changes in the 'reward contract' over time*

There was good evidence from the data in this domain to suggest that, over the years, the division's reward system had undergone considerable change. This was a change, not in the types of rewards that were offered, but rather in the availability of those rewards which had traditionally been in use. For example, as indicated above, divisional members no longer had the opportunities for promotion from within the division that they had had in the past; similarly, the past system of pay increments for high performers was no longer in use (this system had reportedly been abandoned due to a lack of funds, in addition to which wages were now fixed by an award). Perhaps the most significant change to the division's reward system, however, was the change which was effected by the major downsizing of the division which was undertaken in the early 1970's. Specifically, the division's workforce was reduced to approximately half its original size (of approximately 1000 members), with the sacking of all those shopfloor employees with less than ten years' service with the company. The retrenchments were apparently carried out within a very short period of time (less than one week) and with no advance warning given to employees. Moreover, at this time, there was no obligation on the part of the company to pay retrenchment money – those made redundant were compensated for one week's notice only. That this was a critical event in the history of the division was abundantly clear from members' accounts of the

period. For example, some divisional members talked about the atmosphere of fear and uncertainty which prevailed in the division just prior to the retrenchment notices being handed out. In the words of one such employee:

There was a horrible air of scariness about the place. Everybody knew something was happening, but they didn't know what. (staff, supervisory).

Other divisional members described the shocked reactions of those who were dismissed:

...they just walked off the plant in stunned amazement. (staff, supervisory)

...there was just blokes standing around with their mouths gaping wide open. (staff, supervisory)

And still others (notably those who had been dismissed and subsequently returned to the division) commented on their own personal reaction to the experience:

If I could have got a bomb, I would've blown this place up... (staff, supervisory)

...it is terribly disappointing, you feel betrayed. It's like somebody stealing your car, breaking in your house, and... well, I will not go as far as rape, but it's almost like that. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

One important consequence of this event was that it undermined what appeared to be a tacit agreement between employees and the company – referred to in the literature as the 'psychological contract' (Rousseau, 1989) – that if employees did the 'right thing' and were loyal to the company, then they would be rewarded with long term job security. The following excerpts serve to illustrate:

...prior to '71 it was unknown that anyone would be sacked because of lack of work; if you were a tradesman you were secure. ('wages' employee)

...this couldn't happen, you know, this couldn't happen, we had a job for life, we did the right thing, you know, why would they want to do it to us.. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

You had given, or thought that you'd given your best, and your loyalty and all of a sudden, without any explanation you were redundant, you were out... that was a great shock. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

...everybody just thought 'Well, 'til the age of 65, or retirement age, I'm safe and secure', which then '71 or '70 already, changed abruptly and became very confusing and very demoralising, absolutely demoralising. ('wages' employee)

...the years when I sort of started, once you got in Holden's and once you got on staff, that was it, you've got a job for life, you've got a good job, they'll look after you... (staff, supervisory)

This expectation of a 'job for life' was clearly a very important, though implicit, aspect of the division's reward system and it can reasonably be argued that its disconfirmation by the events of the early 1970's had contributed, in part, to the negativity which

characterised the current attitudes of divisional members. Some of this negativity is evident in the data presented above. In addition, numerous comments were made by divisional members to the effect that the morale of the workforce had declined, that employees no longer felt any loyalty toward the organisation, and that productivity had dropped significantly such that many employees now did no more than was required.

An important conclusion suggested by the above analysis was that an understanding of the historical context of organisation member experience can help one to better understand member perceptions of, and responses to, their current experience. This analysis also provided some confirmation of the view, expressed by a number of organisational culture scholars (Pettigrew, 1979; Sathe, 1985; Schein, 1985), that critical events in the history of an organisation can bring to the surface beliefs and assumptions which have previously been taken-for-granted and unconsciously held.

Considered as a whole, the various themes described above can be seen to be more consistent with Theory X, rather than Theory Y, assumptions about the nature of workers. In particular, there was an emphasis on the role of economic self-interest in motivating employee performance and there was evidence of the use of money (in this case, overtime pay) as a mechanism by which to control employee behaviour. Moreover, while there was a sense in which tradesmen in the division experienced their work as inherently satisfying, there was little evidence to suggest that intrinsic rewards (such as the sense of achievement provided by the work itself) were explicitly recognised by divisional management and exploited for their motivational potential. Finally, in terms of its basic orientation (whether Theory X or Theory Y), the organisation's reward system appeared to have changed very little from the past to the present. There had, however, been considerable erosion of this system over time (rewards traditionally in use were no longer available and employee assumptions about a 'job for life' had been undermined by the events of the early 1970's) and this, it was argued, helped to explain the negativity which was evident in divisional member accounts of their current experience.

Performance appraisal

While references to the appraisal of employee performance tended to be made in the context of more general discussions about the organisation's reward system, there were sufficient data on this topic to warrant their treatment as a separate domain. The analysis of these data suggested the following four common themes:

Theme 1: *Appraisal as a basis for remuneration and promotion decisions*

The data in this domain provided evidence to suggest that divisional members who were involved in formal performance appraisal (the system applied to staff only and not to 'wages' employees) tended to regard appraisal primarily as a vehicle for the administration of pay rises and promotions. This view emerged in the context of complaints about the fact that, in the current climate of financial restraint and staff rationalisation, the system no longer worked as people believed it should. In the words of one employee:

A lot of people don't think it's worthwhile. I mean there's no value in it. The only value is like I said, if there is any merit money around. Another time it's supposed to be used is for human resource management, I think. All this information on who you are and what you are, and what you're doing and what you'd like to do, is supposed to be recorded by Personnel, who then when there is a position vacant, they're supposed to go through all the records and press a button, and out pops somebody's name, but that doesn't happen. (staff, non-supervisory)

In a similar vein, another employee indicated that, as he saw it, the organisation's appraisal system was no longer being used:

The system is there to be used, but as far as I know I don't think it is being used... Because there's about 15 staff people out there that have been out there since J.C. was a boy. (staff, supervisory)

Theme 2: *Appraisal decisions based on the organisation's needs*

Consistent with a Theory X perspective, there was evidence to suggest that decisions made on the basis of appraisal information (such as, promotion and work allocation decisions) were designed principally to satisfy the organisation's needs. To the extent that these decisions also satisfied the individual needs of the employees concerned, this appeared to be more by coincidence than by design. Consider, for example, the following excerpt:

I fill them [Appraisal Worksheets] out for the people who've worked for me, and somebody fills one out for me, and it goes right through the system there, recorded by Personnel... So when the company needs somebody in a particular position, they have a look through the records of what people have done, and what their ability is, and where their strengths are, and that's how a selection is done. So I suppose in my case, they must've looked at everybody that was here... I must have some strengths that are good for what we're trying to do here, at this particular time. (staff, supervisory)

The notion of 'required personnel', referred to previously in relation to promotional practices, was also mentioned in the context of comments about performance appraisal. For example, one employee (a non-supervisory member of staff) described how, in his very first performance appraisal, he had specified a further development goal which involved a request for a transfer to another section of the division. He indicated that his

manager at the time made no effort to accommodate this request, but refused it outright – “You can’t do that, you can’t do that” – on the grounds that the employee was “required in his current section”.

Theme 3: Principles of performance appraisal not consistent with practice

In the stated objectives of performance appraisal – outlined in a company document, published in 1981, and entitled ‘Performance appraisal and counselling: Procedure and guidelines’ – considerable emphasis was given to the importance of active employee involvement in the appraisal process. Such involvement, it was argued, would facilitate the employee’s development “in line with [his/her] abilities and interests”, it would promote “better communication” (presumably between the employee and his/her supervisor), and it would help to ensure the achievement of appraisal objectives (presumably by engendering the employee’s greater commitment to these objectives) (p. 1). This emphasis on the value of a ‘client-centred’ focus was also evident in the design of the system which allowed for (i) the appraisal of the employee by his/her supervisor; (ii) employee self-appraisal; and (iii) the appraisal of the supervisor by the employee.

While the formal documentation on performance appraisal was available to all those involved in the process (including the appraisers and those being appraised), there was good evidence from the present study to suggest that the system was not operating in accordance with the values espoused in this documentation. In particular, there appeared to be little support, in practice, for employee self-appraisal. On the one hand, it was suggested that supervisors failed to take the self appraisal comments of their subordinates seriously and that this had resulted in a reluctance, on the part of subordinates, to provide this information:

Initially you spill all your beans – ‘I’ve done this, I’ve done that.’ You go into the office where your supervisor sits, and the management, the head of that particular department. ‘Right, [subordinates name], we’ll read out your ... [laughs here] ... look at that. Did you, did you do that? Well, you’re a good boy.’ And the supervisor and that, they have a good laugh at your expense. You know, you feel that degraded... Now, well I can’t think of anybody here that fills out an appraisal. You say to the supervisor ‘You go ahead and say what you think’, and its brought back to you, you read that, you approve it, or say that is correct, incorrect, sign it. I think that some don’t even sign it. (staff, non-supervisory)

On the other hand, there were those who were opposed to employee self-appraisal, in principle, and who argued that the responsibility for appraisal should rest exclusively with one’s supervisor. In the words of one divisional member:

I totally disagree with the system and won’t fill it [the self-appraisal form] in. As far as I’m concerned, it’s my boss’s job to tell me what to do and my job to tell those below me what to do. (staff, supervisory)

It is interesting to note that this latter view was consistent with evidence suggesting that divisional members had traditionally had little experience of the kind of active role for employees implied in self-appraisal approaches. For example, while 'wages' employees in the division were not involved in the formal appraisal system, there had reportedly been some past initiative by the company to develop a dossier of general information on employees at this level. As indicated in the following excerpt, however, 'wages' employees were somewhat reluctant to provide the information requested and viewed the exercise with some suspicion:

They ['wages personnel'] were asked to fill in a form with what their qualifications were, what their interests were, and what they would like to achieve, and a lot of them just put in their name, address, trade, and their age. The rest of it, which was the information people wanted, just wasn't put in... There wasn't the interest out there, and people ['wages'] thought that they [the supervision] were prying, looking... trying to get underneath them and find out what was going on. It wasn't. I took it as an exercise to try and find out what skills people had and what they wanted to achieve, but these people just didn't want to do it. (staff, supervisory)

Finally, while the appraisal system had been designed to allow for appraisal of supervisors by their subordinates, in practice, there appeared to be no support for this option and no evidence of it ever having been implemented. In the words of one divisional member:

Well, if you like to go back to sweeping the floor... I mean people aren't stupid. The company might think they are but they are not totally stupid... I mean, would you write down... you've got a wife, kids, trying to run a car, and every other thing... and sit down and tell your boss he is a complete dickhead and then walk out. I mean, what's he going to think? (staff, non-supervisory)

Theme 4: *Performance appraisal seen as an administrative formality*

The fourth theme to emerge from the data in this domain concerned a perception, by some divisional members, that performance appraisal was little more than an administrative formality. Consider, for example, the following account by one divisional member of his experience of being an evaluator:

It's a bit daunting for a start... When you are new or when you come into that position and have to do it, to be able to write up about somebody I suppose, it's a bit of a task. But after a while it becomes fairly repetitious – just drag out the previous year's and almost rewrite what you saw before. (staff, supervisory)

In a similar vein, one divisional member indicated that he was aware of an appraisal having been conducted retrospectively, that is, after the decision had been taken to grant the employee being appraised a promotion. There was also evidence that apprentices in the division, though they were appraised using a different system from that described

above for staff, shared similar views about the appraisal process. For example, two apprentices indicated that their most recent progress reports had been completed by a supervisor whom they had never met, and who had never observed them at work. Finally, as suggested by the following excerpt, the timing of appraisals – in the case of staff, annually on the individual's birthday – seemed to further confirm the perception of appraisal as an administrative formality, rather than as a tool by which the individual's development and motivation could be enhanced:

They come around once a year on your birthday, not in a particular period that you've put in a good effort, come up with a good answer and saved the company some money. It's not pulled up then or done then. It [the good effort, good idea] might be a month after your birthday, so 11 months later you do this appraisal. That's forgotten – that pat on the back – because it happened 11 months ago.
(staff, non-supervisory)

In conclusion, the data in this domain, along with the emergent themes which they suggested, provided further evidence that the culture of the division supported predominantly Theory X, rather than Theory Y, assumptions. Despite the participative values that were espoused in the formal documentation associated with the company's performance appraisal system, the evidence suggested that, in practice, those being appraised had a relatively passive role in the process. Moreover, there appeared to be a general acceptance of this role and a belief in the inherent 'correctness' of one's superiors taking primary responsibility for the process and for the decisions which followed from it. There was also little evidence of appraisal being used as a vehicle by which the individual's and the organisation's needs and goals might be mutually satisfied (a Theory Y perspective). On the contrary, the organisation's needs appeared to be the dominant consideration in appraisal decisions and there appeared to be little awareness of the potential of appraisal to motivate employee performance and facilitate employee growth.

Superior/Subordinate perceptions

While the data in this domain provided insights into how superiors and subordinates were viewed, the perspectives offered were principally those of subordinates. That is, subordinates talked about how they thought their superiors saw them; they talked about how they saw their superiors; and they talked about how they saw themselves, in the context of their relationship with superiors. The analysis of these data suggested the following four common themes.

Theme 1: *Workers seen as 'numbers'*

A common perception among 'wages' employees was that their superiors regarded them, and treated them, not as valuable human resources, but as production resources or 'numbers' whose worth lay solely in their ability to do the work to which they had been assigned. In the excerpts which follow, one interviewee (a 'wages' employee) contrasts his current work experience with his experience in a previous job, in terms of how he thinks he is seen by his supervision:

There [past job] I was fully appreciated. Here I am appreciated in my trade, they have recognised me in that direction, yes, but only as doing the job, not as a person.

The interviewee went on to talk about how his past supervisor attempted to accommodate the individual needs of subordinates (the interviewee, for example, had a preference for working independently rather than in a team), the result of which was that there was "less friction" in the work unit and an ability to "achieve more". As he saw it, his present supervision lacked this kind of interest in the individual and in "the broad prospect of the whole relationship". Rather, the attitude toward subordinates was that:

[You are] here to work, to do a job that I give you.

In a similar vein, another 'wages' employee expressed the view that:

Really they [supervision] don't treat us as people. We're not people to them, we're a particular number, and what they can get out of us, and that's it.

This same employee likened the relationship between superiors and subordinates to that between a "master and slave", where the attitude of the former toward the latter was: "We know what's good for you, and you'll accept it". Evidence for this theme was also indicated in references by divisional members to workers being regarded, and treated, as "second class citizens", "peasants", "pawns", and even "cattle".

Theme 2: *Workers seen as expendable*

Closely associated with the above view was a perception among subordinates that their superiors regarded them as expendable. Consider, for example, the following reference to the major downsizing of the division which was undertaken in the early 1970's and which, according to some divisional members, resulted in the loss of some of the company's best employees:

They [the company] thought it would make no difference, [to] let these people go, and if the work picks up again, there will be enough unemployed on the street which can be employed and taken into a job. ('wages' employee)

In a similar vein, but at a more individual level:

If they don't need me, they'll just put me out in the street, no 'ifs', no 'buts'. It's business and that's how they work it. (staff, supervisory)

Interestingly, there was some evidence from the present study to suggest that the attitudes and behaviours of subordinates in the division corresponded to their perceptions of how their superiors regarded them – that is, as easy to replace and of value only in terms of their ability to get the job done. There was evidence, for example, that workers were motivated primarily by self-interest. Apart from economic self-interest (to which reference has already been made), there were indications that, in a more general sense, workers were inclined to put their own needs and interests before the needs and interests of the organisation. Employee commitment to the organisation, at least at the present time, was reportedly very low, with one divisional member (a 'wages' employee) estimating that only 1% of shop floor employees had any sense of loyalty toward the company. This theme is further illustrated in the following two excerpts, the first in which reference is again made to the events of the early 1970's, and the second in which the interviewee draws attention to the tendency for organisational outcomes (in this case, the efficient operation of equipment) to be compromised in the name of protecting one's own interests:

Well, it was [a difficult time for the company], yes, but it wasn't for me. How can I put it? It wasn't for me. I just went with it at that stage. There was nothing that I had to worry about, because I'd nearly paid my house off, because I'd worked a lot of overtime, and I wasn't really concerned at what happened to this company. I knew that I had the potential and skill to go anywhere and get a job. I just used to come in here... do the job that I was required to do, and that was it. ('wages' employee)

They [superiors] say: 'Oh well, patch it up, patch it up, patch it up.' They try to save their dollars – their expense account so they look good and, of course ... well, anybody – I do the same thing myself, to make your side of the thing look rosy and as a result the whole demise... its [the Toolroom] runs itself down very markedly. I think that's fairly simple, that people try to look after their own jobs and make themselves look good, and the rest of the situation gets a little bit hopeless. ('wages' employee)

The dominance of self-interest as a motivator of employee behaviour was also indicated in the admission by one divisional member (also a 'wages' employee) that his attendance at company training courses "is selfish – it's for me and not for the company".

Finally, there were a number of references to the less than optimal productivity of workers in the division. One divisional member (a supervisor) noted the tendency of workers to perform only at the minimum required level, unless "pushed to work harder". Similarly, in the words of another divisional member (also a supervisor):

I don't think they're [shop floor] purposely trying to sort of make the company go down; they just haven't got that interest any more to do more than sort of required. They'll just do what's their minimum requirement.

It is worth noting the implication in the above excerpt that workers' past attitudes and behaviours were different from their attitudes and behaviours at the present time. Indeed, these comments were made in the context of a discussion by the interviewee about changes in the division from the past to the present – in particular, a change whereby the division was no longer valued by the company as a whole, and a change whereby the traditional promote-from-within practice had given way to external promotions (ie. the promotion of personnel from other divisions of the company to senior positions within the division). The point can again be made that information about the historical context would appear to be essential for an understanding of information pertaining to the present context.

Finally, the above suggestion of a link between subordinate perceptions of how their superiors regarded them and the subsequent attitudes and behaviours of subordinates, can be seen to have some support in the literature. For example, as Schein (1985) has suggested, subordinates (at least those who remain with the organisation) tend to adapt to the underlying assumptions of their superiors – that is, they come to behave, and think, in the way in which their superiors expect them to behave and think. And it is in this way, according to Schein, that the initial assumptions that superiors hold about their subordinates come to be confirmed and reinforced.

Theme 3: *Superiors seen as the ultimate and legitimate authority*

A third theme to emerge from the data in this domain concerned a perception among subordinates that their superiors (that is, their supervisors and managers) were the ultimate and legitimate authority. Thus, while subordinates might not agree with some of the decisions made by their superiors, they believed in the inherent 'right' of their superiors to make such decisions and see that they were implemented. Consider, for example, the following excerpt in which one employee describes his response to a company decision – namely, the appointment of someone from outside of the division to a senior position within the division – with which he and his work colleagues disagreed:

I thought to myself at the time: how can we do anything to stop it [the appointment]? I mean why do we want to stop it? The guy's [new appointment] been given to us; he's obviously a management-type person, or else he wouldn't have got the job. It's the company's management decision to make. I mean, who are we to say: 'This is the way I feel personally'? (staff, supervisor)

In a similar vein, and in the context of his complaints about a recent directive from divisional management (regarding the need for employees to be more punctual with respect to their start time and break times)⁵⁵, another employee (an apprentice) expressed the view that: “They [management] are just enforcing laws that they have a right to enforce”. A third employee (a supervisor) indicated that, while he thought that workers should have more say about matters such as where they worked, ultimately “it is the management’s right to put people where they think fit”.

Associated with the above, there were some divisional members who saw it as inappropriate for subordinates to question, or openly disagree, with their superiors. One employee (a ‘wages’ employee), who was a particularly strong proponent of this view, commented that “Your supervisor is in that position because he is superior”. Interestingly, the researcher herself was confronted with this view when a question that she put to a senior member of staff (concerning the implications for the division of the forthcoming merger of the company with Toyota) was met with the response: “You shouldn’t ask about things that don’t concern you, or for that matter us”.

Finally, the importance placed on deference to authority appeared to influence role relationships at all levels of the divisional hierarchy. One employee (a ‘wages’ employee with leading hand status) made the following comments about how he thought apprentices should behave in the context of their relationship with their superiors (ie. tradesmen):

Your job is to pick up the hand towels for the tradesman, have them washed. Your job is not to question the tradesman all the time, but look at what he’s doing, but don’t say: ‘Don’t do it like that.’ You’re there to be guided.

There was, however, little evidence to indicate that these expectations were currently being met and, ironically, tradesmen appeared to regard their subordinates (that is, apprentices) in much the same way as they believed their superiors regarded them. The following excerpts serve to illustrate:

They’re [apprentices] shocking, they’re disrespectful, they don’t want to learn. They’re only doing this for a job, they’re not doing it because they want to do it. It’s something they’ll pass the time with, get good money. They’ve no ambition. (‘wages’ employee, leading hand)

A lot of young people are not interested in the job anyhow; they just have something to fill in. I mean there are a few good ones in there, but the majority... (‘wages’ employee)

⁵⁵ A copy of this directive, which took the form of a list of rules, is included in Appendix A2. It provides a nice example of what might be classified as a ‘Theory X’ control mechanism.

Theme 4: *Subordinates see themselves as powerless and of limited worth*

The data in this domain provided insights, not only into subordinate perceptions of their superiors, but also into subordinates' corresponding perceptions of themselves. Specifically, there was evidence that, within the context of their relationship with their superiors, subordinates defined themselves as largely powerless and of limited relative worth. As they saw it, their role was a predominantly passive one which required them simply to comply with the instructions and directives of their superiors. In the words of one employee (a 'wages' employee) "Because he carries the stripes, I've got to do it his way". Moreover, there were some subordinates who, whilst they grumbled and complained about their situation, nevertheless conceded that "it's not for me to judge higher ones" ('wages employee) and "it's only what I sort of gather myself, not that I know anything" (staff, supervisory).

The above observations regarding how superiors and subordinates were defined, within the superior-subordinate relationship, can be seen to correspond closely with Bate's (1984) notion of 'Subordination' (see Section 1.3, p. 31). Of relevance also is Bate's argument (which is the same as that of Schein (1985) above) that, to the extent that subordinates define themselves as powerless, and behave accordingly, the managerial view of authority as the central and indispensable means of managerial control is reinforced.

Overall, and as for the subject categories previously discussed, the thematic content of data pertaining to how superiors and subordinates were regarded was suggestive of a Theory X, rather than a Theory Y, orientation. The data in this domain also provided some support for arguments in the literature about the cyclical nature of the process whereby such an orientation might evolve and be maintained. The essence of these arguments, as applied to the present data, is that Theory X assumptions breed Theory X behaviours, and that these behaviours in turn confirm and reinforce the Theory X assumptions on which they are based.

2.4.2 Themes pertaining to Schein's (1985) Category 5: 'The Nature of Human Relationships'

As Schein (1985) has suggested, assumptions about the nature of human nature can be expected to give rise to, or be reflected in, assumptions about the nature of human relationships. Thus, in the present study, one would expect that the above findings regarding how superiors and subordinates were viewed would have implications for how relationships between these two groups were conducted. That this was indeed the

case is illustrated in the following discussion of the thematic content of data pertaining to communication and decision-making in the division (this domain of data being the primary domain from which inferences about assumptions in this category could be made).

Decision making and communication

Theme 1: Decision making 'top down' and autocratic

A common theme to emerge from the data in this domain was that the division's and the company's approach to decision making, whether at a strategic or operational level, tended to be autocratic. There was no indication of active participation in the process, either by those responsible for implementing the decisions that were made, or by those likely to be most affected by these decisions. With respect, first of all, to strategic decision making, this appeared to be the exclusive domain of the company's executive group, based interstate and overseas. Consider, for example, the following excerpts:

I still say this company's a puppet for America. America make the major decisions. I think very little of management in South Australia get to make any decisions other than 'Oh, I might go to the canteen now' or 'I might not'. They can't make any decisions really on whether they're going to introduce bonus schemes, or 'Should we let the fellows go five minutes early?' or anything like that. It's basically all got to come from Melbourne. ('wages' employee)

As far as we know, America makes the rules for this place... They wouldn't know us from a bar of soap. So you can say we're just a number, and when that number's time is up, rub it out. (staff, supervisory)

We're not even brought in on the finance side of things, only the, you know 'You're spending too much, cut it out'. The financial decision as to whether to make something in-house or overseas is made by the finance experts interstate, main office, head office, that do their sums over there. ('wages' employee)

They're [divisional management] only the puppets, because they get told what to say and they say it because that's their job. (staff, supervisory)

Similarly, when asked about whether or not staff in the division had any involvement in the recruitment of divisional management, one employee replied:

There's just no communication in that direction. It's all decided by people higher up, the directors – in Melbourne, and America, I suppose. (staff, non-supervisory)

In the same way that senior members of the division were not consulted about decisions which affected them, or which they might be required to implement, so too were shopfloor employees excluded from decisions of a more operational nature. In the following excerpt, a 'wages' employee expresses his dissatisfaction with the fact that engineering personnel in the division did not consult directly with tradesmen about the problems which they (the engineers) experienced:

They [the engineers] talk to the foreman and the foreman's got to come back to me. I said to [name of foreman] one day, I said 'Look, you've got all these guys here. Why don't they come and converse with us. Like, I built the bloody thing. I'd like to know where their problems are, or what's going on. ('wages' employee)

Another 'wages' employee commented on the tendency for divisional management to work in almost complete isolation from the shopfloor, such that when problems arose, no thought was given to the possibility of seeking input from the shopfloor as to how these problems might be resolved:

They [internal management] are a group that is not to be touched... They are sufficient that they can handle it, and if they have problems, then they should go higher up, to Melbourne or so on, but not with the workforce itself, trying to iron these things out.

And a third 'wages' employee pointed out that, while there had been talk of introducing a problem-solving committee which would include representatives from the shop floor, this had not eventuated and the dominant approach, as he saw it, continued to be one in which:

All you get is [management saying] 'That's what we're going to do'. [Workers say] 'Oh, hang on, how about we go and discuss it?' [Managers say] 'Well, we've kicked it around and we can't see anything better than that, so that's it!' ('wages' employee)

Interestingly, the above perceptions of decision making practices in the division (and the organisation generally) were not consistent with statements about the company's new 'people focus', which were made by the company manager, and which appeared in the local press at the time:

'We used to be a bureaucratic, unresponsive operation' Mr. Grigg said. 'Now we are giving people the accountability and the responsibility to run their own business.' (Adelaide News, February 15, 1988)

People were another essential part of the winning formula. 'We're putting the focus on people' Mr. Grigg said. 'It's people who are going to run the business, make it survive and make it grow.' He said decision making, authority and responsibility were now shared, right down to the shop floor. (Adelaide News, May 11, 1988)

Theme 2: *Communication via informal, rather than formal, channels*

There was evidence from the data in this domain to suggest that the division's 'grapevine', and even the local media (ie. newspapers), were often the means by which divisional members first learned about important decisions that had been made. For example, in an informal conversation with a small group of divisional personnel, the researcher was told that:

(i) the company decision to merge with another company (ie. Toyota) had initially been rumoured; subsequently, the news appeared in a motor magazine; and later still, employees had been notified of the decision by way of a public address from a company executive;

(ii) the company decision to sell the tooling division site, and subsequently lease the premises from the new owners, had initially been rumoured and was later reported in the newspapers; divisional members had received no official notification of this decision from the company;

(iii) the proposal to sell the tooling division facility to another company had initially been rumoured; subsequently, divisional members had been officially notified of this decision by way of a public address; and

(iv) the resignation of the then general manager of the division had initially been rumoured; subsequently, divisional members had received official notification of this decision by way of a public bulletin posted on the division's bulletin board.

Interestingly, the public bulletin referred to in the last point above had been written and signed, not by the general manager who was resigning, but by his immediate superior. This style of communication seemed, to the researcher at least, to be unusually impersonal. Surely, it would have been more appropriate for the general manager to communicate this information directly to his subordinates? When the researcher put this view to the personnel with whom she was talking, however, their surprise at the question indicated that they regarded the practice as in no way unusual. On the contrary, this form of communication was one with which they were entirely familiar and which they regarded as entirely appropriate. Of relevance here is the argument in the organisational culture literature (Louis, 1980; Schein, 1985) that when one encounters a discrepancy between one's own perceptions and the perceptions of the group (ie. 'insiders'), one may in fact be passively experiencing some aspect of the group's culture.

Theme 3: *Communication via the chain of command*

Another feature of communication practices in the division, as indicated by the data in this domain, was that communication, whether upwards or downwards, was directed through the chain of command. One consequence of this was that shopfloor workers reportedly never received direct feedback from senior company personnel (whether local management or management from interstate) about the quality of the tooling

projects which they completed. Rather, as suggested by one employee (a 'wages' employee):

They told that to [my boss's] boss, and it gets passed down the line.

There was also evidence that violations of the chain of command were met with considerable disapproval. In the following excerpt, one employee (a 'wages' employee) describes the reaction of his superiors to his transfer to a new position – a change which was not negotiated through the usual channels, but which was the result of a decision taken by his immediate superior (ie. his foreman) and a senior superintendent in the division:

And my superintendent and my general foreman at the time were rotten because firstly they really knew nothing about it, it was talk between a foreman and a senior superintendent, and it didn't go through the chain of command, you know, down through the ladder. And they tried to stop it and all that, but fortunately, management saw reason and said 'He's the one for the job and that's it'. ('wages' employee)

Theme 4: *Recent changes in communication and decision making practices*

Finally, the data in this domain provided evidence to suggest that, in recent times, communication and decision making practices in the division may have changed somewhat. Specifically, there was a perception among some divisional members that information was exchanged more freely now than it had been in the past, and that rules of hierarchy and authority were no longer observed, or enforced, with quite the same degree of strictness. Consider, for example, the following excerpt in which reference is made to a change in the division towards greater information dissemination to employees at the shop floor level:

Well, they're being told more than what they have been told. They're being told more, not everything, but they're being told something, which is good, and this is what they've been after for a long time, to get told some of the decisions that are going to be made in this place... This has only happened in what, the last six months. Up till then, they [the workers] really had to drag everything out of them [management]. (staff, supervisory)

A change in the relationship between shop floor employees and their immediate supervision had also been observed, such that:

The big barrier's not there, like the iron walls and everything have been pulled down in general, like, you know, the staff don't go 'round with their nose up in the air and that sort of thing. (staff, non-supervisory)

And finally, there was a suggestion that some decision making was being pushed down the divisional hierarchy (at least, to the level of supervisory staff). For example, in a reference to retrenchment decisions, in which people at his level had typically had no

say, one divisional member (a section supervisor) indicated that: "Nowadays, I believe that we would have more of a say...".

While the above changes might be interpreted as tangible evidence of the company's espoused commitment to a stronger 'people focus' (see above), the attributions of divisional members regarding why these changes had occurred suggested an alternative explanation, namely, that the changes were the result of circumstances over which divisional management had little control. For example, there was a perception among some divisional members that the devolution of responsibility downwards was simply a consequence of the significant downsizing of the division – a reduced workforce meant that those who remained had to take on more responsibility and had to work together more closely simply to get the job done. As one divisional member put it:

You go to [divisional management] with a problem and these guys are that busy because there's been so many people taken away from them, that you go with a problem and say 'Look, so and so and so and so,' and [management] says 'Yeah, okay. Well look, first of all get your facts and figures, build up a case...', and then it's back to you again, so then you find you've got another job to do which, going back to the good old days, there used to be somebody to do that. (staff, supervisory)

In a similar vein:

...everybody's sort of had to get in and do it, because there's just not the number of people to rely on, that you had... and people have just sort of bonded together for that reason, because if they want to get the job done, they have to do that. (staff, non-supervisory)

A second factor which was seen as influential in the above changes was that management personnel and supervisory staff no longer enjoyed the same job security as they had in the past. Whereas these positions had previously carried a kind of informal guarantee of life-long employment, in recent years, the threat of redundancy had become something with which personnel in these positions, like their counterparts on the shopfloor, increasingly had to contend. As one employee (a 'wages' employee) noted:

They're not the bosses any more so much, because they know they can go tomorrow just the same as we can, so you know, it's a little bit more liberal.

Finally, there was the argument that past events in the history of the division (which had eroded the division's reward system, substantially reduced opportunities for promotion from within, and undermined employees' trust in management) had left the workforce feeling so demoralised and demotivated that they no longer accorded their superiors the same authority that they had in the past. In other words, supervisory and management

personnel no longer enjoyed the solid power base that they had once enjoyed. As one employee (a 'wages' employee) put it:

After all, they're only human beings, and they're only people, and you're not to be scared of them. I mean, what can they actually do to you that they haven't already done?... They can't do any more, and I'm not scared of them and they can do what they like.

On the basis of the above themes, it could reasonably be inferred that the culture of the division was one which supported strong hierarchical assumptions. The relationships between divisional members appeared to be determined very much by the relative positions which they occupied in the chain of command and there was evidence that the 'power distance' (Hofstede, 1980) between superiors and subordinates was relatively high. While there were claims about the company having become more 'people-focussed' in recent years, there was little to suggest that practices in the tooling division had changed significantly to reflect this new focus. Moreover, to the extent that changes had occurred, divisional members attributed these to circumstances outside of the control of divisional management, rather than to an explicit attempt on the part of divisional management to change the power structure in the division. Indeed, from the available evidence, the latter appeared to be predominantly 'paternalistic', that is, "based on [the] assumption of autocracy and on [the] assumption that those in power are obligated to take care of those not in power" (Schein, 1985, p. 134).

2.4.3 Themes pertaining to Schein's (1985) Category 1: 'Humanity's Relationship to Nature'

As indicated above, assumptions in this category are concerned primarily with the issue of control and its articulation in the organisation's (group's) definition of its relationship with its external environment. Schein (1985) draws attention to the link between assumptions in this category and Rotter's (1966) notion of 'locus of control', the argument being that organisations, like individuals, can develop beliefs about the extent to which they are able to control what happens to them. Data from the present study which had a bearing on assumptions in this category came from divisional member accounts of the decline of the division and, in particular, their attributions about the reasons for the decline. A recurrent theme in these data concerned the tendency for divisional members to externalise the source of their problems, that is, to attribute problems to factors outside of their control. In the following discussion, an account is given of the major factors which divisional members saw as contributing to the decline of the division.

A common perception among divisional members was that the decline of the division had been brought about by increased competition in the local market. In the period from the early 1960's through to the mid-1970's, the number of car manufacturers in Australia increased from two to five. As suggested in the following excerpts, one important consequence of this change for General Motors-Holden's was that it could no longer support the number of new model releases that it had in the past:

It was probably about, I guess, 10 to 15 years ago when there were actually five manufacturers in Australia and decisions were taken not to have a new model every year that business started to wind down. (staff, supervisory)

In years gone by we used to put out a complete new model, which took 18 months to 2 years to tool up for... they cut down the number of models coming out... the cost I suppose, the increase, the Japanese coming into the market. ('wages' employee)

In a particularly insightful analysis of the problem, one divisional member argued that it was not competition per se which had caused the decline of the division, but rather the company's failure to redefine itself, and its position in the marketplace, in such a way as to be able to deal more effectively with this competition. In the employee's own words:

I would say that the competition increased here. Japanese cars were coming in, and well, before Holden was supreme in Australia, and there was nothing else. They never in my opinion found a way of adjusting to be part of a big group of manufacturers. They were still clinging, still in my opinion are clinging mentally, to the supreme role they once had. And that I think is the biggest problem here with management. ('wages' employee)

The above observation is noteworthy because it captures a phenomenon which has been well-documented in the organisational culture literature (see, for example, Kantrow, 1987; Kilmann, 1987; Schein, 1985), namely, the tendency for organisations to maintain behaviours and mindsets which, in the past, were associated with success, but which are no longer appropriate for the organisation in its current environment.

A second major factor seen as contributing to the decline of the tooling division was government intervention in the automotive industry. In the following excerpts, reference is made to the impact of the 'Button Plan' – a government initiative to modernise the Australian automotive industry, which was introduced by Senator John Button in the mid-1980's and which involved, among other things, the substantial reduction, over time, of tariffs on imported motor vehicles:

Well, I suppose they were starting to scream about tariffs on imported vehicles, and I believe they were starting to relax tariffs around that time, or were talking about it. Imported vehicles were becoming more and more prevalent... And that [the Button Plan] sort of spelt the death knell, I suppose, for toolrooms in Australia,

because the imported vehicle was becoming easier and easier to get. (staff, supervisory)

The government is at fault too because old Senator Button has just brought in laws that the motor vehicle industry must apply to and must agree to. ('wages' employee)

Third, the decline of the tooling division was attributed to one or more 'wrong' decisions made by 'the company' (a general term used by divisional members to refer to company executives, whether based interstate or overseas). An example of one such 'wrong' decision was the decision to manufacture a 'world' car – a standardised product whose component parts were manufactured in different parts of the world – and the associated introduction of a smaller model vehicle, namely, the Commodore. The following excerpts serve to illustrate:

Then they came up with the idea of building one vehicle with the world market, and that's when the crunch really started to come in... But Ford, the people really liked it, so they [Ford] went to Number 1, we went to Number 2, then Toyota slipped in between us. And now we're fighting our way back up again. (staff, supervisory)

Going from the big cars to the small Commodore. That's the biggest mistake they've ever made... We think it was that Chapman guy, that Yank... It was either him or his little boys. Between them, they all decided, that's it. ('wages' employee)

I noticed a lot of decisions were made up top that we don't have any say in, we can't understand. Do you remember the Kingswood?... Now, they stopped producing them, and to me that was such a disappointing and stupid decision, to stop the Kingswood which was an Australian-sized car... It was a really good vehicle and the management stopped it and they introduced the Commodore. (staff, supervisory)

In a similar vein, divisional members saw the decision to sub-contract tooling projects to outside vendors (within Australia and off-shore), and the decision to sell the facility to another company, as having been instrumental in the decline of the tooling division. Reference to the former is made in the first two excerpts below, and to the latter, in the third excerpt below:

They changed their ideas of tool manufacture. They went away from in-house manufacture to vendor manufacture. It was the decision of one of the hierarchy in Melbourne, to use vendors as manufacturers instead of our own toolroom. (staff, non-supervisory)

All the work went out to Japan. Millions and millions of dollars went out there. I mean they didn't give a damn [about people] because they reckon it was done cheaper over there, so of course they laid people off. (staff, supervisory)

Now it's [the Toolroom] a pile of rubbish, purely because it's just gone down, down, down, for one reason or another. It was let go down because Auto Die was going to buy it and it got worse. Once we sold this site, once HMC [Holden Motor

company] decided to sell this site, it went down you know. That's a decision made for some reason or other. (staff, supervisory)

Finally, there were some divisional members who attributed the decline of the division to problems within the division itself. As with the above attributions, however, there was no suggestion that the group, as a whole, should share responsibility for these problems. Again, it was a case of 'It is they who are at fault, not us'. Consider, for example, the following excerpts in which attention is drawn to the role of divisional management and senior divisional personnel in the decline of the division:

You see management lost track, through dealing with the trade unions and again, I think, lack of enthusiasm, to the fact that they lost control of the workforce... There's no control of the workforce at present... They lost control of the workforce, as if anyone did anything wrong, or didn't perform or what have you, they lost the ability to sack someone. (staff, supervisory)

Let's be honest, I think that if I want to go down to the real nuts and bolts of the whole Toolroom situation at the moment, it's a matter that you've had superintendents that have had a budget to work to, and they've tried to do everything on a shoe string... And they've tried to save their dollars or their expense account so they look good... People try to look after their own jobs and make themselves look good, and the rest of the situation gets a little bit hopeless. ('wages' employee)

In contrast, some divisional members saw the fault as lying with workers rather than with those in authority. As indicated in the following excerpt, there was a perception that the attitudes of workers had changed such that workers today lacked the commitment, and pride in the product, of workers in the past:

That's why half this place is going downhill, because their product isn't really up to standard... because of the attitude of everyone around the place. A lot of people, their attitudes change, they're not as dedicated. You know, a lot of the cars before here, because that's what it's all about – building cars – they put a lot of pride in their cars. But now, oh well, they just get guys off the street. ('wages' employee)

In a similar vein, another divisional member expressed the view that the retrenchments of the early 1970's (in which the 'last on, first off' rule was applied) had resulted in the loss of some of the best workers in the division:

We had lost actually the cream and Holden has never recuperated that. They have admitted themselves that that was the biggest mistake ever. ('wages' employee)

In summary, and drawing again on Rotter's (1966) notion of 'locus of control', the findings reported above suggested that the tooling division supported a predominantly external, rather than internal, orientation. As indicated, divisional members attributed the problems confronting the division to factors which they perceived to be beyond their control and there was little indication that they felt any sense of shared responsibility for

these problems. As they saw it, they did not cause the problems, and neither were they responsible for fixing them. There was also a tendency for divisional members to engage in what Bate (1984) has called 'depersonalisation' (see Section 1.3, p. 31). That is, where the problems of the division were attributed to human factors (and this was predominantly the case), specific individuals who might have been seen as being responsible were rarely named; rather the human element was depersonalised and referred to using vague terms such as 'they', 'the company', 'management', and 'the workers'. According to Bate, this kind of attributional style, to the extent that it is embedded in the organisation's culture, will act to impede effective problem solving and decision making in the organisation.

Finally, the point should be made that, while the data presented above provided some basis for making inferences about assumptions in Schein's (1985) Category 1, there was a limit to what they could reveal in this regard. As Schein suggests, assumptions in this category lie at the heart of an organisation's strategic orientation and are concerned with the way in which the organisation thinks about, and defines, its overall mission or primary purpose. In the present study, the level of organisational membership to which the researcher had access (primarily, shop floor workers and their immediate supervision) necessarily limited the extent to which data relevant to assumptions in this category could be obtained. A more thorough exploration of assumptions in this category could only have been achieved if the researcher had had more access to senior management within the division than was granted (for example, the researcher was not permitted to attend meetings of divisional management), and if access to company management (both in South Australia and interstate) had also been negotiated.

2.5 Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, the aim of Study I was to provide some initial insights into what might be required to develop a measure for organisational culture – in terms of the specific topics that might be explored and the specific questions that might be asked. On the basis of the findings reported above, there are a number of suggestions which can be made, including:

1. Given the level of access which the researcher had been able to negotiate in the research organisation, an appropriate focus for a subsequent and more systematic investigation of the culture of the organisation would seem to be topics related to Schein's Category 3 and Category 5 – 'The Nature of Human Nature' and the 'Nature of Human Relationships' respectively. The results of Study I provided evidence that

subjects at the level of membership being investigated would be able to provide more useful, and more detailed, information about topics related to these categories than about topics related to the other categories in Schein's framework.

2. In Study I, McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions provided a very useful framework for the interpretation of emergent themes from which beliefs about 'The Nature of Human Nature' could be inferred. Consideration might therefore be given to how this distinction could be incorporated into the design of a method for the more systematic assessment of organisational culture.

3. Based on the results of Study I, such a method might also include specific questions about the context of organisation member experience. In particular, information about the historical context of organisation member experience would seem to be crucial for understanding member accounts of their present experience. For example, in the tooling division, information about changes over time in the division's operating reward system (including the undermining of the tacit agreement that employee loyalty would be rewarded with long-term job security) proved essential for understanding the current climate of negativity in the division (which was characterised by low employee morale and commitment to the organisation, and a tendency for employees to work to minimum requirements only).

4. Study I also provided some evidence that attributional data might be of value for understanding organisational culture. For example, the finding that divisional members tended to attribute cause externally provided important insights into the meaning, to members, of changes that had occurred in the division (such as the change toward more open and participative styles of communication and decision making which was reported). In view of this, the development of a method for the more systematic assessment of organisational culture might benefit from the inclusion of some specific questions about members' causal attributions.

5. Finally, on the basis of the insights provided by Study I, the specific method developed might most usefully take the form of some kind of semi-structured interview. Compared with questionnaire measures of organisational culture, in which both questionnaire items and response categories are typically formulated in advance (see Section 1.6.2, pp. 95-103), such an approach would provide respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses. In this way, it would be

possible to obtain relatively detailed and context-specific information about the particular topic(s) being investigated.

CHAPTER THREE

STUDY II

3.1 Introduction

On the basis of insights provided by the findings of Study I, some first steps were taken toward designing a method for the systematic assessment of certain aspects of organisational culture. The aim of Study II was to pilot this method with a small sample of participants from the research organisation in order that some evaluation of the method, in terms of its ability to tap cultural phenomena, could be obtained. It was thought that a useful test of the method would be its potential to detect differences in the cultures of different groups and, to this end, the subjects for Study II were drawn from both the Engineering Toolroom (ie. the tooling division) and the Plastics Operations (ie. the production division). As indicated previously (see Section 2.2), given the markedly different histories and demographics of these two divisions, it was quite conceivable that they would support separate and distinctive sub-cultures.

The method developed for use in Study II can be described in terms of the following three general design features:

1. The method took the form of a semi-structured interview in which open-ended and closed questions were combined. This particular format was chosen for its potential to exploit the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative approaches (see Section 1.6.2, pp. 103-116). On the one hand, it allowed participants some scope to provide the kind of 'rich' data which the results of this, and previous, research had shown to be so essential for cultural understandings; on the other hand, it provided a means whereby these data might be collected in a more systematic and more efficient manner than would be the case if an entirely unstructured qualitative approach were used.

2. The interview was designed to provide information from which beliefs in Schein's (1985) Category 3 – 'The Nature of Human Nature' – could be inferred. This category of beliefs constituted an appropriate area of focus for the second study. As indicated, not only had it been well-represented by the data from Study I, but it had also emerged as a particularly relevant category for describing beliefs at the level of organisation membership to which the researcher had been granted access. In order to infer beliefs in this category, questioning in Study II focussed specifically on how members viewed the

role of workers and the role of supervisors in their organisation. Moreover, consistent with the findings of Study I, and also with Schein's suggestion about the relevance of McGregor's (1960) Theory X, Theory Y typology for classifying Category 3 assumptions (or at least that subset of Category 3 assumptions concerned with roles and role relationships), interviewing in Study II sought specific information about member perceptions of the extent to which the respective roles of workers and supervisors reflected a more or less Theory X or Theory Y orientation.

3. Based on the results of Study I, which highlighted the importance of understanding organisation member experience in its historical context, the method developed for use in Study II sought to systematically examine the way in which contextual data can inform an understanding of organisational culture. To this end, the interview included a number of specific questions designed to provide information about various aspects of the context of organisation member experience.

The next section provides a more detailed description of the interview protocol that was developed for use in Study II, along with some further discussion of the rationale for the inclusion of specific questions. Following this, the participants in Study II are described, and the procedure for administering the interviews is outlined. The reader is reminded that, while the interviews constituted the central focus of data collection in Study II, the 'diary' data referred to in Study I continued to be collected during Study II, in this case from both of the participating divisions. As indicated previously, these data (essentially, records of the researcher's conversations with, and observations of, divisional members) served the important purpose of helping to validate aspects of the method being developed.

3.2 Method

3.2.1 The interview protocol

As shown in the interview protocol (a copy of which can be found in Appendix B1), the same general format of questioning was followed in both sections of the interview (the first concerned with the participant's experience of the role of workers in his/her division and the second concerned with the participant's experience of the role of supervisors). This format is described in some detail below:

Initial open-ended question. This question provided an initial opportunity for the interviewee to describe, in his/her own words and without any prompting from the interviewer, how (s)he saw the role of workers (or, alternatively, the role of supervisors)

in his/her division at the present time. It was intended as a kind of quick 'What's it like around here?' question which would serve to capture the interviewee's immediate impression of the issue about which (s)he was being asked. In addition, it was anticipated that the response to this question would provide some indication of the extent to which the interviewee could clearly articulate a role for workers and a role for supervisors respectively.

Theory X, Theory Y rating. This question was designed to provide a one-off measure (in terms of a single descriptor) of the interviewee's perception of the role of workers (supervisors) in his/her division at the present time. The question involved, first of all, presenting the interviewee with two contrasting descriptions of a role for workers (and subsequently, a role for supervisors), each of which was read out to the interviewee by the interviewer. The first of these descriptions was designed to reflect a predominantly Theory X orientation to the role of workers (supervisors) and the second, a predominantly Theory Y orientation. In formulating these descriptions, the researcher drew on some of the most salient aspects of McGregor's (1960) conceptualisation of the distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions. Rather than use McGregor's labels, however, an attempt was made to identify alternative labels that could be understood more easily by interviewees. Accordingly, the role of workers was described as being either 'passive' (corresponding to a Theory X orientation) or 'active' (corresponding to a Theory Y orientation); the role of supervisors was described as being either 'directive' (corresponding to a Theory X orientation) or 'consultative' (corresponding to a Theory Y orientation).

Once the descriptions of these contrasting orientations had been read out to the interviewee, (s)he was asked to think about the role of workers (supervisors) in his/her division at the present time and to indicate, on a six point scale, from 'very passive' to 'very active' (and, for the role of supervisors, from 'very directive' to 'very consultative') the extent to which this role reflected a more or less Theory X or Theory Y orientation.

It was anticipated that, taken together, the initial open-ended question and the Theory X/Theory Y rating question would provide some insight into what might be regarded as the 'climate' of the division with respect to the particular issues being investigated. In this sense, it is worth noting that the second question is not unlike the kinds of questions that one finds in measures of organisational climate (see, for example, Litwin &

Stringer, 1968; Stern, 1970). The similarities include: (i) it is a closed question; (ii) it focuses on the respondent's perception of a *current* characteristic of the organisation; (iii) the respondent is not asked to evaluate the characteristic (ie. say how (s)he feels about it); and (iv) the respondent is not asked to explain what the characteristic means to him/her (and hence, in the absence of further information, there is no way of knowing whether there are qualitative differences in the meaning which individual respondents attribute to the characteristic).

The aim of the remaining questions in the interview protocol was to push beyond the surface-level insights provided by the two initial questions to reveal aspects of the organisation's deeper-level culture with respect to the issues being explored. More specifically, these questions sought information about the meaning of member perceptions of the respective roles of workers and supervisors (as indicated in their responses to the first two questions), as well as information about the cultural beliefs and assumptions underlying these perceptions. In order to elicit this information, three broad categories of questions were developed, each of which is described below.

Evaluation questions. The aim of the questions in this category was to provide some initial insights into the interviewee's personal position with respect to the issues under investigation. Two questions were asked, both of which it was thought could provide information about the interviewee's personal evaluation of the role of workers (supervisors), as (s)he perceived it, and as indicated in his/her response to the previous Theory X/Theory Y rating question. The first of these questions asked about the interviewee's level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the role of workers (supervisors) in his/her division; the second sought information about the interviewee's perception of the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of divisional workers (supervisors). In both cases, the interviewee was required to indicate his/her response on a seven-point rating scale (from 'extremely satisfied' to 'extremely dissatisfied' in the case of the first question and from 'extremely effective' to 'extremely ineffective' in the case of the second). It should be noted that, in the case of the 'effectiveness' question, some additional information was also sought. Specifically, the interviewee was asked to explain his/her response to this question and, if possible, to do so by making reference to an illustrative example drawn from his/her own experience. The aim of this subsequent probing was to gain some insight into the criteria which the interviewee used in making his/her assessment of the effectiveness of workers (supervisors). It was anticipated that this information would, in

turn, provide clues about the interviewee's beliefs regarding what constituted an appropriate role for workers (supervisors).

Personal experience questions. Whereas all of the questions in the interview protocol up to this point had asked about the role of workers (supervisors) directly, the questions included in this category attempted to elicit this information using a more indirect approach. It was considered that one such approach would be to focus on an aspect of the interviewee's personal experience in relation to the role of workers (supervisors). Accordingly, for the role of workers, the interviewee was asked to describe the 'best' and 'worst' worker with whom (s)he had ever worked in the division, or whom (s)he had ever supervised. Similarly, for the role of supervisors, the interviewee was asked to describe the 'best' and 'worst' supervisor (s)he had ever had in the organisation. In attempting to establish a profile of the interviewee's 'best'/'worst' worker ('best'/'worst' supervisor), specific information was sought about: (i) the particular characteristics and qualities which the interviewee most admired/most disliked about this individual; (ii) the individual's view of the organisation; and (iii) the nature of the individual's relationships with other members of the organisation (that is, with supervisors and co-workers in the case of workers, and with subordinates in the case of supervisors). In the same way that Fiedler used his concept of the 'least preferred co-worker' to investigate an individual's leadership style (Fiedler, 1967), it was hoped that these questions would provide insights into the interviewee's beliefs about the respective roles of workers and supervisors. Thus, it was anticipated that the qualities which the interviewee attributed to his/her 'best' worker, for example, would reveal something about the interviewee's personal beliefs regarding what constituted an appropriate role for workers.

A further rationale for focusing on the interviewee's actual experience (in this case, of a 'best'/'worst' worker and a 'best'/'worst' supervisor) was that it was thought that the interviewee would probably be more articulate about this experience (than about experience acquired indirectly) and also more at ease in talking about it. The information provided might, therefore, be expected to be more valid in the sense of revealing more about what the interviewee *actually* thought. It is also worth noting that the emphasis on personal experience, while most explicit in this category of questions, was an important general feature of the interview protocol. A not uncommon strategy in this regard was to ask the interviewee to clarify his/her responses to particular questions

(see 'Effectiveness questions' previously and also 'Context questions' below) by, if possible, illustrating with an example drawn from his/her own experience.

Context questions. Building on the insights provided by Study I, the questions in this category were designed to provide a context, or framework, within which the interviewee's account of his/her current experience (concerning, in this case, the respective roles of workers and supervisors) could be understood and interpreted. As shown in the interview protocol, three separate aspects, or domains, of context were investigated, namely: (i) the historical context; (ii) the anticipated future context; and (iii) the 'other' context (referring, in this case, to the interviewee's experience of other organisations). The specific questions that were asked in relation to each of these contextual domains are now discussed, along with the rationale for their inclusion in the protocol.

With respect, first of all, to the historical context, the interviewee was asked to comment on the role of workers (supervisors) in the division in the past and, in particular, to indicate how this role had changed (if at all) from the role of workers (supervisors) at the present time. Based on the results of Study I, it was anticipated that historical data of this kind might assist in the more accurate interpretation of data pertaining to the present context. Historical data might, for example, provide important insights (not provided by present-time data) into the meaning of the interviewee's level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the current role of workers (supervisors), as (s)he perceived it. From Study I, it will be recalled that information about members' past experience of life in the tooling division helped to explain the climate of negativity which prevailed in the division at the time that this study was conducted. As indicated, there was good evidence to suggest that this negativity was, at least in part, due to the gradual undermining, over time, of the psychological contract which had traditionally defined employer-employee expectations in this division. The negativity was not, as might have been assumed in the absence of historical data, a result of member dissatisfaction with the division's predominantly Theory X orientation toward the role of workers and supervisors. On the contrary, this orientation appeared to be a relatively widely shared and deeply embedded part of the division's culture. An important implication of this finding is that any attempt to improve the climate of the tooling division by introducing changes (for example, in the division's work practices and in its

reward and control systems) designed to promote the development of a more Theory Y orientation, might be expected to be met with some cultural resistance.

An additional argument in favour of the inclusion of specific questions about the historical context is that most conceptual treatments of organisational culture are quite explicit about the role of an organisation's history in shaping its culture. For example, in discussing Schein's (1985) treatment of the 'essence' of organisational culture (see Section 1.1.2, pp. 9-13), attention was drawn to the historical character of cultural beliefs and assumptions and to Schein's view that, in order for a group (or organisation) to develop a culture, it must have some history in time. An important methodological implication of this view would seem to be that, in order to confirm that a 'cultural' phenomenon is genuine (and not just a manifestation of some aspect of the organisation's more temporary state, or climate), one would need to demonstrate some connection between this phenomenon and the organisation's past. In the method developed for use in this study, it was therefore hoped that the inclusion of specific questions about the past would provide the historical data necessary to validate inferences about cultural beliefs regarding the respective roles of workers and supervisors.

Finally, and as shown in the interview protocol (see Appendix B1), an attempt was made to anchor the interviewee's notion of the past in real time. To this end, the interviewee was asked to specify how far back (ie. 'How long ago...?') the past experiences to which (s)he referred extended. The rationale for including this question was simply that individual interviewees, when talking about the past, might be referring to different periods in time.

Having asked about the interviewee's experience in relation to the historical context, the focus of questioning in this category then turned to a consideration of the interviewee's anticipated future experience. Specifically, the interviewee was asked to comment on his/her expectations regarding how the current role of workers (supervisors) in the division might change (if at all) in the future. Again, it was the early work carried out in the tooling division which provided the rationale for the inclusion, in the method developed for use in this study, of questions about the anticipated future context. As indicated (see Section 2.2, p. 119), at the time that Study I was carried out, the tooling division was undergoing a major transition and, not surprisingly, this had given rise to considerable anxiety among divisional members, many of whom were now

faced with an uncertain future. An interesting question suggested by contextual information of this kind concerned the extent to which information about the future expectations of organisation members might provide additional insights (over and above those provided by historical data) into the culture of the organisation. Accordingly, some attempt was made to investigate the particular contribution that information about the future context might make to the interpretation of data pertaining to the present context.

As shown in the interview protocol, questioning in relation to this contextual domain also sought information about the interviewee's beliefs regarding why future change may, or may not, occur. Drawing again on the results of Study I, there was a possibility, worth investigating, that attributional data of this kind might provide additional clues about the culture of the organisation with respect to the particular issues being investigated.

Finally, the questions in this category sought information about organisation member experience in relation to other contexts. As indicated, the interviewee was asked about his/her awareness of the role of workers (supervisors) in other organisations. The decision to include a focus on this contextual domain was based on the fact that participants in Study II included employees from both the production division and the tooling division. As indicated (see Section 2.2, p. 120), the production division was a relatively newly established division, whose workforce comprised mostly production operators with no formal qualifications. It was reasonable to expect, therefore, that many of the employees in this division might have had some experience of working elsewhere and that this experience, in turn, might have influenced their perceptions of, and attitudes toward, their current experience. Of course, one also needed to acknowledge the possible influence of indirect, as opposed to direct, experience of other organisations – that is, experience acquired through, say, reading about other organisations or through contact with people who worked elsewhere – and, to this end, where knowledge of other organisations was indicated, the interviewee was asked to indicate the source of this knowledge.

3.2.2 Participants in the study

In contrast to Study I which was conducted entirely in the Engineering Toolroom (ie. the tooling division), Study II was conducted both in the Engineering Toolroom and in the Plastics Operations (ie. the production division). In selecting participants for this

study, an attempt was made to get some broad representation of each division's membership⁵⁶, in terms of demographic characteristics such as gender, seniority, work area, and work shift. The rationale for this more inclusive approach to sampling was that it would provide some insight into the extent to which each division supported an overall divisional culture (as opposed to a number of separate divisional sub-cultures). In selecting participants for this study, it was also considered desirable that, as far as was possible, each participant should be representative of the average divisional member working at the same level as the participant, in the same section, and on the same shift. To this end, the researcher consulted with both supervisory staff and union representatives from each division as to who might qualify as 'typical' within a given category of interest. On the basis of this information, a number of potential candidates for participation in Study II were identified. Of those who were subsequently approached by the researcher, there was only one who declined to participate in the study, this being on the grounds of anxiety about the use of an audio tape to record the interview (see details on 'Procedure' below). The final sample for Study II comprised twelve participants, six from the tooling division and six from the production division. The size of the sample, while small, was not considered to be unreasonably so, given that the aim of the study was simply to pilot the method which had been developed.

Table 3.1 provides a summary of the main demographic characteristics of the Study II sample, considered separately for participants from each division. It can be seen that all of the participants from the tooling division were male⁵⁷, whereas participants from the production division included four males and two females. Participants from the tooling division were, on average, older than their counterparts from production, with the average age of the former being 48 years, compared with 38 years for the latter. It was also the case that tooling division participants had considerably longer tenure (both with the company and with their division) than did their counterparts from production. As indicated, the average length of service of tooling division participants was 28 years with the company, and 27 years with the division. In contrast, production division participants had an average length of service with the company of only 10 years, and with the division, of only 5 years. It is perhaps worth noting that the differences

⁵⁶ The sample size for Study II was, however, too small to warrant any attempt to achieve statistical representativeness.

⁵⁷ With the exception of the manager's administrative assistant, the entire membership of this division was male.

Table 3.1 Demographic characteristics of Study II interviewees, shown separately for the Tooling Division (TD) and the Production Division (PD).

Interviewee #	Gender	Age (yrs)	Marital Status	Country of Birth	Years in Australia	Years with the Company	Years with the Division	Section	Position	Shift	
TD01	male	46	married	UK	16	16	16	Small Machines	Tradeswages	day	
TD02	male	52	married	UK	37	29	29	Pattern Shop	Tradeswages (LH)	day	
TD03	male	54	married	Australia	-	39	35	General	General Foreman	afternoon	
TD04	male	41	married	Australia	-	23	23	Fitting	Tradeswages (LH)	afternoon	
TD05	male	43	married	Australia	-	27	25	Die Manufacture	Tradeswages	day	
TD06	male	53	married	Australia	-	36	36	Try-Out	Superintendent	day	
		mean=48.2 yrs sd=5.6 yrs range 41-54 yrs				mean=28.3 yrs sd=8.4 yrs range 16-39 yrs	mean=27.3 yrs sd=7.6 yrs range 16-36 yrs				

Interviewee #	Gender	Age (yrs)	Marital Status	Country of Birth	Years in Australia	Years with the Company	Years with the Division	Section	Position	Shift	
PD01	male	36	married	UK	25	16	8	Production Control	Supervisor	day	
PD02	male	36	married	UK	12	12	3	Materials	Materials Handler	day	
PD03	female	48	married	UK	23	10	8	Assembly	Operator	day	
PD04	male	49	married	UK	29	20	6	Materials	Materials Handler	night	
PD05	female	23	married	Australia	-	3.5	3.5	V-Car	Operator	afternoon	
PD06	male	38	married	India	26	11 months	11 months	General	Acting Supervisor	afternoon	
		mean=38.3 yrs sd=9.5 yrs range 23-49 yrs				mean=10.4 yrs sd=7.3 yrs range 11 mths-20 yrs	mean=4.9 yrs sd=2.9 yrs range 11 mths-8 yrs				

between tooling division and production division participants in terms of the above demographics were consistent with differences in these demographics at a divisional level.

It can also be seen from Table 3.1 that, consistent with the aforementioned aim of sampling widely from each division's membership, the sample for each division included both 'wages' employees (four from each division) and supervisory staff (two from each division); it included participants from a range of different work areas (or sections); and it included participants from each of the different shifts operating within the division (day shift and afternoon shift in the case of the tooling division, and day, afternoon, and night shifts in the case of the production division).

Finally, attention might be drawn to both the marital status and country of birth of participants in Study II. With respect to the former, it can be seen from Table 3.1 that all participants from both divisions were married. With respect to the latter, it can be seen that, whereas the majority of tooling division participants were Australian-born, all but one of the participants from the production division were born outside of Australia. In all cases, however, participants born outside of Australia had been resident in Australia for a considerable period of time (with the range for the entire sample being from 12 years to 37 years).

3.2.3 Procedure

Each of the twelve participants in Study II was interviewed individually using the interview protocol described above. While some consideration was given to the use of group, as opposed to individual, interviews – indeed, Schein (1992) argues that, since culture is a shared (ie. group) phenomenon, it should be studied as such – the adoption of this strategy was rejected on a number of grounds. First, as Schein himself has observed, the use of group interviewing in cultural analysis works best when there is a particular organisational problem or issue (related, for example, to the implementation of some change in the organisation) to motivate the process. Schein indicates that, in his experience, where this has been lacking, the analysis has failed due to a lack of interest on the part of the group. This would seem to mitigate strongly against the use of group interviewing in the present research, since this research was in no way driven by the kind of problem-solving agenda which Schein regards as so essential to the success of cultural analysis at the group level.

A second reason for rejecting the use of group interviews in the present research was that group interviews, generally, have been found to suffer from a number of important limitations. Some of the most commonly cited of these (see, for example, Easterby-Smith et al., 1991, and Patton, 1990) include: (i) problems associated with the management of dominant group members and, conversely, the management of members who lack the confidence and/or verbal skills to share their views; (ii) the existence of social pressures within the group which press group members toward conformity with particular views; and (iii) problems associated with confidentiality such that, in groups where the members know each other, it is not possible to guarantee the confidentiality of the information provided. In group interviewing, there is also the problem of deciding what constitutes the optimal composition of the group. For example, should the group include more senior members of the organisation, or will this have the effect of inhibiting communication? While Schein (1992) provides some guidelines for how to go about making this decision in the case of problem-solving groups – he argues that consideration should be given to the nature of the problem, organisation member perceptions of who the ‘culture carriers’ are, and organisation member perceptions of the degree of openness and trust which characterises the climate of the organisation – these guidelines were clearly of limited usefulness in the case of the present research.

A third and final argument against the use of group interviewing in the present research was that, given the nature of the research (ie. it was not part of an organisational development consultancy), the researcher had no authority as a change agent to try to negotiate permission to work with groups, as opposed to individuals. Indeed, it was the researcher’s impression that it would have been extremely difficult to secure management’s approval for the release, from their work, of more than a few divisional members at any given time.

In terms of further information regarding the procedure for administering the Study II interviews, the following points can be made. Each of the participants in Study II was consulted as to a time for the interview which would be mutually convenient to the participant and to his/her immediate superior. In all cases, the interviews were conducted within the participant’s working hours, with the duration of each interview being approximately one and a half hours. Participants gave their written consent for the interview to be recorded on audio-tape and subsequently transcribed – it was explained that this would help to ensure the accuracy of data collection – and each

participant was assured in writing that all of the information which (s)he provided would be treated with the strictest confidentiality.

3.3 Approach to data analysis

As for Study I, the task of analysing Study II data was conducted manually. In order to get some indication of the value of the method for detecting differences between the two divisions, and also in the interest of maintaining a good research relationship (divisional personnel had expressed an interest in the findings that were specific to their own division), the data for each division were analysed separately. This analysis produced an account of each division in terms of how participants responded to each of the questions they were asked. Consistent with the approach adopted in Study I, within each division, the focus was on identifying any commonalities which emerged in the data for that division. In this way, it was possible to compare, and contrast, the divisions in terms of participant views about the respective roles of workers and supervisors. While it was considered that the results of such an analysis would be of interest in their own right, it must be remembered that the primary objective of the analysis of Study II data was evaluative. That is, the aim was to determine the extent to which each of the questions included in the interview protocol might contribute something to an understanding of cultural phenomena in the two divisions being studied. In this sense, in the results reported below, it is the methodological findings, rather than the more descriptive findings, which are given precedence.

The particular format which has been adopted for reporting the results of the analysis of Study II data is as follows. First, for each of the questions asked, the responses of tooling division participants are summarised, followed by a summary of the responses of production division participants. Attention is then drawn to any similarities or differences between the divisions which are suggested by these data. Following this, and where relevant, consideration is given to the methodological implications of the findings. In particular, consideration is given to the extent to which the question asked 'worked', or 'didn't work', in the sense of providing culturally relevant insights of the kind that were anticipated.

It should be noted that, in the following section, only the results of the analysis of data pertaining to the role of workers are presented. This is because many of the same methodological points were suggested by these results as by the results of the analysis of data pertaining to the role of supervisors. Thus, for the purpose of economy, it was

decided to include the latter as an appendix (see Appendix B2), and to draw on these results in the discussion below only as appropriate, to provide additional support for critical points which are made concerning the method. Finally, it should be noted that, due to time constraints, it was not possible to ask all questions (pertaining to both the role of workers and the role of supervisors) of all interviewees.

3.4 Results and Discussion

3.4.1 Open-ended question

Q1: What do workers do in this division?

For both divisions, the responses to this initial open-ended question tended to be brief, ranging from one word answers to single short sentences. The content of these responses is described below, first for the tooling division and then for the production division.

Tooling Division. This question was asked of four of the six tooling division participants. Of these, three made reference to the work role of workers, one (a supervisor) indicating that workers “build tools”, another (a ‘wages’ employee) that they “build dies”, and a third (a supervisor) that they “work”. A fourth participant (a ‘wages’ employee) indicated that workers “do as they are told”.

Production Division. All six of the production division participants responded to this question. In two cases, the reference was to the work role of workers, with one participant (a supervisor) indicating that workers “produce a motor car” and another (a ‘wages’ employee) that workers “work”. Two participants (both ‘wages’ employees) made reference to the subordinate role played by workers, one indicating that workers “do the job they’ve been given to do” and the other that they “do as they are told”. And two participants made reference to the general level of activity of workers, one (a ‘wages’ employee) indicating that workers did “not much”, and the other (a supervisor) that they did “as little as possible”.

Taken as a whole, the above findings suggest that the initial open-ended question may not have been particularly meaningful to participants. As indicated, participants seemed unable to provide very articulate, or very detailed, responses to this question. At the same time, however, the responses given do serve to provide a very general indication of how the role of workers, in both divisions, was viewed. Moreover, to the extent that this role might be classified as more or less Theory X, or Theory Y, the data would appear to be suggestive of the former rather than the latter. Finally, the point can

be made that, while some of the responses to the initial open-ended question – for example, responses indicating that workers do “as little as possible” and that workers “do as they are told” – might seem to have been said in jest, it was not the interviewer’s impression that this was the case. On the contrary, respondents appeared to be quite sincere in formulating their answers to this question.

With respect to the associated findings for the role of supervisors, it can be seen from Appendix B2 (p. 571) that the summary comments above apply equally to these findings. That is, in response to the question “What do supervisors in this division do?”, participants gave similar types of responses, indicating for example that supervisors “control the organisation”, do “nothing”, do “more than what they used to”, “sit back and take the money” and do “as little as possible”.

3.4.2 Theory X, Theory Y rating

Q2: What is your perception of the current role of workers in this division? (Rate on a six-point scale from ‘very passive’ to ‘very active’.)

Participant ratings for this question, which were analysed separately for each division, are summarised in Table 3.2⁵⁸ and discussed in some detail below.

Tooling Division: All participants from the tooling division responded to this question. As indicated in Table 3.2, responses varied considerably, and were represented by five of the six response categories listed (namely, ‘very passive’ through to ‘moderately active’). This finding was somewhat surprising and not consistent with what was expected, given the predominantly Theory X orientation to the role of workers in this division, suggested by the results of Study I. In other words, based on Study I, it was expected that tooling division participants in Study II would more consistently rate the role of workers in their division as passive, rather than active. It is interesting in this regard to consider participants’ elaborations on their ratings, since qualitative data of this kind (to the extent that they were available) helped to clarify the meanings which participants attributed to their ratings.

As indicated in Table 3.2, there were two participants from the tooling division who rated the current role of workers in their division as active – ‘moderately active’ in the case of one participant (a ‘wages’ employee) and ‘slightly active’ in the case of the other (a supervisor). As suggested by the qualitative data associated with these ratings,

⁵⁸ Table 3.2 also provides a summary of the associated ratings for Question 3, which asks about participants’ satisfaction with the current role of workers in their organisation.

Table 3.2 Theory X/Theory Y rating and Satisfaction rating for the 'Role of Workers', shown for participants from the Tooling Division (TD) and the Production Division (PD).

Interviewee # and position	Theory X/Theory Y rating	Satisfaction rating
TD1, 'wages'	moderately active	moderately satisfied
TD2, 'wages' leading hand	moderately passive	extremely satisfied
TD3, supervisor	slightly active	moderately satisfied
TD4, 'wages' leading hand	slightly passive	moderately satisfied
TD5, 'wages'	very passive	extremely dissatisfied
TD6, supervisor	workers in all response categories	
PD1, supervisor	slightly passive	moderately satisfied
PD2, 'wages'	moderately active	moderately satisfied
PD3, 'wages'	moderately passive	extremely dissatisfied
PD4, 'wages'	moderately passive	moderately dissatisfied
PD5, 'wages'	moderately passive	moderately dissatisfied
PD6, supervisor	slightly passive	moderately satisfied

however, these participants appeared to differ in their interpretation of the term 'active'. In the case of the former, the participant appeared to be using the term to imply a strongly assertive, almost reactionary, role for workers. This participant rated the current role of workers as 'moderately active' on the grounds that, as he saw it, workers today were much more inclined than they had been in the past to challenge managerial decisions likely to affect them. By way of illustration, the participant described a recent situation in which workers had successfully argued against the imposition of a decision, by divisional management, to introduce a roster system which would require day shift workers to periodically work on the afternoon shift. It was suggested by the participant that a key factor influencing management's decision not to proceed with this change was the threat (if not explicit, then implied) of industrial action. In the participant's own words:

...our manager here... he didn't want to rock the boat, he didn't want any industrial upheaval or anything like that, and [so] we got that stopped, and the guys were quite happy. ('wages' employee).

The point should be made that the interpretation of 'active' by this participant was different from that which was intended by the researcher, and which she had attempted

to convey in the definition of 'active' provided in the interview protocol. In particular, in emphasising a more enriched role for workers, the definition implied (though did not make explicit reference to) the existence of collaborative, rather than adversarial, relationships between workers and their supervisors.

In contrast to the above, the qualitative data associated with the 'slightly active' rating of the second participant suggested that, in this case, the term 'active' was being used to mean initiative. According to this participant, the role of workers in the division could be described as 'slightly active' because, rather than "do things blindly", workers would alert their supervisors to problems (whether anticipated or actual) on the job and seek additional job-related information if this was required. The participant's verbatim comments, in full, were as follows:

I say 'slightly active'... because people will come up with some suggestion that they can see something that you're telling them that's wrong – they will certainly talk about it, and bring it to your attention. They're not passive [in] that they'll just do things blindly. And in a lot of cases, you'll sort of give a person a job, but not give him one hundred percent instructions on how to do it, and so he'll be active enough to seek out this information, and either come back to you or ask someone else. (staff, supervisory)

As show in Table 3.2, there were three participants from the tooling division who rated the current role of workers in their division as more or less passive. The specific ratings given, along with participants' elaborations on their ratings, are discussed below.

A 'slightly passive' role was reported by one participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) who argued that, while workers did not "blindly follow" instructions and were generally "alert as to what could be done", they were reluctant to make suggestions regarding how the job might be done better, since they had learned through experience that their efforts in this regard were typically not recognised or rewarded by their supervisors. Interestingly, while this participant acknowledged the benefits of a more active role for workers, he pointed out that the ideal role comprised both active and passive elements. It was good for workers to have some input into the job but, because they didn't have "all the information", they sometimes needed to be able to accept decisions and instructions from their supervisors without question.

A second participant (also a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) rated workers as playing a 'moderately passive' role because, as he saw it, "most people do as they're told". At the same time, however, it was suggested that there were some sections of the division which supported a more active role for workers. The participant cited his own section as one such example, indicating that:

Supervision in our area – the Pattern Shop – are open to suggestions. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

In the case of the third participant (a 'wages' employee), the role of workers was rated as 'very passive' on the grounds that workers were very reluctant to question the instructions of their supervisors in the event that they disagreed with these instructions. According to this participant, this was the case particularly for migrant workers who had been brought up to respect the supervisor as the ultimate and legitimate authority. In the participant's own words:

I'm talking here of guys who are say from a European background, immigrants and that who have probably come up under that – that you don't question your supervisor sort of thing. ('wages' employee)

Finally, as shown in Table 3.2, there was one participant from the tooling division (a supervisor) who indicated that he was unable to provide an overall rating of the current role of workers in the division because, as he saw it, there were some workers who played a more or less active role, and others who played a more or less passive role. The participant was subsequently asked to describe what, for him, constituted the defining characteristics of 'active' and 'passive' workers respectively. With respect to the former, it was suggested that:

The one that's very active is still the one that's willing to go on and do his job, and use his own initiative, and question whatever you're going to do. And the active ones, the real active ones are not the ones that come up and ask you how to fix something. They come up and tell you there's a problem, and that 'Maybe, we can fix it this way'. Whether that be a problem with... like a supervisor with a problem in the shop, whether it's an industrial problem, or whether it's a physical problem on the job, it's all the same sort of thing. (staff, supervisory)

Interestingly, this participant's notion of an 'active' role for workers appears to be somewhat broader than conceptualisations of 'active' which are suggested in the comments of other participants from this division. As indicated above, the latter (whether made in the context of evaluating the role of workers as 'active' or 'passive' contain references to behaviours, such as: bringing work-related problems to the attention of supervisors, asking supervisors for more information about the job if this is required, providing input into how to go about doing the job, and making suggestions for how the job might be improved. While these references convey the idea of at least some degree of job enrichment for workers, contrary to what was intended, 'active' workers in this case appear to have little additional involvement and input beyond the domain of their immediate task or job. In the case of the present participant, however,

'active' workers are seen to have a role, not only in solving "physical" problems on the job, but also in solving industrial relations problems and in helping supervisors to solve more general problems "in the shop". Finally, with respect to the characteristics of 'passive' workers, this participant indicated that:

As you say, his output could be quite reasonable, but he's the type of person that you'd have to still go along and say 'Well, this is the next stage to do, and this is how you should do it', and that's what you do, and he does that.

Production Division. All participants from the production division responded to this question. As can be seen from Table 3.2, there was somewhat less variability among the respondents from this division, compared with their counterparts from the tooling division, in their ratings of the current role of workers in their division. Five participants rated the role of workers as passive, while one rated it as active. With respect, first of all, to the former, there were three participants (all 'wages' employees) who indicated a 'moderately passive' role for workers, and two (both supervisory staff) who indicated a 'slightly passive' role. The qualitative data associated with these ratings – each of these participants elaborated, to a greater or lesser extent, on his/her rating – suggested that the interpretation of 'passive' by these participants was generally consistent with that intended by the researcher. For example, reference was variously made to the role of workers in the division as "followers of instructions", to workers' lack of input in decision-making, to a lack of information dissemination to workers (at least, those below the level of leading hand), to the tendency of workers to unquestioningly accept the decisions of those above them, and to workers' lack of ambition beyond simply coming to work, working eight hours, and getting paid for it. Some illustrative examples of the verbatim comments of these participants are provided below, the first two being associated with a 'moderately passive' rating and the second two, a 'slightly passive' rating:

I'd say they're more on the passive side, at present... We have no say in what goes on, so they [the workers] just go along with management's decision. ('wages' employee)

...there's not enough information that goes down. It goes from supervisor to leading hand and it mainly stops there. It doesn't get shared amongst everybody. There's a few people that – they'll say what they think outright, but most of them will just be given an order and they take it. ('wages' employee)

...but the average worker's not having any input, it's only the leading hands that are having the input. (staff, supervisory)

All they [the workers] really want to do is they want to go to work for eight hours, do the eight hours, give X amount of parts and go home and feel very happy about it, and they get paid for it. (staff, supervisor)

Interestingly, the last participant above expressed the view that, in a company as large as the present company, it was appropriate that workers should play a predominantly passive role, since the resources that would be required "to get involved with the people who have ideas" were simply not available. In this sense, the participant regarded it as important to have "set methods and ways of doing things".

With respect to the single participant from this division who indicated an active role for workers, the specific rating given was 'moderately active'. While the criteria upon which this assessment was based were not specified, it could be inferred from comments made by the participant in response to subsequent questions, that his interpretation of an 'active' role for workers was reasonably consistent with that intended by the researcher. For example, in response to the question about whether or not the role of workers in the division would change in the future, the participant (a 'wages' employee) pointed to evidence, at the present time, that divisional management were becoming more supportive of an active role for workers. As he saw it:

Now management is beginning to recognise in little ways that... you can have one supervisor standing over one operator and that still won't make them produce any more parts. But you can get the worker to enjoy what he does and all of a sudden, 50% goes up in the work [output], because it's no longer a bind, it's no longer a job, it's something he enjoys doing. By that I mean, they're getting us involved in everybody else's areas, and they're beginning to show an active concern. (staff, supervisory).

The above findings, along with those for the role of supervisors (see Appendix B2, pp. 571-574), provide a number of insights which have implications for an evaluation of the present method. These are summarised, in point form, below:

1. Although the interview protocol did not include a question asking participants to explain their X/Y rating, this information, when it was provided (either spontaneously or in response to prompting by the interviewer), gave valuable insights into the extent to which participants' interpretations of the key concepts of 'active' and 'passive' (and, in the case of the role of supervisors, 'consultative' and 'directive') were consistent with the interpretations intended by the researcher. It would, therefore, seem desirable that rating questions of the kind asked in the present interview, should always be followed by a question which seeks clarification of the response given.

2. Following on from the point above, qualitative data associated with the ratings of tooling division participants, provided some evidence that, in this division, an 'active' role for workers had been interpreted somewhat more narrowly than intended. Specifically, there appeared to be little awareness among the participants from this division of an enriched role for workers beyond that which entailed giving workers more involvement in, and responsibility for, their immediate job. An important methodological implication of this finding is that, even though a researcher may attempt to impose his/her own definition of particular concepts (in this case, 'active' and 'passive' to describe the role of workers, and 'consultative' and 'directive' to describe the role of supervisors), these concepts will still be subject to interpretation by respondents and, as such, will be attributed meanings which are context-specific (in the sense of reflecting respondents' experience) and which may, or may not, be consistent with the meanings intended by the researcher.

Further support for the argument above can be found in the interpretation of a 'consultative' role for supervisors which was suggested by the comments of one participant from the tooling division (see Appendix B2, p. 572). As indicated, this participant (himself a supervisor) argued that, because first-line supervisors typically had more subordinates than senior supervisors, and because they had to "come up with an answer for all of [their workers'] problems", it was necessary for them to be more consultative in their style of supervision than senior supervisors. This participant appeared to be using the term 'consultative' simply to imply an increased level of interaction with workers on the part of first-line supervisors. No doubt this interpretation, which was quite inconsistent with that intended by the researcher was, at least in part, grounded in the participant's personal experience of the role of supervisors.

3. The finding, for the tooling division, that one participant misinterpreted 'active' to mean 'reactionary' highlights a possible limitation of the method. As indicated in the interview protocol, in attempting to describe two contrasting roles for workers (supervisors), examples were given of the specific kinds of behaviours in which workers (supervisors) who played that role might engage. It is possible that, to the extent that any one of these behaviours had particular salience for a respondent, the respondent might focus on this behaviour as the sole criterion upon which to base his/her evaluation of the role of workers (supervisors). Thus, in the case of the participant referred to above, undue emphasis may have been given to that aspect of the definition of an

'active' role for workers which alluded to workers being prepared to question and/or challenge decisions (work practices etc.) that they did not understand or that they disagreed with.

4. Finally, as indicated in the findings reported above, and also in the findings reported for the role of supervisors, there were some participants from the tooling division (specifically, two in the case of the role of workers and three in the case of the role of supervisors) who indicated that it was either impossible, or difficult, for them to give a rating of the role of workers, or the role of supervisors, in their division *as a whole*. These participants suggested that there was some variability in the roles played by workers and supervisors respectively and they attributed this variability to individual differences, sectional differences, and in the case of supervisors, seniority differences. This finding highlights a potential problem with the unit of analysis specified in the interview questions (ie. the division) and raises questions about the possible existence of divisional subcultures (within different sections and/or at different levels of the hierarchy). In a more general sense, this finding also draws attention to a limitation of methods which use forced choice questions and which provide no opportunity for respondents to indicate that they 'cannot respond'.

3.4.3 Evaluation questions

Q3: How satisfied are you with the role that workers play in this division at the present time? (Rate on a seven-point scale from 'extremely satisfied' to 'extremely dissatisfied'.)

Tooling Division. As shown in Table 3.2, five participants responded to this question. Of these, four (including one supervisor and three 'wages' employees) indicated that they were either 'moderately' or 'extremely satisfied' with the role played by workers in their division, and one (a 'wages' employee) indicated extreme dissatisfaction with the role of workers. While the interview protocol did not include a question asking for clarification of participants' satisfaction ratings, two of the above participants nevertheless offered this information, one spontaneously and the other in response to prompting by the interviewer. For the first of these participants (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status), his satisfaction rating was 'extremely satisfied' and his rating of the role of workers was 'moderately passive'. While it was intended that these two ratings should be linked (that is, the former should indicate the degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the latter), in the case of this participant, his clarification

of his satisfaction rating suggested that this might not be the case. From the following comments by the participant, it appears that instead of rating his satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the role of workers in the division, the participant was rating his satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of the workers for whom he was directly responsible:

My lot seem to work pretty good together – we all work together. So I'd say I'm satisfied working with the ones I work with. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

In the case of the second participant (also a 'wages' employee with leading hand status), his qualifying comments suggested that he had interpreted the satisfaction question as intended. This participant's satisfaction rating was 'moderately satisfied' and his rating of the role of workers was 'slightly passive'. In qualifying the former, the participant commented that:

I'd say that I was quite happy about [workers] being slightly passive, but there is room for improvement, and being a little bit more active in it could improve things... It would add more to the job – make the job easier actually for all round I think, if you've got more people putting their ideas into how it should be done and that sort of thing. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Production Division. All participants from the production division responded to this question. As indicated in Table 3.2, compared with their counterparts from the tooling division, the majority of whom reported some degree of satisfaction in response to this question, production division participants were evenly divided in their satisfaction ratings. Three participants from this division (all 'wages' employees) reported dissatisfaction with the role of workers in their division, and three participants (including two supervisors and one 'wages' employee) reported satisfaction. With respect to the former, the specific ratings given were 'moderately dissatisfied' (two participants) and 'extremely dissatisfied' (one participant). While each of these ratings was associated with a 'moderately passive' rating for the role of workers, whether or not these two ratings were actually linked remains unclear since these participants were not asked for (and neither did they offer) any clarification of their satisfaction ratings.

With respect to the latter, a rating of 'moderately satisfied' was given by all three participants. In two cases (the participants were both supervisors), this rating was associated with a rating of 'slightly passive' for the role of workers. One of these participants elaborated spontaneously on his response, indicating that he would "like to see [the role of workers] even more passive". When asked to explain why, the participant said:

Because I'm a firm believer in you set up systems, and when systems are set up and they're foolproof, then you can go ahead and do your job. That's the way I sort of feel. When I come to work, I like to know what I'm going to be doing and that's what I get done – in a company this size. (staff, supervisory)

These data would appear to indicate that, for this participant, his satisfaction rating was directly linked to his previous rating of the role of workers. In the case of the third participant (a 'wages' employee), his satisfaction rating was associated with a rating of 'moderately active' for the role of workers. No elaborative data were available on this participant's satisfaction rating.

In conclusion, the following points can be made:

1. Compared with their counterparts from production, tooling division participants appeared to be somewhat more satisfied with the role of workers in their division (ratings of which were highly variable). As indicated, production division participants were evenly divided in their satisfaction ratings and there was some evidence, in this division, of seniority differences in these ratings. Specifically, 'wages' employees indicated that they were dissatisfied with the predominantly passive role that they perceived workers to play, whereas supervisors indicated that they were satisfied with this role.

2. The findings for the role of supervisors indicated a similar pattern of responding to that reported above for the role of workers. That is, as a group, tooling division participants were more inclined than their counterparts from production to indicate satisfaction with the role of supervisors in their division (ratings of which were again variable). In fact, all but one of the production division participants indicated that they were dissatisfied with the role of supervisors in their division and, in this case, participants' ratings tended to be associated with perceptions of a directive role for supervisors.

3. Finally, while the findings for both the role of workers and the role of supervisors indicated that there were some differences between the two divisions in participants' satisfaction ratings, it is difficult to draw any conclusions about what these differences might mean. This is because participants typically were not asked for (and neither did they offer) any qualification of their satisfaction ratings. Indeed, where qualitative data of this kind were available, they provided evidence of the potential for misinterpretation of the satisfaction question. As indicated, there was one participant above whose clarification of his satisfaction rating suggested that, instead of rating his satisfaction

with the role of workers, he was rating his satisfaction with workers more generally. The findings for the role of supervisors contained evidence of the satisfaction question having been similarly misinterpreted. For example, one participant (a supervisor from the tooling division) offered the following explanation for why he was only 'moderately satisfied' (and not 'extremely satisfied') with the with role of supervisors in his division (which, as he saw it, combined both directive and consultative elements):

Well, over the last few years, I think some of our foremen have lost a bit of interest in the place, and this is not necessarily their fault. You've got to have 100% interest to get the extremely satisfied position, and I don't think we'll get that here under the situation that we're in. (staff, supervisory)

Similarly, a second participant (a supervisor from the production division), when asked about why he was 'extremely dissatisfied' with the role of supervisors in his division (which he had judged to be 'very directive'), indicated that:

...because I don't believe that we've really got very many good supervisors. We've possibly got one good supervisor in the whole area. (staff, supervisor)

As above, the satisfaction ratings for these participants appeared to be more a reflection of the participants' satisfaction with supervisors generally, than a reflection of their satisfaction with the role of supervisors specifically.

Misinterpretations such as these raise some doubt about the value of the satisfaction question. While this question was designed to provide some insight into participants' personal views about the respective roles of workers and supervisors – such information being seen to have potential cultural significance – the question may be criticised on the grounds of being overly academic. In other words, while it is likely that most organisation members will be able to comment with ease on their satisfaction with concrete aspects of their experience (such as, workers and supervisors), it may be unrealistic to expect them to be able to comment, in an informed manner, on abstractions (such as, in this case, the role of workers and the role of supervisors).

Q4: How would you rate the effectiveness of the workers in this division at the present time? (Rate on a seven-point scale from 'extremely effective' to 'extremely ineffective'.)

Give reasons for your rating.

Tooling Division. This question was asked of five participants from the tooling division. One of these participants (a supervisor) indicated that he was unable to provide an overall rating of worker effectiveness in the division because, as he saw it, some workers were more effective than others. This participant suggested that approximately 50% of tooling division workers were 'slightly' to 'moderately effective',

25% were 'extremely effective', and 25% 'slightly ineffective'. The ratings of the other four participants were as follows: 'moderately effective' (two participants, including one 'wages' employee and one supervisor), 'slightly effective' (one participant, a 'wages' employee), and 'neither effective nor ineffective' (one participant, a 'wages' employee).

The four participants above who gave an overall rating of worker effectiveness were subsequently asked to explain their ratings. As indicated, it was anticipated that the explanations offered would provide information about the criteria used by participants to rate worker effectiveness and that these criteria would, in turn, reveal something about participants' personal beliefs regarding what constituted an appropriate role for workers. Table 3.3 provides a summary of the main criteria which participants from both divisions appeared to use in evaluating the effectiveness of the workers in their division.

Table 3.3 Criteria used to judge Worker Effectiveness, shown separately for participants from the Tooling Division (TD) and the Production Division (PD).

"Effectiveness" criteria	Tooling Division	Production Division
<i>Work skills</i>		
Ability to do job quickly (efficiency)	TD4, TD5	PD4
Ability to do job well (quality of work)	TD4, TD5	PD1, PD4
<i>Work attitudes/behaviours</i>		
Thinks about the job	TD3	
Takes responsibility for the job	TD3	
Shows imagination in relation to the job	TD4	
Has input into how to do the job		PD4, PD5
Comes up with ideas for improving the job		PD4, PD5
Cares about the job	TD5	
Feels pride in the job	TD5	
Willing to speak out, assertive	TD1	
Shows a desire to learn new skills		PD2
Willing to take on more work		PD2
Reliable		
Trustworthy		PD2
Tries hard		PD2
Conscientious		PD3
Wants to make good quality parts		PD3
Has a good attitude toward work		PD3
'Gives 100%'		PD6

As indicated, participants from the tooling division variously made reference to the importance of work skills, such as, efficiency and producing a quality product, and to the importance of work behaviours and attitudes, such as, being prepared to think about, and take responsibility for the job, and caring about and showing pride in the job. A somewhat different perspective was provided by one participant who judged worker effectiveness according to the extent to which workers were prepared to speak out about their ideas, and be assertive in relation to getting these ideas acted upon by supervision. By way of illustration, a sample of the verbatim comments from which these effectiveness criteria were inferred is provided below. The first excerpt is associated with an effectiveness rating of 'moderately effective', and the second with an effectiveness rating of 'slightly effective'.

...there's a tendency to have people do exactly as you'd want them to do. You're not using their brain power. I always say that half a dozen brains are better than one, and a lot of cases we're not utilising that brain power, because of the way we get things done, and the way we're sort of set up. We haven't got time to go round asking everyone's opinion, and when we continually give a man a job, and let him go away and do it to our instructions, therefore he stops thinking about it... If they were given a little bit more responsibility we'll say, it might make them think about the job in depth a little bit more, and therefore we'll get better value out of them. (staff, supervisory)

Well, I suppose because of the condition – not knowing the future here – the future work loads, and what have you, and not being able to find out the information. More or less no one gives a damn now really. But I suppose when it gets down to it, they've still got a bit of pride in the job they're going to do. It may not be as fast as they could possibly do it, but I mean they don't want to bugger the job up or something. They might overrun the hours because the drive is no longer there. ('wages' employee)

The first excerpt above is interesting in the sense that, while a Theory Y orientation might initially be inferred from this participant's comments, a more careful reading of the excerpt suggests an alternative interpretation. It is true that, when considered 'out of context', the change which the participant is advocating, namely, to give workers more responsibility, can reasonably be seen as implying a Theory Y orientation. Importantly, however, this change is considered only in terms of how it might benefit the organisation, specifically, by enabling the organisation to get "better value out of [workers]". There is no corresponding consideration of the potential benefits of the change to workers themselves (that is, in terms of increased worker motivation and satisfaction). This subordination of the individual's needs and interests to the needs and interests of the organisation is, of course, one of the distinguishing features of a Theory

X orientation. Considered in its entirety, then, the excerpt above serves to illustrate that it may not always be possible to categorically group data according to whether they are more consistent with a Theory X, or a Theory Y orientation. Attempts to formulate questions according to this framework are also likely to encounter difficulties. This is because, as illustrated by this excerpt, the finding that a respondent agrees with a statement, such as, 'Workers should have more responsibility' can not necessarily be interpreted to mean that the respondent holds strongly Theory Y assumptions.

A second point that can be made in relation to the above data is that, contrary to expectations, it was not always easy to infer effectiveness criteria from participants' explanations of their effectiveness ratings. There was sometimes a degree of uncertainty surrounding the inference process which made it necessary for the researcher to take some interpretive licence when analysing these data. The second excerpt above provides a good illustration of the difficulties encountered in this regard. For example, it is not clear from a negative comment such as "no one gives a damn now" whether, for this participant, 'giving a damn' constituted an important effectiveness criterion. While this was the interpretation adopted in the present analysis, such an interpretation is clearly open to question. The same kind of uncertainty surrounds the participant's comments about time overruns and a concern, on the part of workers, not to "bugger the job up". Whether it can be inferred from these comments (as was done in the present analysis) that, for this participant, efficiency and work quality constituted important effectiveness criteria, is an interpretation which is, again, open to question.

Production Division. This question was asked of all participants from the production division. Four participants (including one supervisor and three 'wages' employees) judged the workers in their division to be 'moderately effective', one participant (a supervisor) considered them to be 'neither effective nor ineffective', and one participant (a 'wages' employee) considered them to be 'moderately ineffective'. It can be seen from Table 3.3 that, as a group, participants from the production division, like their counterparts from the tooling division, varied in terms of the criteria they used to judge worker effectiveness. As for the tooling division, reference was made to the importance of skills associated with the quality and quantity of the work produced, and to the importance of behaviours and attitudes suggestive of a more enriched role for workers (such as, having input into the job and coming up with ideas for how the job might be improved). In addition, in the production division, there was an emphasis on the

importance of behaviours and attitudes such as conscientiousness, being a 'trier', reliability and trustworthiness. That there was no evidence for these latter criteria in the tooling division data possibly highlights a 'cultural' difference between the two divisions.

Some examples of the verbatim comments from which the above effectiveness criteria were inferred are provided below. For all three excerpts, the associated effectiveness rating was 'moderately effective'.

Well, out of the 100% of workers here, maybe 25% you'd get more than your money's worth out of their work... You would have 25% that would be moderately effective and you could rely on, and the other 50% I believe you wouldn't really trust them because, if you give them a free rein, then they would go back[wards]. (staff, supervisory)

They all seem very conscientious. They all strike me as if they do want to make good quality parts in here. We've got very few with a poor attitude to work. We've got a few, but on the whole most of them have got a good attitude to their work. ('wages' employee)

I suppose they've got to be effective... Well, they're getting production out... And I suppose they're getting a certain quality out – what is required. ('wages' employee)

As above for the tooling division, there was some uncertainty surrounding the process of inferring effectiveness criteria from the explanations that production division participants offered for their effectiveness ratings. For example, in the first excerpt above, it is not entirely clear whether, for this participant, the qualities of reliability and trustworthiness constituted important criteria for judging worker effectiveness. While, for the purpose of the present analysis, it was assumed that they were, such an assumption is clearly open to question. The findings for the production division suggested the further difficulty that, contrary to expectations, the criteria used by participants to evaluate worker effectiveness might not always be their own. For example, in the third excerpt above, there is a sense in which the criteria implied in this participant's comments may be those of the company (at least, as perceived by the participant), rather than those of the participant himself.

Finally, the data on worker effectiveness (both for the production division and the tooling division) provided some interesting insights into participant perceptions regarding why workers were not as effective as they might be, and how worker effectiveness might be enhanced. For example, in response to prompting, one participant from the production division (a supervisor who had judged the workers in

the division to be 'neither effective nor ineffective') suggested that, in order to improve worker effectiveness, one of two possible approaches could be adopted. On the one hand, stricter controls and more rigid management systems could be introduced, such that the organisation would operate "virtually like an army". On the other, the organisation could be divided into "a lot of little cells", each of which would be managed as an independent unit, very much according to "private enterprise" principles. The participant indicated that he favoured the former 'military' approach on the grounds that the company was too big, and that it lacked the kind of leadership talent that would be required (at all levels) to support the latter approach. Given the potential of data such as these to reveal participant assumptions about how workers should be managed, consideration might be given to the inclusion, in the revised interview protocol, of a formal prompt asking participants to indicate how they think worker effectiveness might be enhanced.

The above findings, along with those for the role of supervisors, suggest the following conclusions and methodological points:

1. The prompt question asking participants to explain their effectiveness rating was useful in so far as it provided some insight into the criteria used by participants to evaluate the effectiveness of the workers, or supervisors, in their division. In the case of the role of workers, there was some evidence, albeit slight, of a difference between the divisions in this regard. As indicated above, whereas qualities such as conscientiousness, reliability, and trustworthiness appeared to be of some significance in the production division (that is, as criteria for evaluating worker effectiveness), there was no reference to these qualities in the corresponding data for the tooling division. In the case of the role of supervisors, the findings were somewhat more conclusive. As indicated in Appendix B2 (pp. 576-580), in the tooling division, the criteria used to evaluate supervisor effectiveness typically emphasised the 'control' aspect of supervision. One participant (a supervisor) went so far as to suggest that the supervisors in his division could become "a lot more effective" if they were given "100% control over their people". In contrast, in the production division, the criteria for evaluating supervisor effectiveness tended to emphasise 'human relations' qualities, such as, being approachable, encouraging worker involvement in the job, and asking workers for their ideas.

2. While the questions about worker (supervisor) effectiveness (including the closed rating question and the associated clarification prompt) went some way toward achieving what they were intended to achieve, these questions were not without their limitations. As indicated above, there were difficulties associated with the process of inferring effectiveness criteria from participants' explanations of their effectiveness ratings. These same difficulties were encountered in the subsequent analysis of data pertaining to the role of supervisors. Moreover, there was some evidence to suggest that, contrary to what was intended, participants might not use their own criteria in evaluating worker (supervisor) effectiveness. These limitations possibly suggest the need for some revision of the effectiveness questions.

3. Finally, while it was anticipated that participants' responses to the effectiveness questions would, to some extent at least, be linked with their responses to the previous X/Y rating and satisfaction questions, this was not always the case. On the one hand, some of the criteria used by participants to evaluate the effectiveness of workers and supervisors (for example, conscientiousness and reliability in the case of workers, and ambition and level of education in the case of supervisors) were unable to be classified within a Theory X, Theory Y framework. On the other hand, there was some evidence to suggest that individuals may not always be consistent in their responses to the questions they are asked. A nice example of this was provided by one participant from the tooling division (a 'wages' employee) who judged the role of supervisors in his division to be 'very directive', indicated that he was 'extremely dissatisfied' with this role, and then went on to evaluate the effectiveness of supervisors in terms of the extent to which they met the 'control' requirements of the job (see Appendix B2, p. 578).

3.4.4 Personal experience questions

As indicated in the interview protocol, there were two main 'personal experience' questions, the first (Q5) comprising five parts, and the second (Q6) comprising four parts. The format for the presentation of results in this section is as follows. For each question, the findings for each part of the question are presented first, along with some brief summary comments, where these are deemed necessary. Following this, there is a discussion of the main methodological implications of the findings for that question, considered as a whole.

Q5: Think about the best worker that you have ever had (worked with, known) in this division.

(a) What was it that you admired or liked about this worker?

Tooling Division. All participants answered this question. For five participants, the worker identified as the 'best' worker was someone whom the participant had known, or worked with in the tooling division, in the past. Only one participant described a worker with whom he was familiar, and whom he admired, at the present time. Participants attributed a range of different qualities to their 'best' workers, a summary of which is provided in Table 3.4. As indicated, four broad categories of 'best' worker qualities were suggested, namely: (i) work knowledge, skills, and abilities; (ii) work behaviours and attitudes; (iii) interpersonal skills and behaviours; and (iv) personal qualities and characteristics. For tooling division participants, the first of these categories was the best represented. Four of the six participants from this division (including three 'wages' employees and one supervisor) made reference to their 'best' worker's competence in terms of his job knowledge, skills, and/or abilities. More specifically, the 'best' worker was variously described as an individual who "understood the job thoroughly", who was able to "plan the job very well mentally", who was highly efficient in the sense of being able to "finish his job very, very quickly" and who was "brilliant at the job".

Qualities associated with the second category – work behaviours and attitudes – were mentioned by two participants only. One of these participants (a supervisor) described the considerable initiative of his 'best' worker (in this case, a leading hand):

...I liked this particular person because he didn't wait to be told to do things. He did things on his own initiative... He went around – he was a leading hand this chap – and he looked after the equipment. He had the equipment up to scratch. He had it where it was needed, and he thought about the job one jump ahead of the person that was doing it and, therefore, had everything ready for the person that was doing it. (staff, supervisory)

It is noteworthy that, implicit in this participant's comments, is the idea that a 'good' leading hand is someone who organises the work for his subordinates. The other participant (also a supervisor) indicated that his 'best' worker's competitive approach to work – "he always wanted to compete with me all the time, to be better than me" – was a quality which he admired since it provided him (the participant) with a strong incentive to do better himself.

Table 3.4 Characteristics of workers judged to be 'Best' Workers by participants from the Tooling Division (TD).

Interviewee #	Work knowledge, skills, & abilities	Work behaviours & attitudes	Interpersonal skills & behaviours	Personal qualities & characteristics
TD01 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill and ability to do the job 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Personality” in the sense of being able to communicate with, and form social relationships with co-workers 	
TD02 (‘wages’)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability and willingness to teach others 	
TD03 (supervisor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good job knowledge • Thorough understanding of the job and the function of the tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows initiative • Always “one jump ahead” 		
TD04 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good job knowledge • Fast worker • Conceptual and planning skills • Imagination in relation to the job 			
TD05 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to do the job well, “brilliant at the job” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of other workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ability to stay calm when disagreements arise
TD06 (supervisor)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competitive approach to the job, always trying to do the job better than co-worker 		

In terms of interpersonal skills and behaviours, it can be seen from Table 3.4 that there were three participants (all 'wages' employees) who made reference to qualities in this category. Specifically, one participant indicated that what he admired most about his 'best' worker was the worker's ability and willingness to teach others. The participant described how this was a quality which he himself had benefited from since, when he first started with the company, this worker had been a kind of mentor to him:

...he taught me a lot of things. ...Virtually, about the job. ...When I first started at Holden's, I didn't know the business at all, and he took me under his wing and showed me different things. ('wages' employee)

A second participant described his 'best' worker's sensitivity to individual differences, in particular, his capacity for understanding workers who "may not be so fast or so good". A third participant commented on the positive social relationship that his 'best' worker had been able to establish with co-workers. According to this participant, the existence of such a relationship (which had its roots in common outside interests, whether "football, or fishing, soccer, or whatever") could facilitate communication between workers and help workers to get on better with one another. From a cultural perspective, it is worth noting that this reference to the importance of qualities associated with the purely social dimension of work (and work relationships) was the only one of its kind in the tooling division data. It is also worth noting the suggestion, by this participant, that an important precedent to the formation of social relationships between workers in the tooling division was that workers should respect one another for their job skills and abilities. In the participant's own words:

...I do believe that people respect one another for their skill and their ability to do the job... And then, from then, you form a relationship in as much as what your common interests are outside. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Finally, in terms of the personal qualities and characteristics of 'best' workers, it can be seen from Table 3.4 that there was a single reference only to a quality in this category. In this case, the participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated, that because the tooling division supported a culturally diverse workforce, exchanges between workers could, at times, "get a bit heated". In this sense, the participant admired his 'best' worker's ability to "control [his] temper".

Apart from the above findings, there was one other point of interest which emerged from the analysis of tooling division data pertaining to 'best' worker characteristics. Three participants from this division (including one 'wages' employee and two supervisors) suggested, without any prompting from the interviewer, that the qualities

which they had attributed to their 'best' worker were qualities which were part of the worker's innate personality make-up and which, as such, could not be developed in workers through training. The verbatim comments of one of these participants speak for themselves:

The best tradesmen are [the] ones that have an imagination, and can see what a job's got to look like when it's finished. There's not too many that have got this imagination... I don't think you can cultivate it. ('wages', leading hand)

A second participant, in reflecting on the considerable initiative displayed by his 'best' worker, made the comment that:

...it's a matter of personality. Not everyone is that way inclined. I mean if we had a factory full of those workers, we wouldn't have a problem in the world, and we wouldn't need a lot of the supervision that we've got... Not everybody has the natural ability to be able to do those things. (staff, supervisory)

And a third participant (a supervisor) indicated that, for many workers, it was simply not "naturewise", meaning that it was 'not in their nature', for them to be competitive or to strive to do better. As he saw it, such workers:

...only want to plod along and do what they always do. They are not interested in change, and not interested in doing something quicker. (staff, supervisory)

The important point can be made that this view of 'best' workers as 'born and not made', to the extent that it is shared widely among the division's membership, has potentially serious implications for the effective implementation of training programmes designed to develop the competencies (whether technical, interpersonal or other) of the workers in this division. Prior to implementing such training, some assessment of the sharedness of this view might, therefore, be recommended.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question, three describing a current 'best' worker and three, a past 'best' worker. Like their counterparts from tooling, participants from the production division attributed a range of different qualities to their 'best' workers. These qualities are summarised in Table 3.5, in terms of the same four categories used to classify the corresponding tooling division data, and discussed in more detail below.

In terms of work knowledge, skills, and abilities, it can be seen from Table 3.5 that there were three participants from the production division (including one supervisor and two 'wages' employees) who, in describing their 'best' worker, made reference to one or more qualities in this category. Compared with the corresponding tooling division data, there were fewer references in these data to the importance of job specific knowledge,

Table 3.5 Characteristics of workers judged to be ‘Best’ Workers by participants from the Production Division (PD).

Interviewee #	Work knowledge, skills, & abilities	Work behaviours & attitudes	Interpersonal skills & behaviours	Personal qualities & characteristics
PD01 (supervisor)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Logical and methodical thinking Ability to work independently ie. “without detailed instructions” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows initiative Strives to achieve 		
PD02 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effort and perseverance, gives “100% all the time” Willing to learn, develop new skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Willing to share knowledge Easy to get on with 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even tempered
PD03 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does a “good” job 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Helps co-workers with work-related problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A nice temperament
PD4 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effort and perseverance, “gives 100%” 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Practices what he preaches” ie. actions consistent with words
PD05 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Well organised Knows the job 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Friendly nature Easy to work with Willing to help others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “All-round nice person”
PD06 (supervisor)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effort on the job, giving “total eight hours work a day” 		

skills, and abilities. Rather, the emphasis appeared to be more on general competencies, such as, logical thinking, the ability to work independently, and organisational skills. This difference between the divisions, while it lacks the support of an extensive data set, is nevertheless consistent with what one would expect given differences in the nature of the work performed in each division – that is, general production and assembly work in the production division, and more specialised engineering and tooling work in the tooling division.

Compared with their counterparts from the tooling division, production division participants placed somewhat more emphasis on the work behaviours and attitudes of their ‘best’ workers. It can be seen from Table 3.5 that there were four participants from this division (compared with two from the tooling division) who described their ‘best’ worker in terms of qualities in this category. Three of these participants (including two ‘wages’ employees and one supervisor) drew attention to their ‘best’ worker’s effort on the job and to the fact that (s)he consistently “gave 100%”. It is worth noting the link between these data and the previous emphasis on conscientiousness as an important criterion by which production division participants judged the effectiveness of the workers in their division. The point can also be made, as previously, that the lack of evidence (in this case, from the ‘best’ worker data) suggesting the importance of qualities such as effort, perseverance, and conscientiousness in the tooling division, possibly highlights a ‘cultural’ difference between the divisions.

In terms of interpersonal skills and behaviours, it can be seen from Table 3.5 that there were three participants from the production division (all ‘wages’ employees) who attributed qualities associated with this category to their ‘best’ worker. The emphasis in these data was on the ‘best’ worker’s willingness to help, and ability to get on with, co-workers. In addition, there were four participants (the three above and a fourth ‘wages’ employee) who mentioned a personal quality which they admired in their ‘best’ worker, in particular, their ‘best’ worker’s positive disposition and even temper. By way of illustration, a sample of the verbatim comments of these participants is provided below:

...he was a very easy chap to get on with – very easy and even-tempered. I mean, we had our disagreements but there was no long animosity after... He was also willing to share his knowledge. (‘wages’ employee)

They⁵⁹ are very helpful. If they think that you have got a problem, they’ll help you out with it... Always, always in the same mood. Never... you know, like some

⁵⁹ This participant used the plural ‘they’ to refer to her ‘best’ worker.

people will help you and then another day, they'll shrug you off... no, always the same, a nice temperament, you know, [a nice] type to work with. ('wages' employee)

[She was] extremely friendly towards me when I first started. She's still very friendly with me now. She was very good at showing me what I had to do. She was just an all-round nice person – easy to work with and she knew what she was doing. ('wages' employee)

Considered as a whole, these data provide some evidence to suggest that, in the production division, the social and personal qualities of workers may be more highly valued (by workers, if not also by supervisors) than they are in the tooling division. Again, this finding can probably be explained in terms of differences between the divisions in the nature of the work performed in each (or, perhaps more accurately, in how the work in each is organised). In the production division, work is typically performed by groups or teams, with each member of the team performing one part only of the total task (or assembly) which the team has been assigned. In contrast, in the tooling division, work is more often performed by individuals who work independently on an entire job, from start to finish. Skills associated with effective teamwork are, therefore, likely to be attributed more importance in the production division than in the tooling division.

5(b) How important is it to you that workers have these particular characteristics (attitudes, behaviours)? Why?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question and, in all cases, the qualities attributed to 'best' workers were regarded as being either important, or very important. The reasons given for why these qualities were important varied. Three participants (including two supervisors and one 'wages' employee) made reference to the benefits, to the individual, of their 'best' worker's qualities. In one case, it was argued that a good knowledge of the job was important because it enabled the individual to make decisions about the job more easily; a second participant drew attention to the pride and self-esteem associated with being "brilliant at the job"; and a third participant argued that the desire to compete with, and do better than, one's co-workers gave the individual more incentive and more interest in the job.

In contrast to the above, there were two participants (both 'wages' employees) for whom the emphasis was more on the social implications of their 'best' worker's qualities. In one case, it was suggested that being good at one's job was important

because it contributed to a positive relationship with one's superiors and it also enhanced one's own satisfaction with the job. In this participant's own words:

Well, you've got to be successful in your job, because if you can do your job well, and successfully, and quickly, then your supervision are happy with you, and you're happy in your job. ('wages' employee)

In the other case, it was suggested that the ability to form social relationships with co-workers was importance because "[in order] to work with somebody, you've got to get on with them". As indicated previously, however, it was this participant's view that the formation of relationships of this kind was contingent on the individual first of all having respect for the skills and abilities of co-workers.

Finally, there was one participant (a 'wages' employee) who suggested that it was important for newcomers – for "anyone learning the trade" – to have access to someone who was willing and able to teach others. The participant did not comment on his reasons for this view.

Production Division. As above, all participants from the production division responded to this question, and all participants regarded the qualities which they attributed to their 'best' worker as being either important or very important. It was also the case that the reasons given for why these qualities were considered to be important were similarly varied.

Two participants (both 'wages' employees) suggested that, given the nature of the work in the production division (very routine, and typically performed by groups), and given the amount of time that one spent at work, it was essential for workers to have a pleasant disposition and be able to get on with one other. One of these participants also suggested that, because workers depended upon one another to get the job done, it was important that they had a good knowledge of, and were well-organised in relation to, their individual tasks. The verbatim responses of these participants were as follows:

...there's nothing worse than coming into work and, like, just bitching all day. You know, some people just bitch all day, and you think 'Oh, God, I can do without this'. Because the work's boring, so you do need... you know, you spend the biggest part of your life in here, and you just don't want to listen to people bitch all the time. ('wages' employee)

Because you're working with those people for eight hours, five days a week, and if they're not organised and they don't know their job, it makes your job twice as hard. And if they're not friendly, it just puts you in an awkward position for eight hours, because it's a long time in there. ('wages' employee)

A further two participants stressed the importance of their 'best' worker's effort on the job. One of these participants (a 'wages' employee) argued that "giving 100%" was an important quality because it led to more efficient operations and this, in turn, provided the individual with a sense of satisfaction in a job well done. The participant went on to suggest that, once the individual's satisfaction was aroused in this way, there was a kind of "flow-on" effect, such that the motivation of other members of the group tended to increase and the performance of the group, as a whole, tended to improve. In contrast with this view, the other participant (a supervisor) argued that, in an organisation as large as General Motors-Holden's, where close supervision of individual workers was not possible, it was very important to have workers who made considerable effort on the job – who were "willing to give you eight hours". In such an organisation, it was considered too easy for workers who didn't really want to work to "hide" and "bludge around".

A different perspective again was provided by a fifth participant. In this case, the participant (a supervisor) argued that being a 'good operator' (in the sense of showing initiative and being able to think logically and methodically) was an important quality because, in recent years, there had been a trend in the division toward the allocation of more responsibility to the shop floor. This meant that some of the functions previously performed by supervisory staff were now being performed by leading hands, and some of the functions previously performed by leading hands were now the responsibility of production operators.

Finally, a sixth participant argued that the consistency of his 'best' worker – "he practises what he preaches" – was an important quality because it gave those around him reason to "believe in" him and "respect everything" he did.

5(c) What was this worker's view of the organisation?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. 'Best' workers were perceived to hold a range of different views of the organisation, a summary of which is provided below.

Two participants (both 'wages' employees, one with leading hand status) reported that their 'best' worker had a negative view of the organisation. In one case, it was suggested that the 'best' worker considered the organisation (specifically, the tooling division) to be poorly managed. The point was made that this was a view which was shared widely among divisional members and which had developed over the years as the

division had been allowed to decline. In the other case, the 'best' worker's negative view was attributed to a perception, by the worker, that he had been poorly treated by the company.

A third participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) implied that his 'best' worker was indifferent to the organisation. In this case, the worker reportedly viewed the organisation simply as "a place to come and earn money". The fact that the worker performed his job as competently as he did was, according to this participant, the worker's way of meeting his "obligation to the company". A fourth participant (a supervisor) indicated that, while his 'best' worker was "pretty positive" in his view of the organisation, like many others he had a tendency toward cynicism because despite the need for change in the division "it goes on and on and on, and nothing ever happens".

The remaining two participants (a 'wages' employee and a supervisor) ascribed a highly positive view of the organisation to their 'best' worker. Interestingly, in each case, the 'best' worker was an individual with whom the participant had worked in the past (15 years ago in one case and 30 years ago in the other). One participant pointed out that, although workers in the division in the past typically did not express their views about the company explicitly, there was nevertheless a feeling of pride in the company, which was evident in the defensive attitudes which workers adopted toward outsiders who said "anything against the product or the company". The other participant indicated that, while he could not remember exactly what his 'best' worker's view of the organisation was, he supposed that it would have been very positive. In the participant's own words, this was because:

...it was an excellent company to work for at that time. ...[it] was a company which you felt was progressing, it had something to offer you, it had a future to offer you, it had stability to offer you. (staff, supervisory)

The reader will recall that the Study I data contained many such references to a more positive past in the tooling division – a past in which members felt more or less assured of a 'job for life', in which those who wanted to get ahead could get ahead, and in there was a strong sense of member loyalty to the organisation and pride in the product it produced.

On the basis of the results reported above, it appears that in the tooling division at the present time, a worker's classification as a 'best' worker is not contingent on the worker having a positive view of the organisation. As indicated, there were two participants

who ascribed a distinctly negative view of the organisation to their 'best' worker. The finding that the most positive views were reported for past 'best' workers raises the possibility that, in this division, a 'best' worker's view of the organisation may be linked in some way with the organisation's life stage, with negative views being associated with a period of relative decline for the division, and positive views being associated with a period of relative prosperity. To the extent that this is the case, it highlights the need, not only to establish a 'best' worker's status as a present or past 'best' worker, but if the latter, to also determine the approximate time (year) to which the participant is referring when (s)he describes this worker (in other words, to establish how far back the 'past' actually extends).

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (including one supervisor and three 'wages' employees) reported that their 'best' worker had a negative view of the organisation. In all cases, this view was attributed to some aspect of how the company, or the division, was managed. Specifically, the reasons given included: the perception that more senior divisional members were, in some cases, not doing their jobs (one participant); the perception that credit was often not given where it was due, with more senior divisional members claiming credit (which was undeserved) for the achievements of those below them (one participant); dissatisfaction with traditional (bureaucratic) management methods perceived to be still in practice in the division (two participants); inadequate recognition by more senior personnel of the abilities and worth of shop floor employees (one participant); a lack of organisational skill at more senior levels (one participant); and the failure of those responsible for implementing various change programmes (for example, information sharing programmes) to follow through on those programmes (one participant)⁶⁰.

Of the remaining two participants, one (a 'wages' employee) indicated that, while her 'best' worker had never commented on his view of the organisation, she supposed that it would be "pretty good" because of the marked contrast between this worker's previous work experience in a communist country and his current work experience in an environment where conditions of work generally were regarded as more favourable. The other participant (a supervisor) suggested that his 'best' worker's view of the organisation was neutral, that is, neither positive nor negative. This participant's 'best' worker was similar to the tooling division 'best' worker described previously, in that his

⁶⁰ Some participants gave more than one reason for their 'best' worker's negative view of the organisation.

involvement with the organisation reportedly did not extend beyond doing his job and getting paid for it. The participant went on to suggest that, in his opinion, all good workers in the production division were similarly inclined in this regard, suggesting that, at least at this level, deeper involvement with the organisation may not be regarded as a particularly important factor in the assessment of an employee's worth. In the participant's own words:

...I think most of the good workers, they're quite happy to get paid once a week for doing their job. I don't believe the involvement goes much deeper with the company. I think they'd be good workers no matter who they worked for; they're just that type of people. (staff, supervisory)

The main conclusion that can be drawn from these data is that, as for the tooling division, a worker's classification as a 'best' worker in the production division was not contingent upon the worker having a positive view of the organisation. In fact, as indicated, the views of production division 'best' workers were perceived to be predominantly negative. Unlike the tooling division, there was no evidence in these data to suggest that past 'best' workers might differ from present 'best' workers in their view of the organisation. A likely explanation for this finding lies in the age of the production division. At the time of this study, the division had been in operation for less than ten years and, as such, its members were unlikely to have developed the kind of historical perspective (at least, with respect to the division) that was so evident in the experience of members of the tooling division. It was also the case that each of the three past 'best' workers described by production division participants was a worker with whom the participant had been associated in this division (rather than elsewhere in the company)⁶¹. In this sense, then, the 'past' as referred to by these participants was a more recent past than that referred to by the two tooling division participants above.

5(d) How did this worker relate to supervision?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. 'Best' workers were reported to have generally positive relationships with supervision, with ratings ranging from 'reasonable' through to 'very good'. No negative relationships were reported, although one participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) indicated that workers no longer respected supervision as they had done in the past. Two reasons were

⁶¹ Participants from the production division, like their counterparts from tooling, were not specifically asked to indicate the time (year) of their association with their 'best' worker. However, from a close reading of the production division transcripts and, in two cases, knowledge of the identity of the 'best' worker being referred to, this information could easily be deduced.

given for this. First, supervisors were reported to have become increasingly negative in their attitudes – this was attributed to their perception that “General Motors doesn’t give a stuff about them” – and this had led to correspondingly negative attitudes among workers. Second, it was argued that supervisors in the tooling division had failed to adapt their style of supervision to suit the more “modern” approaches that were evident elsewhere in the company. The old style of supervision, whereby workers were expected, simply, to “accept orders”, while it was still practised in the tooling division, was no longer entirely acceptable to workers who had acquired some degree of familiarity (albeit indirectly through hearing about changes elsewhere in the company) with alternative, less directive approaches.

Participants used very similar criteria by which to judge the relationship between their ‘best’ worker and his supervisor(s). A common theme in these data was that a positive relationship between a worker and his supervisor was one which was devoid of conflict. It was a relationship in which the worker showed respect for his supervisor and complied with his wishes. This theme emerged in the responses of five participants (including one supervisor and three ‘wages’ employees). A related theme, which emerged in the responses of three participants (one supervisor and two ‘wages’ employees), was that a positive worker-supervisor relationship was one in which the competence of the worker was such that only minimal contact with the supervisor was required. By way of illustration of these themes, a sample of participants’ verbatim responses is provided below:

I think [he] relates reasonable... I think he’s only too pleased to try and help and assist wherever he can. But I do believe now, at this particular time, there’s quite a lot of people that have lost a lot of respect... You should always have respect for your supervisor and know he’s the boss. (‘wages’ employee, leading hand)

Fairly good, I’d say [referring to the worker’s relationship with his supervisor]. He wasn’t a rebel, or he didn’t stir people up, or anything like that... He did his job, he didn’t argue, he did what he was told. (‘wages’ employee)

He was very good with supervision. He was easy to deal with and cooperative. (staff, supervisory)

Very well, I think [referring to how the worker related to his supervision], because he always kept [them] happy and they didn’t pester him or anything like that. They stayed off his back, so he was happy, because he was producing the results. (‘wages’ employee, leading hand)

Production Division. The pattern of responding for production division participants was less clear than that described above for participants from the tooling division. Two

participants reported a generally positive relationship between their 'best' worker and his/her supervisor(s); in two cases the relationship appeared to be more or less neutral; one participant suggested that the nature of the relationship depended on the supervisor; and one participant described a somewhat negative relationship. The criteria upon which these relationships were judged also varied more than they did for the tooling division. These criteria are outlined briefly below.

Of the two participants who reported a positive relationship between their 'best' worker and his/her supervisor(s), one made reference to the relative absence of problems, in this case, between himself (the participant was a supervisor) and the worker. The participant indicated that, apart from times when he had to "pacify" this worker (the worker reportedly had a somewhat difficult personality), he "related quite well" to the worker and "didn't have a problem" with him. The second participant (a 'wages' employee) attributed the positive relationship between her 'best' worker and supervision to the friendliness of the worker and to the worker's knowledge of the job which, it was suggested, had earned her the respect of supervisors who would "go to her and ask her what was going on, more so than the leading hand".

In the case of a third participant (a 'wages' employee), a neutral relationship was implied in the participant's comment that "I think he [the worker] just gets along with supervision, type of thing". This participant pointed out that, because his 'best' worker was an ex-leading hand, he had had more experience with supervision than ordinary shop-floor workers and, as such, he "knew what it was like to talk to supervision". A neutral relationship was also implied in a fourth participant's comment that her 'best' worker "just relates to [supervision] when he's got to". This participant indicated that, unlike many other workers in the division who often sought the attention of their supervisor(s) in order to avoid work, her 'best' worker preferred to work independently and actively sought supervision only if he had "a problem that he needs their help with".

A fifth participant (a supervisor) indicated that his 'best' worker – who was very similar to the 'best' worker described above – related differently to different types of supervisors. He enjoyed a positive relationship with supervisors who allowed workers to work independently, but related poorly to supervisors who desired more control over their workers. In the participant's own words:

Depending on the supervision, the worker, because of the nature of the beast... they tend to like to be left alone to do their job. So they get on with their job and they like very minimal supervision, and they like to go to supervision when they

have a problem. They don't like the type of supervision that stands behind them all the time. (staff, supervisory)

Finally, a sixth participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that, while the relationship between his 'best' worker and supervision was somewhat volatile and argumentative, the worker's grievances were never without foundation and supervision always conceded that the worker had a point. In the participant's own words:

Well, he seemed pretty volatile at times and [supervision] had many confrontations with him. But there was never an argument without any backing. He always had some fact or a valid reason for the argument and [supervision would] always say 'We understand what you're talking about, but there's nothing we can do'.

The participant went on to suggest that, as he saw it, the main reason for the conflict that sometimes arose between his 'best' worker and supervision was that the worker believed that supervision (as well as more senior management) should be more prepared than they were to make difficult decisions that took them outside of the "safe parameters" within which they usually operated.

Two concluding points are suggested by the above findings. First, it would appear that, in the production division, a worker's classification as a 'best' worker is not contingent on that worker having positive relationship with supervision. Second, and in contrast with the associated findings for the tooling division, participants from production varied considerably in the criteria they used to judge the quality of the relationship between their 'best' worker and supervision.

5(e) How did this worker relate to his/her co-workers?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (including one supervisor and two 'wages' employees) indicated that the relationship between their 'best' worker and his co-workers was generally positive; one participant (a 'wages' employee) described a somewhat "reserved" relationship; and one participant (a supervisor) implied that the relationship was variable (in this case, the 'best' worker was reportedly disliked by some of his co-workers, and more or less tolerated by others).

There was considerable variability among participants in the criteria they used to judge these relationships. For the four participants who indicated a positive relationship, these criteria were as follows. In one case, the basis of the relationship appeared to be common outside interests. This participant suggested that workers in the tooling division generally got on "very well" with one another because, apart from the "odd one or two that are slightly different", they were similar in terms of "their interests and general sort of day-to-day running of their lives". A second participant indicated

that, while his 'best' worker had considerable personal and family problems, he did not allow these problems to "affect his working life". The worker reportedly "got on well with everyone" despite these problems. A third participant indicated that his 'best' worker "got on well with" co-workers because "they respected him for his ability [and] for the help that he gave them on the job". Finally, the fourth participant ascribed his 'best' worker's positive relationship with co-workers to the fact that the worker did not interfere in the work activities of his co-workers. In the participant's own words:

Basically I'd say he stayed out of their hair. He didn't go around trying to tell them how to do the job or anything like that... He didn't isolate himself from others; he got along with them very well. But he also didn't impose his will or anything onto them – try to tell them that they're doing it wrong or anything else like that. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

The assessment, by one participant, of a somewhat "reserved" relationship between his 'best' worker and co-workers was based on the participant's perception that there were cultural differences between his 'best' worker and co-workers (his 'best' worker was an Italian immigrant) which somehow inhibited the development of a more intimate relationship and which explained why his 'best' worker was "a bit of a loner". Finally, with respect to the one variable relationship that was reported, the participant in this case indicated that his 'best' worker was disliked by about one third of his co-workers because "his work output was higher [and] it made them look worse than they would [otherwise]". Of the other co-workers with whom this 'best' worker was associated, there were some who reportedly "didn't mind" the worker, and others who "just tolerated" him.

There are two concluding points which are suggested by the above findings. First, it would appear that, in the tooling division at the present time, it is not essential for a worker to have a positive relationship with co-workers in order to be classified as a 'best' worker. Second, participants' judgements about what constituted a positive relationship between their 'best' worker and his co-workers did not seem to be informed by any common criteria. On the contrary, the data provided evidence of considerable variability in this regard.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question and, in all cases, the participant's 'best' worker was reported to have a generally positive relationship with his/her co-workers. In terms of the criteria used to judge this relationship, there were five participants (including two supervisors and three 'wages' employees) who made reference to some aspect of their 'best' worker's attitudes and behaviour toward other

workers. Specifically, one participant reported a “very good” relationship between his ‘best’ worker and co-workers, indicating that his ‘best’ worker was a “very helpful, very cooperative sort of guy to his fellow workmates”. A second participant emphasised his ‘best’ worker’s treatment of co-workers as equals: “He never put you down, he never made you feel small”. A third participant, in describing her ‘best’ worker’s relationship with co-workers, made the point that “Everybody likes him”. A fourth participant described her ‘best’ worker as “friendly” toward others, easy to approach, and straightforward in the sense of giving co-workers a “straight” answer to their questions, rather than giving a “roundabout answer like of lot of [supervisors] do”. Finally, the response of a fifth participant suggested that the “generally good” relationship that was reported in this case was due to the ‘best’ worker making a habit of greeting co-workers at the beginning of his work shift. Beyond this act of courtesy, however, the worker reportedly avoided getting too involved with co-workers, either on the job or socially, outside of work.

The criterion used by a sixth participant (a ‘wages’ employee) to judge his ‘best’ worker’s relationship with co-workers – which, in this case, was described as “pretty fair” – was not clear.

Apart from the above findings, there were three participants from this division (all ‘wages’ employees) who implied, or stated explicitly, that their ‘best’ worker might not enjoy an equally positive relationship with all of his/her co-workers. One participant indicated that his ‘best’ worker could not abide co-workers who were “lazy” and who had the attitude that “That’s not my job”. A second participant implied that his ‘best’ worker, who believed that everyone should be prepared to work as hard as he did, might not be liked so well by co-workers who were inclined to “have a bit of a bludge or take it easy”. And a third participant indicated that, while her ‘best’ worker was liked by his immediate co-workers, he was disliked by workers on different shifts who appeared to be jealous of his ability and the recognition (presumably from his supervision) that this had earned him.

It can be seen from the above that there was considerably more consistency in the production division data pertaining to the relationship between a ‘best’ worker and his/her co-workers than there was in the associated tooling division data. As indicated, a common theme to emerge in these data concerned the perception that positive relationships among co-workers were founded on qualities such as friendliness,

cooperation, equality of treatment, being approachable, and helpfulness. Interestingly, a quality such as being good at one's job, while it might contribute positively to relationships with some co-workers, could contribute negatively to relationships with others.

Methodological implications of the findings for Question 5. We turn now to a consideration of the above findings in terms of what they reveal about the usefulness of Question 5 for generating cultural information of the kind that was being sought. A number of insights were provided in this regard and these are discussed in point form below.

1. On the basis of the above findings, it can be concluded that Question 5 was valuable in so far as it served to differentiate the two divisions, at least to a point. For example, differences were indicated in the qualities which participants attributed to their 'best' worker. In the tooling division, there was an emphasis on the technical competencies of 'best' workers, whereas in the production division, the emphasis was more on qualities such as conscientiousness and the ability to get on with others. Differences were also indicated in the criteria which participants used to judge their 'best' worker's relationship with his/her supervisor(s) and with co-workers. With respect to the former, there was an emphasis in the tooling division on the importance of cooperation and a lack of conflict as defining characteristics of a positive relationship between a 'best' worker and his supervisors. In the production division, these criteria did not emerge as being particularly important. With respect to the latter, there was evidence that, in the production division, qualities such as friendliness, cooperation, and helpfulness provided the foundation for a positive relationship between a 'best' worker and his/her co-workers. In the tooling division, these particular qualities were accorded markedly less importance. As indicated, the differences between the divisions which were suggested by the above findings were consistent with what one would expect given differences in the nature of the work performed in each division. The point might also be made that these differences were consistent with the researcher's impression of differences in the 'culture' of each division.

2. While a number of patterns, or commonalities, emerged in the data for each division (these patterns constituting a source of differentiation between the divisions), it was also the case that, within each division, there was often considerable variability in participants' responses to the questions they were asked. For example, in both

divisions, there was considerable variability in participants' responses to part (a) of Question 5, asking about 'best' worker characteristics. This variability is illustrated in Tables 3.4 and 3.5 which show that, for each division, participants' responses could be represented by all four categories of 'best' worker characteristics that had been identified. Participants within a division were also shown to vary in the criteria they used to evaluate their 'best' worker's relationship with his/her supervisor(s) and co-workers respectively. As indicated, evaluations of the 'best' worker-supervisor relationship in the production division appeared to be based on a variety of different criteria, as were evaluations of the 'best' worker-co-worker relationship in the tooling division.

An important methodological implication of the kind of variability observed in the above findings is that it is impossible to know whether the responses of all, or only some, of the participants within a division are important from a cultural perspective. Consider, for example, the reference by two participants from the tooling division to the work behaviours and attitudes of their 'best' worker (see Table 3.4). The question arises as to whether the qualities referred to (eg. initiative and a competitive approach to work) are qualities which are regarded as important by these two participants only, or whether there are other participants from this division who also regard these qualities as important but who, for whatever reason, did not think to mention them when describing their 'best' worker. Of course, the obvious way to answer this question would be to ask other participants from the division specifically about their perception of the importance of these qualities. In this sense, while an open question, such as Question 5(a), would appear to be limited with respect to its capacity to reveal what is cultural and what is not, the advantage of such a question is that it can highlight issues of potential cultural significance (in this case, these may be characteristics of 'best' workers, or criteria for judging a 'best' worker's relationships with his/her peers and/or superiors) that might subsequently be asked about more directly through the use of some form of closed question or prompt. The approach being alluded to here – namely, the use of qualitative methods (eg. open ended questions) to inform the development of indices for quantitative research – is one which, as indicated in Section 1.6.2 (pp. 103-116), has been advocated, and used, by a number of organisational culture researchers (see, for example, Hofstede et al. 1990, Rentsch, 1990, and Siehl and Martin, 1988;).

3. A third methodological issue raised by the above findings relates specifically to Question 5(b), which asked participants to indicate how important their 'best' worker's qualities were (in the sense of constituting desirable qualities for workers more generally) and why. The finding that all participants from both divisions considered their 'best' worker's qualities to be important is, on reflection, perhaps not surprising. In other words, while it is possible, it is very unlikely that a participant would argue that a quality attributed to his/her 'best' worker would not be an important quality for workers, in general, to possess. The further point can be made that, while it was anticipated that some common themes might emerge in the reasons given by participants for why their 'best' worker's qualities were important, this was not the case. As indicated, there was considerable variability in these data, which perhaps might also have been expected, given the range of different 'best' worker qualities to which they referred. Thus, it would seem that Question 5(b) is somewhat redundant. It appears to add little of value to the information already generated by Question 5(a) and, in this sense, can probably be omitted from any subsequent revision of the interview protocol.

4. A fourth methodological issue concerns the question of whether or not parts (c), (d), and (e) of Question 5, which asked about the 'best' worker's view of the organisation, relationship with supervision, and relationship with co-workers, respectively, were redundant questions in the sense that information of relevance to the issues they addressed had already been provided in participant responses to part (a) of Question 5. From Tables 4 and 5 (which provide a summary of participants' responses to Question 5(a)), it can be seen that, in neither division were there any spontaneous references to the 'best' worker's view of the organisation, or to his/her relationship with supervision. In both divisions, there were, however, several spontaneous references to some aspect of the 'best' worker's relationship with co-workers. The overall conclusion suggested by these findings is that questions of the kind asked in parts (c), (d), and (e), which seek information, in this case, about specific characteristics that 'best' workers might possess, do have the potential to generate additional information, over and above that which respondents provide spontaneously. Whether or not this additional information is also useful, is a question which points 5. and 6. below attempt to address.

5. The above findings suggest that, in terms of their potential to provide culturally relevant information, parts (c), (d), and (e) of Question 5 may be useful only in so far as participants responded negatively to them. Thus, for example, if 'best' workers were

perceived to have negative views of the organisation (this was the case for a majority of 'best' workers in the production division), then it could reasonably be concluded that it was not necessary for a worker to have a positive view of the organisation in order to be classified as a 'best' worker. The corollary of this argument in the case of positive responses to these questions is, however, much more difficult to sustain. Thus, the finding that all 'best' workers in the tooling division were perceived to have a positive relationship with their supervisor(s) does not justify the conclusion that such a relationship was essential to one's classification as a 'best' worker in this division. These two factors – that is, a worker's relationship with his/her supervisor(s) and his/her status as a 'best' worker – may, indeed, be quite unrelated. Of course, where positive responses to these questions confirm what has already been said, one might more confidently argue that the attribute in question may be one which is highly valued. A case in point is the finding that participants from the production division, both spontaneously and in response to part (e) of Question 5, reported positive relationships between their 'best' worker and co-workers.

The fact remains, however, that what is of most interest from a cultural perspective is how organisation members define a 'best' worker. In other words, what are the particular worker qualities (attitudes, behaviours, etc.) that are most highly valued in the organisation? Is it necessary, for example, for a worker to think highly of the organisation in order to be regarded as a 'best' worker? Does a worker have to relate positively with his/her supervisor(s) and/or co-workers in order to be thought of as a 'best' worker? The above findings suggest that parts (c), (d), and (e) of Question 5 were limited with respect to their capacity to provide information of this kind which, it would seem, might have to be sought through a much more direct form of questioning.

6. The argument above about the importance of understanding organisation-specific meanings highlights a further limitation of parts (c), (d), and (e) of Question 5. Again, from a cultural perspective, it would seem to be less important to know that a 'best' worker has a positive view of the organisation, or that (s)he has a positive relationship with supervisors and/or co-workers, than it would be to know what organisation members actually mean by the term 'positive' when they apply it to these concepts. For example, is a 'positive' relationship between a 'best' worker and his/her supervisor(s) one which emphasises deference to authority (as indicated, there was some evidence that this was the case in the tooling division), or is it one which is characterised more by

participation and power sharing? While an attempt was made, in the present analysis, to infer these meanings from participants' responses, it was sometimes difficult to make confident judgements in this regard because of ambiguous, or inadequate, information. For example, if a 'best' worker is described as relating to supervision only as required, in order to solve a problem (this was the case for one participant from the production division), it is not clear from this description whether the ability to work independently is, or is not, an important criterion for judging a worker's relationship with supervision. Again, information of this kind may be best sought through a more direct question, such as, in this case: 'How should a worker behave in order to get on well with his/her supervisor(s)?'. Of course, questions of this kind, which seek to establish the basis for relationships among organisation members are, in terms of Schein's typology of cultural assumptions, more concerned with assumptions in Category 5 ('The Nature of Human Relationships'), than they are with assumptions in Category 3 ('The Nature of Human Nature'), this latter category being the one of interest in the present study.

7. One final methodological issue raised by the above findings is that the term 'best worker' may need to be more clearly specified by the researcher than it was. This is because there were some participants who, when asked about their 'best' worker, described a worker with leading hand status. Given the extra responsibility of workers at this level – leading hands have a semi-supervisory role – they can be regarded as a somewhat different group from ordinary shop floor workers. In one case, the 'best' worker described was actually a supervisor. In this case, it appeared that the participant (himself a supervisor) had interpreted the term even more broadly, to mean 'best employee'. Since this was not the interpretation which was intended, this participant was subsequently asked to describe the 'best' shop floor operator that he had ever known. These findings serve to illustrate that even concepts which appear, to the researcher, to be quite unambiguous in their meaning, can be interpreted differently by different research respondents.

The above arguments regarding the strengths and weaknesses of Question 5 are supported equally well by the findings for the role of supervisors as they are by the findings for the role of workers. As indicated in Appendix B2 (pp. 580-600), Question 5 could again be seen to work well in the sense that some divisional differences were indicated in participants' descriptions of their 'best' supervisor. For example, in the tooling division, there was an emphasis on the job knowledge, skills, and abilities of

'best' supervisors (these were qualities that earned supervisors the respect of others), whereas in the production division, 'best' supervisors appeared to be admired more for their people skills. At the same time, and as above for the role of workers, the responses of participants within a division often varied considerably and, again, this raised the question as to whether or not the various qualities attributed to that division's 'best' supervisors were qualities which were regarded as important by all participants from the division, or as important only by those participants who made specific reference to them. As above, Question 5 was also found to be limited with respect to its capacity to provide culturally relevant information such as, in this case, whether or not it was necessary for a supervisor to have a positive view of the organisation, or a positive relationship with other employees (whether subordinates, peers, or superiors), in order to be classified as a 'best' supervisor. It was also the case, as above, that the criteria upon which these evaluations were made were sometimes difficult to ascertain.

Finally, the findings for the role of supervisors drew attention to one additional methodological issue which, while it was not identified in the review of findings for the role of workers, is nevertheless equally relevant in the context of those findings. This issue relates specifically to participants at supervisory level who, when asked to talk about their 'best' supervisor (or 'best' worker), made reference to an individual they had known, or worked with, in the past. The point is that, in these cases, information should be sought about the participant's position (whether subordinate, peer, or superior) in relation to his/her 'best' supervisor (or 'best' worker) at the particular time to which reference was being made. This is because a participant's perspective in this regard may influence the criteria upon which (s)he judges a supervisor (or worker) to be a 'best' supervisor (or 'best' worker).

We turn now to a consideration of the findings for Question 6, which asked about participants' 'worst' worker (and 'worst' supervisor).

Q6: Think about the worst worker that you have ever had (worked with, known) in this division.

(a) What was it that you disliked, or regarded as problematic, about this worker?

Tooling Division. All participants answered this question. Five participants described a 'worst' worker whom they had known, or worked with, in the organisation in the past (of these, four mentioned a worker from the tooling division and one

mentioned a worker from elsewhere in the organisation). One participant only described a worker who was currently employed in the division.

A summary of the qualities which participants attributed to their 'worst' worker, in terms of the same four categories used to classify the qualities of 'best' workers, is provided in Table 3.6. It can be seen that the second category was the best represented, with five of the six participants from this division (including two supervisors and three 'wages' employees) making reference to one or more problems associated with the work behaviours and attitudes of their 'worst' worker. For example, 'worst' workers were variously criticised for the following: laziness, a lack of interest in the job, low work motivation, negative attitudes towards all aspects of work (including the decisions taken by managerial and other personnel), and a lack of interest in learning. As indicated in the following excerpts, there were two participants who regarded their 'worst' worker's poor attitude to work as an extension, or manifestation, of what was seen as the worker's problematic attitude to life in general:

I suppose they were apathetic to anything, you know, they've got a negative outlook on life and this passes over into the job, in which case they're not interested. They don't want to do anything. Anything that they're really doing is wrong, and all decisions made by other people, or [by] the management structure, are wrong, and totally negative. (staff, supervisory)

...he has a totally different outlook on life. He virtually doesn't have any goals in life or any ambitions and, therefore, doesn't get enthused about anything. It's very, very difficult to teach him anything because basically he's not interested on a lot of occasions. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Apart from the above, there were two participants (both 'wages' employees) who made reference to problems associated with their 'worst' worker's work knowledge, skills, and abilities. One of these participants suggested that, in terms of these qualities, his 'worst' worker was "not as good as 90% of the tradesmen here". The participant went on to express his dissatisfaction with the division's current reward system which was such that less competent workers (such as his 'worst' worker) not only received the same remuneration as more highly skilled workers, but they also ended up with less to do, since the bulk of the work was allocated to the workers judged to be most competent to complete it. In the participant's own words:

...they're getting [the reference is to incompetent workers], well, exactly the same amount of money as you, [and] they're no worse thought of, and you're not better thought of... what tends to happen is that particular person, if he's not as good in his job as you, he will be left alone, and the people that are quite good will be manipulated to do more, and more, and more. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Table 3.6 Characteristics of workers judged to be ‘Worst’ Workers by participants from the Tooling Division (TD).

Interviewee #	Work knowledge, skills, & abilities	Work behaviours & attitudes	Interpersonal skills & behaviours	Personal qualities & characteristics
TD01 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited skill and ability – “not as good as 90% of the tradesmen here” 			
TD02 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lazy 		
TD03 (supervisor)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entirely negative attitude towards work: lack of motivation to work, lack of interest in the job, views all decisions made by management as wrong 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entirely negative outlook on life
TD04 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of interest in the job Unwilling to learn new skills 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Different outlook on life from others: a total lack of ambition and no enthusiasm about anything
TD05 (‘wages’)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited skill in terms of working “with his hands” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of interest in being on shopfloor (aspired to a higher level position) Lack of interest in learning 		
TD06 (supervisor)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of motivation to perform and lack of interest in the work (despite ability and good job knowledge) 		

The reader may recall that this perception of there being a positive disincentive for workers to be good at what they do, was a common theme to emerge in the Study I data for this division (see Section 2.4.1, p. 131). The second participant to make reference to a quality in this category indicated that his 'worst' worker was not particularly skilled in working "with his hands".

The final point can be made that the relatively poor representation, in the above findings, of the first category of worker characteristics (ie. work knowledge, skills, and abilities) – it will be remembered that, in the tooling division data for 'best' workers, this was the best represented category – was perhaps not surprising given that most workers in the tooling division were qualified tradesmen who would have been required to demonstrate a certain level of competence in order to gain their qualifications. In this sense, skills deficits are unlikely to constitute a major, or commonly perceived problem, for the workers in this division.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. In two cases, the time of the participant's association with the worker described was not established. A third participant indicated that he was unable to think of one worker, in particular, whom he would classify as a 'worst' worker, and so he subsequently described the qualities of 'worst' workers in general. Of the remaining three participants, there were two who described a past 'worst' worker, and one who described a present 'worst' worker.

The qualities attributed by production division participants to their 'worst' worker are summarised in Table 3.7, using the same four categories as previously. As indicated, category 3 – interpersonal skills and behaviours – was the best represented category, with all six participants from this division making reference to some aspect of their 'worst' worker's interaction with others. Specifically, 'worst' workers were criticised for being disruptive of others (two participants), for 'riding' on the efforts of co-workers (three participants), for 'dobbing' co-workers in, in order to gain favour with supervision (one participant), for treating others poorly (one participant), and for being disrespectful of supervision (one participant). As shown in Table 3.7, there was also a strong emphasis in these data on problems associated with the 'worst' worker's work behaviours and attitudes. With respect to qualities in this category, 'worst' workers were criticised for not working to their full potential (one participant), for being lazy (two participants), for an inability to concentrate on the job (one participant) – in this

Table 3.7 Characteristics of workers judged to be ‘Worst’ Workers by participants from the Production Division (PD).

Interviewee #	Work knowledge, skills, & abilities	Work behaviours & attitudes	Interpersonal skills & behaviours	Personal qualities & characteristics
PD01 (supervisor)			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capable worker who could do the job but with very disruptive behaviour (particularly when time on his hands) 	
PD02 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did not work to full potential 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lets friends down, would “bludge” on friends 	
PD03 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unable to concentrate on the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disruptive of others (wanted them to “play his game”) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By nature, not suited to the work (unable to “be confined to do something for eight hours a day”)
PD04 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lazy (“bludge” whenever the opportunity arose) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Dob in” workmates in order to gain favour with supervisor • Rides on the efforts of workmates (ie. “bludge” on workmates) 	
PD05 (‘wages’)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lazy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rides on the efforts of workmates (“...she made everyone else try to cover for her”) 	
PD06 (supervisor)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor attitude to work: wouldn’t work, didn’t care about the job, didn’t look after equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Poor treatment of other people • Disrespectful of supervision 	

case, the 'worst' worker was considered to be, by nature, unsuited to the work – and for generally poor attitudes to work, reflected in low productivity, and a lack of respect for, and poor treatment of, equipment and people alike (one participant).

The following excerpts provide a sample of the verbatim responses which informed the above analysis:

...he's very capable... he could do the job quite easily and make time for himself, but once he did make time for himself, you'd get nothing else. He just stopped and disrupted everyone else. He'd do anything and everything [rather] than what he's supposed to do, and of course, as a supervisor, when he's disrupting other areas, and not doing his function, even though his work's right up to date, that's what I classified as a 'worst' worker. (staff, supervisory)

When you think about the 'worst' worker type of thing, you know, I think it was people who you didn't respect, that go running to the foremen all the time, type of thing, bludge every opportunity they get... Some people, you know, would dob their mates in at the least drop of the hat, type of thing. They think it might get them somewhere... That person would bludge on his fellow workmates type of thing. ('wages' employee)

...I knew he could do a lot better. He was one that would be 25% rather than 50% and you knew he had the potential to get the 100% and he [did] it several times. He let his friends down, he would bludge on his friends. ('wages' employee)

6(b) What was this worker's view of the organisation?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. In four cases, 'worst' workers were reported to hold negative views of the organisation. Specifically, there was one participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) who indicated that, as he saw it, his 'worst' worker held the same view as the majority of his co-workers, namely, that the organisation was not run very well. Two participants (a supervisor and a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) described a 'worst' worker who was openly critical of the organisation. In one case, the worker reportedly had "nothing much good to say about the [organisation]" and, in the other, the worker reportedly told people how much "he hates the place". A fourth participant (a supervisor) indicated that his 'worst' worker "didn't like [the organisation] at all". In this case, the worker reportedly had little interest in the organisation and viewed it simply as a means to an end:

...he was ambitious to set up his own business outside, which he did do. He actually [did] that while he was here... He didn't have any interest in the company at all. It was just a means of doing his apprenticeship and getting a trade behind him, and that was all he was interested in. (staff, supervisory)

A similar view to the above was expressed by a fifth participant (a 'wages' employee), who reported that his 'worst' worker's view of the organisation was such that "[it] owed him a living and he was here to collect his money and that was it". In this case, however, there was no reference to the worker holding distinctly negative views of the organisation. Finally, a sixth participant indicated that he could not say how his 'worst' worker viewed the organisation, since this was not a subject that they had discussed. At the same time, however, there was a suggestion that the worker, who was reportedly "biding his time" in his current position (he was a shop floor employee) until a preferred position (in administration) became available, might view the organisation as providing the means by which he could satisfy his personal goals and objectives.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. Five participants were able to comment on their 'worst' worker's view of the organisation – perceptions of these views ranged from distinctly negative to more or less indifferent – and one participant was not able to comment. These responses are elaborated upon briefly below.

One participant (a supervisor) described a 'worst' worker whose view of the organisation – and indeed every aspect of his experience of the organisation – was distinctly negative. In the participant's own words:

They⁶² wouldn't be very happy with the organisation. As far as they were concerned the organisation sort of stunk, you know. The union stunk, management stunk, everybody stunk. [They thought] that they should be running show. (staff, supervisory)

A second participant (also a supervisor) was very critical of his 'worst' worker's view of the organisation which, as he saw it, was such that "he's only here to get as much as he possibly can out of it". It was suggested that this worker was guilty of serious exploitation of the organisation, to the point where he had engaged in illegal acts, such as, stealing company property and selling drugs on site.

Three participants (all 'wages' employees) described a 'worst' worker who appeared to be more or less indifferent in his/her view of the organisation (that is, neither hating the organisation, nor being strongly committed to it). Specifically, in all three cases, the 'worst' worker was an individual who reportedly saw the organisation simply as a place to come and earn money. For two of these 'worst' workers, it was also implied that, if

⁶² The participant was using the plural 'they' to refer to his 'worst' worker.

they were able to earn more money elsewhere, then they would readily leave the organisation. Finally, there was one participant (a 'wages' employee) who indicated that, since she never talked to her 'worst' worker – this was because "I didn't like her" – she was unable to comment on the worker's view of the organisation.

It can be seen from the above findings that, while there were no 'worst' workers in either division who were reported to have a positive view of the organisation, it was also not the case that *all* 'worst' workers from both divisions had distinctly negative views. As indicated, there was evidence from both divisions to suggest that a 'worst' worker could be more or less indifferent in his/her attitude toward the organisation. These findings, along with the fact that there were two participants (one from each division) who were unable to comment on their 'worst' worker's view of the organisation suggest that, in neither division, was a worker's classification as a 'worst' worker contingent upon that worker having a negative view of the organisation. Indeed, if these findings are considered together with the previous findings for 'best' workers (as indicated, there were 'best' workers in both divisions with positive, negative, and neutral views), the more general conclusion might be reached that, in neither division, did the view that workers held of the organisation appear to have much bearing on the way in which workers were evaluated.

6(c) How did this worker relate to supervision?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (including two supervisors and two 'wages' employees) judged the relationship between their 'worst' worker and his supervisor(s) to be negative. Of these, three made reference to their 'worst' worker's non-compliance with supervision. In these cases, the 'worst' worker was variously described as refusing to do as he was told, responding reluctantly, or not at all, to supervision, and being difficult to supervise in the sense of not wanting to do the work. Reference was also made by these participants to the supervision needs of their 'worst' worker. One participant was particularly critical of what he saw as the overly lenient treatment of workers such as his 'worst' worker:

In here I find that most supervision... if you're a rebel and you stir things up, they'll put you to one side, not stir you up, and let you go your own way and do what you want. ('wages' employee)

In this participant's view, the proper management of such workers would be to "get rid of them". A second participant (a supervisor) indicated that, in his opinion, "strong [supervisory] measures" were needed to "get on top of" workers such as his 'worst'

worker. This participant also pointed out that he was unsure of the reasons for his worker's non-compliance, whether lack of intelligence, lack of interest, or "playing dumb". A third participant (also a supervisor) indicated that the style of supervision that he used with his 'worst' worker, namely "speaking to him, and trying to encourage him to do his work" had no effect whatsoever, in terms of changing this worker's behaviour.

The above findings are consistent with the associated findings for 'best' workers, in the sense that, in both cases, a worker's compliance with supervision appeared to constitute an important criterion upon which that worker's relationship with supervision (whether positive or negative) was judged. Not surprisingly, whereas a positive relationship was one which was characterised by a lack of supervision (the idea that 'best' workers could work independently), a negative relationship was one in which strict supervisory control was seen as being necessary, if not practised.

In the case of the fourth participant above, the basis for his assessment of a negative relationship between his 'worst' worker and supervision was unclear. This participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) suggested that his 'worst' worker's poor relationship with supervision – the worker was described as relating "not very well" to supervisors – was underpinned by personal insecurity and a basic fear of supervisors, which the worker disguised with shows of bravado and efforts to gain popularity.

The response of a fifth participant from this division implied a more or less neutral relationship between the participant's 'worst' worker and supervision. In this case, the worker was reportedly ignored by his supervisor because the latter was aware that the worker, who was "only a cadet" (similar to an apprentice) had no intention of remaining in his current section on completion of his training. Finally, a sixth participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) indicated that his 'worst' worker had much the same relationship with supervision as did the majority of workers in the division. This relationship was "reasonable", but with some loss of respect on the part of workers for supervisors, over the years.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. It could reasonably be inferred from the responses of four of these participants that the relationship between the participant's 'worst' worker and his/her supervisor(s) was negative. For example, there were two participants (a 'wages' employee and a supervisor) who drew attention to their 'worst' worker's negative attitudes towards, and lack of respect for, their supervisors. In one case, the 'worst' worker reportedly regarded his supervisors as "a

bunch of wankers” and, in the other, supervisors were seen as “a mob of dickheads”. According to one of these participants, the most appropriate way to deal with workers of this kind was not to transfer them to another department or shift, as was typically done, but rather to confront the problem directly by dismissing them. In the participant’s own words:

The best way is to face it in confrontation. Get it out of the way and get rid of him. ...get the union involved and everything, and if they didn’t want to work, you’re far better off getting rid of him. (staff, supervisory)

A third participant (a ‘wages’ employee) judged the relationship between her ‘worst’ worker and supervision from the perspective, not of the worker (as above), but of the worker’s supervisor. In this case, it was suggested that the worker was disliked by her supervisor – “he wasn’t real keen on that particular person... he used to watch her all the time” – because she was the kind of individual who was “just outright lazy”. The fourth participant (a ‘wages’ employee), in commenting on his ‘worst’ worker’s relationship with supervision, merely indicated that “management were after sacking [the worker] for a long, long time”. While the exact nature of this worker’s relationship with supervision was not made clear, the participant’s response strongly implies that it was a negative relationship.

Finally, there were two participants from this division (a supervisor and a ‘wages’ employee) who described a relationship between their ‘worst’ worker and supervision that was difficult to classify (in terms of whether it was negative, neutral, or positive). In one case, the participant (in this case the worker’s supervisor) indicated that, while his ‘worst’ worker often required strict supervisory discipline in order to get the job done – “once I started getting right onto the level of having to threaten to sack him, or get close to giving [a] disciplinary procedure... he’d do it” – there were nevertheless times when he and this worker related “quite well” and would be “quite friendly” towards one another. In the other case, the participant indicated that it was typical of ‘worst’ workers generally to “toe the line” in the presence of supervisors but, in their absence, to “try to get away with whatever they can”.

In summary, in neither division, was it the case that *all* of the ‘worst’ workers described were reported to have a distinctly negative relationship with their supervisor(s). This finding suggests the tentative conclusion that, in neither division, was a worker’s classification as a ‘worst’ worker contingent on that worker having a negative relationship with his/her supervisor(s). The corresponding finding for the

production division, namely, that not *all* 'best' workers had a positive relationship with their supervisor(s), suggests the further conclusion that, at least in this division, evaluations of workers more generally may be influenced very little by perceptions of how workers get on with their supervisors.

A second point that can be made with respect to the above findings is that, while there were four participants from each division who reported (or at least implied) a negative relationship between their 'worst' worker and his/her supervisor(s), there was markedly more inconsistency in the production division data that were generated by this question than there was in the corresponding tooling division data. For example, there was no evidence of any common thematic content in these data (such as the emphasis, in the corresponding tooling division data, on the importance of compliance with authority), participants evaluated the relationship between their 'worst' worker and his/her supervisor(s) from different perspectives (in two cases, from the perspective of the worker and, in one case, from the perspective of the supervisor), and some relationships were described which were difficult to classify in terms of whether they were negative, neutral, or positive. While the difference between the divisions in this regard may be nothing more than an anomaly of the small sample size, it is perhaps worth noting that a similar pattern of responding emerged in the corresponding findings for 'best' workers.

6(d) How did this worker relate to his/her co-workers?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. While each of the 'worst' worker-co-worker relationships that was described contained some negative element, only two of these relationships could be classified as being distinctly negative. In both cases, this assessment appeared to be based on a perception, by the participant, that the worker somehow didn't 'fit' into the group, as a whole. Specifically, one participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) indicated that his 'worst' worker was unpopular with his peers because of his self-interested attitude – "he's for himself and that's it" – which was manifested in a refusal to participate in activities (such as, contributing to the purchase of gifts for co-workers who were retiring or getting married, and giving assistance to workers who were "in strife", whether at work or outside of work) that helped to build a more cohesive work unit. Another participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that his 'worst' worker, who was anticipating a transfer from his current position on the shop floor to an administrative position, was unpopular

with his co-workers because of his superior attitude toward them. In the participant's own words:

...no one had any time for him because he sort of looked down upon us, sort of thing. He thought he was going to be more or less God Almighty and we were just the trash. ('wages' employee).

A further two participants described 'worst' worker-co-worker relationships that appeared to be neither particularly negative, nor particularly positive. In one case, the participant (a supervisor), who had chosen to talk about 'worst' workers generally, indicated that, while such workers typically had a reputation with co-workers for being "bludgers or spongers", and while co-workers might complain amongst themselves about such workers and "have a bit of a dig at them", it was not the case that these workers were, in any way, ostracised by the group. Rather, it was suggested that, in general, "they get on alright with other workers". In the other case, the participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that his 'worst' worker was tolerated by his co-workers. This worker reportedly had a problem with alcoholism and, according to the participant, his work colleagues correctly understood his behaviour (including shows of bravado, attempts to gain popularity, and public criticism of the division) to be a front for his underlying insecurity. In the participant's own words:

People can see that it's a front... probably they feel sorry for him. They sort of tolerate him and ignore [him] in that respect. But he's not shunned or outcast. People talk to him and everything. ('wages' employee)

Finally, there were two participants from this division who indicated that their 'worst' worker's relationship with co-workers was such that the worker got on well with some co-workers, but was unpopular with others. One of these participants (a 'wages' employee) indicated that, while his 'worst' worker had a reputation for being "very, very lazy", and while his co-workers were inclined to "treat him as a joke", he nevertheless had some friends and some enemies. The other participant (a supervisor) indicated that, while his 'worst' worker probably got on "okay" with his age peers, older co-workers were very disapproving of this worker's poor attitudes to work.

On the basis of these findings, it would seem reasonable to conclude that, in the tooling division, it is not necessary for a worker to have a negative relationship with his co-workers in order to thought of as a 'worst' worker.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. Given the previous emphasis that participants had spontaneously given to problems associated with their 'worst' worker's interpersonal skills and behaviours (see the findings for part (a) of

Question 6, reported above), it was anticipated that the relationships between 'worst' workers and co-workers described in response to this question, would be predominantly negative. However, this was not the case. In fact, there were two participants from this division who reported a distinctly positive relationship between their 'worst' worker and his co-workers. One of these participants (a supervisor) indicated that, while most people knew his 'worst' worker to be a "rogue" – the worker reportedly used the organisation to generate his own personal income (for example, from drug sales and from doing "foreigners"⁶³ at work) – he was nevertheless considered to be a "loveable rogue". It was suggested further that, for a small fee, the worker would "do anything and everything" for his co-workers⁶⁴. The other participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that, while her 'worst' worker was disruptive of others, and while there were days when he performed very poorly, he was nevertheless liked by all of his co-workers. The participant attributed the worker's popularity to his cheerful disposition and to his desire to see those around him equally happy. In the participant's own words:

They liked [the fact that] he was always happy. If somebody was down in the dumps, he'd really want to cheer them up, you know. He didn't like to see anybody unhappy. He was a happy soul. ('wages' employee)

In a similar vein to the above, though depicting a reasonable, rather than distinctly positive, relationship, there was one participant (a 'wages' employee) who indicated that, while the "worker side" of his 'worst' worker "left a lot to be desired", the worker "wasn't bad" as far as his "personal relationship" with others was concerned.

One possible explanation for the apparent contradiction between the above findings and the free responses of these participants to part (a) of Question 6 – being disruptive of others and 'bludging' on co-workers were the qualities which these participants spontaneously ascribed to their 'worst' worker – is that it may be picking up on a kind of organisational equivalent of what Fiedler (1967) meant by a relationship-oriented, as opposed to task-oriented, personality. According to Fiedler's theory (and with reference specifically to the personality measure derived from it), a relationship-oriented individual is an individual who describes his/her least preferred co-worker (that is, the worker with whom (s)he can work least well) in very favourable terms (such as, pleasant, friendly, cheerful, and agreeable). The idea here is that the relationship-

⁶³ Local organisational jargon used to refer to private jobs completed in company time, and using company equipment and materials.

⁶⁴ Presumably, the reference here is to assistance given in relation to the extramural interests and activities of co-workers.

oriented individual places so much value on personal relations that (s)he is able to think positively even about the worker with whom (s)he least prefers to work. In the case of the present findings then, it is conceivable that while a 'worst' worker might be criticised for, say, disrupting the work of co-workers, (s)he may still be liked by these co-workers.

With respect to the remaining three participants from this division, there was one (a supervisor) who expressed the view that 'worst' workers typically had quite strong personalities and that, as such, they would always attract a small core of followers (ie., other workers) who would see them as "heroes" and seek to emulate their behaviour. This participant did not comment on his perception of the relationship between 'worst' workers and co-workers more generally. A second participant (a 'wages' employee) described a relationship that might be classified as indifferent. This participant argued that, since most workers were inclined to "bludge" if the opportunity arose, his 'worst' worker's poor performance (the worker had a reputation for being lazy and 'bludging' on his workmates), "probably didn't matter" to them too much. Finally, a third participant (also a 'wages' employee) indicated that the relationship between her 'worst' worker and co-workers was negative. This was the only relationship of its kind reported by production division participants, the assessment in this case being based on the participant's experience that her and her colleagues continually had to make up for the below average effort and output of this 'worst' worker. In the participants own words:

Not very well [referring to how the 'worst' worker related to co-workers], because everyone had to cover for her... it's a big area... everyone has to do their own job. Otherwise everyone else is behind and [then] you have to do twice as much to cover one person at the beginning, especially if it's the first operation... Everyone does that sometimes, but we don't mind it. If someone is having an off day, you cover for them because normally you know that they're up with their job. But when it's all the time, you get sick of it. ('wages' employee)

In conclusion, and as for the tooling division, a worker's classification as a 'worst' worker in the production division does not appear to be contingent on that worker having a negative relationship with co-workers. As indicated, some of the 'worst' workers from this division reportedly enjoyed a very positive relationship with their co-workers. Importantly, however, it would seem that a distinction needs to be drawn between relations among workers that revolve around getting the job done, and those which operate at a more personal level. As indicated, there was some evidence (from the above findings and those pertaining to part (a) of Question 6) to suggest that, in this division, a worker could get on well with his/her co-workers in a personal sense, while

at the same time having poor working relations with them. A possible limitation of part (d) of Question 6 in this regard, is that it does not specify whether the respondent should comment on the working relationship, or on the personal relationship, between his/her 'worst' (or 'best') worker and co-workers.

Methodological implications of the findings for Question 6. On the basis of the above findings, there are several points which can be made regarding the value of Question 6 for eliciting information of the kind that was sought. These are as follows:

1. In its current form, Question 6 does not appear to provide significant additional insights about what worker qualities are valued/not valued by the organisation, over and above those which were provided by Question 5. In other words, within each division, the qualities which participants attributed to their 'worst' worker were, to a large extent, the opposite of those which participants had attributed to their 'best' worker. A comparison of the findings reported in Table 3.5 with those reported in Table 3.7 provides a clear illustration of this. As indicated, whereas the 'best' workers in the production division were admired for the effort which they put into the job, as well as for their ability to work well with others, the 'worst' workers in this division were criticised for being lazy and for having poor working relations with co-workers. Although the corresponding findings for the tooling division were somewhat less illustrative in this regard, it was nevertheless still the case that the qualities attributed to the 'worst' workers in this division were consistent with what one might have expected, given the qualities which had been attributed to the 'best' workers in the division. Whereas the latter were admired for their technical competence (that is, job-specific knowledge, skills, and abilities), the former were criticised, not so much for their lack of technical competence – as indicated, this would have been unlikely since most of the workers in this division were trade qualified – but rather for their poor attitudes toward the job (for example, lack of interest in the job and lack of interest in learning new skills) and for their poor work motivation. The further point can be made that, in the same way that the interpersonal skills and personal qualities of the 'best' workers in this division were accorded relatively little significance, so too was there a lack of emphasis on these qualities (or, at least, deficits in relation to these qualities) for the 'worst' workers in this division.

2. While Question 6 can be regarded as being somewhat redundant (for the reasons outlined in point 1. above), it was valuable in so far as it generated information that,

when combined with the findings for Question 5, enabled a number of more general conclusions to be drawn about the value of particular worker qualities. For example, the finding that, in neither division, were 'worst' workers consistently negative with respect to their view of the organisation, when combined with the finding that, in neither division, were 'best' workers consistently positive with respect to their view of the organisation, suggested the more general conclusion that a worker's view of the organisation (similar perhaps to the notion of organisational commitment) was a quality which had little bearing on how the workers, in either division, were judged. In a similar vein, the emergence of a deference to authority theme in both the 'best' worker and the 'worst' worker data for the tooling division – for 'best' workers, a positive worker-supervisor relationship was one in which the worker complied with supervision and, for 'worst' workers, a negative worker-supervisor relationship was one in which the worker did not comply with supervision – suggested the more general conclusion that, in the tooling division, deference to authority was a quality which was relatively highly valued.

3. Given that Question 5 and Question 6 were essentially the same question, but with a different focus ('best' workers in the case of Question 5, and 'worst' workers in the case of Question 6), the same criticisms which were made previously of Question 5 can also be made of Question 6. For example, the same difficulty arises with respect to the interpretation of variability in participants' responses. That is, it is difficult to know, without asking, whether the different qualities which participants within a division variously attributed to their 'worst' worker were important to all participants within that division (suggesting that they might be part of the division's culture), or important only to those participants who made specific reference to them. Although the researcher used her knowledge of the research setting to make some assumptions in this regard – for example, it was argued that skill deficits were unlikely to be a major concern in the tooling division – the previous argument still applies, namely, that information of this kind is probably best acquired directly through the use of some form of closed question or prompt (see point 2., pp. 204-205).

The criticisms made previously of parts (c), (d), and (e) of Question 5 – which asked about the 'best' worker's view of the organisation, his/her relationship with supervision, and his/her relationship with co-workers – can also be made of these questions asked about 'worst' workers (that is, parts (b), (c), and (d) of Question 6). The problem

remains that, in the final analysis, these questions (whether asked about 'best' workers or 'worst' workers) do not contribute much to an understanding of the group's interpretation of what it means to be a 'best' worker, or a 'worst' worker. In particular, they provide inadequate and inconclusive information about the value of the qualities which they ask about – a worker's view of the organisation and the nature of his/her relationship with supervision and with co-workers – to the group as a whole. It remains unclear, for example, as to whether or not a worker's relationship with his/her supervisor(s) is so important in the group that, if negative, the worker is likely to be classified as a 'worst' worker and, if positive, the worker is likely to be classified as a 'best' worker. As suggested previously (see point 5., pp. 206-207), a more direct form of questioning may be needed to elicit information of this kind.

4. One final methodological point is that, in this broad category of questions, it might have been more informative to have asked about 'good' workers and 'bad' workers, rather than about 'best' workers and 'worst' workers. The latter may be individuals who have been classified as such because of particular idiosyncratic characteristics which they possess which make them 'stand out' from others (the 'worst' worker from the tooling division who reportedly suffered from alcoholism being a possible case in point). As such, the qualities attributed to these individuals may reveal more about the individuals themselves (and what they value) than they do about the organisation in which they work (and what it values). Questions about 'good' workers and 'bad' workers, on the other hand, might be more likely to elicit descriptions in terms of more general characteristics which would be shared by a number of individuals and which, as such, may provide more of a 'window' into values which are supported by the organisation (division) as a whole.

Finally, on the basis of a review of the corresponding findings for the role of supervisors (see Appendix B2, pp. 600-612), it can be concluded that these findings give rise to the same methodological arguments as those made above, on the basis of the findings for the role of workers. Of particular interest, perhaps, is the finding that, of the 'worst' supervisors identified, there were two (both from the production division) who reportedly possessed characteristics which one might reasonably assume would place them well outside of the norm for their group. In one case, the 'worst' supervisor was reported to have formed close personal bonds with a number of subordinates (the implication was that he had enjoyed sexual relations with them); in the other case, the

'worst' supervisor was reported to have been "seen drunk on the premises". This finding provides further support for the argument made in point 4. above, namely, that questions about 'best' workers/'worst' workers (and, in this case, 'best' supervisors/'worst' supervisors) may be limited in the sense that they may elicit information about worker (supervisor) characteristics that are idiosyncratic, rather than necessarily culturally relevant.

Apart from the confirmatory value of the findings for the role of supervisors, these findings drew attention to one additional methodological issue of relevance to an evaluation of Question 6. Specifically, there was some evidence in these findings to suggest that a distinction might need to be drawn between what the individual values and what the individual thinks the organisation values. In describing their 'worst' supervisor, there were three participants, all of whom were 'wages' employees (two from the tooling division and one from the production division), who suggested that their 'worst' supervisor was probably not regarded as such by the organisation. In one case, the participant suggested that her 'worst' supervisor was simply complying with the expectations of those above him; a second participant indicated that his 'worst' supervisor was "a real company man", meaning that he followed the directives of his superiors "without question" and did not "rock the boat"; and a third participant suggested that, from the company's perspective, his 'worst' supervisor was "probably a very good person" since he was "always thinking about the job". While it is impossible to know, without more information, what the cultural significance, if any, of these responses might be, there are two possible 'cultural' interpretations which come to mind. On the one hand, it may be the organisation supports separate worker, and management (company) subcultures. On the other, the organisation's culture may be one which supports strong 'us/them' assumptions, such that workers and management are, by definition, viewed as opposing entities. These speculations aside, the argument remains that the questions in this category (whether they ask about 'best'/'worst' workers and supervisors, or 'good'/'bad' workers and supervisors) might usefully seek information, not only about what the individual values in this regard, but also about what the individual thinks the organisation values in this regard.

3.4.5 Context questions

As indicated in the description of the interview protocol (see Section 2.2), the questions in this category were designed to provide contextual information that would assist in the more accurate interpretation of participant accounts of their present experience (regarding, in this case, the respective roles of workers and supervisors). To this end, participants were asked to comment on (i) their experience of the role of workers (supervisors) in their organisation in the past, (ii) their expectations regarding the future role of workers (supervisors) in the organisation, and (iii) their experience of the role of workers (supervisor) in any other organisation(s) which they had worked in, or which they knew about. To ensure some comparability of the data across the various contextual domains of interest (including the present context), it was considered desirable that participants base their responses to these questions on the same Theory X, Theory Y framework which they had used, in Question 2, to evaluate the current role of workers (supervisors). Prior to the administration of the questions in this category, each participant was therefore reminded briefly of the X/Y rating which (s)he had given in response to Question 2.

The findings for each of the context questions are reported below, along with a more general discussion, at the end, of the methodological implications of these findings.

Q7: What was the role played by workers in this division in the past? Did it differ from the role of workers at the present time? How? Give examples. How long ago was this?

Tooling Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (all 'wages' employees) reported some change, from the past to the present, in the role of the workers in their division and two participants (both supervisors) reported no change. With respect to the former, the perception of three of these participants was that divisional workers had played a more passive role in the past than they did at the present time. In one case, it was argued that, whereas workers today were prepared to challenge managerial decisions likely to affect them (using the threat of industrial action, if necessary), workers in the past had been more inclined to simply accept such decisions. A second participant argued that, given the high degree of job specialisation in the past, there was not the same requirement then, as there was now, for workers to possess a range of skills and to be versatile with respect to the use of those skills. In the participant's own words:

In the old days, you used to do a little bit of a job, you didn't finish the whole job. Now, we do the whole thing virtually from start to finish. People are more

versatile than they used to be and more active in what they do... they're prepared to do things that years ago they wouldn't [do]. They'd only do a certain job and that was it, you know. ('wages' employee)

A third participant attributed a more passive role to workers in the past on the grounds that supervisors, at the time, were more dictatorial and, as such, there was little inducement for workers to "speak out with any ideas" or to "add something to the job". Interestingly, a kind of win-lose perspective was indicated in this participant's attempt to explain the role changes which he perceived to have taken place (reportedly, over the last ten years or so). He said:

At one time, the supervisor was almost sort of God. But now, I don't know whether the workers have come up, or whether the supervisor has been dragged down, but they've got a lot closer together. ('wages' employee)

It is worth noting that the responses of the first two participants above imply an interpretation of the active/passive (Theory Y/Theory X) dichotomy – participants had been introduced to this in Question 2 – which was not entirely consistent with that which was intended. In the first case, the participant appeared to be contrasting a reactionary with a compliant role for workers; in the second, the distinction seemed to be between a role for workers which emphasised skill versatility and one which emphasised skill specialisation. The point can be made here, as previously, that interpretive inconsistencies such as these raise questions about the imposition, in the present method, of a priori dimensions (in this case, contrasting a Theory X with a Theory Y orientation) by which to try to represent organisation member experience.

Of the four participants who reported a change, from the past to the present, in the role of divisional workers, there was one who, at least initially, attributed a more active role to workers in the past. This participant used the term 'active' in the same way as the participant above, namely, to imply a reactionary or oppositional role for workers. As an example of divisional workers playing a more active role in the past, the participant described a strike by workers in 1985 – divisional members commonly referred to this as the "Tent City" incident – in which workers maintained a 24 hour campsite vigil outside of the division, as a protest against the threatened closure of the division. Given that this participant had been with the division for many years (his length of service with the division at the time of this study was 25 years), he was subsequently asked if he could comment on the role of divisional workers in the more distant past. The information provided in response to this question, and in response to

an associated prompt, was of particular interest and, as such, it is considered in some detail below.

When asked about role of divisional workers in the more distant past, the participant indicated that:

Well, [workers] didn't really have a role. Everyone was so happy, there was plenty of work. You could work here six or seven days a week if you sort of chose [to]. That was it – everyone knew more or less what was going on. There was a lot of people here. It was a more friendly atmosphere. ('wages' employee).

On further consideration, however, and having been reminded of the active/passive orientations described in Question 2, the participant acknowledged that, in terms of these orientations, there was no difference between the role of workers at this time, and the role of workers at present, which the participant had judged to be 'very passive'. In other words, workers then, as now, did pretty much as they were told, and they were not involved in, and neither did they question, the decisions made by those in authority. These data are interesting because they suggest that, while the role of the workers in this division appears to have changed very little over time, at least in an objective sense, the context in which that role is played out may have changed considerably – from one of certainty and security in the past, to one of uncertainty and insecurity at present. If this was the case – certainly, the results of Study I would appear to support such a conclusion (see, for example, the discussion on pp. 132-134 of Section 2.4.1) – then one might question the *actual* source of the dissatisfaction which this participant expressed in response to Question 3 (in response to this question, the participant indicated that he was 'extremely dissatisfied' with the current role of the workers in his division). It is possible, for example, that the emphasis on the role of workers in the present study may simply have provided a focus for the participant's dissatisfaction, the real cause of which may have been changes in the experience of work associated with the declining fortunes of the division (eg. increased job insecurity, fewer opportunities for promotion, reduced access to overtime etc.). An important implication of this argument is that training designed to alleviate worker dissatisfaction through a redefinition of the role of workers may, in this situation, be misdirected.

Finally, with respect to the two participants who reported no change in response to this question, there was one who argued that, in his experience (the participant had been with the division for some 35 years), the workers in this division had always played a "slightly active" role. The basis for this assessment was that, according to the

participant, workers had always been prepared to question the instructions of their supervisors if they anticipated problems with these instructions – they did not just “do things blindly”. Workers had also always had the initiative to seek out the additional information that might be required to complete a job for which they had been given partial instructions only. The second participant indicated that, as far as he could tell, the role played by divisional workers – in response to Question 2, this participant had attributed a predominantly active role to some workers and a predominantly passive role to others – had not changed from the past to the present. In his own words:

I don't think there's any difference. I don't think they've changed. If they have, its been a very gradual change and I've never noticed it. (staff, supervisory)

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (including two supervisors and two ‘wages’ employees) attributed a more active role to divisional workers in the past; one participant (a ‘wages’ employee) suggested that workers in the division in the past played a more passive role; and one participant (a ‘wages’ employee) reported no change. A more detailed account of these findings is provided below.

All four participants who attributed a more active role to divisional workers in the past had rated the current role of divisional workers as passive, with the specific ratings given ranging from ‘slightly passive’ (two participants) to ‘moderately passive’ (two participants). In describing the past role of divisional workers, three of these participants (including one supervisor and two ‘wages’ employees) made reference to the Team Concept, a Japanese model of work organisation on which operations in the production division were originally based. During this period in the division’s history, it was reported that (i) workers were more interested in, and committed to, the success of the division (one participant); (ii) workers were involved in group meetings for the purpose of solving problems on the shop floor (two participants); and (iii) workers and management interacted more as equals in the sense that workers had the opportunity to respond to the proposals put forward by management, even to the extent that they could openly disagree with these proposals “without being reprimanded” (one participant).

A number of reasons were offered for why the Team Concept – which had been abandoned some four years after its introduction – had failed. According to one participant (a ‘wages’ employee), the team meetings which were an integral part of this initiative, and which should have been “worthwhile to the company”, frequently

suffered from a lack of focus, with team members losing sight of the true purpose of the meetings. In the participant's own words:

...[the meetings] didn't always work very well, because they very often went off line. [They] got to be bitch sessions, so they stopped them, and I can see why they stopped them, because they were becoming just a bitch session and, for some people, it was just [time] off the shop floor for half an hour or an hour. ('wages' employee)

A second participant (also a 'wages' employee) argued that the problem with the team meetings was that there were some team members who simply did not contribute. It was suggested that, in a team of say ten members, there would be three or four who would be actively involved, while the rest would be more "passive" and happy to "go along with whatever decisions [were] made".

Both of the above participants also made reference to what they saw as management's role in the failure of the Team Concept. In one case, it was argued that, while the workforce as a whole was initially very enthusiastic about the innovation, management did not provide the kind of ongoing support and feedback that was needed in order to ensure its success. As illustrated in the following excerpt, this lack of support for an innovation by the very people seen to be responsible for its introduction, was regarded by this participant as a key factor influencing the current attitudes of divisional workers towards renewed efforts, by divisional management, to increase the involvement of workers in divisional activities:

Look, we made charts... and I don't think anybody ever looked at them, and so now when [management] come along and they ask you to chart something, the attitude is 'Oh, stuff that, I've done that before and nobody even bothered to look at them'. And it's true [that] once they've done something to people on the shop floor... [they've] got a long memory, and they resent [management] trying to get them to do it again, even though this time they might be genuine. ('wages' employee)

In a similar vein, the second participant reported that the Team Concept "wasn't really pushed by upper management" who had the final say in whether or not suggestions for change made by shop floor workers were approved for implementation. The fact that upper management frequently did not support workers' ideas was attributed, by this participant, to a general resistance to change at this level – a reluctance to do something "different from what they'd known" – as well as a concern that the Team Concept provided workers with "too much freedom and latitude", thereby undermining their own positions of power in the organisation.

Without making reference specifically to the failure of the Team Concept, the third participant above (a supervisor) did offer some comments on his perception of why the role of divisional workers had changed. In this case, it was suggested that the commitment and enthusiasm displayed by divisional workers in the early set-up phase of the division, had been “gradually browbeaten out of [workers]”. While there was no indication of how this was done, its impact, according to the participant, was that many of the division’s original employees had left the company, whilst those who remained developed the attitude that: “I’m here for eight hours, and I don’t give a shit what they do any more, because I’ve been there, done that, so what the hell for?”. This participant also expressed the view that current efforts on the part of divisional management to encourage a more active role for workers were being met with limited success only. He attributed this to differences between managers and workers in how these efforts were perceived. Managers, on the one hand, were convinced of the “morale-boosting” value of what they were doing, believing that “commitment [was] going back on the shop floor”. Workers, on the other hand, perceived that their representation was inadequate and that, in reality, input from the shop-floor was rarely sought below the level of Leading Hand.

As indicated, there were four participants who attributed a more active role to divisional workers in the past. The last of these participants argued his case somewhat differently from the three participants whose responses have been described above. This participant (a supervisor) spoke about the company more generally and argued that, because of the downsizing which had taken place over the years, a climate of uncertainty had developed which had induced many of the company’s more active personnel (both staff and ‘wages’ employees) to voluntarily leave the organisation. The personnel who remained were, according to this participant, the kind of individuals who lacked the confidence and self-direction to take control of their lives in this way. In the participant’s own words:

...I think it was a little bit more active prior... because I think Holden’s diminished in size... we got rid of shall we say our more active people... they would have seen the writing on the wall, and in any situation where there was a possibility of you losing your job, people who know they have the ability and people who don’t mind taking the risk... [they are] the good people who opt out and jump off the ship before it sinks, to get on to something else. And you [are] left with the people who are unsure and are scared, and they will hang on to the last minute and possibly go down with the ship... So I suppose we’ve got slightly more passive as time has gone on. (staff, supervisory)

It is worth noting the assumption in this participant's use of the terms 'active' and 'passive' that individuals are, by nature, either active or passive. Contrary to what was intended, these were not seen as qualities, or orientations, which were under the control of, and therefore able to be shaped by, the organisation and the particular style of leadership and management which it supported. The point should also be made that this participant, unlike the three participants above, was a relative newcomer to the company and the division. At the time of this study, he had been with the division and the company for eleven months only; in contrast, the tenure of his colleagues at the time of the study was between six and eight years with the division, and between ten and twenty years with the company. Unlike his colleagues, then, this participant did not have a first-hand knowledge of the early set-up of the division and was, therefore, not able to bring the same personal history to bear on his discussion of the role played by divisional workers in the past.

Of the remaining two participants from this division, there was, as indicated, one who reported no change, from the past to the present, in the role of division workers, and one who attributed a more passive role to divisional workers in the past. With respect to the former, this participant (a 'wages' employee) simply indicated that, as she saw it, the role of divisional workers in the past was "basically the same" as it was at the present time (the participant had previously rated the current role of divisional workers as 'moderately passive'). With respect to the latter, this participant's attribution of a more passive role to divisional workers in the past – the participant had previously rated the current role of divisional workers as 'moderately active' – appeared to have been influenced, at least in part, by his experience elsewhere in the company. The participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that, prior to commencing work in the production division (some three years ago), he had worked for nine years in another division where the managers, relative to his current managers, had been "quite strict on the workers". The participant subsequently provided an example, in this instance from his more recent past, of the more passive role which he believed was played by divisional workers in the past. He recounted how, in the early months of his employment with the production division, he had come up with an idea for the treatment of a particular waste product which, if implemented, could save the company a considerable amount of money. Despite having confirmation of the worth of his idea from one of the company's technical experts, the participant's supervisor at the time did not support the idea and

instructed the participant to dispose of the product in question. The participant described his compliance with this instruction as follows:

He said: 'Scrap it.' I said: 'Whatever you say.' So I scrapped it. That was his job – his job as foreman was to say 'Scrap it'. So you scrap it. To me, that was very passive. ('wages' employee)

Apart from the above findings, one other finding of interest that emerged from the analysis of the present data set was that there were two participants (both 'wages' employees) who, despite being reminded of their previous X/Y rating of the current role of divisional workers, initially responded to Question 7 by talking about some seemingly unrelated aspect of their past experience in the division. One of these participants made the comment that she was "a lot more fussy" (presumably, with respect to the quality of her work) now than she had been in the past; the other participant made reference to the fact that, in the past, "you didn't have so many women in the workforce". A possible interpretation of these responses is that they provide further evidence of the difficulty experienced by participants in conceptualising a role for workers in terms of the kinds of abstract, or theoretical, dimensions with which they had been presented.

Methodological implications of the above findings. There are a number of methodological issues which are raised by the above findings. These are discussed in point form below:

1. The findings for Question 7, like those for Question 2, provided evidence of problems associated with the conceptualisation of a role for workers (in this case, a past role) in terms of the active/passive dichotomy described. In particular, participants from the tooling division seemed to have difficulty with the concept of an 'active' role for workers, which was variously interpreted to mean a role in which workers actively opposed those in authority and engaged in 'win-lose' negotiations with them (two participants), and a role in which workers practised multi-skilling as opposed to task specialisation (one participant). There was also the comment by one participant from this division that, in the more distant past, divisional workers "didn't really have a role", implying perhaps some further difficulty with the framing of one's experience in terms of this dichotomy. While the problems in this regard were by no means exclusive to the tooling division, they were more evident in the data for this division than in the corresponding data for the production division. It is possible, therefore, that the active/passive dichotomy had less relevance for the members of this division, than for

the members of the production division. Indeed, as indicated in Study I, it was the researcher's impression, based on an association of several years with this division, that divisional members had had little exposure, over time, to a more enriched role for workers of the kind that the definition of an "active" orientation was intended to imply.

2. With respect to the usefulness, in the present method, of seeking information about the historical context of participant experience, the findings for the production division were more informative in this regard than were the findings for the tooling division. One explanation for this may be that, because there was less interpretive inconsistency indicated in the findings for the production division (see point 1. above), these findings provided a more coherent picture of the value of historical data. In particular, they provided some support for the idea that past experience helps to shape current perceptions and that a knowledge of past experience can, therefore, provide important insights into the meaning of current perceptions. For example, the finding that the workers in the production division were perceived to play a predominantly passive role at the present time – interestingly, the researcher's own impression of this role was that it was relatively active, at least when compared with the corresponding role of workers in the tooling division – is perhaps better understood when it is viewed in the context of the more active role which the workers in this division reportedly played in the past (as manifested in their involvement in activities associated with the Team Concept). In a similar vein, the finding that there was one participant from this division who, in contrast to his colleagues, rated the current role of divisional workers as active, makes more sense when it is viewed in the context of this participant's past experience in another division of the company, in which workers reportedly played a very passive role. The preceding arguments, while they are based on the responses of a small number of participants only, nevertheless draw attention to the potential value of historical data of the kind generated by Question 7 and, as such, provide at least tentative justification for the retention of this question in any subsequent revision of the present method.

3. The findings for Question 7 confirmed the importance of establishing a time frame for participant experience. While the researcher was not as diligent as she might have been in seeking information of relevance in this regard (this was partly due to time constraints), when this information was obtained it served to amply illustrate that organisation members can differ considerably in terms of what, for them, constitutes the

'past'. For example, as indicated in point 2. above, there were some participants from the production division for whom the 'past' constituted the early years of the division's set-up; for another, shorter-serving, participant from this division, his 'past' was defined by his experience in the division in which he had first commenced work with the company. Similar differences were found among the participants from the tooling division. Interestingly, while all of the participants from this division had a considerable divisional history upon which to draw (the shortest-serving participant from this division had been with the division for sixteen years), there were some participants who, when asked about their past experience, made reference to the recent past (less than five years ago), and others who talked about the more distant past (at least ten years ago). This latter finding suggests that a distinction might need to be drawn between an individual's chronological past and his/her psychologically salient past.

4. The fourth and final point is that the above findings draw attention to the need to consider, not only the content of organisation members' past experience (in this case, whether workers in the past played a more active, or a more passive role than workers at the present time), but also the affective response of organisation members to that experience. As indicated, the findings for the production division provided evidence that the members of this division had had some past exposure, via practices associated with the Team Concept, to a more active role for divisional workers. Importantly, however, members' experience of this role did not appear to have been particularly positive. Among other things, it was suggested that workers' efforts in relation to their more enriched role – including making suggestions for change and recording work-related information – were not actively encouraged by divisional management. The legacy of this experience was that recent efforts, by the division's current management, to resurrect certain aspects of the Team Concept had reportedly been met with some resistance from workers. An important implication of this latter finding is that, without a knowledge of the historical context of organisation members' experience – in terms of both its content and affective dimensions – management's understanding of, and ability to deal effectively with, such resistance is likely to be curtailed.

A review of the corresponding findings for the role of supervisors (see Appendix B2, pp. 613-617) provides additional support for the points above regarding the methodological implications of the findings for the role of workers. For example, the

findings for the role of supervisors served to further illustrate the value of historical data. In the case of the tooling division, these data depicted a relatively long history of no change in the more or less directive role which divisional supervisors were perceived to play. In the case of the production division, perceptions of the past role of divisional supervisors differed, depending on the particular time frame within which the participant was operating. Moreover, these differences helped to explain differences among the participants from this division in their perception of the current role of divisional supervisors. Interestingly, there was one participant from the production division who based his evaluation of the past role of divisional supervisors, not on personal experience (this participant had been with the company for a very short time only), but rather on what he had heard from fellow employees. These data drew attention to the possibility that knowledge acquired through socialisation may be just as important in influencing the way in which organisation members interpret their experience as knowledge acquired through direct experience.

The final point can be made that, while the concepts of 'directive' and 'consultative' seemed to present fewer difficulties than the corresponding concepts of 'active' and 'passive' (in terms of the meanings which participants attributed to them), it was still the case that there were some participants who, despite being prompted to do so, did not evaluate the past role of supervisors in terms of these concepts. This again brings into question the use, in the present method, of the Theory X/Theory Y framework.

Q8: Do you think that the role played by workers in this division at the present time is likely to change/stay the same? If you think that it will change, how will it change? Why will it change in this way? If you think that it will stay the same, why?

Tooling Division. Five participants responded to this question. Three participants (including one supervisor and two 'wages' employees) responded in a way which suggested that they did not anticipate any change in the role of divisional workers in the future, and two participants (a supervisor and a 'wages' employee) suggested that the role of divisional workers might become more active. These findings are discussed in more detail below.

With respect to the participants whose responses implied no change, there was one (a supervisor) who predicted that, in the future, there would be fewer workers in the division with characteristics similar to those of his 'best' worker (an individual whom the participant had described as having an ability to think ahead, showing an interest in

the job, and being self-motivated, in the sense of being able to “do things without being goaded and driven into it”). The reason for this, it was argued, was that there had been a change in the broader social context such that people today were more self-interested, and more expecting of immediate gratification for their efforts, than they had been in the past. The implication was that workers today constituted a different ‘breed’ from workers in the past. A second problem, as this participant saw it, was that the industrial relations environment had changed such that much of the power and authority that was once invested in the supervisory role was now held by the unions. These views are expressed verbatim in the following excerpt:

...the tendency nowadays is for people on the job, and this is part of our social thing I think, that people want to do less for more rewards, that’s the basis of it. In fact, some of the young people that we get in now think that the world owes them a living; they want the best conditions and everything right from the word go, before they’ve actually learnt anything... I mean it was a bit the same when I was young, but we were under far stricter discipline than what you can apply now. You can’t apply the discipline now like you could because of the social system, not only in here but outside. I mean in our day you could get a cuff under the ear [whereas] you certainly can’t do that now... The power of the unions now too [has] got that way where a person has got to do something really wrong for you to be on safe ground to take some action against him... It’s all wrapped up in legality now. (staff, supervisory)

Interestingly, there is an implicit assumption in the above excerpt that strict supervisory control and discipline are the appropriate means by which to improve worker performance. Such an assumption is, of course, consistent with a Theory X, rather than a Theory Y, view of workers.

The response of a second ‘no change’ participant conveyed this participant’s considerable pessimism about the future of the division more generally. It was suggested that, because the company no longer regarded the division as integral to its operations, it had allowed the division to decline to the point where divisional members no longer had any opportunity for promotion and where the only remaining inducement to work was the challenge of the work itself. The implication was that, given this state of affairs, it was unlikely that anything whatsoever would change in the division in the future. In the participant’s own words:

Well, we seem to have stagnated these last few years. The way I see it, this company really doesn’t want us. That’s the feeling I get. We’re put to one side virtually and we’ve stagnated. There’s been no one promoted, they’ve just been tied up. So we’re in a situation... we’ll get jobs in that no one else wants to do and we’ll do them... Or no one else can do them and we’ve done them. That’s the challenge – in the work, not in you’re looking forward to being promoted or whatever, that doesn’t come into it. (‘wages’ employee)

Finally, a third 'no change' participant indicated that, as he saw it, change was unlikely because the age and length of service of the majority of the division's members was such that they were all "sort of in a groove" and they were "very hard to shake up".

Both of the participants who anticipated a more active future role for divisional workers conceptualised this role in terms of a closer relationship between supervisors (or management) and workers. In one case, the participant's response recalled the above theme of the diminishing power of supervisors. This participant (a 'wages' employee with leading hand status) indicated that, as he saw it, workers and supervisors were beginning to interact much more closely with one another. The reason for this was that supervisors had reportedly lost some of the control which they had once enjoyed and, as a result, were less dictatorial now than they had been in the past. In commenting on the diminished control of supervisors, the participant made the following observation:

I don't think the supervisor can really fire somebody now – definitely not straight out. He's got to put him on report so many times, almost sort of put it before a board before [he] can get rid of anybody. He can't just say 'You're out'. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

The second participant (a supervisor) argued that advances in technology would necessitate a closer working relationship between workers and management in the future. Essentially, this participant's argument was that, as the skill requirements of jobs increased (a consequence of advances in technology), so too would it be necessary for the level of education and training of workers to increase. This, in turn, would lead to some equalising of the status of workers and management and would make it possible for these two groups to communicate more directly with one another. Apart from advances in technology, the diminishing size of the tooling division was also considered, by this participant, to be a factor which would bring about a closer working relationship between workers and management. These views were expressed verbatim, as follows:

Yes, [the role of workers] will change. Well, technology itself is going to change, so [the worker's] got to change with it. We will need, in this organisation, higher educated people in the trades groups, to be able to keep up with the technology we've got... you're getting onto a level where you're going to have very similar two people, the management and the tradesman... you're going to be still very highly educated people to be able to converse with.. each other a lot more. And because also the Toolroom is getting smaller in numbers, and will get smaller in numbers, and you'll have a much closer relationship between management and [workers]. (staff, supervisory)

There are two general points which can be made in relation to the above findings for the tooling division. First, these findings provided further evidence to suggest that the active/passive dichotomy may lack relevance for the participants from this division. Not only were direct references to this dichotomy lacking in participants' responses to Question 8, but there was also a sense in which the responses given by some participants failed to properly address the question (a case in point being the first participant above who anticipated that workers in the future would be more self-interested than their counterparts in the past had been). Moreover, the problem of interpretive inconsistency was once again encountered. For example, in one case, a more active future role for divisional workers was conceptualised as involving, simply, "a bit more interaction between the supervisors and the men", brought about by the fact that supervisors could no longer be as dictatorial as they had once been.

The second point concerns participants' explanations for why the role of the workers in the division would, or would not, change in the future. The general impression conveyed by these data was that there was a lack of perceived control over outcomes in this regard, with participants variously making reference to the influence of factors such as changes in the society at large, changes in the industrial relations context, advances in technology, and the downsizing of the division. The reader may recall that this tendency for participants from the tooling division to attribute cause externally was noted previously in the findings for Study I. In view of this, and also given the argument by Bate (1984) that some organisations (groups) are culturally predisposed to think in this way – Bate classified this as 'depersonalisation', a cultural orientation whereby organisation members commonly attribute their problems to non-human factors, or to factors outside of their control (see Section 1.3, p. 31) – the argument might again be made that questions which seek information about participants' causal attributions (whether in relation to experienced, or anticipated, changes) may be particularly useful for eliciting information about the organisation's (group's) culture.

Production Division. All participants responded to this question. Four participants (including two supervisors and two 'wages' employees) anticipated no change in the role of divisional workers in the future; one participant (a 'wages' employee) anticipated a change towards a more active role; and one participant (a 'wages' employee) anticipated a change towards a more passive role. These findings are elaborated upon below.

With respect, first of all, to the 'no change' participants, all of these participants had previously judged the current role of divisional workers to be more or less passive. In arguing that this role was unlikely to change in the future, one of these participants (a supervisor) drew attention to the very traditional style of management which he believed prevailed in the division. According to this participant, the majority of the division's managers had been with the company for a very long time, they had all been indoctrinated in the same way – in the participant's own words, "very similar to an army situation" – and, as a result, it was likely that they would "continue to run the place [in] exactly the same way" as it had always been run. A second participant (a 'wages' employee) argued that a change in the role of divisional workers was unlikely because, while divisional management might espouse a commitment to a changed role for workers – management might, for example, espouse the importance of sharing information with workers – it was the participant's experience that this commitment was never borne out in practice.

The other two 'no change' participants (a supervisor and a 'wages' employee) shared the view that, while there was the potential for divisional workers to play a more active role in the future – made possible by the current restructuring of the award⁶⁵ – it was unlikely that this potential would be realised. The reason, according to one participant, was that there were not enough workers with the motivation and interest to benefit from opportunities for greater involvement. In the participant's own words:

...it's my belief that you'll get a few, a minority, that'll try their best, but you'll have the majority that'll just sit here and let the rest of the ship cruise, sail into the sunset, you know. They'll just sort of lay back passively [with the attitude] 'What do you want me to do?'. (staff, supervisor)

This participant argued further that, unless the "good people" were encouraged and given "some sort of incentive" to continue to perform, the role of divisional workers in the future might become even more passive than it was at the present time. The other participant argued that efforts to encourage a more active role for divisional workers were unlikely to come to much because of the cynicism with which workers viewed such efforts. As indicated in the following excerpt, this participant clearly saw some

⁶⁵ Towards the end of the 1980's, a major restructure of the vehicle industry award was undertaken. This was a tripartite initiative involving the government, the unions, and local automotive manufacturers. Among its main objectives were the simplification of existing award classifications and the introduction of industry-wide procedures for increasing employees' skills and knowledge. Award Restructuring can be seen as the precursor to the more recent Enterprise Bargaining.

parallels between the practices associated with the Team Concept of the past, and those associated with the more recent Award Restructuring:

Well, when I saw this restructuring, what they're going to do type of thing, and read some of that, I think 'Heck, we had that years ago' and they're talking about reintroducing it... I mean, Plastics, I always thought was way ahead of all that years ago, and they chucked it out. Management got rid of it, you know. ('wages' employee)

This participant also expressed some concern about the ability of the division's current management to bring about a change towards a more active role for divisional workers. According to the participant, the main problem in this regard was that ineffective managers were never removed, but simply transferred to other managerial roles of equally high status. In this way, the poor performance of the ineffective manager continued to have an impact.

Of the remaining two participants from this division there was, as indicated, one who anticipated a change towards a more active role for divisional workers and one who anticipated a change towards a more passive role for divisional workers. The first of these participants argued that, because of improved managerial attitudes toward workers, the role of divisional workers in the future was likely to be even more active than it was at the present time (this participant had previously rated the current role of divisional workers as 'moderately active'). According to this participant, there was a growing recognition among divisional managers that shop floor workers constituted a valuable resource and that the way to increased productivity lay not in more, and stricter, supervision but rather in efforts to increase the job satisfaction of workers. In the participant's own words:

It will change, it's going to get better. ...management is beginning to recognise in little ways that people who run the shop floor, the people on the shop floor... you can have all the supervision in the world, you can have one supervisor standing over one operator and that still won't make them produce any more parts. But [if] you can get the worker to enjoy what he does... all of a sudden 50% goes up in the work [output] because it's no longer a bind, it's no longer a job, it's something he enjoys doing. By that I mean they're getting us involved in everybody else's areas and they're beginning to show an active concern. ('wages' employee)

In the case of the second participant, it was initially argued that, whether or not there would be a change towards a more active, or a more passive role, for divisional workers in the future would depend entirely upon management:

It's up to management... [workers] are passive basically. If management want them to be passive, they will be. If they want them to be actively involved, they've got to give them the first nudge. ('wages' employee)

After reflecting on how her own attitudes toward work had change – nowadays, she felt that she should “just come in, ask what they’ve got to do, and do it... like the little robot” – the participant reached the conclusion that, in the future, divisional workers would probably play an even more passive role than they played at the present time (the latter having previously been rated as ‘moderately passive’).

One general point that can be made in relation to the above findings is that the participants from the production division seemed to experience less difficulty than their counterparts from the tooling division, in framing their anticipated future experience in terms of the active/passive dichotomy. Not only were there more direct references to this dichotomy in participants’ responses to this question – that is, the terms ‘active’ and ‘passive’ were used more frequently – but there was also more evidence of participants having interpreted these terms as intended. This finding is not inconsistent with evidence suggesting that the members of the production division, compared with their counterparts from tooling, had had some exposure, over time, to work practices that, on the one hand, implied a passive role for workers and, on the other, implied a more active role for workers.

The point can also be made that the attributional data for the production division provided an interesting comparison with the corresponding data for the tooling division. Whereas tooling division participants seemed to attribute outcomes (in this case, related to the future role of divisional workers) to the influence of factors external to the division, production division participants seemed to place more emphasis on the influence of factors internal to the division. As indicated above, there were references by the latter to the role of divisional management (their style, attitudes, competence etc.) in influencing future outcomes; the attitudes of divisional workers were also seen as important in this regard; and there was a reference, by one participant, to problems associated with the division’s operating reward system (which reportedly provided workers with little incentive to become more actively involved). Given the previous argument about the possible cultural significance of attributional data, it would seem appropriate that, in revising the present method, allowance should be made for the further investigation of organisation member attributions.

In terms of a more general assessment of the value of Question 8, a review of the above findings, for both divisions, suggests a number of reasons for why this question might usefully be retained. These are as follows:

1. While there was some variability, within each division, in the content of participants' comments about the anticipated future context, the general impression conveyed by these data was one of considerable pessimism about the future. In fact, there was only one participant from the total sample who expressed any optimism about the future. This was a participant from the production division who believed that things would "get better" because divisional managers were gradually coming to regard shop floor workers as a valuable resource. There was also evidence of a perception in both divisions that, if there was to be some future change – importantly, a majority of participants from each division anticipated no change, or very little change, in the future – then this change was unlikely to be taken up very easily, or incorporated very rapidly. There were references, for example, to the likelihood of change being a "slow process"; to the likelihood that the workforce would be "very hard to shake up"; to the indoctrination of management personnel in traditional ways of thinking and behaving; and to the cynical attitudes of workers toward change.

The above observations suggest that information about the future context of organisation member experience might be valuable in so far as it may provide insights into the likely responsiveness of the organisation (group) to change, and it may also serve as a kind of gauge for the affective dimension of the organisation's (group's) culture. With respect to this latter point, the idea here is that organisation members' views about the future (whether positive or negative) may reveal more about how members feel about their current situation than information pertaining to the present time only.

2. Apart from the general mood of negativity which they conveyed, the future context data – particularly those for the tooling division – were noteworthy because of the number of references to the past which they contained. As indicated, participants from the tooling division variously made reference to the better prospects for promotion which existed in this division in the past (one participant), to the greater control and authority invested in the supervisory role at the time (two participants), and, by association, to the relative lack of power, in the past, of employee unions (one participant). While participants from the production division were somewhat less inclined to talk about the past, reference was nevertheless made to the division's past experience of the Team Concept (one participant) and also to the veteran status of the division's management, many of whom had been with the company as apprentice

tradesmen (one participant). These observations draw attention to the possibility that information generated in response to questions about the future context may provide clues as to which aspect of organisation (group) member experience (for example, whether members' experience of the past, or whether their anticipated future experience) may have been most influential in shaping the organisation's (group's) culture. Drawing on the above findings, the tendency for participants from the tooling division to talk about the past, when asked about the future, suggests that this division may be more strongly rooted in the past than in the anticipated future.

3. A third and final argument in favour of seeking information about the future context is that such information may reveal the extent to which organisation members share a clearly articulated, and coherent, view of the future. Despite the emergence in the above findings of a sense of shared negative affect about the future, there was, as indicated, considerable variability in the content of participants' comments about the future (and what it might hold with respect to the role of divisional workers). This kind of variability, it might be argued, might have implications for the ability and willingness of the members of the group (organisation) to accommodate changes in relation to the issue in question. In particular, change may be more difficult in groups whose members lack a clear direction for the future, than in groups whose members are able to clearly articulate such a direction.

Finally, a review of the corresponding findings for the role of supervisors (see Appendix B2, pp. 617-621) draws attention to a number of parallels between these findings and the above findings for the role of workers. Once again, the attributional data provided evidence to suggest that the divisions might differ in terms of members' causal attributions (in this case, concerning whether or not there would be a change in the role of divisional supervisors in the future). As above, participants from the tooling division were more inclined to attribute outcomes in this regard to the influence of factors outside of, rather than within, their control (including, for example, changes in company policy, an increase in the power of unions, improved educational standards in the population as a whole and, hence, a better educated workforce, and advances in technology). In contrast, while the corresponding data for the production division contained some external attributions (for example, one participant commented on how global competition would force a redefinition of the supervisory role), there were also references in these data to the influence of factors internal to the division (for example,

one participant made reference to the influence of a new manager who had ‘‘brought a breath of fresh air into the place’’, while another participant argued that, in his opinion, it would be the resourcefulness of the workforce which would ultimately convince supervisors of the value of a more consultative approach). These findings provide further support for the case made above in favour of an extension of the current investigation of organisation member attributions.

The findings for the role of supervisors also served to further support the above argument that information generated in response to questions about the future context may be of value in so far as it may provide clues as to the dominant orientation of the organisation’s (group’s) culture. Once again, there was evidence of a relatively strong past-orientation in the tooling division, with the participants from this division being much more likely than their counterparts from the production division, to make reference to their past experience when asked about their anticipated future experience. Reference was made, for example, to the higher status enjoyed by supervisors in the past (‘‘...a supervisor was held on a higher pedestal years ago’’), to the style of supervision which was regarded as acceptable in the past (which was such that workers had little autonomy and were ‘‘treated like slaves’’), and to the way in which supervisors were traditionally inducted into the role (with ‘‘no training at all virtually’’).

One last point that can be made in relation to the findings for the role of supervisors is that these findings, in contrast to the findings for the role of workers, provided some evidence of a difference between the divisions in participant perceptions of the likelihood of future change (concerning, in this case, the role of divisional supervisors). Specifically, a majority of participants from the production division (four out of the five who responded to this question) regarded a change in the role of divisional supervisors as inevitable or, at the very least, quite possible. Moreover, there was good agreement among these participants about the nature of the anticipated change which, in general terms, was seen as involving the devolution of some of the supervisor’s current responsibilities to leading hands, and a redefinition of the supervisory role to incorporate activities such as planning, giving technical advice, coaching and consulting. In contrast, in the tooling division, a change in the role of divisional supervisors was not only seen as less likely, but of the two participants who seemed confident that change would occur, one was very negative about what he saw as the undermining of the power and authority which was rightfully invested in the supervisory

role. Finally, the data for the tooling division also contained elements of the kind of negative affect to which reference was made above.

Q9: Are you aware of the role played by workers in other organisations? Give examples. What was the nature of the other organisation(s) and how did you come to know about it?

Tooling Division. This question was asked of four participants only. Of these, there were two (a supervisor and a 'wages' employee) who indicated that they were unaware of the role played by workers in other organisations. In one case, the participant explained that this was because he had "only ever worked here". A third participant (a 'wages' employee) indicated that he some knowledge, acquired through friends who worked there, of the role played by workers in the local branch of the chemicals company, ICI. In this firm, workers reportedly had "far greater input" as indicated, for example, in their representation in meetings of the company board, in which decisions were made about personnel recruitment and promotion. The participant indicated that he was very much in favour of this particular practice because, in his opinion, it would help to ensure that people would be hired, or promoted, on the basis of merit, rather than on the basis of family connections – "your father may be on staff" – or the ability to win favour with those in authority – "the blue-eyed boy syndrome".

Finally, in response to this question, the fourth participant (a supervisor) indicated that he could comment only on the role played by workers in other tooling facilities which he had visited in Australia. It was noted that, while these facilities were very similar to the Engineering Toolroom (the participant had been with this division for 36 years) in terms of how they were structured, they were generally much smaller and, as a result, "management have been much closer to the people". The participant also made reference to the poorer physical conditions (eg. facilities such as rest-rooms) and lack of security, leading to high employee turnover, which he had observed in tooling facilities that were non-unionised.

While no firm conclusions can be drawn on the basis of the above findings, an emerging pattern is that, among the members of this division, direct knowledge of the role of workers in other organisations (that is, knowledge based on personal experience of having worked elsewhere) may be limited.

Production Division. All participants from the production division were asked about their knowledge of the role of workers in other organisations. Three participants

(including two 'wages' employees and one supervisor) were able to respond to the question on the basis of their personal experience of having worked elsewhere. Of these, one recalled his years as an apprentice in an organisation in the United Kingdom. In describing what the workers in this organisation did, the participant made no reference to the active/passive dichotomy, but rather drew attention to the culture of low productivity which this organisation supported:

There I [saw] a different culture... I have never seen so many people do so little, honestly. I mean, I think back now... I can understand why the government wanted to privatise [the organisation]... They were some of the best dart players and card players in England, I can tell you that. ('wages' employee)

The second participant commented on her experience, some twenty three years previously, in a job in which employees were paid according to a piece-rate system. Such a system, it was argued, fostered very passive attitudes in employees, such that:

They didn't want to question things. The only time they got upset was when the machines didn't work, and they weren't earning money. ('wages' employee)

The third participant responded to the question on the basis of his experience in a number of other organisations. The participant indicated that, compared with his current organisation, these other organisations supported a climate of much greater trust between workers and management. The size of the organisation was regarded as an important factor here, with reference being made to the experience of working in smaller companies which were set up in such a way as to enable managers to interact "on a one-to-one basis with the people". According to the participant, a further problem for his current organisation in this regard was that the rationalisation of the workforce, over the years, had led to considerable job insecurity:

...the place has been going for so long, as I've said, it's just sort of lumbered on and lumbered on. And the people who are left have the distrust in them, they foster that, you know. If you're scared, everyone around you is going to be scared... (staff, supervisory)

In addition to the three participants above, there was one other participant from the production division (a supervisor) who reported having some knowledge of the role of workers in other organisations. In this case, however, the participant's knowledge in this regard had been acquired only indirectly – that is, through contact with a relative who worked elsewhere. The participant suggested that, while the role of workers in his relative's organisation was very passive (compared with the role of workers in his own organisation), far from creating dissatisfaction, this role was one which workers enjoyed

because it provided them with a clear and unambiguous understanding of what they were expected to do. In the participant's own words:

...it's a completely different sort of lifestyle up there. The role there is virtually... you've got an area, you're told what to do, and you work that way, and they seem to be a lot happier in what they're doing. It seems to be an 'us-and-them' sort of situation, but at least they get some sort of... you know where you stand. You know what the rules are... and everybody understands it. (staff, supervisory)

The participant went on to point out that a recent attempt, on the part of this organisation's management, to develop a more participative work culture, had encountered some difficulties. The problem, as he saw it, was that practices associated with "worker participation" and "worker democracy" had the disadvantage of creating considerable role ambiguity for superiors and subordinates alike:

...it's leaving grey areas. ...who's the boss, and who's not? ...what areas are you going to put the controls on? Where does it stop? If you leave that open, you create grey areas of demarcation.

Finally, there were two participants from this division (both 'wages' employees) who indicated that they were unable to comment on the role of workers in other organisations. In one case, the participant was an older employee with some twenty years' service with the current organisation and, in the other, the participant was a young employee in her first job.

In conclusion, the above findings for the production division confirmed the expectation (see Section 3.2.1, p. 163) that, given their demographic characteristics, the members of this division would be more likely than their counterparts from the tooling division to have had direct experience of working in other organisations. Given the small sample size, and also given problems associated with depicting this experience in terms of a common framework (in this case, the active/passive dichotomy), it is not possible to comment with any confidence on how this experience might have influenced participants' experience of their current organisation. At the same time, however, one might reasonably expect there to be some kind of association in this regard and, in this sense, the further investigation of organisation members' 'other' experience would seem to be warranted.

Finally, with respect to the corresponding findings for the role of supervisors, it was not surprising, given the nature of the question being asked – Question 9 was, in a general sense, concerned simply with the extent of the participant's knowledge of other organisations – that the same pattern of responding emerged in these findings as in the

above findings for the role of workers. That is, participants from the production division were more likely than their counterparts from the tooling division to report some direct knowledge of the role of supervisors in other organisations. The same conclusion is, therefore, suggested by these findings as by the findings for the role of workers.

3.5 Conclusion

As indicated in the introduction to this study, the aim of the study was to pilot a first attempt at the more systematic assessment of certain aspects of an organisation's (group's) culture (specifically, beliefs and assumptions pertaining to Schein's (1985) Category 3 – 'The Nature of Human Nature'). Based on the results of the study, a number of conclusions were able to be drawn regarding which features of the method seemed to work well – in so far as eliciting information of the kind that was being sought – and which did not. A summary of some of the main insights that were obtained in this regard is provided below and, where appropriate, reference is again made to how these insights might inform the subsequent refinement of the method.

Strengths of the method

1. The results of the study provided reasonable evidence of the method's capacity to detect differences between the divisions, in this case, in members' experience of the role of divisional workers (supervisors). There was evidence, for example, that participants from the two divisions differed in the criteria which they used to judge the effectiveness of the workers (supervisors) in their division, as well as in the criteria used to classify a worker (supervisor) as a 'best' worker ('best' supervisor). Differences were also indicated in participants' past experience of the role of workers (supervisors) in their division and in the extent of their experience of the role played by workers (supervisors) in other organisations. The point can be made that the differences identified in this regard were, on the whole, consistent with the researcher's impression of 'cultural' differences between the divisions.

2. The results of the study confirmed the importance of asking participants to explain, or elaborate on, their responses to the questions they were asked. While this information might have been sought more consistently than it was – this point has implications for the subsequent revision of the method – when it was provided (whether in response to prompting, or spontaneously), it proved valuable for a number of reasons. For example, it served to clarify the meanings of participants' ratings of the respective

roles of workers and supervisors – whether more or less passive or active in the case of workers, or more or less directive or consultative in the case of supervisors – and, in so doing, revealed the extent to which these meanings were consistent with one another and also consistent with the meanings intended by the researcher. Similarly, in the case of participants' satisfaction ratings, qualifying and elaborative data proved valuable in so far as they provided a check on whether or not a participant's expressed satisfaction, or dissatisfaction, was actually related to the topic under investigation. For example, there was one instance in which these data revealed that, instead of rating his satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the role played by the workers in his division (as he had been asked to do), the participant had rated his satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality, or calibre, of the particular workers for whom he was directly responsible.

In the present study, the opportunity to explain, or elaborate on, their responses also allowed those participants who felt unable to express an opinion about some aspect of their division *as a whole*, to indicate that this was so. While it might be argued that the obvious way to deal with such contingencies, at least in the case of forced-choice questions, would be to include a 'cannot respond' or 'don't know' response category, there is a danger that, if given the opportunity *not* to express an opinion about a particular issue, respondents may be less likely to think seriously about the issue than they would be if no such opportunity existed. In this sense, an advantage of the present method, which includes no formal response categories of this kind, is that respondents are unlikely to admit that they are unable to answer a question, without first having given the question (along with its various response options, where these were specified) some, hopefully careful, thought.

3. The above arguments regarding the value of qualifying and elaborative data are not intended as a case against the degree of structure which was adopted in the present method. Given the more systematic approach to the assessment of organisational (group) culture which was sought, it would have been inappropriate for the method to have taken the form of a completely unstructured interview. In seeking information about a particular aspect of organisational (group) culture – in this case, beliefs and assumptions about the respective roles of workers and supervisors – it was important to obtain a body of coherent information of relevance to the topic at hand. Clearly, this would not have been possible without the use of some fairly highly focussed questions, the responses to which could be shown to be linked in meaningful ways. As indicated,

the results of the study provided evidence of a number of such linkages – for example, the link between participants' past experience of the role of workers (supervisors) and their current perceptions of this role – and, in this sense, the adoption of a more structured format for the present method can be seen to have been vindicated.

4. Another feature of the method which seemed to work well was the inclusion of specific questions about the context of participants' experience. As indicated above, there was some evidence to suggest that a knowledge of participants' past experience could valuably inform one's understanding of participants' perceptions of their current experience. For example, the knowledge that participants from the production division had had some past experience of a more active role for divisional workers (through their involvement in the Team Concept) helped to explain the perception, among these participants, that the workers in their division at the present time played a predominantly passive role. Another important insight provided by the data pertaining to the past context was that, within a given group, individuals could differ in terms of what, for them, constituted the meaningful past. The finding that participants referred to different periods of time when they talked about the past and that, for a given participant, his/her chronological past could differ from his/her subjectively important past, highlighted the need to seek more specific information about the time frame of participants' past experience in the subsequent revision of the method.

Questions about the future and 'other' contexts, while they were of less obvious value than questions about the past context, were nevertheless also shown to generate information of potential cultural significance. With respect to the former, there was evidence to suggest that information about the future context might provide some insight into the affective dimension of an organisation's (group's) culture and that this, in turn, along with members' ability, or lack thereof, to clearly articulate a future, might provide clues as to the organisation's (group's) likely responsiveness to change. With respect to the latter, the finding that participants from the tooling division had had less experience of other organisations than their counterparts from the production division suggested the possibility that experience of other organisations might help to explain the degree of embeddedness of an organisation's (group's) culture.

There was also evidence to suggest that contextual information may be of value in that it may highlight differences between organisations (groups) in the particular aspect, or domain, of context (whether the present, the past, the anticipated future, or the other)

which is most dominant in members' thinking (and which may, therefore, have been most influential in shaping the culture of the organisation (group)). As indicated, the finding in the present study that participants from the tooling division, when talking about their anticipated future experience, frequently made reference to their past experience, confirmed the researcher's impression that this division (more so than the production division) supported a culture which was very strongly rooted in the past.

Overall, the above arguments would seem to provide fairly strong grounds for the further investigation of the way in which organisation (group) member experience in relation to different domains of context might inform an understanding of the organisation's (group's) culture.

5. Finally, the results of the study provided further support for the argument (suggested by the results of Study I) that attributional data may be of value for understanding organisational culture. As indicated, there was evidence to suggest that the two divisions might differ in terms of members' attributions concerning why things may, or may not, change in the future. It would be interesting in the forthcoming study to look more carefully at members' causal attributions and, in particular, to try to establish the extent to which these reflect a consistent, or common, style. A useful modification to the present method in this regard would be to seek information, not only about member perceptions of the cause of anticipated changes, but also about their perceptions of the cause of changes already experienced.

Limitations of the method

1. One feature of the method which was found to work less well than expected was the attempt to arrive at some classification of the respective roles of workers and supervisors in the two divisions, in terms of McGregor's (1960) Theory X and Theory Y dimensions. As indicated, a number of problems were encountered in this regard. For example, with respect to the Theory X, Theory Y rating question, it was found that participants' interpretations of the key terms used to describe these dimensions – 'passive' and 'active' in the case of the role of workers, and 'directive' and 'consultative' in the case of the role of supervisors – were not always consistent with the interpretations intended. It was also the case that the description of each of these dimensions in terms of a number of characteristic behaviours (attitudes) – this was necessitated by the complexity of the dimensions – gave rise to the problem of some participants basing their rating, not on a consideration of the full range of characteristic

behaviours (attitudes) specified, but rather on the basis of a consideration of a single behaviour (attitude) which may have had particular salience for the participant.

Another limitation of this feature of the method to which attention was drawn was that, contrary to what was intended, it was not always possible to classify participants' responses to the 'context' questions in terms of the Theory X, Theory Y dimensions. In other words, despite being prompted to do so, there were some participants who failed to draw on these dimensions when describing the role of divisional workers (supervisors) in the past, the anticipated future, and in relation to the 'other' context. This finding, along with the interpretive inconsistencies referred to above, raised questions about the extent to which these dimensions were relevant to participants themselves, in so far as offering them a framework within which they could meaningfully classify their experience. Even though there was evidence to suggest that participants from the production division may have been somewhat more at ease than their counterparts from the tooling division, in the application of these dimensions – this was attributed to the members of this division having had some actual experience of the contrasting roles of workers and supervisors which these dimensions attempted to represent – the problem remains that one cannot assume, a priori, that these dimensions will necessarily be relevant to organisation members.

In view of the above arguments, there would seem to be little value in attempting to directly measure a collective phenomenon, such as organisational culture, using hypothetical dimensions such as those identified by McGregor.

2. The 'evaluation questions' constituted a second feature of the method which proved to be less useful than anticipated. As indicated, in the case of the 'satisfaction' question, there was evidence to suggest that participants' satisfaction ratings may not always have been related to the topic under investigation (the example was given above of the participant who rated his satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the quality of the workers for whom he was directly responsible). This finding suggested the conclusion that, while participants might easily be able to rate their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with those aspects of their experience that are tangible and concrete (eg. their subordinates, supervisors, conditions of work etc.), it might be unrealistic to expect them to rate their satisfaction/dissatisfaction with more abstract notions, such as in this case, the role of workers (supervisors). In this sense, it was argued that the 'satisfaction' question possibly suffered from being overly 'academic'.

In the case of the 'effectiveness' question, participants' explanations of their effectiveness ratings proved to be less revealing than it was hoped they would be, in so far as providing insights into participants' beliefs about what constituted an appropriate role for workers (supervisors). As indicated, it was sometimes difficult to infer effectiveness criteria – that is, the criteria used, by participants, to evaluate the effectiveness of the workers (supervisors) in their division – from participants' explanations of their effectiveness ratings. There was also evidence that, in some cases, participants based their evaluations of the effectiveness of workers (supervisors) not, as intended, on criteria which they themselves considered to be important but rather on criteria which they believed the organisation (presumably management) regarded as important. The failure of the method to adequately distinguish between participants' personal values and the values which participants believed were supported by the organisation, is a subject to which attention is again drawn in point 3. below.

3. Finally, the results of the study highlighted a number of flaws in the design of the 'personal experience' questions. As indicated, one of the main problems in this regard was that these questions provided, at best, equivocal information only about the particular worker (supervisor) qualities and characteristics that were, and were not, valued in each division. For example, the variability which was indicated in participant responses to part (a) of these questions left some doubt as to the importance, to the *group*, of those qualities which were not mentioned by a majority of participants. One possibility that was suggested in this regard was that the qualities identified by some participants as being important may have been equally important to other participants who, for whatever reason, had simply forgotten to mention them. In a similar vein, there was a degree of uncertainty about the 'cultural' significance of the qualities which participants ascribed to their 'best'/'worst' worker (supervisor) in response to the latter parts of these questions (which asked about the worker's (supervisor's) view of the organisation and the nature of his/her relationship with supervision and with co-workers). For example, as indicated, the finding that all participants from the tooling division attributed a positive worker-supervisor relationship to their 'best' worker could not necessarily be interpreted to mean that, in this division, a worker's classification as a 'best' worker was *dependent upon* him/her having this quality.

There were a number of additional shortcomings of the 'personal experience' questions to which the results of the study drew attention. For example, there was some

evidence that the focus on extremes – in this case, ‘best’ and ‘worst’ workers (supervisors) – may have resulted in the identification of worker (supervisor) characteristics that were idiosyncratic rather than, as intended, more generally approved of, or more generally disapproved of. It was also the case that, while the questions pertaining to ‘worst’ workers (supervisors) were valuable in so far as they elicited information which, to a large extent, confirmed the findings of questions pertaining to ‘best’ workers (supervisors), they were redundant in the sense that they provided few additional insights of relevance to an understanding of the cultures of the two divisions being investigated. Finally, the finding that some participants sought to differentiate their own values (in this case, regarding important supervisor qualities) from those which they believed the company held, highlighted the need to make more of this distinction than was made in this, and other, categories of questions in the present method.

On the basis of the above limitations, a number of suggestions were made (more or less explicitly) regarding how the ‘personal experience’ questions might usefully be modified. Briefly summarised, these suggestions included: (i) the removal of Question 6, pertaining to ‘worst’ workers (‘worst’ supervisors); (ii) a shift in the focus of the inquiry to seek information about ‘good workers’ (‘good supervisors’) as opposed to ‘best workers’ (‘best supervisors’); (iii) the use of a more direct form of questioning along the lines of ‘What does a worker (supervisor) have to do to be thought of as a ‘good’ worker (‘good’ supervisor); (iv) the possible inclusion of specific prompts about behaviours in which a worker (supervisor) might engage in order to be thought of as a ‘good’ worker (‘good’ supervisor); and (v) the drawing of a distinction between the respondent’s personal values regarding what makes a ‘good’ worker (‘good’ supervisor) and the respondent’s beliefs about what the organisation values in this regard.

CHAPTER FOUR

STUDY III: PART 1

BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL INFORMATION

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 Presentation of Study III

In view of the amount of information generated by Study III, and given the need to report this information in some detail, it was decided, for the sake of readability, to present the contents of Study III in four separate chapters. The present chapter, Chapter Four, details the background to the study (ie. it introduces the study), in addition to providing procedural information concerning the method, approach to data analysis, and format for reporting the results. The next two chapters, Chapters Five and Six, report and discuss the main findings of Study III. It will be seen that, in these chapters, rather than report the results of all of the data analyses that were conducted, only those results which are sufficient to demonstrate key methodological points are presented. Results which provide further support for these points, but offer no new methodological insights, have been placed in the appendices. The final chapter, Chapter Seven, provides a conclusion to Study III in addition to discussing the possibilities for future research which are suggested by the combined results of the three studies which make up the present research.

4.1.2 Background to Study III

On the basis of insights provided by the results of Study II, a revision of the method being developed was subsequently undertaken. Broadly speaking, this revision involved retaining and, as deemed necessary, making modifications to, those aspects of the method that showed promise with respect to the assessment of organisational culture, and removing those aspects of the method that seemed to be ineffective, or redundant, in this regard. As with Study II, the main aim of the third, and final study, was evaluative. This study, like the one before it, sought information about the extent to which the method (in its revised form) offered a useful means by which cultural phenomena in organisations might be investigated. In the discussion which follows, the key features of

the revised method are described, together with the rationale for particular changes that were made to the method.

1. Issue-focussed interview. As previously, the method took the form of what Sackmann (1991) has called an 'issue-focussed' interview. In Study III, however, the focus of interviewing was somewhat narrower than it was in Study II. Whereas the method, in its original form, had been designed to tap prevailing views about both workers and supervisors⁶⁶ – through questioning about the respective roles of workers and supervisors – the revised method was concerned only with how workers were viewed. The decision to narrow the focus of interviewing in Study III in this way was based on the finding, from Study II, that information pertaining to the role of supervisors was largely redundant in the sense that it provided few additional *methodological* insights over and above those which had been provided by information pertaining to the role of workers. In attempting to infer organisation (group) member beliefs about the essential nature of workers, the specific focus was, once again, on the role of workers. However, in the revised method, interviewing was structured around two separate sub-topics (each of which had been addressed, but not clearly differentiated, in Study II). The first of these was concerned with what workers do (that is, their duties and activities), and the second was concerned with the defining characteristics of 'good' workers (previously, 'best' workers).

At this point, it is perhaps worth drawing the reader's attention again to the exploratory nature of the present research. The aim of this research was not to describe divisional culture in a car company per se but rather, as indicated, to test out a new method for investigating workplace culture. In view of this, it was important, indeed necessary, that the method took the form of an *issue focussed* interview. Had the interview lacked a specific focus (for example, if respondents had been allowed to talk very generally about their experience of organisational life), it would have been very difficult to evaluate the extent to which particular features of the method had, or had not, 'worked'.

2. Semi-structured interview. In the revised method, the semi-structured interview format, whereby open-ended and closed questions were combined, was also retained. This feature of the method differed, however, in so far as modifications had been made

⁶⁶ Such views can be regarded as constituting an organisational subset of beliefs and assumptions in Schein's Category 3 ('The Nature of Human Nature').

to the specific questions that were asked, in addition to which there was a more direct link between the open-ended and closed questions than there had been previously. In terms of the details of these changes, it can be seen from the revised interview protocol (a copy of which can be found in Appendix C1) that, for each sub-topic being addressed, respondents were first of all presented with an open-ended question about that topic. Thus, in Part A of the interview, respondents were asked, first of all, to comment on their perception of what it was that the workers in their division did at the present time (in terms of their main duties, as well as any other activities in which they were engaged); in Part B of the interview, respondents were asked about the characteristics of those workers in their division who were generally regarded as being 'good' workers. The inclusion of these questions in the revised protocol was supported by evidence from Study II suggesting that, while such questions may not elicit very detailed, or very articulate responses, they nevertheless give a sense of respondents' spontaneous thinking about the issue under investigation. It can also be argued that such questions serve the additional purpose of providing a platform from which to begin to explore the issue in more depth.

From the revised protocol, it can also be seen that, for each sub-topic being investigated, the initial open-ended question was followed by a series of closed questions, or 'prompts'. These prompts were linked directly to the subject of the open-ended question and were designed to elicit additional information of relevance to this question. Thus, in Part A of the interview, respondents were prompted as to the involvement of the workers in their division in a number of specific activities in which workers might reasonably be expected to engage (including, for example, attendance at meetings of various kinds, record-keeping activities, participation in training and development programmes, and participation in social activities). In Part B of the interview, respondents were prompted as to the importance, in their division, of a number of specific worker characteristics (including, for example, initiative, compliance, efficiency, and team skills), each of which could potentially influence judgements about whether or not a worker was a 'good' worker. In both Part A and Part B of the interview, a given prompt was presented *only* if the information sought by that prompt had not already been provided spontaneously, that is, in response to the open-ended question.

There were two main reasons for the inclusion, in the revised protocol, of this form of prompting. First, there was evidence from Study II to suggest that the open-ended questions alone might be limited with respect to their capacity to reveal what is 'cultural' and what is not. As indicated, the responses to such questions can be quite variable and this creates the problem of not knowing whether aspects of their experience to which some respondents refer in answering these questions might not be equally relevant to other respondents who, for whatever reason, simply failed to mention them. A hoped-for outcome of the revised method was that the particular combination of open-ended and closed questions (or prompts) adopted would go some way toward resolving this problem. In particular it was hoped that, for each sub-topic addressed, the information generated by the prompts, when combined with that elicited spontaneously (that is, in response to the open-ended question) would provide a more accurate, and more complete, picture of those aspects of respondent experience that had relevance for the group, as a whole. The second reason for the inclusion of specific prompts of the kind described above was that it provided a means whereby relatively detailed information about the topic in question might be elicited relatively quickly. It was hoped that this, in turn, might increase the likelihood of drawing the respondent's attention to aspects of his/her experience which, because of their taken-for-granted nature, might not normally be mentioned and might require considerable time to bring them to the surface if qualitative methods alone were being used.

It is important to point out that the choice of an appropriate set of prompts for each of the sub-topics addressed in the revised protocol was not made arbitrarily. Rather, it was guided by insights from Study II (in particular, concerning the kinds of worker qualities that participants in this study seemed to value), as well as the researcher's more general knowledge of the two research divisions and their respective orientations to the role of workers. In addition, and as for the development of the Theory X, Theory Y rating questions in Study II, the development of these prompt sets was guided, in part, by McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions about the essential nature of workers. Drawing on the most salient aspects of McGregor's conceptualisation of these contrasting views, an attempt was made to include, in each prompt set, some prompts that could be classified as indicative of a Theory X orientation to the role of workers and some prompts that could be classified as indicative of a Theory Y orientation. For example, in Part A of the interview, the

involvement of workers in meetings which require their active participation (eg. 'planning' and 'work group' meetings) would imply more of a Theory Y orientation to the role of workers, whereas the involvement of workers *only* in those meetings in which they play a passive role (eg. 'information' meetings), would suggest more of a Theory X orientation. In Part B of the interview, a quality such as being prepared to question, and suggest alternatives to, current approaches – to the extent that it is valued – would be suggestive of a Theory Y orientation; a quality such as compliance – to the extent that it is valued – would be suggestive of a Theory X orientation.

The attempt, in the revised protocol, to incorporate the Theory X/Theory Y distinction into the design of each of the prompt sets can be seen, at least partially, as a response to the problems that were encountered with the Theory X/Theory Y rating question that was included in the original protocol. As suggested by the results of Study II, attempts to access theoretical dimensions such as those identified by McGregor, through the use of direct questioning about these dimensions, are unlikely to be successful. A more effective alternative may be to use a less direct method, such as that being proposed, whereby information is sought from which one can infer the relevance, or otherwise, of these dimensions.

In addition to the particular combination of open-ended and closed questions (prompts) described above, an important feature of the semi-structured interview format which was adopted was that it assumed a degree of in-built flexibility. That is, although the revised protocol shown in Appendix C1 depicts a relatively high degree of structure, in its actual administration, the interviewer provided respondents with considerable latitude to elaborate on, or qualify, their responses. The reason for this was that, as suggested by the results of Study II, qualitative data of this kind can provide important insights into the meanings which respondents themselves attach to the answers that they give, and these meanings, in turn, can have important implications for understanding the culture of the organisation (group) being studied. Interviewing in Study III also allowed a certain amount of what Measor (1985, cited by Bryman, 1988) has called 'rambling', whereby respondents spontaneously move away from formally designated topics to explore issues which are of more immediate interest to them. Where this occurred, the additional data generated were not discarded but, rather, were used to build upon insights gained from data generated by questions included in the formal schedule. Finally, allowance was made for the tendency of some respondents to pre-empt

standardised questions. For example, it was not uncommon for respondents from the older tooling division to pre-empt standardised questions about the past⁶⁷, by referring spontaneously to their past when responding to questions about the present. Where this occurred, the respondent was allowed to continue uninterrupted for the time taken to give his/her particular train of thought closure, after which the interviewer would redirect the focus of interviewing.

3. The operationalisation of context. As indicated, the results of Study II provided evidence to suggest that the more systematic examination of the 'context' of organisation member experience might contribute valuably to the assessment of organisational culture. In particular, the treatment of context as a multi-dimensional phenomenon – comprising a number of different dimensions, or domains – emerged as a promising avenue of inquiry in this regard. The revised method, therefore, retained the original focus on 'context', with information being sought, as previously, about the respondent's present experience with respect to the issue under investigation, his/her anticipated future experience, and his/her experience in relation to other organisations. As can be seen from the revised interview protocol, however, an important modification that was made to this aspect of the method was the inclusion of a focus on what was called the 'ideal' context. Questioning in relation to this contextual domain sought information about the respondent's views regarding how things *ought to be* – in this case, what workers *should* do (in terms of their duties/activities) and what the defining characteristics of 'good' workers ideally *should be*. To clarify further, and with reference to the particular treatment of 'context' adopted in the present research, the 'ideal' context might reasonably be seen as constituting the evaluative dimension of context.

In terms of the rationale for this change, questions about the 'ideal' context were, broadly speaking, intended to take the place of, or offer a (hopefully) better alternative to, questions in the original protocol which sought information about what the respondent him/herself valued, or considered to be important. Examples of such questions from the original protocol include the 'effectiveness' question, in which the respondent was asked to explain his/her rating of worker effectiveness, and the 'personal experience' questions which asked about the characteristics of the respondent's 'best' and 'worst' worker. As indicated, these questions were designed to

⁶⁷ See 'context' questions below.

provide information about the particular worker behaviours (attitudes etc.) which the respondent him/herself regarded as being important, and which (s)he would take into account in evaluating a worker's worth. In the final analysis, however, these questions were shown to suffer from a number of methodological shortcomings (see Section 3.4.3, pp. 185-186 and Section 3.4.4, pp. 204-209 and 223-226) and it seemed that a more direct form of questioning might be needed in order to more readily access the kind of information being sought. Thus, in the revised protocol, the respondent was asked explicitly about his/her own values regarding the role of workers. The point can also be made that the addition of these questions to the revised protocol provided a means by which to more easily detect differences between what the respondent valued and what the respondent perceived the organisation to value (the former being the subject of questioning in relation to the 'ideal' context and the latter, the subject of questioning in relation to the present context). While the original protocol did not explicitly seek information about this distinction, it nevertheless emerged as being a relevant distinction for some of the participants in Study II.

It is interesting to note that, while the treatment of 'context' adopted in the present research has (as far as this researcher is aware) no precedent in the literature, existing conceptualisations of organisational culture nevertheless provide some support for the notion that 'context' might usefully be thought of as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. In the paragraphs which follow, a brief review of some of the main evidence in this regard is, therefore, offered.

As indicated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1.3, p. 13), most scholarly treatments of the concept of organisational culture acknowledge the importance of the historical context. The central idea here is that, in order for a culture to develop – that is, in order for the members of a group (organisation) to develop a shared view of their world, and a shared way of interpreting, and dealing with, the problems they encounter – the group must have some stability in time, that is, a definable history. This condition is also necessary in order for the particular ways of thinking adopted by the group to acquire the status of 'assumed' knowledge (most analysts sharing the view that culture, at its deepest level, is taken-for-granted and implicit in the minds of organisation members). A further testament to the importance of the historical context is that the historically-based character of organisational culture has been identified as a key point of distinction between organisational culture and the related concept of organisational climate (see

Section 1.4.1, p. 43), as well as between 'strong' cultures and 'weak' cultures. With respect to the latter, Wilkins and Ouchi (1983), for example, argue that a key condition necessary for the development of 'clan' cultures (cultures characterised by high level of social consensus among members) is a long history combined with relatively stable group membership. In a similar vein, Louis (1983) argues that a defining characteristic of 'local' cultures (whether organisation-wide or existing only at the level of organisational sub-groups) is the stability, over time, of a set of shared social ideals. Finally, there is the argument that even in less scholarly, more 'practitioner-oriented' treatments of the concept, one encounters this same emphasis on the past and the importance of the passage of time in the evolution of organisational culture. For example, Kantrow (1984) describes the development of an organisation's culture as being analogous to the build up, over time, of a coral reef. He is critical of management training programmes which ignore the historical dimension of organisational culture and mislead participants into believing that culture change is achievable in the very short term, and with a minimum of effort.

While it is the historical context which is acknowledged most explicitly, and most consistently, in conceptualisations of organisational culture, there are nevertheless a number of other aspects of context which emerge as being relevant. For example, there are some conceptualisations which draw attention to the notion that cultures have a future. Specifically, cultural meanings are thought to shape the way in which organisation members perceive, and think about, the future. An important practical implication, as noted by Donaldson and Lorsch (1983), and Schein (1985), is that culture can exert a powerful influence on the kinds of strategic choices which are made by the organisation. It has also been suggested (Pettigrew, 1979) that cultural meanings might themselves be influenced by the expectations that organisation members have of the future. If, indeed, this is the case, then it might reasonably be argued that any attempt to understand the culture of an organisation is likely to benefit from taking into account, not only the influence of members' past experience on their current perceptions, but also the influence of members' future expectations on their current perceptions.

Another contextual dimension to which some conceptualisations of organisational culture draw attention is the 'other' context. The idea here is that an important factor thought to influence the strength, or embeddedness, of an organisation's (group's)

culture is the extent of the group's social isolation from other groups. For example, Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) argue that 'clan cultures' are more likely to develop in groups which have little or no exposure to 'institutional alternatives' – that is, belief and value orientations which prevail in other organisations which are different from, and possibly even contradict, those supported by the group's current culture – than in groups which have been exposed to such alternatives. Louis (1983) also suggests that the group's social isolation from other groups, reflected in the "impermeability of organisational boundaries" (p. 47), may be an important factor contributing to the development of localised cultures.

Finally, the importance of what might be regarded as the 'ideal' context can be inferred from conceptualisations of organisational culture which draw attention to the prescriptive function of culture. It is generally thought that cultural beliefs and assumptions provide organisation members with prescriptions for how they *should* think about, and respond to, their experience of organisational life. Hence, from a cognitive perspective (see, for example, Smircich, 1983a), organisational culture is defined as the organisation's knowledge system or system of shared cognitions. Contained within this knowledge system are the 'rules' and 'scripts' that define the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. In a similar vein, Sackmann (1991) uses the term 'recipe knowledge' to refer to that part of the organisation's knowledge system which provides organisation members with 'theories of action' defining what they should, or should not, do when faced with specific situations or issues.

The view that culture influences the cognitions and intended, if not actual behaviour⁶⁸ of organisation members, has important implications for how members might respond to questions of the kind asked, in the present research, in relation to the 'ideal' context. As indicated, these questions seek information about the kinds of activities which the respondent believes shop floor workers *should* be engaged in, and about the kinds of qualities (eg. behaviours, attitudes, etc.) which the respondent believes workers *should* display. One hypothesis that can be suggested in this regard is that in more extensive cultures which have a long history and relatively stable membership, and in which members have limited familiarity with alternative perspectives, member responses to questions such as these are likely to be more 'culture

⁶⁸ From Chapter 1 (Section 1.1.2, p. 12), the reader will recall Schein's (1985) argument that beliefs about how one *should* act, given the organisation's cultural predisposition, do not necessarily translate into overt behaviours, which can also be constrained and shaped by environmental contingencies.

bound' than in less extensive cultures which have a shorter history and which support higher levels of member mobility across organisational and divisional boundaries. In other words, members in the former group would arguably have become so much a part of the culture that their view of how things ought to be (ie. the 'ideal') would, to a large extent, reflect their experience and perceptions of how things always had been.

The point should be made that, while conceptualisations of organisational culture (considered as a whole, rather than singly) draw attention to what might be regarded as different dimensions (or domains) of context, this same emphasis is not reflected in actual operationalisations of organisational culture. Questionnaire measures of culture can be most readily criticised in this regard. Indeed, researchers using such measures – particularly where these take the form of 'off-the-shelf' questionnaires – cannot really claim any commitment to context, since the relevance of the categories, or dimensions, with which the questionnaire is concerned, in the context being studied, can only be speculated upon. Even where an attempt is made to develop questionnaire items which have some contextual grounding (for example, by using the results of preliminary qualitative work conducted in the field to inform the subsequent development of the questionnaire⁶⁹), the problem remains, as indicated in Chapter 1 (Section 1.6.2, pp. 102-103), that most questionnaire measures of organisational culture are concerned only with organisation member perceptions of, and beliefs about, the organisation *at the present time*. These measures provide no information about how these perceptions and beliefs might have been shaped by members' experience in relation to other contextual domains.

Interestingly, there are a few questionnaire measures of organisational culture which, in addition to a focus on the present, also seek information about the 'ideal'. Two notable examples are The Kilmann-Saxton Culture-Gap Survey (Kilmann & Saxton, 1983) and Harrison's (1975) (unnamed) questionnaire for diagnosing organisational ideology. Apart from dealing with different manifestations of organisational culture – in the former, the focus is on behavioural norms and, in the latter, it is on values and overt beliefs – these measures differ from one another in that they define the 'ideal' differently. In the Kilmann and Saxton measure respondents are asked about the 'ideal' as it relates to their *current work group*. Specifically, they are asked to choose (from a series of norm pairs) those norms which they believe should be operating in their work

⁶⁹ A detailed treatment of this particular approach is provided in Section 1.6.2, pp. 103-116.

group in order to improve performance, job satisfaction, and morale. In contrast, in the Harrison measure, the focus is on respondents' *'ideal' organisation*. Specifically, respondents are asked to think about the kind of organisation that they would ideally like to belong to, and to identify the ideologies that would be dominant in that organisation. The point can be made that, in terms of its conceptualisation of the 'ideal', the present method has more in common with the Kilmann and Saxton measure than it does with the Harrison measure. As indicated (see Appendix C1), in the revised interview protocol, respondents are asked to imagine that they are in charge of their current division and then, from this perspective, to talk about the kinds of duties and activities in which they believe workers should be engaged, and the kinds of behaviours (attitudes etc.) which they believe workers should display.

Despite the conceptual overlap with the Kilmann and Saxton measure, the present method differs from this, and the Harrison measure, in terms of its use of information about the 'ideal'. As indicated, a potential advantage of asking about the 'ideal' in the present method is that information about this contextual domain, when considered *in combination with* information about other contextual domains – namely, the present, the past, the anticipated future, and the 'other' – may provide insights into the strength, or 'boundedness', of the organisation's (group's) culture. Evidence of a strongly bounded culture would be suggested by the finding that respondents' thinking about the 'ideal' was constrained by their experience in relation to other contextual domains, whereas evidence of a weaker, or less bounded, culture would be indicated by the relative absence of demonstrable links between respondents' experience in relation to the 'ideal' and other contexts.

In questionnaire measures, such as the two above, information about the 'ideal' is *contrasted with* information about the present in order to determine the extent of the gap, or discrepancy, between the 'actual' culture, as perceived by organisation members, and members' 'ideal' culture. Moreover, in the case of the Kilmann and Saxton measure, members' 'ideal' culture, to the extent that it is different from their actual culture, is viewed as the preferred culture and, hence, the one towards which the organisation should endeavour to move. Of course, this approach might be seen to imply that culture change towards some projected ideal can be achieved relatively easily, and that it will not be undermined by elements of the organisation's deeper-level culture which may be incompatible with this ideal. In reality, however, this is unlikely

to be the case. For example, if an organisation's underlying culture is one which supports strong Theory X assumptions about the nature of workers, then an attempted change in that organisation towards increasing the decision-making responsibilities of workers (the desirability of which may be espoused by organisation members) is likely to be strongly resisted. Kilmann and Saxton's approach also ignores the possibility that a marked discrepancy between members' 'actual' and 'ideal' may constitute evidence of a culture which is high in what Bate (1984) has called 'Antipathy' (see Section 1.3, p. 32). The members of such a culture, in responding to a questionnaire such as that developed by Kilmann and Saxton, might be expected to consistently position themselves in opposition to the organisation, with respect to the issues about which they are asked.

Whereas quantitative (questionnaire) measures of organisational culture are generally regarded as being ill-equipped to generate context-specific understandings, approaches which use qualitative methods are often advocated on the grounds of their explicit commitment to contextualism – that is, understanding events (actions etc.) in the context in which they occur. Indeed, there is little doubt that the techniques used by qualitative researchers (including, for example, in-depth interviewing and various forms of observation) provide a level of involvement with the research setting and subjects that helps to ensure the relevance of the data collected to the specific context being studied (see Section 1.6.2, p. 93). Apart from the emphasis given to studying organisation member experience 'in context', many qualitative studies of organisational culture also explicitly acknowledge the importance of the historical context. A common approach in this regard is for the researcher to seek information about crises or 'critical' events in the history of the organisation, the argument being that the analysis of such events can provide important insights into the evolution and change of the organisation's culture. Unfortunately, however, it is often the case that studies which adopt this approach fail to convincingly demonstrate how members' current thinking may have been influenced by their experience (and interpretation) of these past events.

For example, in his study of the evolution and transformation of organisational culture in a private British boarding school, Pettigrew (1979) argues that an important advantage of the longitudinal research design which he uses is that it allows one to examine the impact of one 'social drama' (ie. critical event) on "subsequent and even consequent dramas" (p. 571). No evidence is provided, however, to demonstrate the

legitimacy of this claim. Sathe's (1985) study of culture change in an engine company can also be criticised on the grounds that claims are made without adequate supporting evidence. In this study, critical events in the history of the company are claimed to have led to changes in a number of the company's core cultural assumptions. These claims take the form of unsubstantiated statements to the effect that 'crisis *a* caused core belief *x* to be transformed into core belief *y*'. A possible advantage of the present method in this regard lies in its use of issue-focussed interviewing. Unlike existing approaches which seek information about the historical context (whether about the past generally, or about critical events in the past), in the present method, questioning about each of the different contextual domains of interest is concerned with the *same* basic issue (the duties and activities of workers in Part A of the interview, and the defining characteristics of 'good' workers in Part B). In this sense, the present method may be better equipped than existing approaches to identify linkages, where these exist, between organisation member experience in relation to these different domains (whether between the past and the present, the present and the anticipated future etc.).

Not surprisingly, in addition to the attention given to the historical context, qualitative approaches to the study of organisational culture typically also include a focus on the 'here-and-now'. This is reflected in the widespread use of both observation and interviewing to gather information about the experience of organisation members in the *current* context. For example, in his guidelines for group interviewing to elicit cultural data, Schein (1985) includes a number of questions which seek information about the organisation's current practice with respect to activities such as recruitment, promotion, performance appraisal, and reward and control.

Despite a focus on the past and the present, however, qualitative approaches still fall short of achieving the kind of comprehensive treatment of context which is being advocated in the present research. For example, the author is not aware of any qualitative studies in which organisation members are asked explicitly about their expectations of the future. While the guidelines for deciphering culture which are offered by Dick and Dalmau (1988) do include a number of future-oriented activities (for example, the 'dream trip'), these activities are concerned more with the articulation of a vision, or ideal end state, for the organisation than they are with the demonstration of a link between the anticipated future experience of organisation members, and their experience in the past and at the present time. To this author's knowledge, there are

also no qualitative studies of culture in which the influence of the 'other' context is examined. While research participants might be asked about their previous work experience before entering their current organisation (see, for example, Sackmann, 1991), this information is typically sought only in order to establish the demographics of the sample. No assessment is made, for example, of how participants' thinking about life in their current organisation may have been influenced by their experience in other organisations.

Finally, the prescriptive function of culture is also largely ignored in operationalisations of the concept which use qualitative methods. These methods typically produce a description of an organisation's culture in terms of number of dominant themes. No attempt is made, however, to further validate these themes by examining the extent to which they are also reflected in organisation member responses to questions of the kind asked, in the present method, about the 'ideal' context. While Sackmann's (1991) method for investigating culture does include a number of questions designed to elicit 'recipe knowledge' (that is, prescriptive knowledge), Sackmann's aim is simply to describe the content of this knowledge and compare it with the content of other forms of cultural knowledge (in this case, 'dictionary' and 'directory' knowledge)⁷⁰.

It can be seen from the above review that the kind of contextualist approach being proposed in the present research is very different from anything which has been attempted previously. As indicated, while conceptualisations of organisational culture variously draw attention to the importance of a number of different dimensions of context, there is no *single* treatment of culture which incorporates a focus on all of these dimensions. There are also no studies of organisational culture (whether using qualitative or quantitative methods) which attempt, systematically, to operationalise different dimensions of context and examine the way in which they might be interrelated.

4. Causal attributions. In addition to the key design features described above – specifically, the use of issue-focussed interviewing, the adoption of a semi-structured interview format, and the operationalisation of context – the revised method, compared with the method in its original form, sought to more systematically examine the value of attributional data as a source of information about the organisation's (group's) culture.

⁷⁰ See Section 1.6.2, pp. 91-92 for a brief account of the study by Sackmann's (1991).

To this end, the revised interview protocol (see Appendix C1) sought information about respondents' perceptions of the cause of both experienced changes (that is, changes from the past to the present) and anticipated changes. Building on insights from Study I and Study II, it was thought that the analysis of this information could provide insights into the extent to which the two research divisions might be able to be differentiated on the basis of 'cultural' differences in attributional style.

4.2 Method

4.2.1 The interview protocol

As indicated above, a copy of the interview protocol which was developed for use in Study III can be found in Appendix C1. It can be seen that, along with the actual interview questions, the protocol includes guidelines for administration⁷¹. These guidelines were developed in an attempt to provide what might be required to make the protocol suitable for use by a person (or persons) other than the present researcher. It would be recommended, however, that prior to conducting the interview, the interviewer should familiarise him/herself with both the interview questions and the administration guidelines. As indicated, an important aim of interviewing in the present method was to generate 'rich' information and, to this end, it was necessary for the interviewer to administer the interview in such a way as to create something of the atmosphere of a conversation.

Also contained in the appendices is a copy of what has been called a 'Response Summary Sheet' – a form on which to record the interviewee's responses (see Appendix C2). Given that all of the interviews for Study III were recorded on audio tape (see Section 4.2.3 below), this form was used in this study *only* for the purpose of noting down respondents' answers to questions about the present context. It was important to have a written record of this information because the researcher needed to remind respondents of what they had said about the present before asking them to comment on their experience of the issue (whether the duties and activities of workers, or the characteristics of 'good' workers) in relation to other contextual domains. Of course, in circumstances where permission to tape-record interviews was not granted, a form such as the 'Response Summary Sheet' could arguably be put to very good use. In such circumstances, it would probably be preferable for one person to conduct the interview and another to act as a scribe and record interviewees' responses.

⁷¹ These are italicised and appear in square brackets.

In terms of the design and structure of the Study III interview – and by way of further clarifying some of the points made in the introduction to this chapter – it can be seen from the interview protocol that the same general format of questioning was followed for each of the two sub-topics being investigated. Specifically, respondents were asked about each sub-topic in the context of (i) their present experience (What is 'x' like at the present time?); (ii) their past experience (What was 'x' like in the past? Was it different from the way it is at present?); (iii) their anticipated future experience ('What do you think 'x' will be like in the future? Will it be different from the way it is at present?); (iv) their experience of other organisations (What is/was 'x' like in other organisations?); and (v) their ideal experience (What would 'x' be like if you were running this organisation? Would you want it to be different from the way it is at present?). Within each of these contextual domains (with the exception of the 'other' context), the same pattern of open-ended question(s) plus prompts was followed. While a different prompt set was developed for each sub-topic (Part A prompts differed from Part B prompts), within each sub-topic, the same prompt set was presented across contextual domains. No prompts were presented when asking respondents about their experience of other organisations since questioning in relation to this contextual domain was intended simply to provide a rough indication of the extent of respondents' experience and/or knowledge of organisational life beyond the boundaries of their current organisation.

It can also be seen from the interview protocol that, in Part A of the interview, an attempt was made to obtain objective information about the extent of workers' involvement in the activities in which they were, reportedly, currently engaged. Specifically, respondents were asked to estimate the percentage of workers engaged in each activity and, where appropriate, the frequency of occurrence of each activity. These estimates subsequently provided the standards against which respondents were asked to compare their experience of these activities in relation to other contextual domains. Thus, questioning about the past context, for example, sought to establish whether or not, in the respondent's experience, the involvement of workers in these activities in the past was the same as, or different from (in the sense of being greater than, or less than), the involvement of workers in these activities at the present time. While an alternative to the present approach would have been, simply, to ask respondents to rate the extent of workers' involvement in the activities in which they

were engaged, there was evidence from Study II to suggest that the meanings attributed to ratings of this kind may differ from one group (culture) to another, reflecting, at least in part, differences between groups in the nature of their past experience. Thus, in Part A of the interview, where the behaviours of interest were behaviours about which respondents should be able to provide more or less objective information, the use of rating scales was rejected in favour of the more 'factually-oriented' line of questioning that was adopted.

Of course, in Part B of the interview, where the information sought took the form of value judgements by respondents – in this sense, there were no objective measures for this information – there was no option but to use rating scales. Thus, in this part of the interview, respondents were asked to rate, on a five-point scale (from 'very important' to 'disapproved of')⁷², the importance of the particular worker qualities which they mentioned, or about which they were asked. Ratings of this kind were obtained for four of the five contextual domains of interest, namely, the present, the past, the anticipated future, and the 'ideal'. In the case of the first three of these domains, the focus was on the respondent's perception of what the organisation (division) valued, or regarded as important; in the case of the 'ideal' context, the focus was on what the respondent, him/herself, valued or regarded as important.

The Study III interview protocol, like the protocol in its original form, also included questions designed to generate 'time-line' information. In the revised protocol, however, these questions were asked, not only in relation to experienced changes (as was the case in the original protocol), but also in relation to anticipated future changes. With respect to the former, it can be seen that, for each change from the past to the present which a respondent mentioned (whether spontaneously, or in response to prompting), (s)he was asked to indicate approximately when the change had occurred (that is, in what year) and for how long before the change (that is, for how many years) things had been the same. With respect to the latter, it can be seen that, for each anticipated future change that a respondent mentioned (whether spontaneously, or in response to prompting), (s)he was asked to estimate when (that is, in how many years' time), in his/her opinion, the change was likely to occur. As previously, these questions sought to anchor the respondent's 'past' and, in this case also his/her 'future', in *real*

⁷² As indicated, there were two prompt questions for which an additional response category of 'no opportunity' was included. Both of these questions were concerned with behaviours that workers may have had no opportunity to exhibit due to the structural properties of the divisions.

time. The value of such questions, as suggested by the results of Study II, was that they could potentially provide insights into the extent to which individuals, or groups, differed in terms of what, for them, constituted the psychologically meaningful past (as distinct from the chronological past), and the psychologically meaningful future.

Finally, and as indicated in the introduction to this study, information was sought about respondents' causal attributions. Thus, for each change from the past to the present which a respondent mentioned (whether spontaneously, or in response to prompting), (s)he was asked to comment on his/her perception of why the change had occurred; similarly, for each anticipated future change that the respondent mentioned (whether spontaneously, or in response to prompting), (s)he was asked to indicate why, in his/her opinion, the change would occur.

4.2.2 Participants in the study

As was the case for Study II, Study III was carried out in both the Engineering Toolroom (ie. the tooling division) and the Plastics Operations (ie. the production division). Given the events occurring in the Engineering Toolroom at the time – the final stage of the division's major restructure was underway and, as indicated in Section 2.2 (p. 119), this involved a further reduction in the size of the workforce, as well as the physical relocation of the division from its original site to a new plant within the company's main assembly and manufacturing complex – decisions regarding the selection of participants from this division were necessarily constrained. One problem in this regard was that it was difficult to select participants who would be broadly representative of the division's membership (in terms of demographics such as age, tenure, seniority etc.). This was because, during the period over which this study was conducted, the demographics of the division were changing constantly, with divisional members variously, and at different times, accepting retrenchment packages or transferring to the new site. In terms, simply, of the numbers, the workforce comprised approximately 190 members at the time when participants were being selected for this study; by the time that data collection was complete, this had declined to approximately 75 members. The point should also be made that this was a period of considerable stress for many divisional members and, as such, the researcher had to exercise greater than usual sensitivity when soliciting members' involvement in the study. The researcher therefore decided that, rather than risk creating further anxiety for these individuals, she would not proceed with those negotiations in which individuals agreed

to participate, but with obvious reservations. As it turned out, it was necessary to exercise this option on one occasion only.

In view of the above constraints, the tooling division sample was necessarily made up of individuals selected principally on the basis of their availability at the time, as well as their willingness to participate in the study. The point should be made that the kind of opportunistic approach adopted here draws attention to a well-documented characteristic of fieldwork in general, namely, that the researcher must work within the constraints imposed by the research context and that, very often, this necessitates a trade-off between what is theoretically desirable, on the one hand, and what is practically possible, on the other (see, for example, Buchanan, Boddy, & McCalman, 1988 and Easterby-Smith et al., 1991).

Table 4.1 provides a description of the tooling division sample in terms of its main demographic characteristics. It can be seen that the sample comprised twelve divisional members, all of whom were male. Of these, six were 'wages', or hourly paid, employees and six were salaried staff. Four of the salaried staff were foreman, responsible for the direct supervision of 'wages' employees, and two held more senior positions as general foremen. Using the figures available at the time of sample selection, the sample represented approximately 6% of the division's total workforce at that time. Approximately 4% of the division's 'wages' employees were represented, and approximately 25% of the division's salaried staff. It was also the case that seven of the division's ten major sub-sections were represented. In terms of summary statistics, it can be seen from Table 4.1 that participants in the sample had a mean age of 48.8 years ($sd=7.6$ years); a mean length of service with the company of 25.7 years ($sd=10.8$); and a mean length of service with the division of 23.2 years ($sd=10.7$). From Table 4.1, it can also be seen that all but one of the participants from the tooling division worked on day shift.

With respect to the selection of participants from the production division, this was not subject to the kinds of constraints that influenced selection from the tooling division. As such, in sampling from this division, an attempt was made to achieve some broad representation of the demographic characteristics of the wider membership of the division. Having identified a list of potential participants, the researcher sought the advice of a number of supervisory staff regarding which of these individuals were likely to be most suitable for inclusion in the study. Individuals whose English proficiency

Table 4.1 Demographic characteristics of Study III interviewees – Tooling Division (TD).

Interviewee #	Gender	Age (yrs)	Marital Status	Country of Birth	Years in Australia	Years with the Company	Years with the Division	Section	Position	Shift	
TD01	male	53	married	md*	md	30	30	Die Manufacture	Tradeswages(LH)	day	
TD02	male	47	married	UK	17	17	9	Machine Shop	Tradeswages	day	
TD03	male	55	married	Germany	md	33	33	Jig Shop (MMT)	Foreman	day	
TD04	male	49	married	Australia	-	33	33	Try-Out	Foreman	day	
TD05	male	51	married	Australia	-	28	20	Die Fitting and Manufacture	Foreman	day	
TD06	male	52	married	Australia	-	35	25	Pattern Shop	General Foreman	day	
TD07	male	53	married	Australia	-	30	30	Pattern Shop	Tradeswages(LH)	day	
TD08	male	52	married	Australia	-	6	6	Jig Shop	Tradeswages(LH)	day	
TD09	male	28	single	Australia	-	6	6	Jig Shop	Tradeswages	day	
TD10	male	56	married	Australia	-	40	36	General	General Foreman	afternoon	
TD11	male	42	married	md	md	25	25	Quality Control	Foreman	day	
TD12	male	48	defacto	UK	25	25	25	Pattern Shop	Tradeswages(LH)	day	
		mean=48.8 yrs sd=7.6 yrs range 28-56 yrs				mean=25.7 yrs sd=10.8 yrs range 6-40 yrs	mean=23.2 yrs sd=10.7 yrs range 6-36 yrs				

* missing data

was reportedly limited were excluded, as were individuals who were employed on permanent night shift. With respect to the latter, the work schedule of these individuals presented problems in so far as their availability for interviewing was concerned. Once identified, individuals deemed 'suitable' for participation in the study were individually approached by the researcher (with their supervisor's permission) and invited to take part.

A description of the demographic characteristics of the final sample for the production division can be found in Table 4.2. The point should be made that, while this sample originally comprised twenty divisional members – and not nineteen as indicated in the table – there was one participant (a 'wages' employee) whose data, unfortunately, could not be included in the analysis. This was because the recording of this participant's interview was of such poor quality – the cause of this was not known to the researcher – as to make the interview very difficult to transcribe. In terms of its size, the sample for the production division represented approximately 6% of this division's total workforce of 320 members at the time that the study was carried out. As indicated in Table 4.2, fourteen of the nineteen participants from this division were male and five were female. This gave a male:female ratio of 3:1, twice that of the male:female ratio of 6:1 for the division as a whole. Fourteen participants were 'wages', or hourly paid, employees and five were salaried staff, representing 5.5% and 15% of the total membership of each of these categories, respectively. All of the staff in the sample had supervisory responsibilities, with two being senior supervisors and three, first-line supervisors.

It can also be seen from Table 4.2 that there were seven divisional sub-sections represented in the sample. The two sub-sections not represented, namely, the Maintenance Department and the Tooling Department, were intentionally overlooked because the 'wages' employees in both of these sections, unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the division, were in all cases trade qualified. Finally, in terms of summary statistics, it can be seen that participants in the sample had a mean age of 39.7 years ($sd=8.8$ years); a mean length of service with the company of 12.7 years ($sd=7.2$ years); and a mean length of service with the division of 7.4 years ($sd=2.1$ years). It should be noted that the variability indicated in participants' length of service (with both the company and the division) was quite consistent with the variability that characterised the division's entire membership in this regard. In other words, whereas the tooling

Table 4.2 Demographic characteristics of Study III interviewees – Production Division (PD).

Interviewee #	Gender	Age (yrs)	Marital Status	Country of Birth	Years in Australia	Years with the Company	Years with the Division	Section	Position	Shift	
PD01	male	30	single	md*	md	8	8	Enacon	Operator	day	
PD02	male	41	married	UK	30	19	9	Materials	Clerical (LH)	day	
PD03	female	44	widowed	Australia	-	5	5	Moulding	(LH)	afternoon	
PD04	female	57	married	UK	23	17	10	Quality Assurance	Inspector	alternate	
PD05	male	28	separated	Australia	-	9	9	Enacon	Operator	day	
PD06	male	49	married	UK	md	9	8	Materials	Forklift driver	day	
PD07	male	32	separated	UK	14	9	8	Enacon	Operator	day	
PD08	female	43	married	Australia	-	4	4	Assembly	Operator	day	
PD09	male	40	married	Australia	-	20	7	Enacon	Operator	day	
PD10	female	56	married	UK	30	15	9	Moulding	Inspector	day	
PD11	male	30	married	UK	27	5	5	Moulding	Die Setter	afternoon	
PD12	male	53	married	UK	30	30	9	Quality Assurance	Inspector	alternate	
PD13	female	30	separated	Australia	-	5	5	Moulding	Operator	day	
PD14	male	39	married	Australia	-	18	8	Bumper, Paint & Assembly	Senior Supervisor	day	
PD15	male	36	married	Australia	-	20	10	Bumper, Paint & Assembly	Senior Supervisor	afternoon	
PD16	male	37	married	UK	24	17	9	Materials	Supervisor	day	
PD17	male	37	married	UK	33	15	8	Moulding	Supervisor	day	
PD18	male	38	married	UK	14	14	6	Enacon, Paint & Assembly	Supervisor	day	
PD19	male	35	married	Australia	-	3	3	Bumper, Paint & Assembly	Operator	day	
		mean=39.7 yrs sd=8.8 yrs range 28-57 yrs				mean=12.7 yrs sd=7.2 yrs range 3-30 yrs	mean=7.4 yrs sd=2.1 yrs range 3-10 yrs				

* missing data

division comprised mostly longer-serving employees (typically with more than twenty years' service with the company and the division), the production division comprised employees whose length of service varied considerably. Given the widely accepted view of culture as being historically-based (see introductory comments above), one might reasonably expect that organisation members' interpretations of events will differ depending on the length of members' association with the organisation. In sampling from the production division, an attempt was therefore made to identify participants who had been with the company, and the division, for varying periods of time. Specifically, the sample included (i) participants who had been with the company for fifteen years or more, and who had also spent a considerable amount of time in the division (five years or more); (ii) participants who had been with the division since its inception (some eight years ago) and who had not worked for any significant length of time elsewhere in the company; and (iii) participants who were relatively new to the division (with four years of service or less) and who had no significant experience elsewhere in the company.

One final point that should be made regarding the selection of participants for this study is that an attempt was made to obtain sufficient numbers of participants from each division to allow individual differences, between and within divisions, to emerge. At the same time, however, the sample size for each division was relatively small and this, combined with the large numbers of variables to be considered (prompt questions, for example, were each asked in relation to four different contextual domains), made the widespread use of statistical tests of such differences inappropriate. Moreover, given the nature of this research, the conclusions drawn were based not just on insights obtained from the analysis of quantitative data, but rather on insights obtained from the analysis of quantitative data in combination with qualitative data. An important focus of the analysis in this sense was that it sought information about the degree to which respondents' interpretations across a range of variables (for example, their perceptions of a given issue in relation to different domains of context) were consistent. In view of these considerations, the results of statistical tests, where these were carried out, are simply noted, rather than reported in detail.

4.2.3 Procedure

Participants in Study III were interviewed individually by the researcher for approximately two hours each, on two separate occasions. All of the interviews were

conducted outside of working hours. Participants were asked to indicate their preferred location for the interview, whether (i) a private office at their place of work; (ii) their own home; (iii) the researcher's work office; or (iv) the researcher's home. Eight of the nineteen participants from the production division were interviewed in their own homes, with the remaining eleven being interviewed in a private office made available in the division for this purpose. Of the twelve participants from the tooling division, eleven were interviewed in their own homes and one was interviewed in the researcher's home.

All participants gave their written consent to participate in the study and to have their interviews recorded on audio-tape. Participants were assured that the information which they provided would be entirely confidential and that their identity would not be revealed in any account, either written or verbal, of the results of the study. On completion of the interviews, each participant received a copy of his/her recorded interview and subsequently also, when it had been prepared, a copy of the interview transcript. The purpose of making this material available to participants was twofold. On the one hand, it was simply an act of courtesy; on the other, it provided participants with the means whereby they could review what they had said and make any corrections they deemed necessary. With respect to this latter point, it is worth noting that no such corrections were made.

4.3 Approach to data analysis

Interview data (in the form of complete transcripts of each participant's interview) were analysed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. With respect to the former, data generated by both open-ended and closed questions were quantified. The quantification of responses to closed questions was very straightforward since these questions typically required the respondent to give simple 'yes/no' answers or, alternatively, to select the 'best' answer from a number of a priori response categories. The quantification of responses to open-ended questions was more difficult. Responses were content analysed to identify a finite number of categories into which common or similar responses could be grouped. For example, an analysis of responses to the question 'What do workers in this organisation at the present time have to do to be thought of as 'good' workers?' suggested three broad categories of responses, concerned with (i) work skills (eg. job knowledge and quality of work), (ii) work behaviours (eg. attendance and showing initiative), and (iii) interpersonal skills and behaviours (eg. politeness and getting on well with others). The responses in category (ii) were further

divided into (i) work behaviours that one might expect to be valued in an organisation which promoted a predominantly passive role for workers (Theory X orientation); (ii) work behaviours that suggested a more active role for workers (Theory Y orientation); and (iii) work behaviours that were neutral in the sense of reflecting neither a predominantly passive nor a predominantly active role for workers.

It was also the case that, where responses to the open-ended questions described worker activities, or alternatively, 'good' worker characteristics that were the same as, or similar to, those which were the subject of the prompt questions, they would be classified with the same label as the associated prompt. Thus, for example, the prompt label 'work group meetings' (see Part A of the interview) was used to classify all references by participants from the production division to the past involvement of the workers in their division in team meetings (held as part of the Team Concept). This facilitated the comparison of prompt data with open question data and enabled an assessment to be made of the extent to which the worker activities and characteristics that were the subject of the prompt questions were mentioned spontaneously, in response to the open-ended questions.

Interview data were also analysed qualitatively using a text analysis computer programme known as 'Ethnograph' (Seidel, Kjolseth, & Seymour, 1988). In the present study, ethnographic analysis was undertaken primarily to clarify the meaning of results obtained from the quantitative analysis. The aim was *not* complex theory building and, hence, for any given interview, selected segments of text only were extracted for analysis. Specifically, a given segment was extracted if it either (i) clarified or provided new insights into the meaning of quantitative data; or (ii) introduced a topic or theme which was different from, or tangential to, the topic of the formal interview question.

Finally, the point should be made that, consistent with the approach taken in the previous two studies, the main focus of the analysis of Study III data was on methodological issues. Once again, and in contrast with the approach taken in most qualitative studies of organisational culture, the aim was *not* to provide a summary description of each division's culture based on the data collected. Rather, it was to evaluate the method being developed in terms of its capacity to elicit culturally meaningful data (that is, data from which aspects of the culture of each division might be inferred).

4.4 Format for reporting results

As indicated in the introduction to this chapter, Chapters Five and Six (along with their associated appendices) report the results of Study III. The point should be made, however, that these results pertain only to the analysis of data from Part A of the Study III interview (concerned with the duties and activities of workers). While a preliminary analysis of data from Part B of the interview (concerned with the characteristics of 'good' workers) has been completed, the results of this analysis will not be reported in this thesis. This is because the constraints of both time and space made it necessary to choose between providing a detailed account of the results for one part of the interview only, or providing a more superficial account of the results for both parts of the interview. On consideration, the more detailed account was judged to be the preferred option, since it would allow for a more in-depth investigation of the potential of the method to uncover aspects of organisational culture. Moreover, given that many of the same methodological points emerged from the preliminary analysis of both sets of data, it was reasoned that the more detailed account would enable these points to be illustrated more thoroughly. Accordingly, it was decided to report, in detail, the results for Part A of the interview only. As the reader will see, however, some reference is made to the results for Part B in the overall evaluation of the method which is offered in the final chapter, Chapter Seven.

Broadly speaking, there were two main methodological issues which the analysis of the Study III data sought to address. The first of these – which is the subject of the results reported in Chapter Five – was concerned with the use, in the present method, of a semi-structured interview format. The second – which is the subject of the results reported in Chapter Six – was concerned with the treatment, in the method, of 'context' as a multi-dimensional phenomenon. More specifically, Chapter Five presents the results of two separate analyses, the first of which examines the value of combining open-ended questions with closed questions, or prompts, (of the kind described in point 2. of the introduction to this chapter), and the second of which examines how qualitative data (in the form of respondents' elaborations on, and qualifications of, their responses) can inform our understanding of the meaning of quantitative data. In Chapter Six, the results of the analysis of data pertaining to each of the contextual domains of interest – namely, the present, the past, the future, the 'other', and the 'ideal' – are presented. In this chapter, the nature of the linkages between the findings for these different

contextual domains is also examined, and attention is drawn to the possible cultural implications of these linkages.

Finally, as for the reporting of results in the two previous study, the results of Study III (in any given section) are reportedly separately for the tooling division and the production division. Also as previously, attention is drawn to both similarities and differences between the divisions, and these are discussed in terms of their possible significance for understanding the culture of each division.

CHAPTER FIVE

STUDY III: PART 2

RESULTS: THE USE OF SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWING

5.1 Introduction

As indicated in the introduction to Study III, an important feature of the method for this study was the use of a semi-structured interview format. This aspect of the method consisted of two key elements: the use of closed questions, or prompts, in combination with open-ended questions, and the use of qualitative data (generated by allowing respondents to qualify and/or elaborate on their responses) to give meaning to quantitative data. The first of these elements is examined in Section 5.2 below, and the second is examined in Section 5.3.

In Section 5.2, the question of central concern is whether or not the use of prompt questions, following on from the open-ended questions, provides additional information of value, over and above that provided by the open-ended questions alone. In an attempt to answer this question, the results of an analysis of the difference between the open question data and the prompt data for the *present* context – these data pertain to respondents' perceptions of what it is that the workers in their division do at the present time – are presented and discussed. A number of possible reasons for the discrepancy between respondents' free and prompted responses are suggested and these are evaluated through a more detailed examination of the data pertaining to two worker activities, namely, 'Information Meetings' and 'Attend Training'. This latter analysis draws on respondents' accounts of both their present and past experience of the involvement of divisional workers in these activities.

In Section 5.3, the question of central concern is whether or not the additional time required to allow respondents to elaborate on, and/or qualify, their responses is justified in terms of the insights that the data generated can provide. In attempting to answer this question, the results of an analysis of the qualitative data associated with the same two worker activities as above – namely, 'Information Meeting' and 'Attend Training' – are presented and discussed. Particular attention is drawn to the emergent themes in these data and the similarities and differences between the divisions which they serve to

highlight. While the analysis in this section, as in Section 5.3.1 above, is concerned primarily with respondents' *present* experience, it also draws on aspects of respondents' past experience. Specifically, attributional data (generated by questions about the past context) are analysed in order to gain insights into respondents' personal explanations for the current status of the two worker activities examined.

5.2 Combining open-ended questions with prompts

5.2.1 Findings for the present context

Open question data. Respondents were first of all given the opportunity to comment freely, that is, without any prompting from the interviewer, on their perceptions of what constituted the main job of workers in their division at the present time. For both divisions, responses to this initial open-ended question typically took one of two forms. Many respondents gave a brief description of the broad function of either their division as a whole (for example, for the tooling division "building dies" and for the production division, "making parts") or the particular section in which they worked, or for which they were responsible (for example, for the tooling division, "prototype work"). Other respondents provided a list, which was more or less inclusive, of the key operations of their division (for example, for the production division, "materials handling, moulding parts, inspection, assembly of parts, painting of parts") or section (for example, for the production division, "writing job schedules, keeping track of stock, issuing job cards"). A minority of responses (only three in the total sample) could not be classified in this way. One respondent from the production division made reference to the expectation that workers should "do as they are told" and two respondents from the tooling division made reference to the expectation that workers should "do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay".

It is worth making the point that the responses to this initial open-ended question (particularly those given by respondents who were themselves workers) were probably not the considered responses that one might expect if the question had been of a more probing nature. On the contrary, they were probably very similar to the kinds of well-rehearsed and economical responses that one would expect to get to the commonly encountered question 'What do you do for a living?'

Following the presentation of this very general open-ended question, respondents were asked whether or not there were any other activities, in addition to those which they had already mentioned constituted the main job of workers, in which workers in

their division engaged at the present time. Again, this was an open-ended question and respondents were given no prompting by the interviewer that might suggest possible answers to the question. The responses to this question, along with the responses to the subsequent prompts, are summarised in Table 5.1. It should be noted that, in terms of its construction, Table 5.1 lists all of the 'other' activities, or activity categories, to which respondents made reference (whether in response to the open-ended question or in response to subsequent prompting). In order to facilitate the comparison of open questions with prompt data, those activities which were the subject of specific prompts are grouped separately and appear, in the table, in italics. In the event that a respondent mentioned a 'prompted' activity spontaneously – it was anticipated that this would occur since the prompts asked about 'other' activities in which workers could potentially engage – the respondent was not subsequently prompted about that same activity. Thus, the numbers of respondents which are represented in the 'Open' and 'Prompt' cells of the table are independent of one another.

It can be seen from Table 5.1 that, in response to the second open-ended question, one quarter (3/12) of the respondents from the tooling division and just over one third (7/19) of the respondents from the production division indicated that the workers in their division at the present time were engaged in no other activities. It can also be seen that the remaining respondents from each division made reference to a range of 'other' activities. With respect, first of all, to the results for the tooling division, reference was made to worker involvement in safety activities (whether formal, in the sense of attendance at safety meetings or informal, in the sense of maintaining a general awareness of safety requirements) and industrial relations activities (ie. attending union meetings). Reference was also made to worker participation in formal and informal social activities (the former being initiated by the organisation, usually with the involvement of a formally constituted social committee and the latter being more impromptu and initiated by individual workers). Finally, two respondents from this division made reference to worker involvement in 'primary task' activities, that is, activities that would appear to constitute an integral part of the main job of workers in the division.

The picture for the production division 'open' responses was somewhat different. As can be seen from Table 5.1, there was a strong emphasis in this division on worker involvement in 'work maintenance' activities, that is, activities designed to maintain the

Table 5.1 Workers' 'other' activities: A comparison of the open question and prompt data for the Tooling Division and the Production Division for the present context.

Activity Categories	Tooling Division (n=12)		Production Division (n=19)	
	Open		Open	
Primary Task	2			
Work Maintenance	1		7	
Quality Activities			4	
Efficiency Activities			1	
Job Rotation			1	
Communicate with Workers	1		1	
Safety Awareness	2			
		Prompt		Prompt
<i>Planning Meetings</i>		1		4
<i>Information Meetings</i>		8	1	18
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>		2		5
<i>Safety Meetings</i>	3	8	1	13
<i>Union Meetings</i>	2	9		15
<i>Help Other Workers</i>		11		16
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>		3		15
<i>Attend Training</i>		12		12
<i>Formal Social</i>	2	10	2	17
<i>Informal Social</i>	2	10	3	16
<i>Communicate with Supervisors</i>	1	9		19
	no other activities n=3		no other activities n=7	

- Notes 1: Activities, or activity categories, which constituted the subject of specific prompt questions are shown in italics.
 2: Multiple references by a single respondent to any given activity, or activity category, are not reported.
 3: Respondents were not prompted about activities which they had already mentioned spontaneously, that is, in response to the open-ended question. Thus, the numbers of respondents represented in the 'Open' and 'Prompt' cells of the table are independent of one another.

flow of work and support production operations (eg. housekeeping, fork truck driving, relieving other workers etc.). Approximately one third of the respondents from this division (7/19) made one or more references to worker involvement in activities of this kind. The next best represented activity category for the production division was 'quality activities', with two respondents making reference to the rework responsibilities of workers in the division, and two referring to a more general quality function for workers. As for the tooling division, reference was also made to worker participation in formal and informal social activities.

Prompt data. Following the presentation of the two open-ended questions described above, respondents were presented with a series of closed questions or 'prompts'. As indicated, the prompts for this part of the interview took the form of specific questions about worker involvement in a range of potentially relevant 'other' activities. Some of the prompts described very general activities (for example, work-related social activities and communication with one's supervisor), while others described activities that more obviously implied a more 'active' and self-directing role for workers (such as, involvement in planning and group problem-solving activities).

It can be seen from Table 5.1 that, for both divisions, there was a large discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses in terms of both the range of activities in which workers reportedly engaged, and the numbers of respondents who indicated worker involvement in these activities. Thus, the activity profile suggested by an aggregation of spontaneous with prompted responses is significantly broader than that suggested by the spontaneous responses alone. Also, there was generally more agreement among respondents about worker involvement in 'prompted' activities than in activities referred to in response to the open-ended question. For example, Table 5.1. shows that, for the tooling division, five of the 'prompted' activity categories were represented in responses to the open question, whereas in response to prompting all eleven of these categories were represented. The pattern of responding was similar for the production division. As indicated, whereas only four of the 'prompted' activity categories were represented by the spontaneous responses, all eleven of these categories were represented by prompted responses.

With respect to the numbers of respondents indicating worker involvement in particular activities, Table 5.1. shows that, in the tooling division for example, there were no respondents who made spontaneous reference to the involvement of workers in

this division in either information meetings or training programmes. However, in response to prompting, a majority of respondents from this division reported worker involvement in both of these activities (8 indicated worker involvement in information meetings and 12 indicated worker involvement in training). Again, the pattern of responding was similar for the production division. One respondent only made spontaneous reference to worker involvement in information meetings but, in response to prompting, eighteen respondents reported worker involvement in this activity. Similarly, no respondents made spontaneous reference to the involvement of workers in this division in training compared with twelve who indicated worker involvement in this activity in response to prompting.

5.2.2 Interpreting the discrepancy between open question and prompt data

It is clear from the above results that, if the interview had included open questions only, this additional information about the activities of workers in each division would not have been obtained. The question arises as to why respondents from both divisions failed to mention worker involvement in particular activities in response to the open-ended question, but subsequently, in response to prompting, indicated that workers were involved in these activities. One possible explanation for this discrepancy, which receives some support in the literature, is that more structured approaches to data collection (such as the present use of specific prompts) can have the effect of 'putting words into people's mouths'. A good illustration of this is provided by Lewis and Furnham (cited by Lewis, 1990) in their study of opinions about how unemployment in Britain could be reduced. In this study, open-ended questions (respondents were simply asked, without prompting, for their views on how unemployment could be reduced) were combined with a forced choice procedure whereby respondents were required to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with a number of 'solutions' that had been identified a priori by the researchers. The result was that some 'solutions' (for example, reducing immigration) received strong support in the forced choice procedure but were mentioned considerably less often in response to the open-ended questions. Thus, according to Lewis (1990), a problem with the forced choice procedure is that it can inflate the popularity of certain proposed 'solutions' and inhibit respondents who genuinely have nothing to say from indicating that this is the case. In this sense, the forced choice procedure can have the effect of 'putting words into people's mouths'.

While this explanation for a discrepancy between 'free' responses and forced choice responses seems reasonable in the context of Lewis and Furnham's study, it is less plausible in the context of the present results which reflect respondents' perceptions of what *actually* happens (that is, what workers in their division actually do), rather than their opinions about what *ought* to happen. There seems little reason to doubt the validity of the present results, particularly given the significant numbers of respondents (in some cases, the entire sample) who, in response to prompting, reported that workers in their division engaged in particular activities. It might be anticipated, however, that the effect of 'putting words into peoples' mouths' would be more likely to influence results for that part of the interview concerned with respondents' opinions about the activities that workers *ideally* should be involved in. If this were the case, one might expect that, for questions in this later part of the interview, the discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses would be even more pronounced than that observed for the present set of questions. However, as will be seen in Section 6.3.4 in which the results for the ideal context are reported, this was not the case.

There are three other possible explanations for the present discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses:

1. It may be that respondents were simply unclear as to the meaning of the initial open-ended question concerned, in this case, with 'other' worker activities (that is, activities in which workers engaged in addition to those which reportedly constituted their main job). However, with the subsequent presentation of the prompts, any ambiguity about the meaning of this question would be resolved since, as it will be recalled, the activities which were the subject of the prompts were intended as possible answers to the question. While this explanation is plausible, it is not consistent with the author's experience of administering the interviews. Interviewees showed little hesitation in framing their responses to either of the initial open-ended questions suggesting that, for the most part, they had a good understanding of what they were being asked to comment upon.

These impressions aside, however, evidence for the plausibility of this explanation should be contained within the actual interview data. It can be argued that, if initial confusion about the meaning of the open-ended question was the problem, then the pattern of responding reported above, which pertains to perceptions of the present role of workers, should not emerge in subsequent questions about the role of workers in the

past and anticipated future. This is because, as indicated, the earlier presentation of the prompts in the context of respondents' present experience would have removed any ambiguity about the meaning of the open-ended question. Hence, when asked what is effectively this same open-ended question on a second and third occasion, in the context of their past and anticipated future experience respectively, respondents should be quite clear as to what was required. In fact, one might expect that their responses to the open-ended question, when asked on these subsequent occasions, would be primed by the earlier prompting about their present experience of the 'other' activities of workers. (In other words, one would expect that significantly more 'prompted' activities would be mentioned in spontaneous references to the 'other' activities of workers in the past and anticipated future than in spontaneous references to 'other' activities of workers at the present time.) Although respondents were not actually asked the same question again, but rather whether or not, in the past, the role of workers was any different in other contexts, it would still seem reasonable to argue that the questions asked concerning the respondents' present experience should make it clear what respondents were being asked to comment upon, so that this should not be a problem subsequently when asked about the other contextual domains.

2. A second explanation for the present discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses is that some activities may be more central than others to members' definitions of the role of workers in their division. One might expect that these activities would be more likely to be mentioned in responses to open-ended questions about what workers do than activities that are more peripheral to prevailing definitions of the role of workers (even though these latter activities may occupy a reasonable amount of workers' time). As such, specific prompting may be required in order to make apparent the involvement of workers in these latter activities.

3. Alternatively, given the view of culture as comprising unconscious beliefs and assumptions, it may be that certain activities have come to be so much a part of organisation member thinking about 'what workers do' as to have acquired the status of assumed knowledge. An important implication of this third explanation is that such activities would be unlikely to be mentioned spontaneously (in response to the open-ended question) but, rather, would require prompting to bring them to the surface of respondents' awareness.

To determine which of the above explanations (if any) is most plausible in the context of the present results, it is necessary to explore more fully the nature of respondents' experience of the activities of workers in their division. Some valuable insights in this regard were provided by the analysis of data generated by other questions in the protocol, in particular, (i) questions from the present context about the extent of workers' current involvement in various activities, and (ii) questions from the past context concerning whether or not workers' involvement in these activities had changed over time and, if so, why. Since similar observations were made for most of the activities mentioned in response to both the open-ended and prompt questions, only the data for two of these activities, namely, 'Information Meetings' and 'Attend Training', are reported here. These two activities were chosen because, as indicated in Table 5.1, for both activities there was a marked discrepancy in the data for both divisions between respondents' spontaneous and prompted responses.

Findings for 'Information Meetings'.

It can be seen from Table 5.1 that, for both divisions, there was a marked discrepancy between the number of spontaneous and prompted references to workers' current involvement in 'information' meetings. It should be noted that, in the 'prompt' procedure (see Appendix C1, p. 628), 'information' meetings were defined as meetings in which workers were given information by those above them about such things as the current performance and future directions of either their division or the organisation as a whole. This prompt was included to cue respondents to the involvement of workers in both divisions in what were commonly referred to as 'State of the Nation' meetings (held for the purpose of disseminating information of this kind). As indicated, for the tooling division, no respondents indicated worker involvement in 'information' meetings in response to the open-ended question, compared with eight respondents (two-thirds of the sample) who reported worker involvement in this activity when prompted. The picture was similar for the production division. One respondent only made spontaneous reference to the involvement of workers in this division in 'State of the Nation' meetings while, in response to prompting, a further eighteen respondents (95% of the sample) reported that workers attended these meetings.

What then might these discrepancies mean? When asked about the extent of workers' current involvement in information meetings, respondents from the tooling division reported that, while the meetings were typically attended by all workers, they

were held infrequently (only once or twice annually). It also became apparent from questions about respondents' past experience of worker involvement in this activity that the meetings had been introduced relatively recently (on average, five years ago). Given that tooling division respondents had an average length of service with the division of approximately 23 years, it can be argued that, as a group, they shared quite a long history of no worker involvement in this activity. Also, when asked about why the meetings were introduced, a common response was that it was an attempt by management to quash increasing rumours about the possible closure of the division. These findings suggest that, from a cultural perspective, the experience of worker involvement in this activity may not yet have been sufficiently extensive (in terms of how long workers had been involved in the activity, how frequently they were involved in it, and perceptions about why the activity was introduced) to have effected a change in traditional ways of thinking about what workers do.

The explanation for the production division findings is essentially the same as that for the tooling division findings. There were, however, some differences between the two divisions with respect to the specific nature of respondents' experiences of the involvement of workers in information meetings. While respondents from the production division also indicated that information meetings had been introduced relatively recently (on average, three years ago) and that they were typically attended by all workers, the meetings were reportedly held much more frequently than those in the tooling division (every one to three months). Hence, workers in the production division appear to have had much greater exposure to this activity in recent years than their counterparts in the tooling division. While this might suggest that the activity had come to be taken-for-granted with respect to divisional member thinking about what workers in the division do, this is unlikely given the relatively short history of the activity and given what we know about the length of time required for culture evolution and change (see, for example, Schein, 1985).

A consideration of respondents' attributions about why the meetings were introduced provides some additional insights here. Most respondents associated the introduction of information meetings with the arrival, in 1988, of a new divisional manager who was perceived by divisional members to be more committed to the involvement of shop floor workers in divisional activities than most previous managers reportedly had been. In fact, it was the author's understanding from a number of conversations with this

manager, that this was an integral part of his overall strategy for improving the efficiency of the division. It was also the case that, during the period of the author's association with the division, a number of other initiatives designed to increase worker involvement in divisional activities were beginning to be introduced.

The above findings, together with the author's more general observations, suggest the interesting possibility that the introduction of any new worker activity which assumes values that somehow challenge more traditional thinking about the role of workers, is unlikely to lead to a redefinition of that role unless all of the following conditions are met:

- i) the activity has occurred for a relatively long period of time;
- ii) workers have had significant exposure to the activity;
- iii) positive attributions (as above) are made about the reasons for worker involvement in the activity; and
- iv) the activity constitutes one of a range of management initiatives which have been fully implemented to increase worker involvement, rather than simply a 'token' effort by management to bring about change.

From this perspective, it would be interesting to return to the production division, after a period of say five years, to see whether the additional time, and the more complete implementation by management of a number of similar initiatives, would be reflected in spontaneous accounts, by workers and their supervisors, of what workers in the division do.

Findings for 'Attend Training'.

With respect to the activity 'Attend Training', Table 5.1 shows that prompting was again required to highlight the involvement of workers in this activity. In fact, as indicated, no respondents from either division spontaneously mentioned worker involvement in training. However, in response to subsequent prompting, all of the respondents from the tooling division and almost two thirds of the respondents from the production division reported that the workers in their respective divisions attended training. Interestingly, all seven of the production division respondents who reported that workers were not involved in training were 'wages' employees (that is, they themselves were workers). Again, in attempting to explain the discrepancy between free and prompted responses, it is useful to consider some of the additional data pertaining to respondents' experience of the involvement of workers in this activity.

In contrast to the findings for 'information' meetings, there was considerable variability, among respondents from both divisions, in their estimates of the extent of workers' involvement in training programmes. For the tooling division, estimates of how many workers attended training ranged from 5% to 50%. Estimates of the amount of training received ranged from 20 hours per worker per year to 50 hours per worker per year. The picture was similar for the production division, with estimates of the numbers of workers involved in training ranging from 5% to 100%, and estimates of the amount of training received ranging from 2 hours per worker per year to 50 hours per worker per year. This lack of agreement among respondents from both divisions about the extent of workers' involvement in training may reflect on the status of the activity in each division. In other words, to the extent that training was regarded as a somewhat peripheral activity, one might expect members' knowledge of the activity to be limited. This explanation is not inconsistent with the author's impression of the status of training in each division.

Another explanation, which is also supported by the author's experience, is that training in both divisions was a less uniform activity than the so-called 'State of the Nation' meetings. In other words, where all workers were required to attend 'State of the Nation' meetings which were held on a more or less regular basis, the involvement of workers in training seemed, more often than not, to reflect individual initiatives whereby individual workers would express an interest in, and seek approval for, participation in particular training courses that were being offered. To the extent that this was the case, estimates of the extent of worker involvement in training could be expected to vary considerably.

Tooling Division: Past experience of training. At this point, it is useful to turn to a consideration of the data pertaining to the history of worker involvement in training. In answer to questions about the past, all of the tooling division respondents reported that, in the past, there was less training (5/12 or 42% of the sample) or no training at all (7/12 or 58%) for workers in this division. Estimates for the whole sample of when the change towards increased training had occurred ranged from between 2 years ago to 8 years ago. However, 80% of these estimates were between 2 and 4 years ago, suggesting a fair degree of agreement among respondents from this division about when this change had occurred. There was also good agreement among respondents about why the change towards increased involvement in training had occurred. Of the eleven

respondents for whom attributional data were available, eight made reference to the requirement, associated with the recent restructuring of the award, for workers to become multi-skilled. Other attributions included: the impact of technological change requiring workers to become better trained (one respondent); a recognition on the part of management of the need to increase the knowledge, efficiency, and flexibility of workers (two respondents); an attempt to replace skills lost through the downsizing of the division over recent years (one respondent); and an increasing emphasis on quality in line with international developments (one respondent). All respondents also agreed that, prior to the change reported, the status of this activity in the division had remained the same (that is, less training than that received currently or no training at all) for a period which extended back to at least the respondent's start date with the company. In two cases reference was made to a past that extended back beyond the respondent's date of commencement to the early years of the start-up of the division (some fifty years previously).

The above historical data are interesting for a number of reasons. First, there was more consensus among respondents about the history of worker involvement in training in the tooling division than about the extent of workers' current involvement in training. Second, the data suggest that, when viewed in its historical context, the involvement of workers in this division in training has been relatively brief. This would tend to support the argument that training may not constitute a centrally important activity with respect to divisional members' thinking about what it is that workers in the division do. One might therefore expect that respondents would be unlikely to mention worker involvement in this activity without prompting. As indicated above, this was indeed the case. The point should also be made that the majority of workers ('wages' employees) in the tooling division were qualified tradesmen who had gained their trade qualifications after successfully completing their training as apprentices when they first commenced work with company. In this sense, the training of these workers was probably regarded, by divisional members in general, as being complete. The notion that training should continue to constitute a centrally important activity for workers in this division might, therefore, be seen as an admission of inadequate apprenticeship training.

Finally, the data are interesting because they provide some insight into the context which may have shaped respondents' perceptions of the nature of workers' involvement

in training at the present time. As indicated, respondents in this division had experienced a relatively long history of little or no worker involvement in training. The question arises as to whether or not this may have led to a tendency to overstate the case with respect to the current involvement of workers in this activity. In other words, would the same objective amount of training be perceived differently by respondents from a division in which workers had participated in training on a regular basis over a much longer period of time? If this was the case, it would be consistent with the view – shared widely among organisational culture scholars and supported by the results of Studies I and II of the present research – that the historical context can significantly influence the meaning that respondents attach to particular events. The further point can be made that one of the problems with questionnaire measures in this regard – whether measures of organisational culture or some other organisational phenomenon – is that they assume that questionnaire items and the various Likert-type response categories associated with these items (eg. ‘very likely’, ‘strongly agree’ etc.) will mean the same thing to all respondents.

Production Division: Past experience of training. The experience of production division respondents regarding the history of worker involvement in training was much less uniform than that reported above for tooling division respondents. As a group, production division respondents appeared to have less shared history of worker involvement in this activity than their counterparts from the tooling division. Just over half of the respondents from the production division reported that there was no change in worker involvement in training from the past to the present (with half of these having previously reported that workers attended training at the present time and half having reported that they did not). The remaining respondents indicated that there was a change from the past to the present, with the majority of these reporting that, in the past, there was either less training than at the present time or no training at all. Estimates of when the change towards more training had occurred were similar to those reported for the tooling division and ranged from between one to four years ago.

Attributions about why the change had occurred included: pressure from the government and unions associated with the introduction of Award Restructuring (three respondents); the more positive attitudes of the recently appointed manager to training (one respondent); part of a more general effort to make better use of the division’s human resources (one respondent); and an initiative by the respondent himself to

increase the amount of training provided to the workers in his section (one respondent). All respondents agreed that, prior to the change reported, the status of this activity in the division had remained the same (that is, less training than that received currently or no training at all) for a period which extended back to the respondent's start date with the company (which for longer serving production employees can be distinguished from their start date with the division).

Interestingly, the majority of respondents who reported a change from the past to the present (with less or no training in the past) were longer-serving employees with fifteen or more years' service with the company. In contrast, of those reporting no change from the past to the present, the majority were shorter-serving employees who had spent most of their time with the production division and whose length of service with the company ranged from between four and nine years. These findings are consistent with the argument that the historical context of an individual's experience of any given change may influence the salience of that change to the individual. In the present example, longer serving employees with a relatively long history of little or no worker involvement in training were more likely to report a change in this activity than shorter serving employees who were nevertheless present when the change occurred. The argument is that these latter employees are likely to be more accustomed to change (from the outset, the production division has been a site for management innovations) since they do not have a significant history of 'no change' against which to evaluate their current experiences.

The question remains, however, as to the implications of the above findings for an understanding of why, to the extent that workers in the production division were currently involved in training, this only became apparent when respondents were prompted about it and did not emerge in their responses to the open-ended question. In attempting to answer this question, it is interesting to consider the data for shorter serving and longer-serving respondents separately. If 1980 is used as the 'cut-off' to differentiate longer-serving from shorter-serving respondents, the sample for the production division can be seen to comprise ten longer-serving respondents (ie. respondents who commenced with the company before 1980) and nine shorter-serving respondents (ie. respondents who commenced with the company after 1980). Of the longer-serving respondents, there were eight (including all five supervisors in the sample) who, in response to prompting, indicated that the workers in their division were

currently involved in training. Given the length of service of these respondents, as well as the timing of the introduction of the change (relatively recently), the same explanation as that offered above for the tooling division may apply here. In other words, for these respondents, training may constitute a peripheral rather than a central activity in terms of their definitions of the role of workers. It is possible also that the pattern of responding for this group contains some social desirability bias. As indicated, the group included all five of the supervisory staff in the sample and, it may be that these individuals, in responding positively to the prompt, were expressing their overt support for company policy regarding the importance of training.

Of the nine shorter-serving respondents (all of these respondents were 'wages' employees), there were four who, in response to prompting, indicated that the workers in their division were currently involved in training, and five who indicated that the workers in their division were currently not involved in training. Shorter-serving respondents were, therefore, less inclined than their longer-serving counterparts to agree about worker involvement in this activity. This lack of agreement alone would suggest that, for these respondents, this activity is not centrally important in their definitions of what workers do. Further support for this conclusion can be found in findings reported in the following section which provide evidence of a degree of cynicism among employees in this division, associated with their perception that training was provided only when production demands allowed it.

5.3 The use of qualitative data to give meaning to quantitative data

As indicated, in this section, the results of an analysis of qualitative data associated with respondents' accounts of the involvement of divisional workers in 'information' meetings and in training are reported. The findings for 'information' meetings are reported in Section 5.3.1 and the findings for training in Section 5.3.2. Within each of these sections, attention is given to the following: (i) similarities and differences, within and between divisions, in the way in which respondents defined the issue in question (ie. 'What are 'information' meetings?' and 'What is training?'); (ii) similarities and differences, within and between divisions, in the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on the issue in question; and (iii) attributional data reflecting respondents' views about the events (actions, etc.) which had shaped the present situation, with respect to each of the issues in question (essentially, attempts to explain the current involvement of workers in 'information' meetings and in training).

Before reporting these results, however, the following points of clarification (concerning, for example, certain specific features of the data set, the 'style' of presentation of the data etc.) are offered:

1. With the exception of the attributional data, all of the data included in the present analysis pertain to respondents' accounts of their *present* experience. At the same time, however, these data were often embedded in responses pertaining to some other contextual domain. For example, in the course of talking about his/her experience of training in the past or anticipated future, a respondent might, by way of drawing a comparison, comment on training in the division at the present time. These comments, along with all other data pertaining to the respondent's experience of training at the present time were extracted for inclusion in the present analysis.

2. It will become apparent from the data reported in this section that the perspective from which different respondents provided information sometimes differed. For example, it was not uncommon for supervisory staff to talk about a particular issue (for example, training) from the perspective of what they as individuals did in the organisation. Shop floor (ie. 'wages') employees, on the other hand, were more likely to talk about the issue from the perspective of their perception of how things were done in the organisation.

3. All of the data presented take the form of respondents' comments, quoted verbatim. In accordance with guidelines set down in the Australian Government Publishing Service's *Style Manual* (1994), the following style protocol has been observed. No attempt has been made to correct grammatical errors in any of the quoted material. However, where clarification of a respondent's meaning is required, or where it is necessary to substitute a name with a more neutral title, such changes have been inserted into the quoted material and enclosed in square brackets.

The last three points below pertain specifically to the results of the thematic content analysis.

4. In reporting the results of the thematic content analysis, emergent themes which were common to both divisions are described first, followed by a description of emergent themes which were unique to each division. Within each of these two categories ('common' and 'unique' themes), themes are described in order of how strongly they were supported by the data (in terms of the number of respondent

comments reflecting each theme), from those with the most support to those with the least support.

5. For each theme described, all of the data (that is, all respondent comments) reflecting that theme are presented. Also, contradictions to any given theme in the form of minority views are also highlighted. This approach was adopted in order to provide a clear indication of the extent to which given themes were supported by the data. It can be contrasted with the more common practice in qualitative studies of reporting data selectively, typically with no indication given of the criteria used in selecting the data that are reported.

6. Finally, the reader may note that, in some cases, the same data are presented in support of more than one theme. This occurs when a respondent has made a comment (concerning some aspect of his/her present experience of 'information' meetings or training) containing more than one central idea or theme. Since the comment could not be fragmented further without risking a change in meaning, it was left intact and simply reproduced where appropriate. Since this occurred very infrequently, it was felt that there was little reason for concern about redundancy in the data presented.

5.3.1 Findings for 'Information Meetings'

(i) What are 'information' meetings?

As indicated above (see p. 292), in response to prompting, eight respondents from the tooling division and eighteen respondents from the production division reported some involvement of the workers in their division in information meetings. It is interesting to note that, of the eight respondents from the tooling division, there were only two who offered this information in response to an initial *general* prompt: 'Do workers in your division at the present time attend meetings of any kind?' The remaining six had to be asked *specifically* about the involvement of workers in their division in 'information' meetings. In contrast, in the production division, fifteen respondents provided this information in response to the initial general prompt, whereas only three had to be presented with the subsequent more specific prompt⁷³. This finding is consistent with the frequency data reported above, suggesting that workers in the production division had had markedly more exposure to this activity than their counterparts in the tooling division.

⁷³ This difference between the divisions was statistically significant (Chi square=7.53, p < .01).

Tooling Division. Of the eight tooling division respondents who reported some worker involvement in information meetings, five gave some indication of their perception of what these meetings involved. The remaining three simply indicated that workers were involved in such meetings, without elaborating on the nature of these meetings. The most common perception of the purpose of information meetings was that they provided a venue for the dissemination of information about the performance of the company as a whole. This view was indicated, more or less explicitly, in the comments of four respondents, as follows:

...[talking about] tooling projects, the way the car was selling and all that sort of general company situations... ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Well the only thing that I've been to a meeting of is when the future of the company, when they've been going bad and they'll have a meeting right, of telling you what's going on. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Occasionally we were involved, like they used to, [the divisional manager] used to call a mass meeting sometimes. ...for a specific reason, if there was a special occasion like the launch of the new model, they'd say how it was going, how we did. ('wages' employee)

The State of the Nation meetings, or state of the company or whatever, is given to provide the workers with information, not really to take from them any information. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Also contained in two of the excerpts above is the idea that information meetings were held, not on a regular basis, but only when some specific event or set of circumstances seemed to warrant this form of communication to workers (for example, a downturn or, alternatively, the launch of a new model).

In contrast to the above, one respondent from this division was emphatic that the sole purpose of the information meetings was to inform workers about how the current relocation effort was proceeding and to notify them of the likely implications of this change for the division as a whole and for them as individual employees. According to this respondent, performance information (related, for example, to product quality) was not disseminated in these meetings:

Hang on a minute. The information update was only on the future of the Toolroom and what will happen with the people. It has never involved quality or whatever. (first-line supervisor)

Production Division. Compared with the tooling division, there seemed to be more variability among respondents from the production division in their perceptions of what constituted the main focus of information meetings. In all, there were fifteen

respondents from this division whose elaborations on the subject included some reference to the specific content of information meetings. While these respondents all agreed that the meetings were for the dissemination of performance information, respondents differed in their accounts of how local the information was. For example, the following comments by eight respondents suggest that an important focus of information meetings was the dissemination of highly localised information pertaining to the performance of the respondent's particular section or work group:

Well, you just go through how your area is going – its reject rates, its absenteeism, safety, you just go through your performance. It entails how to improve it, where we're going wrong, things like that. With management [you] sit down and go through these things. ('wages' employee)

State of the Nation talks... they're mainly about how your area runs. ('wages' employee)

...they go in and they just talk about [the section]... how good that's going, how many rejects. ('wages' employee)

...we had monthly feedback sessions to the groups where we monitored key performance indicators and then once a month, we would, when we collated the end of month figures, we would sit them down and we would talk about those, that is their key performance indicators, so they really knew where they were, what it meant, what went into them. ...we would present them with anything that we thought was relevant, coming forward, like we did a lot of, we kept right up to date with the latest developments in [the new model]... it was just monthly feedback meetings, it was done by operating group, by the supervisor, by shift. (senior supervisor)

We do that on about a monthly basis because we do the charts and all that, the performance charts. ...Yes, [you get] performance indicators for the areas that they're working in. Absenteeism and stuff like that, car sets, injury visits to the medical centre and all that stuff. (senior production control supervisor)

...each respective supervisor of their own particular section takes the troops in and lets them know about the absentee rates, their scrap rate, the productivity per car sets, mostly just to keep them informed of what is going on. And like if the company made a profit – like the last one was that the company announced a 53 million dollar profit – and what happened was that before it was announced on the press, they had all the groups in and told them that this is what is going on. (first-line supervisor)

...we try on a monthly basis to give a state of the nation type talk and we schedule everybody right across the floor in all areas and departments. ...[The Plant Manager] comes along, [the Technical Manager] comes along, our superintendent may give a talk, I always give a talk on how the group performs, give them that feedback and normally just general company type issues. (first-line supervisor)

...we have a monthly meeting where we discuss with the group... we discuss safety, production, scrap, absenteeism, quality, our customer's perception of

quality, and we added one in, I believe a new one, with suggestions – we try to encourage people on the floor to put in suggestions. (first-line supervisor)

In contrast to the above, the following comments by six respondents contain no reference to the dissemination of local work group information in 'information' meetings. Rather, the focus appears to be broader and concerned primarily with the dissemination of divisional or company-wide performance information:

They hear about how the plant's been running for the last month or six weeks or whatever. They get told something about the future sometimes. ('wages' employee)

Well, we have a State of the Nation but that's just like our every three months' meeting where we sit and watch a video of the state of the whole of GMH, not just production. Really we're not involved in any meetings as just for Production. ('wages' employee)

State of the Nation meetings – how the company is going virtually. ...it's all about Holdens, their operations here. ('wages' employee)

...they're only telling you what's happening in the industry, that's all... ('wages' employee)

About the only meetings we attend, as like State of the Nation or actually how production is going. ...That's mainly just getting all the people together and just saying how the cars are selling, and what the industry is going like. ('wages' employee)

In the case of the following two respondents, it was unclear from their description of information meetings, whether or not the information disseminated in these meetings included any local content:

Just to tell us... if we're up or if our parts are down... Just, you know, [to tell us] how the cars are selling. ('wages' employee)

Well we have the State of the Nation. That involves... they tell you the quality, how the quality record's going, how many rejects we've had for so many months, how the sales, how the market is... If they've got any grievances, the bosses that is, management. If they've got any grievances they'll bring them up at this meeting and see if people have got ideas as to how to overcome them... ('wages' employee)

One possible explanation for the apparent inconsistency in respondents' perceptions of the nature of information meetings is that respondents were referring to different meetings. In fact, after responding to the initial prompt, two of the above respondents went on to distinguish between local production meetings, in which workers from individual sections (work areas) were given feedback about the performance of their

section, and 'State of the Nation' meetings in which workers received divisional and company-wide performance information:

Well one [meeting], like the first one, is how your section's going... like whether you're getting many rejects on the table... and the bigger, the State of the Nation, is how the company's going. ('wages' employee)

State of the Nation was different... that was one that [the plant manager] put on purely to sort of give them the big burst, that was the plant-wide stuff... It's usually like major things, like financial reports, you know, this is where we are, this is where we were, this is where we're going, you know, everything's rosy, everyone's happy, we've really got to stay on top of the overtime, and blah, blah and all that... (senior supervisor)

The point should be made, however, that the term 'State of the Nation' appears to have been used generically by some respondents to refer to any meeting in which performance feedback was provided to employees. As such, in the absence of more specific information, there remains some uncertainty about whether the meetings to which some of the respondents above were referring were local production meetings or more widely-focused 'State of the Nation' meetings. The important lesson provided by these data, however, is that they challenge our tendency, as researchers, to assume that respondents' interpretations of our questions are consistent with our own, and that the responses they provide to any given question can be taken to mean the same thing. On the basis of such assumptions, we proceed to aggregate data and report trends in these data that may, in fact, be entirely spurious. This, of course, is a particular problem where quantitative methods constitute the sole approach to data collection, since such methods, unlike qualitative methods, typically do not allow respondents to elaborate on the responses they provide.

(ii) **Thematic content analysis**

Themes common to both divisions

Theme 1: *Attendance at meetings not self-motivated*

Respondents from both divisions made comments that indicated that the involvement of workers in information meetings was not self-motivated. On the contrary, it seems that it was mandatory for workers to attend such meetings, the implication being that, if this were not the case, the meetings would be considerably less well-attended than they were at the present time. In the production division, there were five respondents who expressed this view:

But [100% workers attend] because it's compulsory, it's done in company time and the line goes off. ('wages' employee)

Well, I would say ninety five percent of the people go because they're virtually told that they've got to go. ('wages' employee)

...but [there has] always been maybe one State of the Nation, once or twice a year, where the workers would have to go. ('wages' employee)

[They don't go] unless they are instructed to. ...Now when I say instructed, they get told that we're going to have a State of the Nation meeting as we call it, and we all go into the canteen, and one of the bosses usually give a run down on how things are going. ('wages' employee)

They're supposed to [attend] but they don't. ('wages' employee)

Similar views were expressed by two respondents from the tooling division. Note that, in the first excerpt below, the respondent (a first-line supervisor) presents an image of workers as being motivated entirely by economic self-interest. As he saw it, workers were disinclined to participate in any work activities for which they were not compensated financially. This view of workers is, of course, entirely consistent with Theory X assumptions about the nature of workers (McGregor, 1960).

[Workers attend meetings] only if they have to. ...If the company is paying you for it, if it is in company time, they go there. If it is not in company time, even if it is in their own interest, if they don't get paid they don't go. ...They used to keep those meetings for about once a month and everybody went until... because you had to clock off at 4 o'clock. ...And they clocked off at 4 o'clock and that was it. They only went to the meeting because it was better than working. (first-line supervisor)

The State of the Nation meetings have always been on a two times a year, three times a year basis and workers are expected to attend. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

The above data raise some concerns about the extent to which any intention, on the part of management, to make workers feel more valued as a result of their involvement in meetings such as information meetings, is being realised. The overall impression created by these data is one of obligatory, rather than self-motivated, involvement.

Theme 2: *Role of workers essentially passive*

A small number of respondents from both divisions commented on the role of workers in information meetings. It was clear from these data that, despite the numbers of workers attending these meetings, and the fact that they were invited to contribute with questions, the role of workers in information meetings remained essentially passive. As indicated in the following comments by two respondents from the production division, few workers responded to the invitation to ask questions and those who did tended always to be the same workers:

Like some people do, like, the whole lot do get involved, but it's only like three main people who've got questions and questions firing. ('wages' employee)

...afterwards when they ask for comments or ask for questions, you get very few people stand up... like at most meetings, they won't. ('wages' employee)

A third respondent from the production division made the point that workers were not asked for their views at all, but were simply told about decisions that management had taken:

The only time you really get any information is if something has happened or, you know, something's wrong, then they'll come and say 'Well we're changing this'. ...they don't come out and ever say 'Well we're looking at changing this. What do you think?' You know, they come out and say 'We're changing this'. ('wages' employee)

In a similar vein, two respondents from the tooling division alluded to the relatively passive role of workers in information meetings. In the first excerpt below, the point is again made that it is always the same workers who contribute in question time. Moreover, the reluctance of many workers to contribute is attributed to their perception that they have little power to influence key organisational outcomes. In the second excerpt, the respondent makes the point that 'State of the Nation' meetings are intended primarily for the dissemination of information downwards. Their main purpose is not to facilitate two-way communication between workers and management.

Well there's always a question time, and it is always the same people that ask questions... Teamwork's teamwork, but what happens is at these information type meetings... you get the same people, you don't actually get a team response. You know what I mean? You will get people that will come up... they'll be the same people all the time, and others just sit back. And I mean we're all guilty of it. I mean, I go to some meetings and I think to myself 'Well they haven't brought up any relevant points that [are] going to stir me up', so I don't normally get involved in things that I find irrelevant. If something I think is really gonna bug me, okay, but I think a lot of the people are prepared to go along with... because maybe in some ways they're a bit like me, you can say a lot but you're not gonna have a big influence on any change in a big organisation like the General. It's very regimented and you've got you're chain of command and a bloke on a shop floor is going to have... alright he might change a couple of things in his area, he might get a light put in the corner so he can read a drawing better, which is all a help, don't get me wrong, but he's not gonna have a big influence on the running of the place. And I think that tends to quieten people down. They realise that fact. People aren't completely stupid. (first-line supervisor)

[Workers] get involved in as much as after a State of the Nation meeting it's open for questions. So if they've got any problems then is the time to state the problem. Beyond that, they don't really have any involvement whatsoever. The State of the Nation meetings, or State of the company, or whatever, is given to provide the workers with information, not really to take from them any information. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

In the tooling division there were also a number of respondents who, in the context of their comments about information meetings, made more general references to the nature of the communication between shop floor workers and their supervision. In the first excerpt below, it is suggested that supervisors feel threatened by, and hence discourage, a more active and involved role for workers. In the second excerpt, the respondent makes the point that workers often have difficulty gaining access to information that has direct relevance for them.

But down there, they don't like it, they don't like you being involved... To me, I got the feeling that supervisors feel as if you're trying to give too much and you might be sort of be after their job or something like that. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Like we're having at the moment, our programme's starting up, and its not until you sort of ask questions... You've got to sort of like dig deep... Yeah, [I would want] the information given freely instead of workers [having] to work it out for themselves, or having to really dig deep. ('wages' employee)

The point should be made here that it is perhaps an over-simplification to equate the degree of support for any given theme (in terms of the number of respondents' comments which reflect that theme) with the theme's centrality to respondents' thinking about the particular issue under investigation. For example, while the present theme does not appear to be strongly supported by the data, the absence of any views to contradict those reported above suggests that the theme may, in fact, be of some significance in informing our understanding of the nature of workers' current involvement in 'information' meetings.

Theme 3: *Meetings held as the need arises*

A small number of respondents from both divisions suggested that 'information' meetings were held only as the need arose, that is, when there was specific information, whether negative (for example, relating to declining productivity) or positive (for example, relating to the launch of a new model) which management wished to communicate to workers. This theme emerged in the comments of three respondents from the production division and two respondents from the tooling division. Specifically, respondents from the production division commented that:

[Meetings are held] only when they've got information to tell the people... Or when the situation arises, such as a shortage of work or a drop in sales. Then, you know, we get 'told' [to improve performance]. ('wages' employee)

The only time you really get any information is if something has happened or, you know, something's wrong... ('wages' employee)

...there's not really much to report at the moment 'cos nothing's happening, there's not a heap of cars being sold and it's probably bad news anyway... ('wages' employee)

The two respondents from the tooling division commented that:

Well, the only thing that I've been to a meeting [for] is when the future of the company, when they've been going bad and they'll have a meeting, right, [for] telling you what's going on. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Occasionally we were involved, like they used to, [the divisional manager] used to call a mass meeting sometimes... For a specific reason, if there was a special occasion like the launch of the new model, they'd say how it was going, how we did. ('wages' employee)

While it is not entirely clear, it appears that this contingency applied only to 'information' meetings in which company-wide information was disseminated and not to the sectional or work group meetings, mentioned previously, and referred to in the elaborations of some of the respondents from the production division.

Themes unique to each division

Production Division. The analysis of the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on 'information meetings' revealed two themes that were unique to the production division. Each of these themes is described below. For the tooling division, no unique themes were identified by the present analysis.

Theme 1: *'Information' meetings contingent on production demands*

Four respondents from the production division made explicit reference to their perception that either the attendance at 'information' meetings, or the frequency with which these meetings were held, was contingent on the level of production in the division. When production demands were high, meetings were either not held or not attended by certain key workers or groups of workers:

Well, yes, [all workers] are supposed to [go], but we don't always do it if we're busy or something. I quite often cop out if I'm busy... I think, I haven't got time to go to that. ('wages' employee)

No, they haven't been [held on a regular basis]. Since the introduction of the new model, it has been whenever there has been time. And that is the whole philosophy regarding all meetings, right. It has sort of died a death and [been] put to the back burner until we get some sort of stability, because of the model introduction... (first-line supervisor)

...unfortunately, the last couple of months we've missed out, with the [new model].
...unfortunately, our first function is that we have to provide parts to build a car, and when the heat's on, certain things get dropped off. It's unfortunate, but this only happens once every two years anyway with a new model. And the last couple

of months we've missed out on our monthly talk to the groups. (first-line supervisor)

[All workers] are supposed to [attend] but they don't. ...it depends on the section. If the section is busy, they just ignore them... they miss out. ('wages' employee)

The notion that 'information' meetings were of secondary importance, relative to other activities in the division (associated, for example, with the production demands referred to above), was implied in the comments of a further ten respondents from this division. Of these, four reported that 'information' meetings were held more regularly in the past than at the present time. Given the data above, it would seem reasonable to assume some association between this observation and the introduction, in recent times, of a new model vehicle:

It used to be once a month. I reckon [it is now] about three or four times a year. ('wages' employee)

Occasionally, not as often as we used to... Well, I don't think I've been to one now since January. So it's not as often as it should be. We used to have them regular. We used to have them at least every two months and now I would say it's about four months since I've been to one. ('wages' employee)

Interviewer: Do workers in production attend meetings? *Respondent:* Not as much these days as we used to. ('wages' employee)

...from the shop floor initially they were pretty sceptical because, you know, these sorts of programmes start and stop, start and stop, and then in fact that's what happened. (first-line supervisor)

The remaining six respondents simply pointed to the irregularity with which 'information' meetings were currently held. Again, while these respondents offered no explanations as to why this was the case, their comments below nevertheless give some indication of perceptions about the relative importance of 'information' meetings:

I'd say they've always been there, but on and off. Sometimes you'd have them and then you might go for a few months and you wouldn't have them. Then they might develop again. ('wages' employee)

I'd say [meetings are held] maybe every couple of months, maybe more. It just depends. ('wages' employee)

...I think it's supposed to be once a month, but I reckon it averages out once every 3 months. ('wages' employee)

It depends, they vary. Sometimes you get them every six months or you have them every couple of months. It just depends. ('wages' employee)

...sometimes you can get a couple [of meetings] in, you know, one each month, and then don't have it for two months, so it's not as regular [as it should be]. (senior supervisor)

...occasionally a month will slip by where we don't give a meeting, but we try on a monthly basis to give a state of the nation type talk... (first-line supervisor)

Theme 2: *Divergent views about 'information' meetings*

Respondents from the production division had varying perceptions of the value of 'information' meetings. For example, there were four respondents who expressed positive views about 'information' meetings. Of these, three elaborated further on their perception of the implications of such meetings for employee relations within the division:

...on the average [the meetings] are pretty good. ('wages' employee)

...I think when you give the people the information back, I mean they don't all appreciate it, but I think say ninety percent of them do... And, you know, to me it instils a little bit more pride in what you're doing. ('wages' employee)

...it generated interest, it got them together. It did at least force the supervisor, even if he didn't want to, to communicate with his people in a structured way... and it was a pretty good get together... (senior supervisor)

...if we don't give one they say, 'How come we haven't had a monthly feedback?'. And that's good, because they want to know their position and they want to know their future, and I want to know mine as well, so we're all in the same boat. (first-line supervisor)

In contrast to the above, there were four respondents from this division who, for varying reasons, were critical of 'information' meetings. For example, one respondent made the point that, even though there was an opportunity in these meetings for workers to ask questions, the concerns which they raised were often not attended to seriously or acted upon:

...even at the State of the Nation meetings they'll say 'Well, we need your input for this... If you don't like the way this is done...', but then you can turn around and say 'Well, I don't like the way that's being done', and they say 'Well, bad luck'. ...and like I said, they say the same things, the workers say the same things. I mean we get bad parts from [the moulding section] so 'Why don't you do something about moulding?' and the bosses give us the same answer. And every meeting is exactly the same... it doesn't matter how much you complain about what's wrong up your end, they've got just as many problems down their end. But then a lot of our guys don't see it like that. All they can think of is 'We're getting all these shit parts and we don't want them anymore, do something about it'. Whereas moulding have got the same problem, even I can see that. ('wages' employee)

Two other respondents were critical of the content of 'information' meetings, arguing that the information presented lacked relevance for workers on the shop floor and that it was communicated in a way which made it difficult for workers to understand:

...we really felt like early on, I mean, it just went way over their heads. It was too far up the management scale to be meaningful to them. [It was] sort of pie-in-the sky stuff that a lot of them really weren't interested in anyway. ...if you're going to communicate to them, it's got to be something that is directly relevant to their working day. They're not really interested in company profit and loss really. (senior supervisor)

...quite often they throw a lot of figures around, which most people don't understand. Figures don't mean a lot to a lot of people... quite often people come up [and say] 'What was he talking about?' And you have got to try and explain what he was saying. And that happens so many times. In fact, every meeting I've ever been to, I've had people come up to me and say, 'Oh I didn't really understand anything'. ('wages' employee)

A fourth respondent pointed out that the communication in 'information' meetings was very much one-way – from management down to the workers. This respondent argued for a more active role for workers, in particular, with respect to the collection of the performance data presented in these meetings:

It's all management [communicating to the workers]... They come up with these graphs and say, 'We've done this – rejects, medical visits... This is not good enough, that's not good enough. [You] have to improve this, improve that. You people out on the shop floor, you should know all the safety hazards...'. What you [should] do is get the figures for the month, you get one person, like let's say you've got yourself this month, I give it to you. The figures for the month could be accident reports and the costing, and rejects, right? So you've got one day, a whole day to do all that. Next time it's somebody else's turn. ('wages' employee)

In contrast with the production division, there was only one respondent from the tooling division (out of eight who reported some worker involvement in 'information' meetings) who provided any insight into his evaluation of these meetings. As indicated in the excerpt below, this respondent was critical of what he perceived to be a failure on the part of management to keep promises that were made in 'information' meetings:

After that, for many occasions, the company has shown that what they were saying proved to be untrue. I kept a lot of records which I threw away where our leaders told us 'We will look after you. We [will] do this and we [will] do that' and it was completely untrue. (first-line supervisor)

The finding that tooling division respondents were less inclined than their counterparts from production to comment on their perception of the value of 'information' meetings is not inconsistent with the previous observation that this activity appeared to be somewhat peripheral to definitions of the role of workers in this division.

(iii) Attributional data

Respondents from each division were asked *specifically* about changes in their experience of worker involvement in 'information' meetings from the past to the

present. Where changes were reported they were then asked to comment on their perceptions of the reasons for these changes. The point should be made that these attributional data, while they could only be generated by asking respondents to focus on differences between the past and the present, nevertheless represented explanations for why the present was as it was. As such, it seemed appropriate to report on the findings of the analysis of these data in the present section (which, as indicated previously, is concerned primarily with qualitative data reflecting the *current* context of respondents' experience), rather than in some other section of the results. Findings for the tooling division are reported first, followed by findings for the production division. Within each division, the main focus of the analysis was on attributions that respondents had in common.

Tooling Division. As indicated below, the attributional data for this division could be summarised in terms of one major theme.

Major Attribution: *Information meetings introduced to quell employee anxiety*

Six respondents from the tooling division reported a change in their experience of 'information' meetings from the past to the present. In all cases, it was indicated that, in the past, there were no 'information' meetings for workers in this division. All six respondents pointed to a link between the introduction of 'information' meetings and the decline of the division (which culminated in its substantial down-sizing and eventual relocation). This was reportedly a period of high anxiety for divisional employees, marked by the proliferation of rumours and the growing unrest of a workforce that felt increasingly uncertain about its future. The excerpts below suggest that management's primary aim in introducing 'information' meetings at this time was to try to deal with the negative employee relations' consequences of the decline of the division. The reader's attention is drawn to the last two excerpts which contain evidence of the growing distrust that workers in the division felt towards management:

The information update was only on the future of the [tooling division] and what will happen with the people. (first-line supervisor)

[Management were] probably I guess trying to gradually indoctrinate people into the move and the way things were slowing down. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

[It was a] management decision. They probably woke up that they should be telling everyone, passing on more information, probably to make a happier work force or to stop rumours. [I would] say [that] the rumours became a lot more prevalent over the last four or five years, the rumours of the Toolroom closing

down. A lot of the meetings were held to pass on information about that, [to] stop false rumours, [to] sort or give us facts and information. (first-line supervisor)

[The meetings were introduced] probably when work started to become irregular. ...previously we had continual work from our own models... you might have a bit of a period of three or six months when there was a bit of a lull, but there was always something coming, there was something in the pipeline. But when things started to become, you know like there's nothing coming, it was like 'We won't have anything to do for two years' and that's when rumours started amongst people out on the shop floor and so management obviously tried to put people in the picture that, you know, 'No need to worry, we've got this job and we're looking at this, and we are trying to do this, trying to keep the workforce happy'. (first-line supervisor)

...some of the things that had to be told to the people when [the divisional manager] took over couldn't be told and then retold. It had to come from [the divisional manager's] mouth, otherwise they used to say 'That's bullshit, you know, we don't believe you'. And the only way that they would think that what they were being told was honest was for him to stand up in front of everybody and tell them. And half the time they didn't believe him anyhow. (first-line supervisor)

[The meetings were introduced] because I think, or what I heard was, in the past... see they had that big sacking a few years, I don't know what year it was, but a few years ago they put off a lot of people... [It was in the] early 70's and the people don't trust them. The workers didn't trust the management of Holdens. And they were kicking up because they heard a lot of whispers, and I think the workers wanted to know what was going on. And they kept going to the union all the time and asking the union to find out what's going on. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Production Division. In the production division, there were thirteen respondents who reported a change in their experience of 'information' meetings from the past to the present. Of these, twelve indicated that, in the past, there was either no formal performance feedback to workers at all, or less than that which was currently made available. Respondents' explanations for the increase in performance feedback in recent years varied and suggested the following three themes or attributions.

Attribution 1: Information meetings seen as a new management initiative

Seven respondents attributed the change to a change in management, with particular reference to the appointment in the late 1980's of a new divisional manager (who still occupied the position at the time of this study). As indicated in the excerpts below, five of these seven respondents made explicit reference to some aspect of the new manager's style reflected in: (i) a recognition on the part management of the value of increased worker involvement in divisional operations; (ii) a recognition on the part of management of the need for workers to receive feedback on their performance; (iii) the new manager's commitment to communication; (iv) the new manager's preference for

the visual (that is, graphic) presentation of performance information; and (iv) the new manager's commitment to formalising the process of providing workers with feedback on their performance. It is worth noting that four of the respondents whose comments are quoted below were supervisory staff.

Well, it was an idea, same thing as the Team Concept, to try and get people involved, you know. If you are involved in a thing, you can... you have more input to the thing, you know, more idea of what's going on. Like years ago, you were sort of always in the dark, you didn't know what was going on, you know. But at least now if you're interested, you can find out, or you can know what's going on. ('wages' employee)

[The meetings were introduced because] I think that the management that we've got now realised the people's needs, that they do need feedback on how the company is performing, and [that they need] some sort of outlook on what sort of future they're going to have with the company. (first-line supervisor)

It's only in recent times [that 'information' meetings have been introduced]... after [the divisional manager] came... I think he probably spent about twelve to eighteen months just sniffing around the place and making small subtle changes, and then he got really heavily into this communications... [He] wanted to communicate with people and really let them know. (senior supervisor)

No, it's only when [the divisional manager] came along. [He's] a stickler for graphs and stuff... (senior supervisor)

They had [State of the Nation meetings] there before, but not on a regular formalised basis. [Then] it was only when there was a requirement to have it, if that makes sense... once [the divisional manager] came in, he wanted a formalised State of the Nation. (first-line supervisor)

While somewhat less specific in their attributions, the remaining two of these seven respondents also expressed the view that management was responsible, at least in part, for the increased emphasis, in recent times, on performance feedback to workers:

We didn't used to get any at all to begin with, so it's since [the divisional manager] has taken over, he has sort of brought this in. ('wages' employee)

[The meetings were introduced] because the people wanted to know more information... I don't know if it's the workers, or the union, or management [that] have decided to give us more information. Like [the Managing Director] had us over in the canteen to tell us how bad the cars was going, see, that would never have happened years ago, never... I think [the Director of Manufacturing Operations] is the one that's bought a bit more [feedback] to the workers. ('wages' employee)

Attribution 2: Information meetings seen as a vehicle for providing positive feedback

While a change in management constituted the most commonly cited reason for the increase, in recent years, in 'information' meetings for workers, a number of other explanations for this change were also offered. Two respondents pointed to the role of

'information' meetings in the communication of 'good' news to workers. As they saw it, 'information' meetings in their current form had been introduced at a time when the company was experiencing a significant upturn in its performance associated with the market success of the most recently released model. In the first excerpt below, the respondent (a 'wages' employee) is distinctly cynical about what he sees as a form of management propaganda designed to secure the commitment of workers to company objectives. In the second excerpt, the respondent (a supervisor) portrays the initiative in a much more positive light, suggesting that the workers were both surprised and encouraged by the experience of receiving positive feedback about their performance.

It really, it's all been connected with the [new model], because [it] was so successful. They could actually show people on charts that we were coming up to [the level of] our main competitor. And, you know, they could show people nice propaganda instead of doom and gloom as before, because the plant, the production plant was never making any sort of money for years up there [or] so they tell us, you know. But I can't see a big business pumping money into a plant unless, in the long term, they think they're going to make money out of it. But they always said that production was down, it was all doom and gloom. But the last couple of years it has picked up, it has been better you know.

.....they could say, they could show you positive charts 'cos the [new model] went Number 1 seller, so you could see our red line up there and [our competitor's] blue line down there, sort of thing. So whether they were trying to psych the people up saying, 'Yes, you're number one', all American crap that. I don't know, there's not many people up there are... they're not Japanese-type people, they're not American-type people, they're just Australian workers in the factory, sort of thing, you know. ('wages' employee)

But they actually brought out State of the Nation to say how well we were doing, and that was totally... people thought 'Blimey, that's the first time we've ever been sat down and [told] you're doing a good job, and look how well we're doing here, and we're going in the right direction...'. And they came out of those meetings thinking 'Oh yeah'. So the State of the Nation for the first time ever was used in a positive manner. (first-line supervisor)

Attribution 3: *Information meetings introduced to quash rumours*

Another reason for the change, cited by two respondents, was that 'information' meetings had been introduced to curb the spread of rumours within the organisation. In the second excerpt below, the respondent makes the point that, in his opinion, 'information' meetings were introduced primarily to provide workers with more reliable and consistent information than that which was available to them through the company 'grapevine'.

[Information to workers] stops rumours, and things like that, 'cos rumours are deadly, you know... ('wages' employee)

...up until State of the Nation was introduced in a global [ie. company-wide sense], there was always... one plant would have a bit of information, you'd go to the canteen, people would say 'What's going off here?'. 'Oh, I didn't hear that...'. Come back here and you could even hear something about [what] was going to affect your plant that another plant was talking about. And when they had State of the Nations, they were planned so that they were all done within a certain time frame, people felt a little bit more informed. And I believe that was the first idea of State of the Nation... to let everyone know at the same time. That was its first purpose... that's what I believe anyway. (first-line supervisor)

In addition to the above, there were two respondents from the production division who made attributions that were not shared by any other respondent. One argued that 'information' meetings provided management with the means by which they could familiarise workers with management problems. This respondent was critical of the behaviour of management in this regard, arguing that management failed to reciprocate by seeking a better understanding of the problems of workers:

I think they were introduced mainly to make workers, people producing things, aware of the problems that management have... to show they're [the workers] not the only people with problems and that we should all work together... But it's never worked the other way. We've started to go to meetings now with management and get told about production. But management have never gone onto the shop floor to do manual work to find out [about] the problems that we have. ('wages' employee)

The other respondent indicated that his first experience of 'information' meetings coincided with his transfer from afternoon shift to day shift. The perception of this respondent was, therefore, that the change in his experience of 'information' meetings (from no involvement in this activity in the past to his current level of involvement) could be attributed to the change in his work shift. However, subsequent questioning revealed that the respondent was uncertain about the actual history of 'information' meetings within the division. He indicated that he did not know whether, in the past, there were no 'information' meetings for workers at all or, alternatively, whether 'information' meetings were provided for workers on day shift only.

When I was on afternoon shift, there was none... Afternoon shift people just didn't get to go to them. They might have had one a year or something, but that's it... I don't know if they had them at all [in the past]. I'm not too sure if they did before. ('wages' employee)

The reader may note that the number of respondents represented by the above data is thirteen and not twelve, as might have been expected. The reason for this apparent inconsistency is that two of the respondents represented above are each quoted on two separate occasions (that is, in attempting to explain the change in their experience of

worker involvement in 'information' meetings, they each made two attributions); further, attributional data were not available for one of the twelve respondents who reported a change towards increased worker involvement in this activity in recent years.

Finally, one respondent from the production division reported that, in the past, there had actually been more performance feedback to workers than that which was currently made available. This respondent attributed the current status of this activity to the phasing out of various initiatives (eg. weekly team meetings) introduced as part of the Team Concept.

Conclusion to the analysis of qualitative data on 'Information Meetings'

The above analysis of qualitative data on 'information' meetings provided a number of valuable insights into the meaning that this particular worker activity had for respondents from both divisions. These are discussed in point form below.

1. First, there was some evidence to suggest differences (both between and within divisions) in the way in which respondents defined 'information meetings'. While there was general consensus among tooling division respondents that 'information' meetings involved the dissemination of company-wide performance information, respondents from the production division variously referred to 'information' meetings as meetings in which local (sectional) performance information was disseminated or, alternatively, as meetings in which company-wide performance information was disseminated. This lack of agreement among production division respondents about what constituted the main focus of 'information' meetings suggested the possibility that, in this division, there existed more than one type of meeting which could be classified as an 'information' meeting. As indicated, the findings of this analysis of 'definitional' data have important implications for the extent to which quantitative data from one division can be aggregated reliably and compared with quantitative data from another division.

2. A second, deeper level of insight into the meaning of the quantitative data on 'information' meetings was provided by the analysis of the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on this subject. As indicated, there were a number of emergent themes in these elaborations that were common to both divisions. For example, respondents from both divisions made the point that attendance at these meetings was obligatory rather than self-motivated, and that it was primarily because of this that the meetings were currently so well-attended. It was also suggested that, despite the opportunity for workers to ask questions in these meetings, their role in the

meetings remained an essentially passive one. Finally, it was noted that some 'information' meetings (namely, those in which divisional or company-wide, rather than sectional or work group, information was disseminated) appeared to be held, not on a regular basis, but rather in response to certain specific events (either positive or negative) about which management thought workers should be informed.

3. The thematic content analysis also revealed that, with respect to some aspects of their experience of 'information' meetings, the two divisions were qualitatively different. For example, a number of respondents from the production division shared the view that the level of production in the division significantly influenced both the attendance at 'information' meetings and the frequency with which they were held. High levels of production inevitably led to compromises in the involvement of workers in this activity. This was not a theme that emerged in the tooling division data. Respondents from the production division were also more inclined than their counterparts from the tooling division to make evaluative comments regarding their experience of 'information' meetings. While their evaluations of these meetings tended to be mixed (that is, some positive and some negative), the important point can be made that, at least in the production division, respondents appeared to have had sufficient exposure to this activity to have formed an opinion about its value.

4. It was argued that the results of the thematic content analysis could have important implications for the achievement of managerial objectives associated with the introduction of 'information' meetings. If a hoped-for outcome of providing workers with more performance feedback was that workers would feel more valued by the organisation, and hence more committed to its goals – as indicated, in the production division, there was at least an espoused commitment, by divisional management, to a more Theory Y approach to the management of workers – then the results of this analysis would suggest that only partial progress toward the achievement of this objective had been made.

5. Finally, the analysis of attributional data provided evidence of divisional differences in respondents' attributions about why 'information' meetings, in their current form, had been introduced. There was also evidence of differences in the degree of sharedness of attributions. In the tooling division, there was general consensus among respondents that 'information' meetings had been introduced to deal with the uncertainty and rumours associated with the decline of the division. In contrast,

respondents from the production division were more variable with respect to their perceptions of why the meetings had been introduced. The most common attribution pointed to a link between the current emphasis on performance feedback to workers and the arrival of a new divisional manager whose managerial style was characterised, in part, by a commitment to more open communications with workers. It can be argued that this attribution is potentially more optimistic than that made by tooling division respondents. The latter suggests a view of management as reactive and inclined to adopt initiatives such as 'information' meetings only when problems arise, whereas the former suggests a view of management as being more aware of the human relations value of more open communications with workers. A number of other attributions were also made by respondents from the production division, including the introduction of 'information' meetings for the purpose of communicating 'good' news to workers (whether as a form of management propaganda or as genuinely positive feedback) and also to curb the spread of rumours within the organisation. However, these attributions were shared by a minority of respondents only.

An important methodological implication of the above findings, when considered as a whole, is that it is hard to imagine how the insights they provide could have been obtained using a more structured quantitative approach to data collection. The qualitative data are typically highly context-specific, meaning that it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to identify a priori the range of possible questions that one would need to ask in order to generate the responses obtained.

5.3.2 Findings for 'Attend Training'

(i) What is training?

As shown in Table 5.1, in response to prompting, all of the tooling division respondents and twelve of the production division respondents reported some involvement of the workers in their division in training. No respondent mentioned this worker activity spontaneously. Specifically, respondents were asked: 'Do workers in your division at the present time attend training or professional development programmes?' It was perhaps not surprising, given the wording of this prompt, that the training activity typically reported by respondents from both divisions took the form of formal training courses that were provided 'in-house' or externally through one of the local colleges of further education. For the tooling division, all references were to worker involvement in formal training. For the production division, nine of the twelve

respondents (75%) reporting some worker involvement in training and all of the seven respondents reporting no worker involvement in training were referring to formal training. However, for the remaining three respondents who reported some worker involvement in training (25% of this group), it was clear that the reference in each case was to training that was provided 'on-the-job'. There was, therefore, some inconsistency (albeit marginal) among production division respondents in their interpretations of what constituted 'training'.

This finding draws attention to the point made previously in relation to 'information' meetings, namely, that had the present method relied solely on the use of the particular closed questions that were asked, interpretive inconsistencies of this kind would not have been revealed. Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, one might argue that more specific closed questions might have been asked in order to tap this difference between formal and on-the-job training. However, the problem remains that, without some knowledge of the organisation and its culture, the researcher cannot know what questions are the 'right' questions to ask. In this sense, all closed questions that are designed a priori must be seen to be susceptible to the kind of interpretive inconsistency reported here.

(ii) Initial comments

It became apparent in the early stages of analysing the qualitative data on 'training' that there were some interesting insights to be gained from a review of the very first comments that respondents made in response to the prompt question. Unlike the corresponding data on 'information' meetings, these initial comments actually gave some indication of how respondents from each division perceived and thought about training in their respective divisions. For example, the following initial comments by three respondents from the tooling division suggested some uncertainty about the nature and amount of training provided in that division:

Well, they were bringing those courses in, yes. That would probably be in the last two years. All this new – what do they call it – to make you more skilled.
(‘wages’ employee, leading hand)

I think they would attend training [if they had the opportunity]... Yes, some are.
(‘wages’ employee, shop steward)

We set up a training room. I don't really think we used it very much. They did have some welding classes and some hydraulic classes and some pneumatic classes and stuff like that which was all training... And so I would have to answer yes [to the question]. (senior supervisor)

A further three respondents from the tooling division made initial comments which, more or less explicitly, pointed to a relatively low level of training activity in the division:

[In the] latter years, there have been a few courses on. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

They had a training programme... about twelve months before they sort of closed down. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

I reckon not enough [time is spent is spent in training]. ('wages' employee)

This same impression was conveyed by the initial comments of eight production division respondents. These respondents suggested that not only were training opportunities for workers in the division limited, but they were also restricted to particular individuals or groups within the division:

No. Oh, that's not quite right. In the moulding area sometimes die-setters do get to do some training. ('wages' employee)

[Laughs] Some do, some don't. ...It depends on how much money they got and how much time they got. ('wages' employee)

Interviewer: Are there any other meetings that workers attend? *Respondent:* Maybe a training course which they send some of the workers to. ('wages' employee)

There is, spasmodically there's these die setting courses that they send people on. ('wages' employee)

Yes, some do. I couldn't put a figure on how many but, yes, some have gone down to Regency Park, places like that to [do training]. ('wages' employee)

We have had, yes a bit of training, actually yes, we do attend training. ('wages' employee)

There is I would say the opportunity, what is the word, yes there is training there, they have had training for painters, they have had training for injection moulding... (first-line supervisor)

Not a great deal, no. I mean the sort of training that we do we try and do in-house. (first-line supervisor)

The initial comments from the production division also contained one reference to the company's legal obligation to provide training and one reference to a temporary interruption in training activity that the respondent attributed to current production demands:

By law I think we're obliged to spend 1% of our salary on training anyway and in this plant it's more than that, and I can't tell you exactly what it is but I think it's somewhere around about 5% at any one time. (senior supervisor)

We've got a paint course going at the moment and then along came [the new model] – it's been held off for the last three weeks. (first-line supervisor)

For the production division, some of the 'no' responses to the prompt were also of interest. The first two responses below are notable for the certainty which they project, while the third response expresses a view similar to that above, namely, that there was a tendency in the division for production demands to take precedence over training needs.

[There is] no such thing [as training]. ('wages' employee)

No-one's been to training for yonks. No. ('wages employee, acting leading hand)

No. We only do that when we've got spare time. ('wages' employee)

(iii) Thematic content analysis

Themes common to both divisions

Theme 1: *Organisation's needs take precedence over individual's needs*

A key theme which emerged in the tooling division data and which was also present, although to a lesser extent, in the production division data was that training was primarily a response to the organisation's needs. The potential for training to satisfy higher-order individual needs, such as the need for self-esteem and the need for self-fulfilment (Maslow, 1954), was not evident in respondents' thinking about the provision of training in their respective divisions. This separation of the organisation's and the individual's needs is consistent with Theory X assumptions about the nature of workers (McGregor, 1960), whereby workers are perceived to be motivated primarily by lower-order needs, such as the need for job security and a basic wage. As indicated in the following comments by five respondents from the tooling division, the perception of training in this division was that it was primarily about replacing lost skills, learning what the organisation wanted you to know, and developing competence in the use of new technology. None of the excerpts contains any reference to the notion that training might potentially increase the motivation and self-esteem of individual workers. The last excerpt, in particular, suggests an approach to training and selection that is reminiscent of Taylor's (1911) recommendations for the 'scientific' management of workers. This excerpt also contains the idea that training was reactive, that is, provided in response to a problem that had arisen.

...obviously [the company] introduced [multi-skilling] to benefit themselves of course, there is no doubt about that. But it possibly is [part of a wider industrial] reform, and that is the way of thinking, [whereby] you can have a more versatile workforce. ('wages' employee, shop steward)

When you start to lose skills, you've got to replace them somehow or other and the only way you're going to do it is to get a person willing to start to better himself. (first-line supervisor)

[The approach to training] is a bit like the army, it's sort of what GMH wants you to know is what they'll let you know... I mean you have to have a work relation to the schooling you allocate for the people from a company's point of view, you must have that sort of thing, but I don't think a company should be narrow minded in the way they present it. ('wages' employee)

Give me the authority from the bosses up top that I can educate them [the workers] and if they are unwilling that I can put it to them that 'Either you do it this way, how it should be done. I don't want any shonky work. You do it that way, how it should be done, that we create a product, or you are fired'. (first-line supervisor)

...I think the training is pretty adequate. I think the main training areas are apprentices. Beyond the apprentices, the training involvement then is technological change involvement. That is, we are now introducing NC [Numerical Control] machining and such like, so everybody should be put on those machines even if only for a very short time, so they're aware of exactly what that thing is doing and what they need to do to achieve what that machine requires. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Well training... once I found out from the leading hand that a person is not capable in doing the job, I encouraged the leading hand to look after him, and help him out so that he knows what he is supposed to do. I also encouraged the people in the Gun Shop, particularly in the Gun Shop, that every one knew how to make it, and once that was done, then I selected the people for a job that they could do best. Now we had Bill on the drill. He was magic. Putting Fred on the drill who couldn't do it, didn't want to do it, or whatever, it just didn't work out. But also Bill on the drill knew exactly how to make a gun, not as good as Fred who was bending tubes or doing something else. They all knew how to make guns but after I found out who can do things better and faster, not necessarily faster, but better because our aim was quality... (first-line supervisor)

A similar view of training emerged in the production division data. The following comments by two respondents from this division highlight the role of training in satisfying production needs in the division. In the first excerpt, the suggestion is that training is provided only when the need arises (in this case, the need for a new fork lift driver to cope with the division's materials handling requirements). In the second excerpt, the implication is that training is of value only to the extent that it will subsequently be applied 'on-the-job'.

Well, drivers get training but that's if they need a new driver they train someone up. ('wages' employee)

[There's] no point in sending an operator to a trouble shooting course because unless they are going to be a die setter, they're not going to get any benefit out of it, and I think the courses are about \$400 each, which I'm sure the company can claim on its tax purpose or whatever, but they haven't got a heap of money to

throw around up there, and what's the point of sending a 45 year old lady to a die setting course and she's Polish and she's not going to understand it? ('wages' employee)

While the above data provide evidence that a predominantly Theory X view of workers may underlie the approach to training in each division, there was one respondent from the tooling division whose perception of worker involvement in training implied a more Theory Y view of workers. As this respondent saw it, the company's aim in providing workers with training was to help workers develop an increased sense of responsibility for the job and enhance their interest and involvement in their work. Whether or not this aim had been achieved, however, was not commented upon.

The company is trying to get the worker to feel as though he is responsible for what he's doing. Like at one stage when you go into work the expected thing is you are there for eight hours because of the fact that you've got a clock there. You clock on, you clock off. So the attitude of the worker is that well, I'm here for eight hours, I'll do the work and that's it. But what the company's trying to get into people is that not only are they doing eight hours work, but they're doing eight hours of interesting work, and they're trying to get them more involved in that work. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

It is perhaps worth pointing out that the respondent who expressed this minority view worked in a section of the tooling division which was separate from the main area which housed the division's machining, manufacturing, and try-out operations (and from which the majority of respondents in the present study were drawn).

Theme 2: *Negative attitudes toward the current emphasis on training*

In both divisions, there existed negative attitudes towards the 'formal' training that was currently made available to workers. However, as above for Theme 1, this result was more pronounced for the tooling division than for the production division. In all, there were five respondents from the tooling division whose elaborations on the subject of 'training' contained some form of criticism. For example, two respondents were critical of the current emphasis on multi-skilling, suggesting that it resulted in workers acquiring skills which were unlikely to be maintained because of their questionable relevance to the actual work in which workers were engaged:

I mean since I started a couple of years ago, as I was saying, you could take any course, and it didn't matter... it had nothing to do with die making for instance. What is the sense in that? ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Well you can retrain yourself to do lots of things, but these things are useless to you unless you carry on working in that capacity. I mean I could go to a course and be retrained as a computer operator. After a couple of months, that would be

totally useless to me because I would have forgotten everything I had learned, and unless you're working with it, things are so complicated nowadays you can't retain them in your memory. (senior supervisor)

Another respondent warned against the financial implications of having too many trained workers:

I think that [training] will reach a level and then they have got to be careful because if you have got too many [trained workers], you can't use them because everybody will be demanding extra money. ('wages' employee, shop steward)

There was also a perception that older employees, who had acquired valuable experience over the long term, were being discriminated against unfairly by the current reward system which was designed to link remuneration and opportunities for promotion to the number of skills acquired through training:

How can he ever move up the ladder? He's too old. He's got all the brains and the skills that's necessary to put him there, and it's too late. Now, with this thing that's come in [the reference is to Award Restructuring], if he can't pass courses and sit for exams and do well, which are supervisory type stuff, you just don't make it. (first-line supervisor)

Finally, one respondent expressed the view that the most valuable training available to workers was still that provided 'on the job':

I mean to me, to me personally, I don't think schooling is the big advantage to a tradesman. I went to trade school, I learnt nothing there. I learnt all my skills from work. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Two of the nine respondents from the production division who reported some worker involvement in 'formal' training expressed negative attitudes towards this training. Specifically, these respondents were critical of the quality of the training provided, with the second respondent quoted below pointing to the questionable practice of classifying, as training, any worker activity which did not involve direct production (including basic housekeeping activities, such as, "painting" and "cleaning up"). As suggested subsequently by this respondent, the aim of this practice was to ensure compliance with recent government legislation that required companies to spend a certain percentage of their payroll on training.

And what happened was when we went down, downturn in our schedule this year, all of a sudden everyone was getting this training everywhere, and I still believe a lot of it was just a total waste of time. And we could have trained in better ways. (senior supervisor)

...I think that it was last August. They stopped the plant two and a half hours early every day to get people training. Now you have seen what happened around here with the training didn't you? *Interviewer:* People were cleaning up and painting and... *Respondent:* But they recorded that as training. Now, pushing a broom is

not training, sitting in an office upstairs and showing them how to do problem solving techniques... Well that was training, but people have seen that all over before, and yet nothing after that training has been of any value to the company, so I again question 'What is training?'. (first-line supervisor)

It is perhaps worth noting that, while the above data are similar in that they all reflect negative attitudes towards training, one can nevertheless detect a difference between the divisions with respect to the specific grounds upon which respondents are critical of training. A key issue for tooling division respondents was the questionable relevance of the training provided (given both the ageing population of the division and also the nature of the work traditionally performed in the division); for production division respondents the issue was whether or not the training provided constituted 'real' training. From a cultural perspective, this difference may not be insignificant and may reflect the different cultural contexts into which training for workers has been introduced.

Theme 3: *Workers motivated by economic self-interest*

A third theme that emerged in the accounts of training provided by respondents from both divisions concerned the motivation of workers to participate in training courses. In the following comments by two respondents from the production division (both of whom had previously reported some worker involvement in training), the suggestion is that workers are reluctant to attend training if this requires an investment of their own time for which they are not compensated financially by the company. The implication here is that workers are primarily motivated by economic self-interest which is, again, a view of workers that is typically associated with Theory X assumptions:

Well, they used to pay them overtime if it was in their own time, but they don't pay that any more, and some workers are telling management to stick it. ('wages' employee)

...if people don't get paid to go on extra training, quite often they won't go. ...Well, knowing the people, I know a few of them won't do anything unless they get paid by the company and unless they are going to gain something out of it, and a lot of them don't consider gaining knowledge as a gain. ('wages' employee)

A similar view was expressed by one respondent from the tooling division:

That is why the attendance was that low because a lot of people said that I am not spending my time... the training time was two hours, the company paid you one, and you paid one out of your own time. (first-line supervisor)

While the number of respondents represented by the above data is small, the reader will recall a related theme that emerged in the context of respondents' elaborations on

'information' meetings. As indicated previously, a perception in both divisions was that workers attended information meetings primarily because it was compulsory that they do so, and not because they were necessarily motivated by a desire to be better informed about, and hence more involved in, company and divisional operations. In the same way, the present theme raises questions about the genuine commitment of workers to enhancing their skills and knowledge through 'formal' training. These data have important implications for what management might be trying to achieve through the increased involvement of workers in activities such as 'information' meetings and training. If the aim is to effect a more positive human relations environment, then the perception that workers engage in these activities because they have to, or because their participation offers a means of avoiding work, must be seen as a potentially serious impediment to the achievement of this aim.

In the context of the present discussion on worker motivation, the following comments by two respondents from the production division are also of interest. The implication in the first is that, given the low levels of motivation of workers compared to staff, it is questionable what training, if any, can usefully be provided to workers. In the second, the implication is that company sponsorship of worker participation in more general training courses (in which they could acquire skills that were potentially marketable outside of the organisation) is undesirable on the grounds that workers are not sufficiently committed to the company to stay there in the event that other options were to become available. Both of the respondents quoted had previously reported some worker involvement in training.

...what training courses do you give 'wages' people? ...like staff are more motivated to do things on their own. (first-line supervisor)

There are courses available from the company to anyone who wishes to benefit themselves and benefit the company. I mean they won't pay for you to go and do a car re-spraying course, or anything like that because what the company finds is that they pay for the training and then the person shoots through and gets a better job. (first-line supervisor)

Themes unique to each division

Tooling Division. The analysis of the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on 'attend training' revealed two themes that were unique to the tooling division. These were as follows:

Theme 1: *Involvement in training an individual initiative*

In the tooling division, there was some evidence to suggest that, although training was offered according to divisional (organisational) needs (as above), the actual involvement of workers in this training was largely an individual initiative. In other words, it was up to the individual worker to express an interest in, and seek approval for, attendance at particular training courses that were being offered. In this sense, the division's role with respect to training would appear to be essentially passive. There was no indication that workers in the division were actively encouraged by their supervisors and managers to attend training. This theme is reflected in the following comments by four tooling division respondents:

Well, they were bringing those courses in... to make you more skilled. Everybody had the opportunity. It was open to everybody. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

No-one is forced to go. They are made aware that these courses are on and they let me or a supervisor know they want to attend and those arrangements are made. (first-line supervisor)

There are courses that they can attend, like a welding course, electrical courses, that they can do part in company time, part in their own time... they would see the notice come out saying that they wanted welding courses, electrical courses and you could put your name down for whatever you wanted to do. (first-line supervisor)

Yeah, well I was in charge of the training side of things. ...Not in charge of training the people themselves, but just organising those people to be trained in certain, how would you say, post-trade little courses and what have you. They were available and it was up to the individual to become involved. (first-line supervisor)

Theme 2: *Training more appropriate for younger workers*

In the tooling division, the training implications of the introduction of Award Restructuring were perceived to have more relevance for younger employees than for longer-serving employees. This theme emerged in the comments of four respondents, as follows:

A lot more people will be involved in training with Award Restructuring, particularly the younger people. ...it's not going to have a great effect on a person like me, I'm sort of getting a bit too old to learn new tricks and all that sort of thing now. Award Restructuring is for the younger people and the next generation coming up. More so than the older people. (first-line supervisor)

Well, I believe that any knowledge is good knowledge as long as you're a young kid... When you get over fifty years of age and they turn around and say the only way you can get to become Grade 7 [a more advanced supervisory grade] is to go back to school and get your intermediate and then go and get this certificate, who is going to remember how to two times two? (first-line supervisor)

I think restructuring is going to make people go and do [training]. If they're prepared to go on, particularly the boys are going to have to do a lot more. They tell me that there's supposed to be a grandfather clause in it for us older guys. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

I think the young ones will [be involved in more training]. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Production Division. The following four themes which were unique to the production division emerged from the analysis of the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on 'attend training':

Theme 1: *Divided views on the effectiveness of 'on-the-job' training*

As indicated above, in response to prompting about worker involvement in training, respondents from both divisions typically made reference to the involvement of workers in formal, rather than 'on-the-job', training. At the same time, however, the subject of 'on-the-job' training appeared to be of some significance to respondents from the production division. Twelve respondents from this division made reference to the fact that 'on-the-job' training continued to constitute a common approach to the training of workers in the division. In contrast, none of the tooling division respondents made reference to this form of training when talking about their present experience of training in the division. This finding was perhaps not surprising given that almost all of the 'wages' employees in the tooling division were qualified tradesmen who, in most cases, had negligible responsibility for providing 'on-the-job' supervision and training to the division's few remaining apprentices. It could also be argued that respondents from this division might be less likely to be explicit about any 'on-the-job' training that was provided, since this might be seen by them as an admission that the existing trade skills of workers in the division were somehow inadequate.

In the production division, attitudes towards 'on-the-job' training appeared to be somewhat divided. For example, the implication in the following comments by four respondents (two of whom had previously reported some worker involvement in 'formal' training and two of whom had reported some worker involvement in 'on-the-job' in training) is that 'on-the-job' training constituted an effective means of teaching job skills to new or existing workers:

...if a person came from the Trim Fab, and you wanted to show them, you put an experienced operator and you stay with them, while they feel they're capable of being left and then they go back later, and see that they're going all right. And they are implementing – it is being implemented that. ('wages' employee)

...what I normally do is get my key people to train any new people, and I believe in job rotation and that means that when you do job rotation everyone gets trained to do the job properly. (senior supervisor)

I mean the sort of training that we do, we try and do in-house... Well, as a new worker you would be shown the basics right throughout and if you came to my area for example, you would be [shown] right through moulding... We have people trained up in a way that we would feel confident, that we train them up ourselves, they've got the capability to actually run through like a system, if you like. (first-line supervisor)

That works with the obvious thing where you bring in either a new employee, or you're training up because of award restructuring, the employee can do a certain function within the group, so then he is trained up so that he can do every single function within that group, and he is trained either by the leading hand or another experienced operator. (first-line supervisor)

In contrast, the four respondents quoted below (two of whom had previously reported no worker involvement in training and two who had reported some worker involvement in 'formal' training) were all critical of the quality of the 'on-the-job' training that was provided. In addition, it was either implied or argued explicitly that such training did not constitute 'real' training:

I mean our spray painters get put in the booth and get stuck with someone who has sprayed before. I mean is that training? ...As far as I'm concerned training is learning to do a job the right way, by the right people, by professionals. ...There's [on the job training] for everything. You get put on a job by whoever is doing it and get shown how to do it, but the only thing that you are doing then is getting taught the bad habits of the person who was there before. There's no official training, there is no people with authority that have done the training themselves, that have got some sort of recognition that they can do the job right. ('wages' employee)

...the spray painting we got here is if your overalls fit, you are sort of a spray painter. They don't have any formal training or anything like that. ...there's a few of us that got trained properly and the rest of them nowadays just get thrown in the booth and they say 'This is the gun, this is the part, paint it'. ('wages' employee)

I think [management] have got the feeling that everybody should know their job, without being trained. ...Well, that's like as I said to you before. When I started learning spray painting, the foreman came in, no [it] was the leading hand actually, he was in there for about an hour, two hours showing me how to do it and that was it, he just walked out. ('wages' employee)

It depends [on] what the definition of training is. If it is you telling me as the leading hand of the area, sitting me down and saying 'This is what you have to do, that is what you do' and that is recorded as training, then I do not consider that as training... When you come into Production you are taken around, shown where the toilets are, shown where the canteen is, told the fundamentals and all this sort of thing. Then you are taken to the [work] area and then you are [told] that is what is going to be your job, and then you stand there, and then you are given to a leading hand and you are shown, if you are moulding, this is what you do in this particular

job. Then you are taken on this [job] and that is what you do there and this is it. There is no formalised follow up. There is no written job procedures. Unless you have something to measure a person's performance by, in a formalised sort of a fashion, you are only relying on what the person. [says]: 'Yes, they are okay, they seem to be going alright, no particular problems there, they do everything I ask them'... Now is that training? (first-line supervisor)

It is worth mentioning that, although the small numbers of respondents represented by the above excerpts preclude statistical significance testing, seniority does appear to be a factor influencing respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of 'on-the-job' training. Supervisory staff tended to be positive in their attitudes towards this form of training (three out of the four respondents expressing positive attitudes were supervisory staff), whereas 'wages' employees tended to be negative (three out of the four respondents expressing negative attitudes were 'wages' employees).

Theme 2: Amount of training contingent on production demands

It will be recalled that, in response to prompting about the involvement of workers in training, two respondents from the production division made initial comments that contained the idea that training needs were secondary to production demands. When production demands were high, the involvement of workers in the division in training diminished significantly (or sometimes even completely) while, when production demands were low, training activity in the division was increased. In the subsequent more detailed analysis of the qualitative data on training, it was found that this was a view shared by a number of other respondents from the production division. In all, six of the nineteen respondents (32%) from the production division (including the two mentioned above) made comments that reflected this view. These six respondents included three who, in response to prompting, had reported some worker involvement in training (25% of this group), and three who, in response to prompting, had reported no worker involvement in training (43% of this group). The comments of the former were as follows:

Some do, some don't. ...It depends on how much money they got and how much time they got. ...if they've got time to train people, they'll train them, but if all of a sudden they get busy they won't train anyone else. ...A good case was just before Easter. They were doing a big training thing and all the people they could cover away from their jobs, which were most of them except for the duco mixers and spray painters in Enacon, got to go and we didn't, 'cos they can't afford to lose us from our jobs in here. ('wages' employee)

We brought TAFE [the college of Technical and Further Education] in here to do a spray painting course and we got half way through and had to stop it because of VP [a new model⁷⁴] introduction...

They had this downturn and we didn't really look at what we were training them [in]. We just gave them training for the sake of training...

And what happened was when we went down, downturn in our schedule this year, all of a sudden everyone was getting this training everywhere, and I still believe a lot of it was just a total waste of time. And we could have trained in better ways. (senior supervisor)

We've got a paint course going at the moment and then along came VP – it's been held off for the last three weeks...

Most of the training they do is when we're going bad – when we've got excess labour around the plant, they send them on all the training courses they can get their hands on. ...and there's an avalanche of courses like within three months – people get sick to death [of training]. (first-line supervisor)

The comments of the latter three respondents were as follows:

...at the moment the opportunity is there for the company to train people because the industry is depressed and there is not enough work for the workers that they have got. As the industry goes up again they will have even less time, so if they're not training people now when they've got the time and the labour, they're certainly not going to do it when everybody's working solid. ('wages' employee)

No. We only do that when we've got spare time. Like when there was a downturn two months ago... they decided that they would use that time to take one of those [relief groups] and relieve on the lines so that that person on the lines, say in Moulding or Assembly or whatever, could go into a training... It did stop because we started to get busy for the VP...

If we're very slow, then they'll say 'We'll use this time for training.' ('wages' employee)

...at the moment if you want to learn something, they can say 'We haven't got time to show you that'. ('wages' employee)

That the above theme did not emerge in the tooling division data was perhaps not surprising given the distinctly different systems of production which operated in the two divisions. Using Woodward's (1965) typology for classifying production systems (ie. technology), the production division could be described as supporting 'mass production' technology (with work organised around a number of different production lines, each mass producing various component parts), whereas, in the tooling division, work was organised around a 'unit or small batch' production system (for the design and manufacture of press dies, assembly fixtures, and special purpose tooling and equipment). Production demands in the tooling division were, therefore, unlikely to be as urgent on a day-to-day basis as they were in the production division.

⁷⁴ All vehicle models were assigned alphabetical codes.

It will be recalled that the present theme also emerged in respondents' elaborations on 'information' meetings. There is evidence, then, that the demands of production in this division may take precedence over, not just one, but a range of activities not directly related to production. To the extent that this is the case, it sends a clear signal to workers about what it is that management *actually* values and this, in turn, is likely to undermine those values which management may be hoping to communicate through the increased involvement of workers in the division in activities such as training and 'information' meetings.

Theme 3: *Bias in the selection of employees for training*

Two of the production division respondents who reported some worker involvement in training suggested that selection decisions for participation in training courses were often biased in favour of the foreman's (first-line supervisor's) preferred candidate, rather than necessarily the most deserving candidate.

Well, normally it's the foremen that pick who go, or it's the leading hands. And so it's either the leading hands or the leading hands' mates that go all the time. ('wages' employee)

I know people in this plant that have been here nearly as long as me, and [have] never, ever been asked to go on a course. Yet, there are new people that have come in – they've got die setting, they've got all sorts of things – and people resent this. ...I've never been on a course. I've been asked [by the foreman] three times and three times I've been knocked back [by management]. The only courses I've been on is for health and safety, and I've worked here all these years...
...foremen have favourites and you'll get this all the time, that some people will get nothing and another person would [get everything]. ('wages' employee)

This same view was expressed by a third respondent who, in response to prompting, had reported no worker involvement in training:

See you get different... they've just done different things for different people. ('wages' employee)

Theme 4: *Training as a cost*

A key idea in each of the following excerpts by three respondents from the production division is that training is essentially a one-off cost, rather than a potentially valuable investment in the human resource capabilities of the organisation. The first two respondents quoted had initially reported some worker involvement in training, while the third respondent had reported no worker involvement in training. The third respondent also implied that this particular attitude to training, which was not one to which he subscribed personally, was somewhat short-sighted.

Well, I'd like to see more training but training can be so expensive you know. The employer doesn't like to have training. ('wages' employee)

Now, we've had a lot of people that have come in who have had no intention of working in Production, you spend six months training them up and they leave, and even that basic training, there's a lot of money. (first-line supervisor)

...they will not have [a training person] here because it's a surplus head. ...But look at what they'd gain by having all the people training properly. You know, it's so sad really. ('wages' employee)

(iv) **Attributional data**

Tooling Division. All respondents from the tooling division reported a change from the past to the present in their experience of training for workers in the division. In all cases, it was reported that there was either no training in the past or less than that which was currently made available. Two common attributions – the first more widely shared than the second – emerged in respondents' explanations for the current status of this activity. These were as follows:

Attribution 1: Increased training seen as a response to 'external' pressures

The majority of respondents (nine out of twelve, or 75% of this group) indicated that they saw the change towards increased training at the present time as having been externally rather than internally driven. It can be seen from their comments below that a range of external forces for change were identified including: pressure from the government; nation-wide reforms in the industry; pressure from the union; changes in government legislation; and the introduction of Award Restructuring. The reader's attention is drawn to the distinctly cynical tone of the first two excerpts below.

If it was left to [the company] it wouldn't happen. But that is the new plan right around the country isn't it, that they want people to be more skilled, so they have got to sort of give people courses that they can do... That will get to the stage where they [management] will say... as it diminishes... they will say that we don't need that anymore anyway. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

The company's been forced to do this [become more quality conscious, increase training etc.]. They never do anything until they're forced to. (first-line supervisor)

Yes quite recently, [workers] have been asked to participate in quite a few educational trainings, like pneumatics, PLC [Programmable Logic Control]... Yes. It is now the tendency... I think that it started about two years ago... it is now the tendency of a company to train their people to acquire a better quality job... It is a government push... It is a government sponsored thing that people should do more and know more... (first-line supervisor)

...obviously [the company] introduced [multi-skilling] to benefit themselves of course, there is no doubt about that. But it possibly is [part of a wider industrial]

reform and that is the way of thinking where you can have a more versatile workforce. ('wages' employee, shop steward)

Interviewer: Why do you think training was brought it? *Respondent:* I think it was the law. I think [it was] the legislation. (senior supervisor)

...since they brought that, what do you call it, where they had to supply worker training... It was a union sort of work thing. ('wages' employee)

Well, I think it was involved with the restructuring, you know, the government's restructuring programme, retraining and so forth. (senior supervisor)

Interviewer: Why do you think that they introduced [training]? *Respondent:* Well, I think it was more about this restructuring situation, I think that's really where it's all starting to stem from. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

...there was very little training being offered until the introduction of restructuring. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

Attribution 2: Training increased to further develop existing skills or replace lost skills

The remaining three respondents simply referred to the implications of increased training for enhancing the skills, knowledge and flexibility of workers. While the first respondent quoted below implied that the change had been driven primarily by internal circumstances (namely, the loss of skills through the retrenchment of divisional employees over past years), the last two respondents offered no insights into their perception of why management might want to increase the efficiency and flexibility of workers. In fact, the clear impression conveyed by the comments of the third respondent below is that his uncertainty about the issue prompted a response designed primarily to 'fit' with what he thought the interviewer wanted to hear.

It was just trying to build up some of the skills of the workers... When you start to lose skills, you've gotta replace them somehow or other, and the only way you're going to do it is to get a person willing to start to better himself. (first-line supervisor)

I think they're trying to develop the tradesman into learning a bit more scope, like, that he can sort of do a bit more here and a bit more there. ('wages' employee, leading hand)

I don't know [why training was introduced]. Probably to make a more efficient organisation, give more knowledge to the people that's working on the tooling.

Interviewer: So it's a management attempt to improve efficiency? *Respondent* [laughing]: Yeah, that sounds all right! (first-line supervisor)

It is interesting to note that, in none of the attributions above, is there any clear reference to a more Theory Y orientation to training, whereby the value of training for satisfying the needs of individual workers, as well as the organisation's needs, is recognised.

Production Division. In contrast to the tooling division, only eight out of nineteen respondents from the production division reported a change from the past to the present in their experience of training for workers in the division. Of these, six indicated that, in the past, divisional workers had either less training than at the present time, or no training at all, and two respondents indicated that there was more training for divisional workers in the past. With respect to the former, various attributions were made regarding the change towards more training at the present time. These are summarised below.

Attribution 1: Increased training seen as a response to 'external' pressures

Like their counterparts from the tooling division, three respondents pointed to the impact of various external pressures. Specifically, the first two respondents quoted below attributed the change to a change in government legislation requiring organisations to spend a certain percentage of their total payroll on the training of employees. The third respondent attributed the change to the introduction of Award Restructuring.

I think a lot of the times they look at the training account and they say 'We better train some people'...

We've put more hours into it, but it is not quality hours. And when I say that, what I am saying is, because the companies now have to spend a percentage of their salaries on training, we tend to train for the sake of training. But I don't believe we've really looked at it diligently enough to come up with the needs of the people on the shop floor. (senior supervisor)

I think that legislation now says they have to record on what the training is because the Award Restructuring has put the emphasis in it, because the companies now get fined if they don't have at least 1% whatever... It is legislation that has forced it onto the company. (first-line supervisor)

Since this job restructuring really – they're doing more training now than they've done before... it's part of the restructuring. ('wages' employee)

Attribution 2: Training increased in order to further develop skills

In contrast to the above, two respondents implied that training initiatives in the division had, at least in part, been motivated by a concern to develop the potential of the division's human resources (particularly with regard to skill development). However, it remains unclear as to whether the 'concern for people' alluded to is intended to serve the interests of the organisation only, or the interests of both the organisation and its workers.

The idea is to try and, you know, improve people or improve the work potential. ('wages' employee')

I guess because we finally got a couple of managers that realised that... you got more out of training than it actually cost you. You know, people can't do a job unless they know how to do it. I mean you can't ask a person to spray paint if he doesn't know how to operate a spray gun, for example... (senior supervisor)

The remaining respondent in this group (a supervisor) indicated that he himself had initiated 'on-the-job' training for the workers in his section. In the excerpt below, the respondent points out that his decision to introduce training had been motivated by a concern to help new workers deal with the frustrations associated with working on new and unfamiliar tasks. He also points to the positive implications of training both for his own, and his workers', sense of achievement. While the comments below imply a very Theory Y orientation to training, the respondent himself makes it clear that the approach he describes is very much an expression of his own personal philosophy, rather than an indication of company-wide values regarding the training of workers:

Interviewer: Tell me, though, this increased emphasis on training, is this just something that you've done... or is there a divisional drive towards [increased training]? *Respondent:* I've got a personal thing myself for that type of [training], that's my personal sort of input. I had frustrations when I came up through the company and I know that a lot of people have got those frustrations, so I do my darnedest to relieve it, in a lot of cases. And it's a twofold type situation. I mean you get a sense of achievement when you can see an operator come into a plant and he's growing in knowledge, and you can see him develop, and that gives me a sense of achievement. And it also gives the employee a sense of achievement because he can see how he's come up and had a chance to improve himself... [But] I wouldn't say there's a real drive [by the division], no. (first-line supervisor)

With respect to the two respondents who reported more training for divisional workers in the past, there was one who argued that there had been a shift in focus, away from the use of external training courses in the past, towards more 'in-house' training at the present time. The implication was that the current approach represented an attempt to make training more relevant to workers' specific training needs:

Actually they used to send people out to TAFE colleges, they used to send them out to TAFE in the old days to do die-setting courses and things like that. They used to actually send them to TAFE but then they started bringing TAFE in... They have to package the course up. They have to make a bit of this, a bit of this, and a bit of this. So you haven't got a full variation of... you've got a variation of all different courses but not any specific things. ('wages' employee)

In the case of the second respondent, his experience of training was reportedly limited to a single training course, offered to spray painters in the division, and conducted 'in-house' over a five month period during 1986. The respondent indicated that he did not know why this training was no longer provided.

Conclusion to the analysis of qualitative data on 'Attend Training'

As was the case for 'information' meetings, the results of the above analysis of the qualitative data on training provide some valuable insights into the meaning of this particular worker activity for respondents from both divisions. Importantly, these insights provided a context (or meaning framework) within which to better understand and interpret the quantitative data on training. With respect to the latter, it will be recalled from Table 5.1 that all of the tooling division respondents and almost two-thirds of the production division respondents reported that the workers in their respective divisions attended training. In all cases, this information was provided in response to specific prompting, rather than spontaneously in response to the open-ended question. Additional quantitative data revealed marked discrepancies, among respondents from both divisions, in their estimates of the numbers of workers involved in training and the amount of training received (per worker per year). The author's general contextual knowledge suggested that these discrepancies might be due to the non-uniform nature of training activities in each division (reflected, for example, in sectional differences in worker access to training, and the expectation, in the tooling division at least, that workers should initiate their own involvement in training). What, then, are the specific insights provided by the results of the above more detailed analysis of the qualitative data on training?

1. First, the analysis of the 'definitional' data revealed some variability among production division respondents in how they defined 'training'. While the majority of respondents from this division thought of 'training' as 'formal' training, it was clear from the responses of a minority that their references were to training provided 'on-the-job'. No such discrepancy existed for tooling division respondents, all of whom defined 'training' as 'formal' training. As with 'information meetings', the point can be made here that this interpretive inconsistency, while reflected in the comments of a minority of respondents only, was not evident in the quantitative data on training. The argument that data pertaining to a particular issue cannot be reliably aggregated where there are differences in respondents' definitions of the issue, also applies here.

2. Second, the above results highlighted the potential value of conducting a separate analysis of the initial comments that respondents make in response to questioning about a given issue. These data can reveal elements of respondents' spontaneous thinking about the issue which are perhaps less likely to emerge in more considered responses.

As indicated above, the initial comments of respondents from both divisions, when asked about the current involvement of workers in their respective divisions in training, conveyed the clear impression that training constituted a peripheral, rather than a central, activity with respect to respondents' thinking about the role of workers in their division. Specifically, the initial comments of some tooling division respondents suggested that there existed in the division a degree of uncertainty about the availability of training for workers; the comments of others implied that the level of training activity in the division was relatively low. This latter impression was also conveyed by the initial comments of some production division respondents. In addition, initial comments from respondents in this division contained references to the differential access of different groups within the division to training, the company's legal obligation to provide training, and the subordination of training needs to production demands. The point was also made that initial comments associated with 'no' responses can be as 'telling' as those associated with 'yes' responses in terms of their capacity to reveal respondents' spontaneous thinking about an issue.

3. The results of the thematic content analysis indicated that, as was the case for 'information meetings', there existed both similarities and differences between the divisions in the thematic content of respondents' elaborations on 'training'. For example, respondents from both divisions talked about training in a way which suggested a predominantly Theory X orientation to the provision of training for workers. In other words, the emphasis was on the role of training in serving the organisation's needs, with no indication of a significant role for training in the satisfaction of individual worker needs. In both divisions, there was also some evidence of negative attitudes towards the 'formal' training that was made available to workers. A third theme common to both divisions concerned the motivation of workers to attend training. It was suggested that workers were reluctant to attend training in their own time unless they were paid by the company to do so. Reference was made to the similarity between this theme, which suggested a view of workers as motivated primarily by economic self-interest, and a previous theme which emerged in the data on 'information meetings' suggesting a view of workers as externally motivated (in the sense of participating in various activities because they have to, and not because they want to).

In addition to the above common themes, the thematic content analysis also revealed a number of themes that were unique to each division. For example, the elaborations of

some tooling division respondents on 'training' contained the idea that it was largely up to the workers themselves to initiate their own involvement in training. There was no sense in which the organisation was seen to be actively encouraging workers to pursue development of this kind. That this theme did not emerge in the production division data may reflect changes in this division, over recent years, whereby management had introduced a number of initiatives (eg. problem-solving groups, performance feedback sessions for individual sections, and the graphic display of outcome data in work areas) which were designed specifically to increase the involvement of workers in the daily operations of the division. As such, management in this division could be seen to be more actively encouraging and supporting the involvement of workers in a number of 'non-production' activities. A second theme that was unique to the tooling division concerned the perception that recent training initiatives in the division were of relevance only to the division's younger employees. The emergence of this theme in the tooling division data, and not in the production division data, probably reflects differences in the demographics of the two divisions, with employees in the tooling division being, on average, older and longer-serving than their counterparts in the production division.

The elaborations of production division respondents also contained a number of themes that were unique to that division. As indicated, the subject of 'on-the-job' training was clearly of some significance to respondents from this division, with some offering positive evaluations of this form of training and others suggesting that it did not constitute 'real' training (which, in their view, was training provided by qualified professionals). The point was made that the absence of any references to 'on-the-job' training by tooling division respondents probably reflected the status of employees from this division as qualified tradesmen, whose 'on-the-job' skills and competencies were already well-established. Another theme which was unique to the production division concerned the view that the amount of training available to divisional workers was contingent on production demands. When production demands were high, the level of training activity in the division was low; when production demands were low, there was 'spare time' available for the provision of training. It was noted that this same theme emerged in the production division data on 'information meetings', suggesting that the particular contingency described may apply to a range of worker activities in this division. Finally, there were two additional, though less well-represented, themes which emerged in the production division data on 'training'. The first pointed to a degree of

bias in the selection of workers for participation in training courses and the second highlighted the perception of training as a cost.

4. The fourth and final point concerns the insights offered by an analysis of the data pertaining to respondents' past experience of training. As was the case for 'information' meetings, there was evidence to suggest that tooling division employees may be a more homogeneous group in this regard than their counterparts in production. As indicated, all respondents from the tooling division reported that, in the past, there was either less training in the division than that which was currently available or no training at all. In contrast, less than half the respondents from the production division reported a change in their experience of training from the past to the present. Moreover, while most of these respondents indicated an increase in training activity over recent years, there was a minority who reported a decrease. With respect to their attributions regarding these changes, there was again less variability among tooling division respondents than among production division respondents. For the former, the impact of external pressures was the most commonly cited explanation for the increase in training over recent years. For the latter, the increase in training was variously attributed to external pressures, a recognition by management of the need to develop workers' skills, and in one case, the commitment of the respondent himself to developing the potential of his workers. The point was made that the less consensual views of production division respondents (regarding their experience of training) could not be accounted for simply by differences in the demographics of this group, and that an alternative explanation in terms of contextual factors might need to be considered.

Overall, then, it can be seen that the above findings for 'Attend Training' highlight the value of qualitative data for understanding the meaning of quantitative data. This same general conclusion applied with respect to the findings for 'Information Meetings'. Again, the point can be made that, if the present method had relied solely on quantitative techniques of data collection, it is unlikely that the above insights into the nature of respondents' experience of, and thinking about, training could have been obtained. It is difficult to imagine how one could design, a priori, a set of specific questions capable of generating the range of highly context-specific information reported above.

5.3.3 Methodological issues arising from the analysis of qualitative data

There are a number of important methodological issues arising from the findings reported above, all of which have implications for an evaluation of the particular approach to combining qualitative and quantitative methods adopted in the present study.

1. Issue specific analyses. The first issue concerns the present approach to analysing qualitative data. Rather than conduct a single analysis of the entire qualitative data set for a given interview, the approach adopted above was to dissect this data set and conduct separate analyses of the qualitative data pertaining to specific issues addressed by the interview (in this case, concerning respondents' experience of worker involvement in 'information' meetings and in training). One of the problems with this approach is that, if viewed separately from each another, the findings of these separate 'issue-specific' analyses can under-represent the prevalence of emergent themes or attributions that are identified. This is because the same theme or attribution may emerge in the context of respondents' comments about, not one, but a range of different issues. In fact, it will be recalled from the results of the thematic content analyses reported above, that two such themes were identified each of which emerged in respondents' elaborations on 'information' meetings and training. The first theme, which was a theme common to both divisions, concerned the lack motivation of workers to participate in non-production activities; the second concerned a perception among production division respondents that, at any given time, the involvement of workers in non-production activities was largely dependent on the demands of production at that time. An important implication of this particular feature of the present method is that, in order to provide accurate information about the prevalence of any given theme or attribution, the researcher must, at some point, draw together the findings of each of the separate 'issue specific' analyses that (s)he has conducted with the aim of identifying what they have in common.

The above comments are not to deny the value of the present approach to interviewing, whereby respondents are presented with a series of prompts (closed questions) designed to provide information about a range of specific issues. In fact, it might be argued that, compared with completely unstructured approaches to interviewing, the present approach may be more effective in 'bringing to the surface' those themes and attributions that may be of particular significance in a given context.

This is because, in focussing respondents' attention on a number of specific issues there are, in a sense, more opportunities for particular themes and particular attributional styles to find expression. A related advantage of this approach is that there may also be more opportunities for both the emergence and subsequent evaluation of possible explanations for the presence (or absence) of these themes and attributional styles. In fact, the findings associated with the above theme, concerning the perception that production demands determined the level of worker involvement in non-production activities, provided some evidence to support this view. It will be recalled that this was a theme that was unique to the production division. There was no indication of this particular contingency also applying in the tooling division. In attempting to explain this difference between the two divisions, reference was made to the different production systems operating in these divisions. Interestingly, however, this explanation did not become apparent initially, in the context of respondents' elaborations on 'information' meetings (which contained the first references to this theme), but was only suggested subsequently by the findings of the analysis of the associated data on training.

2. Significance of repeated themes. The second methodological issue raised by the above findings is not unrelated to the first in the sense that it too is concerned with the question of how prevalent, or how significant, a given theme is in the context being studied. As suggested above, one indicator of the significance of a given theme is the extent to which the theme emerges in respondents' comments about, not one, but a range of issues of potential relevance to their experience of organisational life. Another indicator is simply the 'sharedness' of the theme, reflected in the numbers of respondents whose comments contain some expression of the theme. However, these two criteria are not the sole criteria by which a theme's significance can be evaluated. A third, somewhat less obvious criterion, is the extent to which disconfirming evidence and/or contradictory themes are absent. Where this is the case, one might be justified in arguing that a given theme, which is not strongly supported by the data (in the sense that it emerges in the comments of a minority of respondents only) may be of more significance than would initially appear to be the case, given the relatively low level of available 'confirming' evidence. Of course, such an argument is convincing only if one reports data comprehensively (as in this study), rather than selectively as is often the case where qualitative methods alone are used. An important practical implication of

such an approach, however, is that it imposes definite limits on the amount of data that one can reasonably be expected to collect (since the comprehensive reporting of all relevant data is possible only if a thorough analysis of the entire data set has been carried out). It is also the case that researchers who adopt this approach would need to make use of one of the available computer programmes for text analysis, rather than attempt to analyse their data manually. In the present study, the use of one such programme, namely, Ethnograph (Seidel et al., 1988) made it possible to systematically analyse a relatively large data set.

3. Use of data from other contextual domains. The third issue is related to a point made previously, namely, that many of the data reported above, while they pertained to the *present* context of respondents' experience were embedded in, and hence drawn from, responses pertaining to some other contextual domain. In fact, this was the case for almost half of the excerpts quoted in the two sub-sections above in which the results of the thematic content analyses are reported. Specifically, of a total of 95 excerpts quoted (all pertaining to the present context), 46 were drawn from responses to questions about the respondent's past, anticipated future, or 'ideal' experience (regarding the involvement of workers in 'information' meetings and in training)⁷⁵. An obvious implication of this finding is that, if respondents had only been asked about their experience with respect to the present context (and not with respect to these other

⁷⁵ An examination of this entire data set indicated that there were no significant differences between the two divisions with respect to the contextual domain from which the quoted excerpts (pertaining to 'information meetings' on the one hand, and 'training' on the other) were drawn. However, there was some evidence to suggest that, within each division, there were differences between each of the issues investigated. For example, for the production division, most of the comments about 'information meetings' which were quoted were embedded in responses pertaining to the present context. A minority of these comments only were drawn from responses pertaining to the past, anticipated future and the ideal. With respect to the comments about 'training', however, these were drawn from responses pertaining to three contextual domains, namely, the present, the past and the anticipated future, with each of these domains being equally well-represented. For the tooling division, one half of the comments about 'information meetings' that were quoted were embedded within responses pertaining to the present context, while the other half were drawn from responses pertaining to the ideal. In contrast, comments about 'training' from this division were almost all drawn from responses pertaining to either the present context or the anticipated future.

It is difficult to know what the significance of these findings might be. Of particular interest is the finding that, for each division, the anticipated future context was well-represented with respect to comments about 'training', but not with respect to comments about 'information meetings'. This finding may reflect the current emphasis in the industry on multi-skilling and the implications of this reform for the re-training of employees, if not now, then in the near future. In this sense, training can be seen to be very much on the agenda for the future, making it perhaps more likely that respondents will refer to their current experiences and perceptions of training, not just in the context of their comments about the present time, but also in the context of their comments about the anticipated future. The observation, made previously, that tooling division respondents in particular, felt some anxiety and uncertainty in relation to the introduction of multi-skilling, may also be of significance here.

contextual domains), these data, and the valuable insights they provide about the present, would not have been obtained.

The same argument applies with respect to the attributional data. These data inform us of respondents' perceptions about why the present is as it is. However, as indicated, they could only be generated by asking respondents about the past. The point should be made here that attributions are, by their very nature, contextual in that they presuppose the existence of a past and/or anticipated future that helps people to explain some aspect of their present.

The above observations might usefully be considered in the context of conceptual treatments of organisational culture that emphasise its dynamic, rather than static, nature. This notion that an organisation's culture has a past, a present, and a future is one that is examined in more detail in the next chapter. In the next chapter, data are presented which provide support for an approach to understanding culture that seeks specific information about respondents' experiences with respect to a number of different contextual domains. In a sense, the above observations can be seen to foreshadow the major claim of the next section, namely, that an understanding of these various aspects of context is crucial for an understanding of culture.

4. Importance of elaborative data on both 'yes' and 'no' responses. The fourth and final issue relates to the present approach of analysing the qualitative data associated with both 'yes' and 'no' responses to the closed questions (or prompts). This approach can be contrasted with that adopted in many questionnaire designs that include a qualitative component. Questionnaire respondents are typically asked to comment only on their 'yes' responses, with no opportunity provided whereby they can elaborate on their 'no' responses. An important insight provided by the findings reported above is that elaborations on both 'yes' and 'no' responses to any given question can contain the same thematic content. This was found to be the case for several of the themes that emerged in the elaborations of production division respondents on training. One such theme concerned the perception of some production division respondents that worker involvement in activities not directly related to production (eg. training) was contingent on production demands. This theme emerged in the elaborations of respondents who had previously reported some worker involvement in training as well as in the elaborations of respondents who had previously reported no worker involvement in training.

It is interesting to consider this finding in the context of Australian research conducted by Clarke, Ruffin, Hill and Beaman (1990). These researchers found evidence to support their argument that the practice, common in quantitative research in the social sciences, of converting verbal probability terms (such as those used to represent response categories for Likert-type items) to numerical scales, for the purpose of carrying out statistical analyses, rests upon a number of questionable assumptions. In particular, their findings questioned the assumption that all respondents assign comparable meanings to these probability terms. Their findings also questioned the assumption that these terms, once converted to numerical scales, represent mathematically equidistant and symmetrical points on these scales (so that the difference between, say, 'very likely' and 'likely' can be assumed to be equal to the difference between 'unlikely' and 'very unlikely' and, furthermore, that responses such as 'very likely' and 'very unlikely' can be taken to represent probabilities that are equal in magnitude, but opposite in direction). The point can be made that, although the 'yes'/'no' response categories referred to above are crude in comparison with those investigated by Clarke et al., the same general conclusion applies, namely, that one cannot assume that those respondents who give a 'yes' response necessarily constitute a qualitatively different group from those respondents who give a 'no' response. An implication of this finding for the design of questionnaires that incorporate a qualitative component is that respondents should be given the opportunity to comment both on their 'yes' responses and on their 'no' responses. Of course, even with such a modification, the fact remains that most questionnaires are designed to generate written information only. A clear advantage of face-to-face interviews in this respect is that the data they generate have both a verbal and a non-verbal dimension. Thus, the meaning of a given response can be inferred, not just from the verbal response (ie. the words, as written down) but also from the way in which the response is communicated. It has been this author's experience, for example, that 'yes' and 'no' responses can be communicated with greater or lesser conviction, with the degree of conviction being reflected, at least in part, in the tone of the respondent's voice.

The suggestion above that differences between respondents who give a 'yes' response and those who give a 'no' response may be more apparent than real is further supported by the finding that respondents can differ with respect to their interpretations, or definitions, of the particular issues about which they are asked. As indicated above,

an analysis of the qualitative data on training revealed some inconsistencies, among respondents from the production division, in their definitions of training. While the majority of respondents defined training as 'formal' training, there were some who defined it as training received 'on-the-job'. Specifically, this latter group comprised three respondents who had previously indicated that, 'yes', workers in their division did attend training. The question arises as to whether these three respondents may, in fact, have more in common with respondents who had previously answered 'no' to the question about worker involvement in training (all of whom were referring to 'formal' training) than they do with other 'yes' respondents (who, unlike themselves, were referring to 'formal' training and not to 'on-the-job' training). To the extent that this is the case, it provides support for the view that differences between 'yes' and 'no' responses should not be taken at face value, but rather, they should be interpreted in the light of insights provided by an analysis of the qualitative data associated with these responses.

One final illustration of the value of analysing the qualitative data associated with both 'yes' and 'no' responses is provided by the above analysis of the very first comments made by respondents in response to the 'training' prompt. As indicated, these comments provided some useful initial insights into the way in which training was perceived by some production division respondents. In particular, they conveyed the impression that training was accorded relatively low status as an activity for the workers in this division.

CHAPTER SIX

STUDY III: PART 3

THE OPERATIONALISATION OF CONTEXT

6.1 Introduction

As indicated in the introduction to Study III, a common conceptualisation of organisational culture is that it is highly context-specific and that, in order to really understand the culture of any given organisation (ie. the pattern of shared meanings that help organisation members to 'make sense of' their experience of organisational life), one must seek an understanding of the context within which that culture has evolved and possibly also been transformed. The results of Study II, considered together with the various conceptual treatments of culture that one finds in the literature, suggested the possibility that an organisation's culture might usefully be thought of as comprising a number of specific dimensions or domains, including a past, a present, a future, an 'other' (reflecting organisation member experiences in, or of, other organisations), and an 'ideal' (reflecting organisation member views about how things ideally should be). Accordingly, a key feature of the present method was that it attempted to operationalise each of these different domains of context by asking specific questions about them, with the aim being to generate information that could assist in the drawing of inferences about underlying assumptions concerning, in this case, the role of workers. In this chapter, the results of the analysis of data generated by these questions are presented and discussed. In particular, consideration is given to respondents' accounts of their experience (perceptions) of the role of workers (specifically, what workers do) in relation to these different domains of context⁷⁶. Also considered are the links between the results obtained for each domain.

Given the amount of data generated by questions about context, it was not possible to report all of the results of the analysis of these data in this chapter. It was decided, therefore, that only the results of the analysis of open question data would be reported in

⁷⁶ It should be noted that the results for the present context are not presented in a separate section; rather, they are integrated, as appropriate, into the discussion of results for each of the other contextual domains of interest, namely, the past, the anticipated future, the 'other', and the 'ideal'. This is because respondents' experience of the role of workers *at the present time* constituted the base from which they considered the role of workers with respect to these other contextual domains.

full, and that the results of the analysis of prompt question data would be referred to selectively, in order to illustrate particular methodological points. The complete results for the latter are presented in Appendix D1 (which reports the results for the analysis of prompt data pertaining to the past context), Appendix D2 (which reports the results of the analysis of prompt data pertaining to the future context), and Appendix D3 (which reports the results of the analysis of data pertaining to the 'ideal' context).

Before proceeding to the discussion of results, it is worth noting that a partial illustration of the value of the present approach to operationalising context has already been provided by findings reported in the previous section. As indicated, information about the *present* context of respondents' experience (in relation to the involvement of divisional workers in 'information' meetings and in training) was often embedded in respondents' answers to questions, not about this contextual domain, but rather about one, or other, of the other contextual domains about which they were asked. As was suggested, if the present method had focussed on the current context of respondents' experience only, the valuable insights that these additional data provided about the present would not have been obtained.

6.2 Spontaneous references to contextual domains in responses to questions about the present

Before proceeding to the above-mentioned analysis of contextual data obtained through specific questioning, it is important to consider the extent to which, when asked about the present, respondents spontaneously make reference to aspects of their experience which pertain to some other contextual domain (for example, the past, anticipated future, the 'other', or the 'ideal'). If this can be shown to occur to a significant degree, then it might be argued that specific questions about respondents' experiences with respect to these other contextual domains may be redundant. It may be, for example, that one does not need to ask specific questions about the past since, if given time, respondents may refer spontaneously to aspects of their past experience in the course of responding to questions about the present. In order to explore this question more fully, data from the present interviews were analysed further to determine the number and nature of spontaneous references to contextual domains other than the present, which emerged in responses to questions about the present.

References to the past in answer to questions about the present. The results of this analysis are shown in Tables 6.1 and 6.2. It can be seen from Table 6.1 that, in the

Table 6.1 Spontaneous references to contexts other than the present context contained within responses to questions about the present context, shown for both the Tooling Division and the Production Division.

Respondent #	PAST		FUTURE		OTHER		IDEAL	
	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division
R1	3			1	1			
R2	3	1		1				1
R3	2	2	1				1	
R4		3					1	3
R5	2	2						
R6	1	3						
R7	2	1						1
R8		1						
R9		2					1	
R10	4	3		1				1
R11	1	5		2				2
R12	2	1						
R13		1						
R14		5		1				1
R15		2						2
R16		3						1
R17		2		2				1
R18		2		2		1		1
R19								
Number of respondents	9	17	1	7	1	1	3	10
Total references	21	39	1	10	1	1	3	14

Note: Multiple references by a single respondent to any given activity, or activity category, are not reported.

context of their responses to questions about the present, a majority of respondents from each division (9/12 or 75% of tooling division respondents, and 17/19 or 89% of production division respondents) made one or more spontaneous references to the past. For the production division, the maximum number of references to the past by a single respondent was five, with most respondents making three references or less. For the tooling division, the maximum number of references to the past by a single respondent was four, with the majority of respondents making only one or two references to the past. While these findings might initially suggest a relatively strong tendency among respondents from both divisions to refer to the past when asked about the present, it must be remembered that, in this part of the interview, each respondent was asked a total of thirteen questions about the present (two open-ended questions concerning, respectively, the 'main duties' and 'other activities' of workers in the division, followed by six prompt questions (the first of which comprised six parts) asking about specific activities in which workers in the division might engage). If it is the case that prompting respondents about specific aspects of their organisational experience at the present time leads them to reflect on the nature of this experience in the past, then one might have expected the number of spontaneous references to the past, made by individual respondents from either division, to have been, on average, greater than that reported.

Table 6.2 shows that, for each division, the spontaneous references to the past that were made covered a fairly broad range of topics (referred to later in this section as 'activity categories'). At the same time, however, there were certain specific topics that were better represented than most (in terms of the percentage of the total number of references which they accounted for, and also in terms of the numbers of respondents who referred to these topics). For the tooling division, the best represented topic was 'sports and social activities'. Seven respondents from this division (58% of the sample) spontaneously commented on the involvement of the workers in this division in the past in sports and social activities, with these references accounting for 35% of the total number of spontaneous references to the past that were made by respondents from this division. The point can be made that this finding was consistent with the more general observation that employees from the tooling division, in their day-to-day conversations with the researcher, were frequently reminiscent of the very positive social climate that prevailed in the division in its early years. 'Information meetings' was also a reasonably

Table 6.2 Activities, or activity categories, which were the subject of the spontaneous references reported in Table 6.1, shown for both the Tooling Division and the Production Division.

	PAST		FUTURE		OTHER		IDEAL	
	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division	Tooling Division	Production Division
Involvement of Workers (general)		1						
Housekeeping		1						1
Specialisation versus Multi-Skilling		1		1				
Job Rotation								1
Reward		1						
Meetings (general)		4						
Demographics		1						
<i>Planning Activities</i>	1	2		1				1
<i>Information Meetings</i>	5	4	1					1
<i>Group Meetings</i>		7		1	1	1		2
<i>Safety Meetings</i>	2			2				2
<i>Union Meetings</i>	1	2						
<i>Help Other Workers</i>	2	1					2	
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>		1		4				1
<i>Training Activities</i>	2	3		1			1	2
<i>Sports/Social Activities</i>	7	7						
<i>Worker-Supervisor Communication</i>	1	3						3
Total references	21	39	1	10	1	1	3	14

- Notes 1. Multiple references by a single respondent to any given activity, or activity category, are not reported.
2. Activities, or activity categories which constituted the subject of specific prompt questions are listed in italics (bottom half of table) and can therefore be distinguished from other activities.

well-represented topic in this division. References to this topic were made by five respondents (42% of the sample) and accounted for 25% of all spontaneous references to the past made by respondents from this division. For the production division, the best represented topics were 'sports and social activities' and 'group meetings'. Each of these topics accounted for 18% of the total number of spontaneous references to the past made by respondents from this division and each was referred to by seven respondents (representing 37% of the sample from this division).

References to the future, 'other', and 'ideal' in questions about the present. The findings for the other contextual domains of interest (namely, the anticipated future, the 'other' and the 'ideal') contrasted markedly with those reported above for the past. As indicated in Table 6.1, there were far fewer respondents from each division who, in the course of responding to questions about the present, made spontaneous references to these other contextual domains. Nevertheless, the findings associated with these other contextual domains provided evidence to suggest some differences, albeit marginal ones, between the two divisions. It therefore seems reasonable to comment briefly on these findings.

With respect to the future, it can be seen that there was only one respondent from the tooling division who made spontaneous reference to the future in the context of answering questions about the present. This compared with seven respondents from the production division (37% of this group). While this difference between the divisions was not statistically significant, it was nevertheless consistent with the common perception among tooling division employees (to which reference has been made previously) that the division was in a state of decline and that, as such, its future was at best highly uncertain and at worst non-existent (in the sense of critical aspects of the division's current or past identity being preserved in the future). With respect to the number of references to the future made by a single respondent, in no case (for either division) did this exceed two. From Table 6.2, it can be seen that, for the production division, no topic was mentioned significantly more than any other topic. The best represented topic (which was a reference to a change, in the future, in the involvement of the workers in this division in the recording of work-related information) was mentioned by four respondents (21% of the sample) and accounted for 40% of all the spontaneous references to the future that were made by the respondents from this division.

The findings for the 'ideal' context were similar to those reported above for the future in that, compared with their counterparts from the tooling division, there were more respondents from the production division who, in the course of commenting on their present experience, made spontaneous reference to some aspect of their 'ideal' experience (their views about how things ideally should be). Specifically, there were ten respondents from the production division (53%), compared with three respondents from the tooling division (25%), for whom this was the case. As above, while this difference between the two divisions was not statistically significant, it was nevertheless consistent with some of the more general differences that were observed to exist between the two divisions. Again, this difference might be explained in terms of the perception among tooling division employees that the future of their division was highly uncertain. It may be that, in the absence of some sense of continuity between their present state and an anticipated future state, organisation members are less inclined to think about, or be able to articulate, a preferred or 'ideal' state. An alternative explanation is suggested by the general impression of the tooling division as supporting a stronger, and more easily identifiable culture than the production division (consistent with the relatively long and stable past experience of employees in this division). If, as a group, respondents from the tooling division were more 'culture bound' in their thinking than their counterparts from the production division, then one would expect that they would be less likely to perceive a need for change and, hence, less likely to speculate on a preferred state which differed significantly from their existing state. As reported for the past and future contexts, the numbers of spontaneous references to the 'ideal' by a single respondent was in all cases relatively small. In neither division did the maximum number of references per respondent exceed three and, in most cases, only one or two references were made by each respondent. It was also the case that, for neither division, was there any one topic which was referred to significantly more frequently than any other topic.

Finally, with respect to the 'other' context, Table 6.1 shows that there was only one respondent from each division who, in the context of commenting on his/her present experience, spontaneously referred to some aspect of his/her experience of other organisations. It was also the case that each of these respondents made one reference only to his/her experience with respect to the 'other' context.

Conclusion. Overall, the above results suggest that respondents are unlikely to provide much information about their experiences with respect to contextual domains other than the present unless they are specifically asked to do so. In other words, questions about the present (whether they are open-ended and relatively general, or closed and more specific) are unlikely to elicit a lot of information of this kind. It was clear from these results, however, that when respondents did provide additional contextual information, they tended to refer more to their past experience (in their current organisation), than to their anticipated future experience, their experience of other organisations, or their 'ideal' experience. This is perhaps not surprising given that one's past constitutes an already experienced phenomenon (compared with, say, one's anticipated future or one's 'ideal'). In this sense, people are probably able to articulate their past experience more readily, and with more confidence, than they are able to articulate their experience with respect to these other contextual domains.

The finding that there were so few spontaneous references to other organisations probably reflects the fact that even the shortest serving participants in the study had been with their current organisation (and division) for at least several years. The longest serving participants in the study (who were from the tooling division) had in excess of twenty years service with their current organisation (and division). In this sense, it is perhaps not surprising that almost all of the spontaneous references to the past that were made were concerned with past experiences that respondents had had in their current organisation, rather than past experiences that they had had in other organisations. It might also be that respondents would be more likely to refer spontaneously to their experiences in other organisations if these experiences differed markedly from experiences they had had in their current organisation. As will be seen later in this section, the results of an analysis of data pertaining to the 'other' context provide evidence to suggest that this was not the case.

The point should be made, however, that even given the focus on the past reported here, there were still relatively few spontaneous references to past experiences that might have shaped the way in which respondents thought about, and talked about, their present experiences. This suggests that a lot of potentially relevant contextual information may be implicit and, therefore, require some form of prompting to bring it to the surface.

6.3 Contextual data elicited through specific questioning

We turn now to an analysis of the data obtained from asking respondents specific questions about their experiences with respect to contextual domains other than the present. The particular results that inform the discussion in this section are summarised in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4. As indicated, Table 6.3 summarises the findings for the tooling division and Table 6.4 summarises the findings for the production division. To assist the reader in interpreting the information in these tables it is necessary to say something about how the tables were constructed. First of all, however, it is perhaps useful to remind the reader of the format of questioning that was followed in this part of the interview.

It will be recalled that the initial focus was on the *current* context of respondents' experience. Specifically, respondents were presented with two open-ended questions – the first asked about the 'main duties' of workers in their division at the present time, and the second asked about 'other activities' in which workers in their division were currently engaged. These open-ended questions were followed by a series of closed questions or prompts concerning possible 'other activities' in which workers in any organisation might engage. It was anticipated that respondents might mention some of these 'prompted' activities spontaneously, that is, in response to the second open-ended question about 'other activities'. This same format of questioning was then duplicated across each of the four other contextual domains concerning, respectively, respondents experience of what workers did in the past, their anticipated experience of what workers would do in the future, their experience of what workers in other organisations did, and their 'ideal' experience (reflected in their beliefs about what workers ideally should do). Unlike the present, however, the focus with respect to these other domains was on perceived (or desired) changes in the 'main duties' and 'other activities' of workers, rather than on the actual duties and activities that defined the role of workers with respect to any given domain. It was also the case that, for the 'other' context, respondents were presented with the initial open-ended questions only and were not asked the subsequent prompts. As indicated previously, this was because the aim of questioning with respect to this contextual domain was simply to obtain a rough indication of the extent of respondents' experience and/or knowledge of organisational life beyond the boundaries of their current organisation.

Table 6.3 Summary of responses to open-ended and 'prompt' questions for five contextual domains for the Tooling Division.

DUTY/ACTIVITY	PAST		PRESENT		FUTURE		OTHER	IDEAL	
	Open		Open		Open		Open	Open	
(No Knowledge)							(6)		
(No Change)	(4)				(2)		(1)	(4)	
(Don't Know)					(1)				
(Change, Unspecified)					(1)				
Primary Task	3		11		2		1		
Technology	2				4		1		
Work Maintenance			2						
Quality	1								
Efficiency			1		1		1	1	
WA-Production layout									
WA-Job rotation									
WA-Workload									
WA-Specialisation vs MS	3				5		1	2	
WA-Responsibility/Acct	2				3		1	3	
WA-Teamwork									
WA-Work schedules							1		
Communication general			1					1	
Health & Safety general	1		2		1			1	
HRM-Reward							1	1	
HRM-Selection									
Individual Skills/Atts/Behs							1	2	
Industrial Relations									
Compliance with Superiors			4						
		Pmt		Pmt		Pmt		Pmt	
<i>Planning Meetings</i>		2		1		4		1	5
<i>Information Meetings</i>		6		8		4	1		7
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>				2	1	4		1	4
<i>Safety Meetings</i>		7	3	8		7	1		2
<i>Union Meetings</i>		4	2	9		2			2
<i>Help Other Workers</i>		2		11		3			2
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>		2		3		2		1	4
<i>Attend Training</i>	1	11		12	1	8			4
<i>Formal Social [Social]</i>	3	9	2	10		5	2	3	4
<i>Informal Social</i>			2	10					
<i>Wkr-Sup Communication</i>		4		10		3	2		5

Note: Activities, or activity categories, which constituted the subject of specific prompt questions are listed in italics

Table 6.4 Summary of responses to open-ended and prompt questions for five contextual domains for the Production Division.

DUTY/ACTIVITY	PAST		PRESENT		FUTURE		OTHER		IDEAL	
	Open		Open		Open		Open		Open	
(No knowledge)							(3)			
(No Change)	(2)				(2)		(4)		(3)	
(Don't Know)					(1)					
Primary Task	1		18		3					
Technology	6				10					
Work Maintenance	1		10							
Quality	3		5						1	
Efficiency	2		1		1				2	
WA-Production layout	1								3	
WA-Job rotation			1						5	
WA-Workload	3				1		1			
WA-Specialisation vs MS	2				1					
WA-Responsibility/Acct	2				1		2		4	
WA-Teamwork							1			
WA-Work schedules										
Communication general	1		1							
Health & Safety general	3		2				2		1	
HRM-Reward	2				1		3		2	
HRM-Selection							1			
Individual Skills/Atts/Behs	4				1		5			
Industrial Relations							2		1	
Compliance with Superiors			1							
		Pmt		Pmt		Pmt				Pmt
<i>Planning Meetings</i>		6		4		3			9	7
<i>Information Meetings</i>	1	12	1	18		4	1		5	8
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>	6	10		5	2	4			2	6
<i>Safety Meetings</i>		6	1	13		6				13
<i>Union Meetings</i>		6		15		3	1			5
<i>Help Other Workers</i>		8		16		3				5
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>		9		15		10				8
<i>Attend Training</i>		8		12	1	11	3		5	11
<i>Formal Social [Social]</i>	2	10	2	17	1	8	6		2	7
<i>Informal Social</i>			3	16						
<i>Wkr-Sup Communication</i>	3	10		19		5	3		4	8

Note: Activities, or activity categories, which constituted the subject of specific prompt questions are listed in italics.

With the above information in mind, the following details are now offered regarding the actual construction of Tables 6.3 and 6.4.

1. With the exception of data pertaining to the present context, all of the data presented in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 are 'change' or 'difference' data. That is, the numbers shown indicate the numbers of respondents who reported some difference between their perceptions of what workers in their division did at the present time (as indicated by the profile of worker activities shown under 'Present') and their experience of what workers (whether in their own or other organisations) had done in the past, their beliefs about what workers would do in the future, and their beliefs about what workers ideally should do. All of these 'difference' data are absolute in the sense that no information is given in the tables about their specific nature, whether quantitative (and, if so, what the reported direction of the difference was) or qualitative. To have incorporated this additional information would have made the tables unnecessarily complex and difficult to read.

2. For each division, the numbers of respondents reporting 'no difference' between their experience with respect to the present context and their experience with respect to the four other contextual domains about which they were asked are indicated (shown in parentheses). In addition, for the contextual domain, 'Other', the numbers of respondents in each division who reported having 'no knowledge' of what workers in other organisations did are indicated (again, shown in parentheses).

3. In line with McGregor's (1960) distinction between Theory X and Theory Y assumptions about the nature of workers, it was originally hoped that all of the data from this part of the interview could be classified according to whether they reflected a more or less 'active' or 'passive' role for workers. It soon became clear, however, that many of the data could not easily or meaningfully be described in this way. This was the case even for data generated by those prompts that were included specifically because they asked about activities that could potentially signal a more 'active' role for workers. As the reader will recall, there was some evidence in the thematic content of respondents' comments about the involvement of workers both in 'information' meetings and in training to suggest that the potential for these activities to provide workers with a more active role was not being realised to the extent that it might have been. In view of these difficulties it was, therefore, necessary to consider alternative approaches to classifying the data.

One such approach involved the application of some of the broad groupings that have been used to order the content of student texts on organisational behaviour (see, for example, Ivancevich, Donnelly & Gibson, 1980). Potentially relevant groupings included 'organisational processes' (incorporating topics such as organisational communications, the reward system, and decision making), 'organisational structure' (with micro issues, such as job design, being of particular relevance in the present context), and 'organisational development' (incorporating topics such as job training and career development). Like the previous approach, this approach also proved to be inadequate, largely because the groupings described were too broad, and hence not sufficiently informative, to capture the context-specific nature of the particular data set to which they were being applied.

The system for classifying the data that was eventually adopted was developed in collaboration with one of the author's work colleagues. Rather than apply an existing classification scheme (such as that described above), an attempt was made to identify the key groupings suggested by the data themselves. This exercise was undertaken only in relation to those data generated by the open questions which could not be classified according to any of the 'prompted' activity categories. With respect to the latter, it can be seen from Tables 6.3 and 6.4 that the activities about which respondents were prompted are listed as activity categories in their own right (highlighted in italics). This separation of 'prompted' from 'non-prompted' activity categories serves to highlight differences between prompted and spontaneous responses, the analysis of which will be reported subsequently. It can also be seen that the emergent or 'non-prompted' activity categories that were identified included some which were 'stand alone' categories (for example, 'Primary Task' and 'Work Maintenance') and others which were subsumed under the two broader groupings of 'Work Arrangements' (WA) activities⁷⁷ and 'Human Resource Management' (HRM) activities.

4. The reader may have noted that some of the so-called 'activity' categories that are listed (for example, 'technology' and 'reward') seem to be inappropriate given that the questions were about worker activities. These categories emerged in the 'difference' data only, suggesting that some respondents may have had difficulty in answering the open questions which required them to comment on changes in 'what workers do' (whether with respect to their past experience, their anticipated future experience, or

⁷⁷ Activities in this category were concerned with job design, that is, the way in which the work was organised.

their 'ideal' experience). As a result, in responding to these questions, these respondents may simply have resorted to commenting on more general changes in the work environment (for example, technological changes), rather than attempt to identify specific changes in the duties and activities of workers. Alternatively, however, it might be argued that the responses included in these 'activity' categories may be culturally significant in that they may highlight issues of central concern to respondents at the time of interviewing (a case in point is the emphasis on technological change that is particularly evident in data from the production division). While not intended, it may be that the open questions about changes in 'what workers do' are, in this instance, functioning as 'projective' questions.

5. As indicated, the initial open-ended questions (asked with respect to each of the five contextual domains) sought information about, first of all, the 'main duties' of workers and, secondly, 'other activities' in which workers were engaged. It was originally anticipated that the responses to these questions might be treated separately, with the latter providing insights into the extent to which the role of workers extended beyond task execution activities to include conceptual activities, such as, planning, decision making and problem-solving. However, it became increasingly clear as interviewing proceeded, that respondents were not distinguishing consistently between 'main duties' and 'other activities'. In other words, the 'main duties' mentioned by some respondents were cited by other respondents as 'other activities', and vice versa. For this reason it was decided that, within each of the contextual domains, the responses to the open-ended questions should be aggregated. As such, no distinction is made in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 between 'main duties' and 'other activities'⁷⁸.

6. The numbers shown in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 represent numbers of respondents, rather than numbers of references to activities (or changes in activities) within a given activity category. In other words, even though a respondent might have mentioned more than one activity which could be classified in a given activity category, that respondent would be represented only once in any given cell. While this approach to presenting the data results in some loss of the emphasis that multiple references give to particular activity categories, it has the advantage of allowing a direct comparison of the divisions in terms of each of the listed activity categories.

⁷⁸ This highlights a difference between the present time data reported in these tables and the present time data reported in Table 5.1 (see Section 5.2.1, p. 287). With respect to the latter, only responses to the second open-ended question, concerning worker involvement in 'other activities', were reported.

7. As mentioned previously, there is a distinction in the tables between 'prompted' and 'non-prompted' activity categories, the main aim of which was to facilitate a comparison of spontaneous and prompted responses (within each division across the five contextual domains, as well as between divisions for a given contextual domain). As can be seen, however, some respondents mentioned 'prompted' activity categories spontaneously, that is, in response to the initial open-ended questions. It will be recalled that this result was as expected, since the activities about which respondents were prompted were selected specifically because of their potential relevance to the role of workers.

General observations regarding responses to context questions

In reporting the results summarised in Table 6.3 and Table 6.4, it is useful first of all to draw the reader's attention to the following general observations regarding what these two sets of results have in common. First, it can be seen that, for each division, there was a marked difference between responses to the open-ended questions and responses to the prompts. Specifically, 'prompted' activity categories were generally poorly represented in responses to the open-ended questions. These activity categories were typically much better represented when respondents were asked about them specifically. The reader will recall that this effect has been noted previously (see Section 5.2.1, p. 288) in relation to the data pertaining to the present context. As shown in Tables 6.3 and 6.4, however, this difference between spontaneous and prompted responses can be observed in the pattern of responding for each of the contextual domains about which respondents were asked.

Of particular interest is the finding that it emerged even in responses to questions about the 'ideal' context. This is contrary to what one would expect to find if responding had been influenced significantly by social desirability biases. In this event, it might be predicted that the numbers of respondents making spontaneous references to 'prompted' activity categories (particularly to those categories which could be seen to be characteristic of a more 'active', and arguably a more desirable, role for workers), would be likely to exceed the numbers reported in Tables 6.3 and 6.4. The reason for this lies in the considerable exposure of respondents, up to this point in the interview, to the 'prompted' activity categories. It will be recalled that the format of questioning was such that, by the time respondents were asked for their views about what workers ideally should do, they had already been presented with the 'prompted' activity categories on

three separate occasions (in relation to their present experience, their past experience, and their anticipated future experience).

From a cultural perspective, this finding may be of some significance. It was suggested in the introduction to Study III (see Section 4.1.2, pp. 265-266) that a possible indicator of the strength of an organisation's culture may be the degree to which 'free' or unprompted responses to questions about the 'ideal' can be shown to be 'culture bound' (in the sense that they suggest a view of organisational life which does not deviate significantly from what organisation members have already experienced). With respect to the above finding it might be argued further that, where there are possibilities for social desirability responding to occur (such as in the present interview which presents respondents with a range of possible 'other activities' in which workers might engage), stronger cultures might be more resistant to these effects than weaker cultures. This finding and its implications will be examined in more detail subsequently.

A second general observation that can be made regarding the findings summarised in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 is that the majority of respondents from both divisions reported some changes in their experience of organisational life (in their respective divisions) over time. That is, most respondents pointed to some differences between the past and the present in what workers in their respective divisions did. Most respondents also indicated that what workers would do in the anticipated future, and what they ideally should do, would somehow differ from what they did at the present time. These findings are consistent with the view that organisational culture is a dynamic, rather than a static, phenomenon (Trice & Beyer, 1993). An important implication of this view is that, in order to achieve more than a superficial understanding of the culture of any given organisation, one should seek information that reflects this basic characteristic of culture. Clearly, any method for investigating organisational culture which focuses only on the present context of organisation member experiences (this is the case for the majority of existing questionnaire measures of organisational culture) will be seriously limited in this regard. At the very least, one's approach should seek to locate organisation member experiences within some kind of time perspective. In this sense, it might be argued that questions about the past and anticipated future, such as those asked in the present interview, should constitute standard questions for inclusion in any measure of organisational culture.

We turn now to a more detailed examination of the results summarised in Tables 6.3 and 6.4. As will be seen, the main focus of the forthcoming discussion is on reported changes in the profile of worker activities for each division – from the past to the present, in the anticipated future, in relation to other organisations in which respondents have worked (or of which they have some knowledge), and with respect to respondents' beliefs about the activities in which workers ideally should engage. Particular attention is drawn to similarities and differences between the two divisions, in terms of the changes reported, and consideration is given to the possible cultural significance of these similarities and differences. It will also be noted that the findings associated with each of the four contextual domains of interest – namely, the past, the anticipated future, the 'other', and the 'ideal' – are discussed separately and in this order.

6.3.1 The past context

Findings for the open questions

It can be seen from Tables 6.3 and 6.4 that, in response to the initial open questions, four respondents from the tooling division (33% of this group) and two respondents from the production division (11% of this group) reported that there was no difference between the past and the present in what the workers in their respective divisions did. In other words, a majority of respondents from each division (67% from the tooling division and 89% from the production division) reported some changes from the past to the present in either the main duties or other activities of workers in their division. It can be seen that, for the tooling division, these changes are described by eight activity categories, with the best represented of these (in terms of the numbers of respondents who made reference to one or more activities associated with each category) being: (i) 'Primary Task' (with two respondents indicating that, in the past, the division undertook less experimental prototype work than it did at the present time, and one respondent indicating that, in the past, more work of this kind was performed in the division); (ii) 'WA-specialisation' (with all three respondents pointing to more task specialisation in the past); and (iii) 'Formal Social' (with all three respondents pointing to the greater involvement of workers in the past in social activities organised by the Company).

For the production division, the changes reported are described by seventeen activity categories. As a group, then, production division respondents were not only more likely than their counterparts in the tooling division to refer spontaneously to some change, from the past to the present, in what workers in their division did (89% compared with

67%), but their experience of change (as reflected in their unprompted responses) also appears to have been broader, in the sense of encompassing more different types of change (seventeen activity categories represented compared with eight for the tooling division). The best represented 'unprompted' activity categories for the production division were: (i) 'Technology' (with six respondents indicating that, in the past, the division was technologically less sophisticated than it was at the present time); (ii) 'Group Problem-Solving' (with six respondents reporting more worker involvement in problem solving groups in the past, associated with the implementation of the Team Concept); and (iii) 'Individual Skills/Attitudes/Behaviours' (with four respondents pointing to differences between the past and the present in how conscientious workers were, how secure they felt in their jobs, and their level of job satisfaction).

The point should be made that, for neither division, were any of the 'unprompted' activity categories particularly well-represented. As indicated, for the tooling division, the best-represented activity categories were mentioned by only three respondents each (that is, by only 25% of the respondents from this group) and, for the production division, the best represented categories were mentioned by only six respondents each (that is, by 33% of the respondents from this group). It is perhaps surprising that there was not more agreement, particularly among respondents from the tooling division (who, as noted previously, constituted a more homogenous group, in terms of their age and length of service, than their counterparts in the production division), about changes over time in what workers did. Interestingly, when respondents were asked specifically about whether or not the involvement of workers in particular activities had changed over time (the prompt questions), there was a marked increase in the level of agreement among respondents about changes in certain of these activities. For example, Table 6.3 shows that, for the tooling division, prompting resulted in an additional eleven respondents making reference to changes over time in the involvement of workers in this division in training. Similarly Table 6.4 shows that, when both unprompted and prompted responses are taken into account, a large majority of respondents from the production division can be seen to have reported a change over time in the involvement of workers in this division in group problem-solving activities. Again, the question arises as to what these discrepancies between prompted and unprompted responses might mean.

With respect to the spontaneous (unprompted) responses reported in Tables 6.3 and 6.4, it might be argued that when respondents are asked open questions about changes over time in the activities of workers in their division, their responses are likely to be based, not on some detailed schema of all of the various activities which might make up the role of workers, but rather on what they perceive to be the general (or overall) role of the workers in their division. In this sense, the open question data can probably be taken at their face value, that is, they can be interpreted to mean that the role of workers, as it is broadly defined by respondents from both divisions, has changed little over time. While the prompt data suggest that worker involvement in certain specific activities may have changed over time, it may be that these changes have been insufficient to redefine, in the minds of respondents, what workers do in their respective divisions. A closer examination of the data on 'training' for the tooling division (including both the quantitative and qualitative data) can help to illustrate this point.

As indicated, all respondents from the tooling division reported a change, from the past to the present, in the involvement of the workers in this division in training, with the majority providing this information in response to prompting. In terms of the direction of the change, all respondents also indicated that there was either no training for workers in the division in the past, or that the level of training available was less than it was at the present time. However, as reported previously (see Section 5.2.2, pp. 294-295), the findings regarding the *current* involvement of workers in this division in training were highly inconsistent, with estimates of the percentage of workers currently attending training ranging from 5% to 50%, and estimates of the amount of training received by each worker annually ranging from 20 to 50 hours. The point can also be made that all of the references to the type of training received were to training in specific skills (such as welding, pneumatics etc.) There were no references to worker involvement in training of the kind which might indicate that the role of workers in the division was undergoing a change of any significance (for example, training of the kind that might be associated with initiatives such as Total Quality Management programmes). Finally, the reader will recall that the majority of respondents from this division attributed the change towards increased training at the present time to a recent initiative, by the government and unions, to multi-skill workers through Award Restructuring. In other words, there was a perception that the Company's current commitment to training was, at least to some extent, the result of external pressures.

Clearly, the change in 'training' described by these data is unlikely to have the same impact on the way in which these organisation members think about the role of workers in their division as would the introduction of training which was provided on a more regular basis, and which was designed by management to facilitate the development of skills, attitudes and behaviours which differed from those associated with the traditional role of workers in the division.

The above conclusion is not intended to understate the possible significance of those changes in specific worker activities about which there was considerable agreement among respondents (whether from the tooling division or from the production division) and which were revealed largely through prompting. It may be that these changes are indicative of culture change 'in progress' (in this case, concerning organisation member beliefs and assumptions about the role of workers). In this respect, it would be interesting to re-administer the present interview to respondents from both divisions at some point in the future, say five years hence. To the extent that there had been a shift of any significance in the way in which respondents from either division thought about, or defined, the role of workers in their division (that is, a cultural shift), one might expect that there would be more spontaneous, as opposed to prompted, references to changes in these particular activities.

The discussion thus far has been concerned mainly with changes, over time, in the profile of worker activities, as represented by the open question data for each division. The 'unprompted' activity categories that were least well-represented (in terms of the numbers of respondents reporting a change, from the past to the present, in one or more activities associated with each category) were noted, as were those which were best-represented. The point was made that, even for the best represented of these activity categories, there was a relatively low level of agreement among respondents about the changes that had occurred. This finding was interpreted to mean that the role of workers in both divisions, as broadly defined by respondents, had remained relatively stable over time. It was also noted, however, that in terms of specific activities in which workers were engaged, the prompt data provided good evidence that there had been some changes, over time, in the involvement of workers in these activities.

Prompt questions: Some initial findings

Before proceeding to a discussion of some of the initial findings for the prompt questions, it is useful to inform the reader of the general approach to the analysis of

prompt data that was adopted. For each of the contextual domains of interest – the past, the future, and the ‘ideal’⁷⁹ – ‘prompted’ activities were first of all grouped into those for which similarities between the divisions (in terms of the numbers of respondents indicating change, whether from the past to the present, the present to the anticipated future, and in the ideal) were indicated, and those for which differences were indicated⁸⁰. The activities within each of these two groups were then analysed further, with particular consideration given to the nature (direction) of the changes reported, the timing of these changes (for the past and future contexts), and respondents’ attributions regarding the causes of these changes (again, for the past and future contexts).

With respect to the first part of this analysis, it can be seen from Tables 6.3. and 6.4 that, for the past context, there are four activity categories for which *similarities* between the two divisions can be identified. These are (i) ‘Planning Meetings’ (defined for respondents as ‘meetings in which decisions are made about such things as the future directions of the division, as well as forthcoming work schedules, equipment needs, and training needs’); (ii) ‘Information Meetings’ (‘in which workers are given information, by those above them, about such things as the current performance and future directions of the division’); (iii) ‘Union Meetings’; and (iv) ‘Social Activities’⁸¹. With respect to ‘Planning Meetings’ and ‘Union Meetings’, the similarity between the divisions lies in the finding that there was a minority of respondents only from each division who reported a change, from the past to the present, in the involvement of workers in each of these activities. For ‘Planning Meetings’, there were two respondents from the tooling division who reported a change (17% of this group) and six respondents from the production division who reported a change (32% of this group). For ‘Union Meetings’, there were four respondents from the tooling division who reported a change (33% of

⁷⁹ The reader will recall that the prompt questions were not asked in relation to the ‘other’ context.

⁸⁰ The nominated criterion for the classification of a ‘similarity’ was that the difference between the number of respondents from each division indicating a change with respect to the activity should be less than 20%; the criterion for the classification of a ‘difference’ was that this difference should be 20% or more.

⁸¹ In the interview, an initial distinction was drawn between ‘formal’ (ie. organised by the company) social activities and ‘informal’ (ie. impromptu) social activities. Specifically, respondents were asked to comment on the involvement of divisional workers in each type of social activity at the present time. However, in subsequent questioning (about the past, future, and ‘ideal’ contexts), there was not the same emphasis on this distinction (partly because of time constraints and also because respondents seemed to find it increasingly difficult to draw the distinction, in particular, in relation to their anticipated future and ‘ideal’ experience). Hence, with respect to questions about these latter contextual domains, no distinction between ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ social activities was made and respondents were asked simply to comment on changes in the involvement of workers in social activities generally. In Tables 6.3 and 6.4, this change is signified by the inclusion of the activity [*Social*] in the same cell in which *Formal Social* is listed.

this group) and six respondents from the production division who reported a change (32% of this group).

In the case of 'Information Meetings' and 'Social Activities', the similarity lies in the finding that at least half of the respondents from each division reported that the involvement of workers in these activities had changed from the past to the present. For 'Information Meetings', there were six respondents from the tooling division who reported a change (50% of this group) and thirteen respondents from the production division who reported a change (68% of this group). For 'Social Activities', there were nine respondents from the tooling division who reported a change (75% of this group) and twelve respondents from the production division who reported a change (63% of this group).

It can also be seen from Tables 6.3 and 6.4 that there are two 'prompted' activity categories, namely 'Group Problem-Solving' and 'Attend Training', for which *major differences* between the divisions (in terms of the numbers of respondents reporting a change from the past to the present) are suggested. For 'Group Problem-Solving', no respondents from the tooling division, compared with sixteen respondents (84%) from the production division, reported a change. For 'Attend Training', all of the respondents from the tooling division, compared with eight respondents (42%) from the production division, reported a change.

The detailed analysis of data pertaining to each of the 'prompted' activity categories above is reported in Appendix D1. Also reported in Appendix D1 are the findings for the remaining categories – namely 'Safety Meetings', 'Help Other Workers', 'Record Work-Related Information' and 'Worker-Supervisor Communication' – for which minor differences between the divisions (in terms of the numbers of respondents reporting a change) were indicated.

As will be seen, the results of these various analyses are referred to selectively in the following summary of the main findings of the analysis of data pertaining to the past context.

The past context: Summary of key findings

This section offers a summary of the main findings of the analysis of data (both open question and prompt data) pertaining to the past context. The key question to be considered in this section is whether or not the additional insights provided by an historical perspective, over and above those obtained through questioning about the

present context only, justify the additional time and effort required to obtain these insights. The findings suggest that an approach that seeks specific information about the historical context can provide the following specific benefits.

1. *An understanding of the historical context of organisation member experiences can highlight important differences between work groups (in this case, between two divisions of a single company) that may not be revealed using research methods that focus only on the present context of organisation member experiences.* In the present study, the findings pertaining to the activity categories, 'Group Problem-Solving' and 'Social Activities'⁸², provided good examples of support for the above conclusion. With respect to the former, the two divisions were perceived to support similarly low levels of worker involvement in group problem-solving activities *at the present time*. As indicated in Tables 6.3 and 6.4, respectively, there were only two respondents from the tooling division, and only five respondents from the production division, who reported any current involvement of the workers in their division in problem-solving activities. While there was some variability in respondent estimates of how often such activities were held, estimates of the numbers of workers involved at any given time were similarly low (5% or less) for both divisions. The point should also be made that there was no evidence in respondents' qualifications of their current experience with respect to this activity category to suggest any marked qualitative differences between the two divisions. Neither of the two respondents from the tooling division who reported some current involvement of the workers in their division in problem-solving activities made any comments to indicate their personal evaluation (whether positive or negative) of this aspect of their experience.

The picture was similar for the production division. Of the five respondents from this division who reported some current involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving activities, three were neutral in their comments about the experience (ie. they expressed neither positive nor negative attitudes); one respondent evaluated the experience positively, suggesting that group problem-solving meetings should be held more often; and one respondent evaluated the experience negatively, suggesting that such meetings served a "finger pointing" purpose, whereby workers were blamed for problems that management were unable to solve. In summary, then, an analysis of the present time data (including both the quantitative and the qualitative data) provided no

⁸² The detailed analysis of the data for 'Group Problem-Solving' and 'Social Activities' can be found in Appendix D1, 650-653 and pp. 645-650, respectively.

substantial evidence to suggest that the divisions differed with respect to respondents' current experience of worker involvement in group problem-solving activities.

In contrast, the analysis of data pertaining to the past context suggested that the two divisions differed markedly in terms of their respective histories of worker involvement in group problem-solving activities. While the tooling division had had a relatively long and stable history of little or no worker involvement in such activities, there were, in effect, two periods in the history of the production division during which workers had had considerable involvement in group problem-solving (the first, and perhaps most significant, during the years of the Team Concept when production operators worked in semi-autonomous teams and the second, associated with the more recent initiative known as the Automotive Quality Assurance Plan (AQAP) which involved a team approach to solving work-related problems). Furthermore, there was good evidence to suggest that, for members at all levels of the production division hierarchy, the experience of group problem-solving in relation to both of these initiatives (ie. the Team Concept and AQAP) had been a predominantly negative one. In fact, the point was made that the reported failure of the more recent AQAP initiative may have been due, at least in part, to the residual effects of divisional members' negative experiences in relation to the earlier Team Concept initiative. It was also suggested that the AQAP initiative might have been more successful had it been implemented with a more obvious commitment, on the part of those implementing the programme, to learning from the lessons of the past. Given that some of the same problems were reportedly encountered in relation to both of these initiatives (in particular, problems associated with a lack of team leadership, a lack of interest and commitment on the part of team members, and a failure on the part of management to follow-up on the ideas generated by the teams), there is a sense in which the AQAP experience might be seen as an instance of divisional history repeating itself.

To the extent that past experience influences organisation member attitudes towards future change, one might anticipate that the members of the production division may respond with some cynicism and resistance to any future attempt, on the part of divisional management, to introduce group problem-solving initiatives similar to those already experienced. If such a change was indeed anticipated, management would be well advised, not only to acknowledge and seek to understand this cynicism and resistance, but also to develop strategies for its effective management.

As above for 'Group Problem-Solving', an analysis of the historical context of respondents' experience with respect to worker involvement in social activities, revealed differences in divisional histories that would have remained largely obscured had the focus been solely on the present context of respondents' experience. While the two divisions appeared to be roughly equivalent in terms of the current involvement of divisional workers in social activities⁸³, the history of the tooling division was distinguished by a long period during which a very active and very positive social climate had prevailed. Furthermore, respondents were typically nostalgic in their recollections of this period. In contrast, the production division had a much less well-defined history with respect to this activity category. Where changes were reported (in the involvement of divisional workers in social activities over time), there was far less consensus among respondents about either the direction or the cause of these changes. The finding that the tooling division supported a very positive social climate in the past provides one important clue as to the foundation upon which this group's past identity may have been formed. Moreover, while it would be unrealistic (given changes in the demographics of this group) to suggest that any attempt should be made to resurrect this aspect of the division's past, a knowledge of it (and what it meant for divisional members) could make management more sensitive to the range of factors that may have contributed to the current low levels of member satisfaction and morale in this division. In other words, the current 'depressed' climate in the division may reflect more than just member anxiety about job security.

2. An understanding of the historical context of organisation member experiences can facilitate the more accurate interpretation of data pertaining to member perceptions of their current experience. This conclusion was most strongly supported by the findings reported for the activity category 'Attend Training'. As reported in Appendix D1 (pp. 673-677), with respect to their present experience, all of the respondents from the tooling division, compared with two-thirds of the respondents from the production division, reported some current involvement of the workers in their respective divisions in training. The point was made that, while this difference was only marginal in terms of its magnitude, its direction was nevertheless the reverse of what had been expected. This author's observations, over a period of several years in each

⁸³ As discussed in Appendix D1, 645-650, the divisions could be differentiated only on the basis of the 'type' of social activity (with retirement functions constituting a common social activity in the tooling division but not in the production division) and not on the basis of either the number of social activities identified or the estimated extent of worker involvement in these activities.

division, suggested that the production division was more committed than the tooling division to the development of its human resources – compared with the tooling division, in which human resource development initiatives seemed to be distinctly lacking, the production division supported a range of such initiatives, including training initiatives. Hence, the finding that there was more agreement among tooling division respondents than among production division respondents about the current involvement of divisional workers in training was somewhat surprising.

As indicated in Appendix D1, an understanding of the historical context of respondents' experience with respect to this activity category provided a possible explanation for this inconsistency between the findings suggested by the interview data and those suggested by what were essentially observational data. The two divisions were found to differ markedly with respect to their 'training' histories. Specifically, it was found that the tooling division had had a very long history during which there had been little or no involvement of divisional workers in ongoing training and development (that is, training and development beyond that provided to trade apprentices). Furthermore, there was good agreement among respondents from this division that the recent increased emphasis on training in the division had been a response to recent moves, by the unions and the government, to multi-skill workers through Award Restructuring. In contrast, the history of training in the production division was far less well-defined. Less than half of the respondents from this division perceived any change, from the past to the present, in the involvement of divisional workers in training. Furthermore, compared with their counterparts from the tooling division, there was less consensus among these respondents about both the direction (whether more or less training in the past than at the present time) and the cause of the perceived change.

On the basis of these findings, it was suggested that the 'yardstick' against which respondents from each division had evaluated their present experience of worker involvement in training was different. For tooling division respondents, the yardstick was a very long past during which the level of worker involvement in training had remained low. For respondents from the production division, the yardstick was more ambiguous – in general, a shorter past with differing member perceptions about the nature of changes that had occurred. It could be argued, therefore, that as a group, respondents from the tooling division were probably more sensitive than production

division respondents to shifts in the emphasis placed on worker involvement in training and more likely to interpret such shifts as instances of specific change.

An important methodological implication of the argument presented above is that researchers cannot assume that they are comparing 'like with like' when they compare the responses of two groups of subjects to a particular set of questions (even if both groups are located within the same organisational context). As the present example illustrates, subjects' interpretations of, and subsequent responses to, the questions that they are asked are likely to be influenced by their own context-specific experience. Given that this is likely to be different (to a greater or lesser extent) for different groups, one must question the extent to which, in the absence of information about the historical context of their experience, groups can be meaningfully compared with one another.

3. *For any given work group, an understanding of the chronology of individual member histories can help to explain variability among members in the way in which they perceive and evaluate their current experience of group life.* This conclusion was most strongly supported by findings reported for the production division in relation to changes, from the past to the present, in the communication relationship between workers and their immediate supervisors. As discussed in Appendix D1 (pp. 691-708), among those respondents who reported a change, some (the majority) pointed to a trend towards more open worker-supervisor communication at the present time, whilst others indicated that worker-supervisor communication had become increasingly strained in recent years. While there was some evidence of sectional differences between these two groups of respondents (with a range of different sections being represented by the former, and all but one respondent from the latter being from the same work section), their contrasting perceptions of change could not be explained in terms of differences with respect to any other demographic variables (including, age, seniority, length of service etc.).

There was, however, some evidence that the two groups differed in terms of the 'yardstick' against which they were evaluating change. Specifically, respondents who reported a trend towards more open worker-supervisor communication at the present time tended to use the distant past as their yardstick, whereas respondents who reported a change towards a growing tension in worker-supervisor communication used the more recent past as their yardstick. In other words, for respondents in the former group, the historical experience that informed their evaluations of change spanned a relatively long

period of time, while for respondents in the latter group, it spanned a relatively short period of time. Moreover, as indicated, this difference between the groups was not reflected in a parallel difference in respondents' length of service (in particular, the latter group comprised employees with relatively long service with the organisation as well as employees with relatively short service with the organisation).

These findings suggest that organisational culture researchers, in seeking to explain variability in organisation member perceptions, should give consideration to the historical context of organisation member experience. In particular, attention should be focussed on the chronology of individual member histories – how far back the individual's history extends. Furthermore, it should not be assumed that this information will always be reflected in the individual's age or length of service (even though, intuitively, this might appear to be the case). As the findings reported above suggest, an individual's chronological past (spanning the period of his/her tenure with the organisation) may not necessarily be the same as his/her psychologically salient past. This, of course, has broader implications for efforts to identify sub-cultural groupings on the basis of the demographic characteristics of the group being studied.

4. *For any given work group, an understanding of the group's history, in terms of its content (ie. the events which make it up) and chronology, can provide important insights into the nature and extent of the group's exposure to change. These insights may, in turn, facilitate the more accurate prediction of the group's likely responsiveness to future change, in addition to providing clues about how to manage such change.* Considered as a whole, the findings for the past context provided good evidence to suggest that the two divisions differed in terms of both the nature and the extent of their exposure to changes, over time, in the role of divisional workers. Specifically, the history of the tooling division with respect to the role of workers appeared to be long and relatively stable, whereas that of the production division was shorter and marked by more change. By way of illustration, attention is drawn to some of the findings pertaining to changes, over time, in the involvement of divisional workers in specific activities (that is, activities about which respondents were specifically prompted).

As discussed in Appendix D1, a majority of respondents from the tooling division reported that the workers in their division at the present time were not involved in planning, group problem-solving, or record-keeping activities, these activities reportedly being the domain of leading hands and/or supervisory staff. Furthermore, according to

these respondents, the role of divisional workers with respect to these activities had remained the same for a period which extended back at least as far as the respondent's start date with the division (which, on average, was some 23 years ago) and, in some cases, beyond this to the year in which the division first commenced operations (some 50 years ago). The findings for the tooling division also showed that, in recent years, there had been a number of changes in the division – specifically, the introduction of 'information' meetings for workers and an increase in the amount of training and professional development for workers – which might be expected to impact upon the role of workers in the division. However, information about the extent and frequency of worker involvement in these activities, as well as information provided by an analysis of the associated qualitative data, suggested that the division's commitment to these activities, at least as initiatives intended to promote a more active and participative role for workers, was not strong. For example, 'information' meetings were reportedly held only infrequently, attendance at these meetings was reportedly mandatory (that is, it did not reflect worker self-motivation and interest), and the introduction of the meetings was seen largely as an attempt by management to quash increasing rumours associated with the threatened closure of the division. Similarly, training initiatives were seen primarily in the context of broader industry reforms (in particular, the current move to multi-skill workers through the restructuring of the award); they were not seen as organisation-specific (division-specific) initiatives designed to enhance the motivation and job satisfaction of individual workers.

It can be seen, then, that the overall picture of the role of workers in the tooling division, at least as suggested by the above 'activity' histories, was that it had remained essentially the same over a prolonged period of time (possibly spanning the entire history of the division). As such, it would not be unrealistic to anticipate at least some resistance, by the members of this division, to any change which required divisional workers to assume a role fundamentally different from that to which they had become accustomed over the past years of their membership with the division. It might also be argued that knowledge of this kind may be of value to change agents (managers) in their efforts to develop strategies for change which take account of the particular context into which change is being introduced.

As indicated, the findings for the production division suggested a somewhat different picture of the role of workers in this division. Specifically, there was evidence that, in

the relatively short history of the division, divisional members had been exposed to more changes than their counterparts in the tooling division with respect to this particular domain of their experience. These changes were associated with initiatives such as the introduction of group problem-solving for workers (initially as part of the broader Team Concept initiative, and more recently taking the form of AQAP meetings), the introduction of regular information meetings for workers, and an increase in worker responsibility for recording work-related information. Given their level of exposure to change, one might predict that, as a group, the members of the production division would be more accepting of future change than their counterparts in the tooling division. Clearly, however, the qualitative dimension of a group's change experience must also be taken into account. Of relevance here is the finding for the production division that, for all members of the divisional hierarchy, the experience of group problem-solving appears to have been a predominantly negative one. One possible implication of this finding for divisional management is that, in the event that some future reintroduction of similar group problem-solving initiatives is attempted, strategies may need to be developed for dealing with the residual effects (including cynical attitudes and resistance to change) of members' negative past experiences in relation to these initiatives.

Furthermore, given the different histories of each division, the strategies likely to facilitate such change in the production division may well be quite different from the strategies likely to facilitate such change in the tooling division. For example, in the production division, it might be useful to involve divisional members (including workers, supervisors, and managers) in group discussions about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of approaches to group problem-solving in the past. This information could then be used as the basis from which collaborative decisions could be made regarding how to modify past approaches to ensure their future success. In contrast, in the tooling division, management might be advised, if time and circumstances permitted, to adopt a more gradual approach to the implementation of group problem-solving. This might involve trialing the initiative in one section of the division only. Ideally, this would be a section comprising workers and supervisors most likely to be responsive to the initiative (possibly because of some positive experience of informal group problem-solving in the past). Furthermore, to ensure the group's success, the initial focus should probably be on 'simple' rather than complex problems.

As with the production division, collaboration among all of the participating members would be important, as would the dissemination of information about the initiative to non-participating members. To the extent that the initiative was found to be successful in the 'trial' section, it could then be introduced gradually into other sections of the division.

In the context of the present discussion, attention should also be drawn to the finding that, among production division respondents, there was a perception that the level of worker involvement in activities not associated with direct production (for example, training and group problem-solving activities) was, at any given time, contingent upon the level of production in the division (with the demands of 'direct' production activities usually taking priority over the demands of 'indirect' production activities). It might be argued that this perception, to the extent that it continued to be reinforced by experience, could lead to the development, among divisional members, of increasingly cynical attitudes towards initiatives introduced with the espoused intention of supporting a more 'active' role for divisional workers. Such attitudes might, in turn, be expected to impact negatively upon member responsiveness to these initiatives.

5. *An understanding of the historical context of organisation member experiences can provide insights into the process by which culture change may occur.* The results of an analysis of data pertaining to the past and present contexts provided some evidence to suggest that culture change may occur as a gradual process, characterised by a series of incremental and possibly indiscernible shifts, over time, in organisation member perceptions and thinking about their experience of organisational life. In other words, except in cases of cultural revolution or extreme cultural crisis, culture change is unlikely to occur as a single event, resulting in the sudden and radical transformation of the way in which organisation members 'see their world'. Some tentative support for this conclusion was provided by the finding that production division respondents (who were shop floor workers) tended to make positive evaluations of the communication relationship that they had with their own supervisor(s), while at the same time holding fairly negative views about the communication climate that prevailed in their division as a whole. One explanation for this discrepancy in respondent perceptions of the 'specific' and the 'general' was that despite the reported change, in recent years, towards more open worker-supervisor communication (possibly reflected in, and reinforced by, the specific experiences of individual respondents), respondent perceptions of the

general situation with respect to worker-supervisor communication were continuing to be influenced by the residual effects of past experience (whereby more distant relationships between workers and supervisors had reportedly prevailed).

If this explanation can be accepted, and if one assumes that the culture of a work group is manifested more strongly in member perceptions of the group as a whole, rather than in their perceptions of their own specific situation, then one can begin to speculate as to the possible conditions under which culture change might occur. With respect to the present example, in order for divisional members to change the way in which they perceive and think about the overall communication climate in their division, it may be necessary, not only for the positive experience of individual members to be continually reinforced by events which occur over some critical period of time, but also for these individual members to become aware of each other's positive experiences. Of course, this may require the use of some formal mechanism of communication to counteract the effects of informally communicated 'rhetoric' about the past which may be negative in tone and which may serve to delay the emergence of a new consensus based on the positive experiences of individual organisation members.

The arguments above should alert managers to the need for considerable persistence and patience in their efforts to bring about culture change. If the aim is a benevolent approach to culture change (as opposed to an approach which involves a substantial rationalisation of the workforce, along with significant changes in personnel) then managers should be aware that this is unlikely to be achievable in the short term. In order to overcome the residual effects of past experience and bring about fundamental changes in the thinking of organisation members, managers will need to persist in their efforts to ensure that the desired change is consistently reinforced in organisation member experience over a sustained period of time.

An additional recommendation suggested by the results is that, where organisation members have developed alternative explanations for change, which are counter to those espoused by management and which may undermine the potentially positive effects of the change (one example would be the perception among production division respondents that training for divisional workers was provided only when production demands were low), managers should seek to ensure that the future experience of organisation members is such that it consistently and repeatedly invalidates these explanations. In fact, one interesting direction for future research in this area would be

to carry out longitudinal studies of organisation member attributions during, and for some time after, the implementation of an organisational change programme. One measure of the success of the programme may well be the demonstration that 'positive' attributions about the change continue to be made well after the initial implementation phase of the programme is over. Conversely, the finding that 'alternative' explanations are beginning to emerge may serve as a warning that the change effort is not proceeding as desired.

6. *Organisation member attributions about changes that they have experienced over time may constitute a valuable source of cultural data and, in addition, may provide clues as to the success of an organisation's culture change efforts.* While a comprehensive analysis of all of the attributional data generated by the present study is beyond the scope of what is being attempted here, a preliminary analysis of the attributional data associated with experienced, rather than anticipated, change⁸⁴, provided some evidence to support the conclusion that such data may provide an important source of cultural information. In particular, organisations (organisational sub-groups) may, to a greater or lesser extent, develop their own distinctive styles of attributing cause, which differentiate them from other organisations (organisational sub-groups). In other words, attributional style may be organisationally-determined (ie. culturally-determined) rather than individually-determined and, as such, it may evolve through the same process of group learning thought to generate other forms of cultural knowledge. In the context of these comments, it is interesting to compare the attributions made by respondents from the tooling division (regarding changes over time in worker activities) with those made by respondents from the production division.

When considered as a whole, the attributions made by tooling division respondents conveyed the strong impression that, in this division, change was seen largely as a response to events (either internal or external) over which divisional members perceived that they had little control. For example, there were references to reactive change in the division such as that indicated in the widespread perception that information meetings for workers had been introduced primarily to combat the negative effects of rumours about the closure of the division. There were also references to changes perceived to be largely externally imposed. For example, the change towards more open worker-supervisor communication was commonly attributed to changes in the broader social

⁸⁴ The latter will be dealt with in Section 6.3.2 in which the findings of an analysis of data pertaining to the future context are reported.

context (such as changes in the educational level of people entering the workforce) which, in turn, were perceived to have changed employee expectations about how they should be managed. The broader social context was also seen as one factor contributing to the depressed social climate in the division (with workers today being seen as more self-interested and less community-minded than their peers in the past).

Similarly, changes such as the current trend towards more training for divisional workers, and the attempt in recent years to increase employee awareness of workplace safety, were seen primarily as externally imposed changes. Specifically, training initiatives were seen in the context of current industry-wide reforms (in particular, the move to multi-skill workers through the restructuring of the award) and the increased attention to workplace safety was seen as a response to changes in government legislation. Interestingly, of all of the causal attributions made by respondents from the tooling division, there were none which suggested the perception that any of the changes reported had been motivated by an explicit commitment, on the part of divisional management, to develop a different, possibly more active role, for divisional workers.

Compared with the tooling division, the attributional data for the production division could be less easily classified to reflect a distinctive attributional style. Certainly, there were some similarities between the two divisions in the types of attributions made by respondents. For example, respondents from the production division, like their counterparts from the tooling division, perceived that some of the changes which they had experienced were essentially reactive changes, attributed in this case to the impact of increasing production pressure in the division over recent years. These changes (which were more or less widely reported) included: the decline, over recent years, in the level of worker involvement in group problem-solving activities (specifically AQAP meetings), in social activities, and in safety activities; the change towards workers today being more self-interested and less helpful towards their co-workers than workers in the past; and the change towards a growing tension in the communication relationship between workers and their immediate supervisors.

Production division respondents, like their counterparts from the tooling division, also reported changes which they attributed, at least in part, to the impact of external circumstances. For example, as for the tooling division, Award Restructuring and changes in government legislation were cited as factors influencing, respectively, recent training initiatives and recent workplace safety initiatives in the production division.

The latter was also seen by some respondents from the production division, to be a response to rising compensation costs.

Despite the above similarities in the kinds of attributions made by respondents from each division, one important difference between the divisions did emerge. Unlike their counterparts from the tooling division, respondents from the production division commonly attributed changes that had occurred to changes in management personnel, in particular, the arrival in the late 1980's of the current divisional manager. Of greater significance, however, was the finding that this attribution typically included the perception that the new divisional management was more participative in its approach than divisional management in the past, and more committed to the development of the division's human resources. This different 'style' of management was cited as one factor influencing a number of recent changes in the division including: the change towards more involvement of divisional workers in information meetings; the emergence of a more positive industrial relations climate in the division (whereby there was less industrial unrest today than in the past); the increase in the level of worker involvement in training; the development of closer communication between workers and their supervisors; and the introduction of an annual divisional barbeque (which, as indicated in Appendix D1 (p. 669), was seen as a somewhat unique event because of management's role in preparing the food, and serving it to workers). This finding provides some support for the view that leaders (managers) have an important role in shaping the culture of an organisation and that central to this role is the use of symbolic activity as a vehicle whereby leaders' values and beliefs are communicated to followers (Pfeffer, 1981; Schein, 1985).

It can be seen, then, that in the production division there was a perception that certain changes in the division had, to a greater or lesser extent, been driven by a commitment on the part of divisional management to develop a more 'active' role for workers in the division and to effect some general improvements in divisional workers' experience of working life. One might anticipate that the existence of such attributions could have positive implications for the success of the particular change(s) with which these attributions are associated. In other words, if organisation members perceive that change is planned and positively motivated, as opposed to being reactive or driven entirely by circumstances over which the organisation has no control, then they may be more likely to be accepting of that change and, consequently, more likely to engage in

behaviours which are conducive to positive change outcomes being realised. It might also be argued, however, that in order for any given change to be successful, such 'positive' attributions about the change would need to be shown to have some stability over time. This is because events can occur which may change the way in which organisation members perceive, and attribute cause to, their experience of organisational life. In the present study, for example, there was evidence to suggest that the success of changes which were perceived to have been positively motivated (for example, training initiatives, information meetings for workers etc.) could well be undermined by the experience that, at times of high production pressure, the division's commitment to these changes was often not sustained.

It might also be predicted that, to the extent that the changes reported were seen to be due to the actions (behaviour, attitudes, personality etc.) of a single individual (in this case, it was the management 'style' of the current head of the division), an event such as the departure of this individual from the organisation could have the effect of making divisional members uncertain (perhaps even somewhat cynical) about the likelihood of these changes being maintained. This suggests that one important criterion for the long term success of any organisational (cultural) change may be the perception among organisation members that the change has survived, despite changes in the key personnel seen to have been the original architects of the change.

An historical overview of the role of workers in each division

It is worth noting that, to a large extent (though not entirely), the summary points above reflected insights that were obtained from an analysis of the prompt data rather than from an analysis of the open question data. This was because, in neither division, did an analysis of the data generated by the initial open-ended questions provide a particularly coherent picture of changes that had occurred, over time, in what the workers in each division did. The reader will recall (see p. 365 of this section) that, while a majority of the respondents from each division (67% from the tooling division and 89% from the production division) reported (in response to the open-ended questions) that there had been some changes, from the past to the present, in what the workers in their respective divisions did, in neither division was there much agreement among respondents about the nature of these changes. For example, in the tooling division, the most widely reported changes (described by the three activity categories 'primary task', 'specialisation', and 'social') were referred to by only three respondents

each. Similarly, for the production division, the most widely reported changes (described by the activity categories 'technology' and 'group problem-solving') were referred to by only six respondents each. There was, however, some evidence from the open question data to suggest that the experience of change had been somewhat broader for members of the production division than for members of the tooling division. As indicated, the changes reported by the former in response to the initial open-ended questions could be described by seventeen activity categories, whereas those reported by the latter could be described by only eight activity categories.

In the paragraphs that follow, an attempt has been made to describe, for each division, a profile of worker activities that is historically based, in the sense that it takes account of changes that have occurred, over time, in the activities in which workers have been engaged. In developing these 'divisional' profiles, no distinction has been made between the findings suggested by the open question data and those suggested by the prompt data (reported in this chapter and in the appendices). Rather, these two sources of information about what workers do (and changes in what workers do) have been combined. The main purpose of this exercise has been to attempt to define the parameters of each division's experience with respect to the role of workers and, by so doing, provide a context within which to interpret and perhaps better understand respondents' subsequent accounts of both the anticipated future, and the 'ideal', role of divisional workers. A profile of worker activities is described, first, for the tooling division and, second, for the production division.

Tooling Division. As indicated, at the time of conducting this study, the primary job of the workers in the tooling division was reportedly to build the tools (including large dies and smaller assembly fixtures) which were used by the company's fabrication and assembly operations. There was little evidence to suggest that this job had changed much over time, except perhaps that, in the past, there had been more task specialisation than there was at the present time. In addition to this main job, the workers in the tooling division were reportedly currently engaged in a number of 'other' activities. As indicated, the history of worker involvement in these other activities had been more or less stable over time. For example:

1. The workers in the tooling division were currently all required to attend '*information*' meetings. These meetings were held infrequently (once or twice per year) and had been introduced only recently (approximately five years prior to the

commencement of the present study), reportedly in an attempt by management to deal with increasing rumours about the closure of the division. In the years prior to the introduction of these meetings, there appears to have been no formal mechanism by which work-related information was disseminated to workers.

2. At the present time, there was some involvement of the workers in the tooling division in *training* activities. These activities typically took the form of off-the-job training courses, which provided training in specialised skills, such as welding, hydraulics, and pneumatics, and which were offered either 'in-house' or externally through one of the local colleges of further education. Much of this training appears to have been made available in the context of the recent industry-wide reform to multi-skill workers through Award Restructuring. Prior to this time, the tooling division appears to have had a long history of little or no worker involvement in formal training, other than that which was provided to incoming apprentices. There was evidence to suggest that whether or not workers made use of the training opportunities that were currently available depended, to a large extent, upon the individual worker's motivation and initiative. Workers did not appear to be actively encouraged, by their supervisors or managers, to attend training and neither was there any sense of a commitment, on the part of divisional management, to the use of training as a tool to enhance worker motivation and feelings of self-worth.

In addition to the above, there was evidence of some resistance, among members at all levels of the divisional hierarchy, to the current emphasis on multi-skilling. For example, the relevance and value of much of the training provided as part of this initiative was questioned on the grounds that the skills learned in training were subsequently often not applied on the job. There was also a perception that the training provided was of relevance to shorter serving (ie. younger) employees only who, compared with their longer-serving counterparts, had a more certain future with the company. And finally, there was a perception that the multi-skilling initiative, which linked rewards such as pay and promotion to the number of skills acquired, discriminated unfairly against longer-serving employees who, it was argued, would be less likely than shorter-serving (younger) employees to cope with the 'academic' demands of the formal 'off-the-job' training courses that were being offered.

3. At the present time, there were a number of factors which constrained the extent to which the workers in the tooling division were able to *help one another* on the job if

and when they needed help. For example, many jobs were designed to be performed by one worker only, rather than by a team of workers. It was also the case that the boundaries which defined specific work areas/sections were typically fairly rigid, so that it was not practical (nor indeed was it approved of) for a worker from one section to go to a worker from another section for help. Associated with these structural constraints was an attitude (which was shared by supervisory/management staff and employees alike) that it was inappropriate for workers to seek help (particularly in relation to technical problems) from one another; rather, according to established authority relations in the division, they should seek help, first from a leading hand, and then from their immediate supervisor. Finally, some individual workers (tradesmen) were more intent than others on 'protecting their turf' or, alternatively, more concerned than others with projecting an image of complete competence. These individual worker characteristics served to further limit the helpfulness of the workers in this division towards one another. There was little evidence to suggest that the role of the workers in the tooling division with respect to this activity category (ie. providing one another with help on the job) had changed much over time.

4. There was evidence to suggest that, at the present time, a majority of the workers in the tooling division engaged in some form of communication with their supervisor(s) on a daily basis. There were, however, a number of contingencies which influenced both the nature and the extent of the communication between workers and supervisors in this division. These included: the type of work being performed (it was argued that some jobs were more complex than others and, therefore, required closer monitoring and control by supervision); the communication 'style' of individual supervisors (some supervisors reportedly favoured a larger 'power distance' between themselves and their subordinates than others); and the nature of individual workers (some workers were reportedly less responsive than others to the efforts of their supervisors to communicate with them). There was no evidence to suggest a division-wide pattern with respect to who was primarily responsible, whether workers or supervisors, for initiating worker-supervisor communication. The communication interactions that were initiated by supervisors were primarily concerned with giving workers information and discussing work-related problems with them. Few of these interactions were socially motivated, and fewer still were concerned with giving workers praise. There was little evidence to suggest that the nature of the communication between workers and their supervisors had

changed much over the history of this division, although due to changes in the broader social context (such as, improved education for people entering the workforce, equal opportunity legislation etc.), supervisors today may have been somewhat more open (ie. more relaxed and less dictatorial) in their 'style' of communication than their predecessors. Finally, there was good evidence to suggest that communication via a strict chain of command was still very much a 'communication norm' in the tooling division.

5. While the level of worker involvement in *industrial activity* (ie. strike action) seemed to have fluctuated somewhat over the history of the division, there was evidence to suggest that, since the early 1970's (which marked the onset of a long period of considerable uncertainty about the future of the division), there had been sustained periods of reasonably high levels of worker involvement in such activity (with reports of between one stop work meeting every month to one stop work meetings every six months).

6. All of the workers in the tooling division were currently involved in activities designed to promote awareness of *workplace safety*. These activities, which were reportedly held every one to two months, typically took the form of either safety talks by the section supervisor or safety handouts which were distributed to workers for them to read. Every one to three months, there were also company-wide meetings of safety representatives (elected from among shop floor workers), and these were attended by two to three workers from each division. A strong shared history with respect to worker involvement in these activities did not emerge in the data for this division. However, there was some evidence to suggest that, around the mid-1980's, changes in government legislation regarding occupational health and safety may have effected an increase in the amount of attention given to workplace safety in this division. More recently (from the late 1980's onwards), however, the overall decline of the division was perceived to have contributed to the current climate of more lax attitudes towards workplace safety.

7. The workers in the tooling division were currently involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in a range of *social activities*, the most commonly cited of which were film evenings, retirement functions and the annual company picnic. There was good evidence, however, to suggest a marked contrast between the social climate that prevailed in the division at the present time and that which prevailed in the division in the past. The tooling division appears to have supported a long and very positive past

history of social activity for divisional workers. The change towards the current less positive social climate in the division was commonly attributed to the general decline of the division. Reports of when this change had first become apparent ranged from 1972 to 1987.

8. Finally, there was good evidence to suggest that the workers in the tooling division had never been involved, to any significant extent, in *planning activities*, *group problem-solving activities*, or the *recording of work-related information*. These activities were largely seen to be the domain of divisional personnel in more senior positions (that is, supervisory and technical staff, and management).

Production Division. At the time of conducting this study, the primary job of the workers in the production division was reportedly to manufacture production components for motor vehicles. This involved direct production activities, such as, the moulding, assembly and painting of parts, as well as indirect production activities, such as, materials handling and quality control activities. As above for the tooling division, there was little evidence to suggest that the primary job of the workers in the production division had changed much over time except perhaps that, in the past, manufacturing techniques and processes were technologically less sophisticated than they were at the present time. Apart from their primary job, the workers in the production division were currently engaged in a number of 'other' activities which, as indicated below, had varying histories with respect to the role of workers in this division. For example:

1. The workers in the production division were currently all required to attend *information meetings*. While these meetings were reportedly held fairly often (every one to three months), the frequency of their occurrence appeared to be contingent, at least to some extent, upon the demands of production in the division at any given time (such that, at times of high production pressure, the meetings were either not held or not attended by certain key workers or groups of workers). The meetings were reportedly a fairly recent initiative in the division (having been introduced approximately three years prior to the commencement of the present study) and their introduction was typically associated with the arrival, in the late 1980's, of the current divisional manager who was perceived to support a more participative approach to management than his predecessors.

2. The workers in the production division were currently involved, to a greater or lesser extent (depending upon the section in which they worked and also, to some

extent, upon the stage of production of the current model) in the recording of *work-related information*. For most of these workers, record-keeping activities appeared to constitute an integral part of their job function and one which had been increasingly emphasised in recent years (from the late 1980's onwards) in an attempt, by divisional management, to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of production operations in the division. There was good evidence (from the attributional data, as well as from data pertaining to what kind of information was recorded and how this information was subsequently managed and used) to suggest that record-keeping served primarily a production control function and that its potential value as a motivational tool was currently not being realised.

3. At the present time, the extent to which workers and their immediate supervisors *communicated with one another* appeared to depend upon a number of factors, including the type of work being performed, the communication 'style' of individual supervisors, and the personality and attitudes of individual workers. The communication interactions between workers and their supervisors were neither predominantly initiated by supervisors nor predominantly initiated by workers. When supervisors communicated with workers it was usually for the purpose of discussing work-related problems with them or providing them with work-related information. It was less often the case that these interactions were concerned with personal/social issues and it was on the rare occasion only that they were initiated for the purpose of giving a worker praise for his/her achievements. Despite their perception of a negative overall communication climate in their division, there was some evidence to suggest that the specific experience of individual workers (with respect to worker-supervisor communication) may have been quite positive.

Finally, there was evidence to suggest that the communication climate in the division may have fluctuated somewhat over the history of the division. In the early years of divisional operations, it appears that a more closed 'autocratic' approach to communication was supported. More recently, due to changes in management and supervisory staff, as well as to changes in the training available to personnel at these levels, this approach to communication appears to have been replaced by a more open 'democratic' approach. And more recently still, due to an increase in production pressure in the division, there appears to have been a growing tension in the communication relationship between workers and their supervisors.

4. At the present time, all of the workers in the production division had some involvement (albeit of a fairly passive nature) in activities designed to promote *workplace safety*. These activities typically took the form of safety talks, which were presented by section supervisors and which all workers were required to attend, and safety handouts, which were distributed to workers for them to read and sign. On average, workers were involved in one or other of these activities every one to three months. In addition, there were several workers in the division who had been elected as safety representatives and these workers attended company-wide meetings of safety representatives, held every one to three months. There was some evidence to suggest that, in recent years (towards the end of the 1980's), there had been an increased emphasis on the involvement of divisional workers in safety activities. This change was associated with legislative changes in occupational health and safety regulations, as well as the rising cost, in recent years, of compensation for work-related injuries.

5. At the present time, the workers in the production division *provided one another with help* if and when they needed it. However, the extent to which they did this appeared to depend upon a number of factors including: the section in which they worked (the design of jobs in some sections, for example the moulding section, was such that the workers in these sections were not easily able to interact with one another); the nature of the relationship between workers (for example, if the worker needing help was disliked or perceived by co-workers to be a 'bludger', then (s)he would be less likely to receive help); and the attitude, of some workers, that since they were not paid to be helpful towards one another, they were not obliged to engage in such behaviour. There was some evidence that, in recent years (from the late 1980's onwards), the workers in this division had become less helpful towards one another than they had been in the past. This change was attributed to an increase in the production pressure in the division, as well as to a change in the nature of workers, such that workers today were perceived to be more self-interested than workers in the past.

6. At the present time, the workers in the production division had little involvement in *group problem-solving activities*. Where such activities were set up, these typically involved a total of no more than 3% to 5% of divisional workers at any given time. Furthermore, estimates of how often workers engaged in such activities varied considerably, ranging from once every six weeks to once in the last eight years. In the past, however, the workers in this division had had considerably more involvement in

group problem-solving activities. In the early years of the division's operations, this took the form of participation in team meetings associated with the Team Concept and more recently, it took the form of participation in AQAP meetings. The former initiative, which involved a radical change to the way in which work was done in the division – with self-managed work teams replacing the traditional supervisory control – was abandoned some three to six years after its implementation, reportedly because the objectives it sought to achieve were not being realised. This was attributed, by respondents in the study, to a number of factors, including the perception that the workers involved lacked the necessary attitudes, skills and experience required for effective teamwork. The more recent AQAP meetings, in which a small group of divisional personnel (including workers, supervisors, and technical staff) would attempt to solve a specific work-related problem (that was usually assigned to the group by management), were reportedly phased out just prior to the commencement of the present study. This change was most commonly attributed to the increased production pressure in the division in recent years, associated with the introduction of a new model vehicle. There was good evidence to suggest that, for members at all levels of the divisional hierarchy, the experience of both of these initiatives (which suffered from some of the same problems, such as, lack of team/group leadership, negative worker attitudes etc.), had been predominantly negative.

7. Workers in the production division were currently involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in a range of *social activities*, the most commonly cited of which were company-sponsored film evenings, the company Christmas party (a family event attended primarily by employees with young children), and the annual barbecue (a recently introduced event which had special significance for employees because, on this occasion, management gave up their traditional role and became the 'servants of the workers', cooking the food and serving it to them). In this division, the history of worker involvement in social activities was not well-defined. There were reports of no change from the past to the present with respect to this activity category, reports of a change towards more social activity at the present time than in the past, and reports of a change towards less social activity at the present time. Furthermore, where changes were reported, there was little consensus about the reasons for these changes.

8. At the present time, there was some involvement of the workers in the production division in *training activities*. The training provided was either on-the-job (whereby

new employees were assigned to work with experienced operators) or off-the-job (typically involving training in specialised skills, such as, die-setting). There was good evidence to suggest that training constituted a peripheral, rather than a central, activity with respect to the role of the workers in this division. In particular, the level of worker involvement in training at any given time appeared to be largely contingent upon production demands in the division (so that, at times of high production, training commitments were often forgone). It was also the case that respondents in the study variously expressed their concern about: (i) the quality of some of the training that was provided (in particular, on-the-job training); (ii) whether or not some of the training provided constituted 'real' training (or whether it was simply labelled as such, to enable the division/company to meet the requirements of the recently introduced government Training Levy⁸⁵); (iii) the current approach to the selection of workers for participation in training programmes (whereby 'getting on well' with one's supervisor constituted a pre-condition for selection); and (iv) the attitude of some workers that they were not obliged to attend training, and neither did they have any interest in doing so, unless it was provided in company-time ie. unless they were paid to attend). While the history of worker involvement in training in this division was by no means clear, there was some evidence to suggest that, in recent years (from the late 1980's onwards), the level of worker involvement in training may have increased somewhat. This change was associated with the recent industry-wide move to multi-skill workers through Award Restructuring. There was also a perception that current divisional management were more committed, than their predecessors, to the development of the division's human resources.

9. In the production division, the current level of worker involvement in *industrial activity* (in the form of stop-work meetings) appeared to be relatively low. Reports indicated between one and two stop work meetings per year. There was some evidence (although not strong) to suggest that, during the initial start-up years of the division, the level of industrial unrest may have been somewhat higher than it was at the present time.

10. There was no evidence to suggest that, at any time during the history of the production division, had divisional workers been involved to any significant extent in *planning activities* (whether the decision-making involved was of a strategic nature, that

⁸⁵ This legislation, which is now no longer operational, was in effect during the early 1990's.

is, concerned with the future direction of the division, or of a more operational nature and concerned with such things as forthcoming work schedules).

6.3.2 The future context

The format of questioning adopted in relation to the future context was the same as that adopted previously in relation to the past context. Respondents were initially presented with two open-ended questions, which asked about anticipated changes (from the present) in the 'main duties' and 'other activities' of divisional workers⁸⁶. To assist respondents in answering these questions, the interviewer provided a brief summary of the respondent's earlier comments regarding what divisional workers did (in terms of these 'main duties' and 'other activities') at the present time. Following the presentation of the initial open-ended questions, respondents were then presented with the same prompt questions as previously. Again, each prompt question was typically preceded by a brief summary, by the interviewer, of what the respondent had said when asked that same question in relation to the present context. For example, 'You have said that, at the present time, there is no involvement of the workers in your division in safety meetings, apart from the occasional safety talk given by the section supervisor. Do you think that this will change in the future?'

Finally, in relation to each anticipated future change that was mentioned, the respondent was asked to indicate (i) when (s)he thought that the change would occur (five a priori response categories were provided, namely: 'within the next six months'; 'within the next year'; 'within the next 2 years'; 'within the next 5 years'; and 'more than 5 years away') and (ii) why (s)he thought the change would occur.

Findings for the open questions

Tables 6.3 and 6.4 show that, for each division, there was a minority of respondents only (3/12 or 25% of tooling division respondents and 3/19 or 16% of production division respondents) who, in response to the initial open-ended question, gave either a 'don't know' or a 'no change' response. In other words, a majority of the respondents from both divisions indicated that they expected there to be some change, in the future, in the role of workers in their division.

⁸⁶ As indicated previously (see p. 362), the distinction intended by these two separate questions did not emerge consistently in the data, with the 'main duties' described by some respondents being the 'other activities' described by other respondents, and vice versa. For the purpose of reporting results, it was therefore decided to aggregate the data from these two questions (in cases where they had been asked separately). Furthermore, towards the latter stages of the interview administration (from questions about the future context and onwards), it was often the case that the two questions were combined and presented as a single question.

Tooling Division. Of the nine respondents from the tooling division (75%) who anticipated some future change(s), there was one who indicated that he was uncertain about the specific nature of this change. The remaining eight respondents made reference to changes that could subsequently be classified into eight activity categories. As indicated in Table 6.3, the best represented of these activity categories was 'Specialisation/Multi-Skilling', with five respondents (42%), including four 'wages' employees and one senior supervisor, making reference to a change, in the future, away from task specialisation and toward multi-skilling. This change was clearly regarded as imminent, with some respondents suggesting that the trend towards multi-skilling was already being experienced and others estimating that the change would be likely to occur within the next two years. The decreasing size of the division over recent years was cited as the main factor precipitating the need for a multi-skilled workforce.

The next best represented activity category was 'Technology'. Four respondents (33%), including two 'wages' employees and two first-line supervisors, made reference to the ongoing impact of new technologies on how work was done in the division. Technological change, to the extent that it was currently being experienced and was anticipated to continue into the future, was seen primarily as an attempt to keep abreast of trends overseas, thereby helping to ensure the international competitiveness of the company's tooling operations.

The only other activity category worth mentioning here is the one labelled 'WA-Responsibility/Accountability'. Three respondents (25%) (two 'wages' employees and one first-line supervisor) anticipated that, in the future, the level of responsibility and accountability of the individual worker would change. Two of these respondents believed that, in the future, divisional workers would have more responsibility and accountability than they did at the present time. This change was reportedly already beginning to be experienced and was attributed, in one case, to the decreasing size of the division (for the division to survive with a smaller workforce, individual workers would be expected to assume more responsibility/accountability) and, in the other, to changes in the broader social context (eg. increased education of workers), whereby workers increasingly expected to have a more active and involved role (and by implication to have more responsibility/accountability) in organisational life. One respondent anticipated that, in the future (time not specified), workers would have less responsibility and accountability than they did at the present time. According to this

respondent, the reduced size of the division would result in the worker being seen even more as a “servant to production” (presumably suggesting a very passive role) than he was at the present time.

Production Division. For the production division, there were sixteen respondents (84%) who spontaneously (ie. in response to the open-ended questions) made reference to some future change(s) with respect to what the workers in their division did. As indicated in Table 6.4, while the responses of these sixteen respondents could be classified into eleven activity categories, there was only one category, namely, ‘Technology’, which could be considered to be well-represented. Ten respondents (53%), including seven ‘wages’ employees, two senior supervisors, and one first-line supervisor, made reference to the likelihood of ongoing technological change that would influence the way in which work in the division was done. This change was variously attributed to the need for the division to survive and remain competitive, and the need for the division to increase its productivity and reduce its operating costs.

As indicated in Table 6.4, the next best-represented activity category for the production division was ‘Primary Task’. Three respondents (16%), all ‘wages’ employees, made reference to some change in the future that would impact on the primary task of the workers in this division. Two respondents argued that the car industry in Australia, at least in its present form, would effectively cease to exist in the future (time unspecified). It was predicted that all manufacturing would move off-shore, leaving Australian automotive workers with assembly operations only. The third respondent predicted that the production operator’s job was likely to become more difficult (again, time unspecified) because of the need to satisfy the increasing expectations of consumers regarding product quality.

Comparing the two divisions. It is interesting to note that, while almost half of the respondents from the tooling division commented on the trend away from specialisation and towards multi-skilling, there was only one respondent from the production division who made this same observation. It is possible that this finding reflects a cultural difference between the two divisions. It can be argued that, for members of the tooling division, their status and role as qualified tradesmen were linked inextricably to their acquisition, over many years, of highly specialised skills and abilities. In this sense, the change toward multi-skilling (which was part of an industry-wide reform) no doubt represented a more significant threat to the members of the tooling division than to their

counterparts in the production division. The latter were predominantly production operators whose work was specialised only in the sense that it traditionally comprised performance of a single, relatively routine, task (or small number of such tasks). Of course, it may also be the case that the production division was more advanced with respect to the consolidation of the multi-skilling reform. In other words, respondents from this division may have considered that this was a change that had already occurred.

Taken as a whole, the above findings concerning respondents' unprompted views about how the role of divisional workers might change in the future suggest that the two divisions are roughly equivalent. It was also the case that in neither division was there much agreement among respondents about the range of changes anticipated. A further similarity between the divisions was that, in both, there existed a perception that technological change would somehow influence what divisional workers would do in the future⁸⁷. As indicated, one possible difference between the divisions (which it was suggested may have some cultural significance) was suggested by the finding that respondents from the tooling division were more likely to make reference to the current (industry-wide) trend towards multi-skilling for workers.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the above analysis of open question data provided little evidence of a perception, among respondents from either division, that divisional workers in the future might assume a more active role. If indeed respondents believed that this was likely to be the case then one might expect that, given their exposure to the prompt set up to this point in the interview administration (initially in relation to questions about the present context, and then again in relation to questions about the past context), respondents might have offered this information spontaneously (that is, in response to the open-ended questions). The fact that they did not might have some significance from a cultural perspective. It may be that, for respondents in both divisions, their past and present experience has been such that it has either provided no

⁸⁷ Respondents typically did not elaborate on the exact nature of this influence and neither were they asked to do so. Had they been prompted for this information, they may have been able to comment without hesitation. On the other hand, however, they might also have responded with considerable uncertainty. The point is that, while respondents may be well aware that changes in technology are imminent, they may have very little notion of (indeed, they might have given little thought to) the specific implications of these changes for their own role (if a worker) and for the role of workers in the division generally. Indeed, it will be recalled from Section 6.3.1 that the introduction of information meetings (which constituted the primary 'formal' means by which management could disseminate information about the future of the organisation to workers) was a relatively recent phenomenon in each division. In this sense, it might be argued that, in neither division, did shop floor workers have a significant shared history of being well-informed, by management, about likely future developments which might impact upon them as individuals, as well as upon the organisation as a whole.

indication at all of a change towards a more active role for workers, or that what evidence there has been has been insufficient to convince respondents of a definite trend in this direction. The findings presented in the previous section suggest that, at least for the production division, the latter explanation might apply.

Difference between responses to the open questions and prompts

As previously, for both the present and the past contextual domains, the addition of prompt questions, following on from the initial open-ended questions, provided a somewhat different picture of anticipated future changes in the role of workers in each division than that which was provided by the open question data alone. This is clearly illustrated by the data pertaining to the activity category 'Attend Training'. Tables 6.3 and 6.4 show that, in response to the initial open-ended questions, there was only one respondent from each division who indicated that the current involvement of divisional workers in training might change, in some way, in the future. However, when specifically prompted, an additional eight respondents from the tooling division, and an additional eleven respondents from the production division, made reference to an anticipated future change with respect to this activity category.

This difference between open-ended and prompt questions has been observed previously in relation to questioning about both the present and the past contexts and, as previously, it is interesting to give some brief consideration here as to what it might mean. Again, it might be argued that the use of specific prompts (closed questions) may have had the effect of 'putting words into people's mouths'⁸⁸. In other words, the effect of asking respondents *directly* about specific changes that might occur (as opposed to allowing them to express their views spontaneously) may have been to increase the likelihood of their admitting to the possibility of such changes, without having previously considered this possibility. If this were the case, however, one would expect to have observed a marked difference between prompted and unprompted responses across the *entire* range of activity categories listed. As indicated in Tables 6.3 and 6.4, this was not the case. Rather, for both divisions, marked differences were observed for specific activity categories only.

It seems reasonable to suggest, therefore, that the responses to prompting shown in Tables 6.3 and 6.4 are considered responses, rather than ad hoc responses. In other words, they can be taken to represent respondents' evaluations of how the role of

⁸⁸ The reader is referred back to Section 5.2.2, p. 289 for an account of the research supporting this claim.

divisional workers, with respect to specific activity categories, is likely to change, given respondents' experience to date with respect to these activity categories. The finding that this information was revealed only through prompting and not spontaneously, in response to the initial open-ended questions, is consistent with the view expressed earlier (see Section 6.3.1, p. 367) that responses to open-ended questions are likely to be based, not on some detailed schema that respondents have of all of the various activities which might make up the role of workers, but rather on respondents' perceptions of the more general (overall) role of workers. As indicated, to the extent that respondents anticipated any change in this more general role, it was associated, in both divisions, with anticipated changes in technology and, in the tooling division, also with the trend towards multi-skilling. Interestingly, both of these spontaneously mentioned changes can be seen as constituting general, industry-wide changes, the impact of which is likely to have been experienced (if not directly, then indirectly through socialisation with one's co-workers or with friends from other organisations, through the media etc.) for some time. Changes of this kind, it might be argued, are likely to be very salient in the minds of organisation members and, hence, are more likely to be mentioned spontaneously than changes of a more specific and focussed nature, such as those which are asked about in the prompt questions.

Finally, it is perhaps also worth highlighting the possibility that, had the interviews been conducted with the company's senior management group (as opposed to shop floor workers and their immediate supervision), the kinds of changes mentioned spontaneously may well have been changes for which there was, as yet, little evidence at the level of the shop floor. In other words, senior managers typically have access to insights and information, not available to members at lower levels in the hierarchy, which make it possible for them to think with foresight about the organisation and where it is headed. As it was, the changes that were anticipated were changes for which there were already clearly established trends.

Prompt questions: Some initial findings

Table 6.5 presents the results of prompting in relation to the future context for *both* the tooling division and the production division (previously these data were presented separately as part of Table 6.3 and Table 6.4 respectively). The percentage of respondents from each division who anticipated some future change with respect to each activity category is shown (actual numbers of respondents are indicated in parentheses),

Table 6.5 Prompt data for the future context for the Tooling Division and the Production Division; also shown are the differences between the divisions in the percentage of respondents anticipating change.

Activity Category	Tooling Division n=12		Production Division n=19		% Difference
	% and (number) of respondents	missing data	% and (number) of respondents	missing data	
<i>Planning Meetings</i>	36% (4)	1	17% (3)	1	19%
<i>Information Meetings</i>	36% (4)	1	35% (4)	3	11%
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>	45% (5)	1	35% (6)	2	10%
<i>Safety Meetings</i>	64% (7)	1	43% (6)	5	21%
<i>Union Meetings</i>	20% (2)	2	20% (3)	4	0%
<i>Help Other Workers</i>	27% (3)	1	19% (3)	3	8%
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>	20% (2)	2	53% (10)	0	-33%
<i>Attend Training</i>	90% (9)	2	67% (12)	1	23%
<i>Social Activities</i>	45% (5)	1	53% (9)	2	-8%
<i>Worker-Supervisor Communication</i>	38% (3)	4	31% (5)		7%

along with the difference between the divisions in these percentages. In addition, for each division, there is a column for 'missing' data that shows the number of respondents who were not prompted with respect to each of the given activity categories. Typically, the decision to omit certain specific questions was based on the interviewer's awareness that time was pressing and that, without such omissions, it would not be possible to cover subsequent key sections of the interview (eg. concerning the 'other' and the 'ideal' contextual domains).

It can be seen from Table 6.5 that the problem of missing data was not insignificant and was somewhat more marked for the production division than for the tooling division. It was also the case that the results of additional questioning pertaining to when anticipated changes were considered likely to occur, and why, suffered from a similar degree of incompleteness. This highlights a problem with the interview design, namely, that in its current form, it attempted to cover too much ground in the time available. (It will be recalled that this part of the interview, concerned with what workers do, constituted one part of a two-part interview that was designed to be administered over a period of approximately two hours.)

A more general implication of the problem of missing data, however, is that with any integrated approach to data collection there is likely to be some trade-off between the amount of structure that can be imposed, on the one hand, and the degree of flexibility that can be accommodated, on the other. In other words, assuming a set period of time in which to conduct an interview, respondents cannot be given more freedom (for example, to elaborate on their responses or to introduce new, but potentially relevant, information) without there being an associated effort, on the part of the interviewer, to rein in the scope of the interview (in terms of the number of specific issues it seeks to address and the number of specific questions included in the protocol). Even where there are no formally negotiated time limits, factors such as respondent fatigue and the need to maintain an amicable research relationship with respondents will mean that an approach which seeks to pursue potentially important qualitative information through allowing respondents to elaborate on their responses will be likely to produce more or less incomplete results.

The 'difference' data reported in Table 6.5 show that, for the future context, there were only two 'prompted' activity categories out of ten (namely, 'Record Work-Related Information' and 'Social Activities') for which a greater proportion of respondents from the production division than the tooling division anticipated a change. In other words, with respect to most of the activity categories about which they were prompted, tooling division respondents were more inclined than their counterparts in the production division to anticipate some future change. Interestingly, the reverse was true for the past context. As shown in Table 6.6 below, there were six activity categories (namely, 'Planning Meetings', 'Information Meetings', 'Group Problem-Solving', 'Help other Workers', 'Record Work-Related Information', and 'Worker-Supervisor Communication') for which a greater proportion of respondents from the production division than the tooling division reported a change. In other words, in response to prompting, production division respondents were more inclined than their counterparts in the tooling division to report changes from the past to the present.

This finding may be interpreted in a number of ways. First, the 'difference' data for the future context may reflect the current climate in the tooling division, whereby divisional members were experiencing considerable uncertainty about their own, and the division's, future. Alternatively, as suggested by the 'difference' data for the past context, it may be that some of the changes anticipated by respondents from the tooling

Table 6.6 Prompt data for the past context for the Tooling Division and the Production Division; also shown are the differences between the divisions in the percentage of respondents reporting change.

	Tooling Division n=12	Production Division n=19	
Activity Category	% and (number) of respondents	% and (number) of respondents	% Difference
<i>Planning Meetings</i>	17% (2)	32% (6)	-15%
<i>Information Meetings</i>	67% (8)	68% (13)	-1%
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>	0% (0)	84% (16)	-84%
<i>Safety Meetings</i>	58% (7)	32% (6)	26%
<i>Union Meetings</i>	33% (4)	32% (6)	1%
<i>Help Other Workers</i>	17% (2)	42% (8)	-25%
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>	17% (2)	47% (9)	-30%
<i>Attend Training</i>	100% (12)	42% (8)	58%
<i>Social Activities</i>	75% (9)	58% (11)	17%
<i>Worker-Supervisor Communication</i>	33% (4)	68% (13)	-35%

division are changes that have already been experienced by production division respondents. In other words, the tooling division may simply lag behind the production division in terms of changes in specific worker activities that may ultimately affect workers across all divisions in the organisation. Indeed, while there was no explicit company policy which advocated that changes of the kind referred to above (ie. associated with worker involvement in planning meetings, group problem-solving etc.) should be introduced into some divisions before others, there is nevertheless some evidence, from a personal communication with the manager of the production division, to suggest that such changes may have been given a lower priority in the tooling division than in the production division.

This manager pointed to the different business contexts in which the two divisions were operating at the time. On the one hand, the tooling division was undergoing a major restructuring and downsizing, which followed on from the company's decision to move many of its major tooling projects off-shore. There was, therefore, a perception, at least among senior management in the company at the time, that the tooling division

was of declining importance with respect to its role in the company's overall operations. On the other hand, the company had made a firm decision to retain its production operations and to develop them to a point where a highly competitive 'in-house' service for the provision of production components was available. Given this goal, there was reportedly considerable pressure on the management in the production division to constantly strive to do better and this resulted in, among other things, a more committed and concerted effort to develop the division's human resources. As the reader will recall, it was also the case that the production division had originally been set-up partly as a demonstration model for the implementation of more innovative management practices (specifically, in the form of the Team Concept). As such, from its inception and at different points throughout its life, this division can be seen to have had more exposure to 'non-traditional' management practices than the tooling division.

As above for the analysis of prompt data pertaining to the past context, the more detailed analysis of future context prompt data involved, first of all, grouping 'prompted' activities into those for which similarities between the divisions (in terms of the numbers of respondents anticipating some future change with respect to the activity) were indicated, and those for which differences between the divisions were indicated. It can be seen from Table 6.5 that there were seven 'prompted' activity categories, out of ten, for which the difference between the divisions (in terms of the percentage of respondents anticipating a change in the future) was less than 20% (the nominated criterion for the classification of 'similarities'). From 'most similar' to 'least similar', these categories included: (i) 'Union Meetings' (a difference score of 0%); (ii) 'Worker-Supervisor Communication' (7% difference); (iii) 'Social Activities' (-8% difference); (iv) 'Help other Workers' (8% difference); (v) 'Group Problem-Solving' (10% difference); (vi) 'Information Meetings' (11% difference); and (vii) 'Planning Meetings' (19% difference). The proportion of respondents anticipating a change for each of these activity categories ranged from 20% to 45% for the tooling division, and from 17% to 53% for the plastics division. The important point is that, for only one of these activity categories, and in one division only, did the proportion of respondents anticipating a change exceed 50% (this was 'social activities' for the plastics division). Thus, the similarity between the divisions with respect to these activity categories lay in the finding that the changes anticipated were noted by a minority (fewer than half) of the respondents from each division, rather than a majority.

It can also be seen from Table 6.5 that there were three 'prompted' activity categories, out of ten, for which the difference between the divisions (in terms of the percentage of respondents anticipating a change in the future) was more than 20% (the nominated criterion for the classification of 'differences'). These categories, in order from 'most different' to 'least different', were: (i) 'Record Work-Related Information' (a difference score of -33%); (ii) 'Attend Training' (23% difference); and (iii) 'Safety Meetings' (21% difference).

The detailed analysis of the data pertaining to each of the above activity categories is reported in Appendix D2, first for categories for which similarities were indicated and then for categories for which differences were indicated.

The future context: Summary of key findings

The summary results which are presented in this section draw on the findings reported above, as well as on the findings of the analysis of future context prompt data, reported in Appendix D2. These results are as follows:

1. In response to the initial open-ended question, a majority of respondents from both divisions anticipated a change, in the future, with respect to some aspect of the role of the workers in their division. In neither division, however, was there much agreement among respondents about the specific nature of the anticipated change. Among tooling division respondents, the most commonly cited change (mentioned by 42% of respondents) was the move away from specialisation towards multi-skilling. In the production division, technological change (and its implications for the downsizing of the workforce, and how work would be done in the future) was the most commonly cited change (mentioned by 53% of respondents). For neither division did the open question change data contain much evidence (in the form of the types of changes anticipated) to suggest a perception among respondents that the role of divisional workers would become more active in the future. This was despite the exposure of respondents, up to this point in the interview, to prompt questions suggestive of a more active role for workers.

2. For both divisions, the addition of specific prompting in relation to the future context resulted in more changes being mentioned than had been mentioned previously in response to the initial open-ended question. However, as above for the 'spontaneously' mentioned changes, the degree of consensus about these 'prompted' responses was, in general, only marginal. For the tooling division, there were only two

activity categories out of ten (namely, 'Safety Meetings' and 'Attend Training'), for which more than half of the respondents from the available sample anticipated a change in the future; for the production division, there were three activity categories (namely, 'Record Work-Related Information', 'Attend Training' and 'Social Activities') for which this was the case.

There was also evidence that, as a group, tooling division respondents were somewhat more inclined than their counterparts from the production division to anticipate changes in the future in response to prompting. Specifically, there were eight out of ten 'prompted' activity categories for which the proportion of respondents anticipating a change in the future was greater for the tooling division than for the production division. That the reverse of this was true for the past context suggested the possibility that some of the changes that were anticipated by respondents from the tooling division were changes which may already have been experienced by respondents from the production division. This conclusion is consistent with the author's general impression (formed over several years as a researcher participant in each division) of each division's history with respect to the exposure of divisional members to change.

3. Considered as a whole, the findings of the analysis of future context data (both open question and prompt data) provided little evidence of the existence, in either division, of a strongly future-oriented culture, at least with respect to beliefs and assumptions about the fundamental role of workers. This conclusion is not inconsistent with what one might expect given the nature of the sample drawn from each division. As indicated, participants in the study were predominantly shop floor workers ('wages' employees) and their immediate supervisors. Had the study been conducted with more senior company (or indeed divisional) personnel, whom one might expect would be better informed about likely future trends (related to this and other issues), the findings might have been quite different. Similarly, had the site of the study been the company's Product Engineering division (which is concerned primarily with research and development) or, alternatively, a different type of organisation altogether (say an organisation involved in the development of computer software), there might have been more evidence of the existence of a strongly future-oriented culture.

It is interesting to note that the above conclusion about the absence, in both divisions, of a strong future-orientation is also supported by the finding (reported above in Section 6.2) that, for both divisions, respondents' accounts of their experiences at the present

time contained very few spontaneous references to the future context. In contrast, for both divisions, these same accounts contained many more spontaneous references to the past.

4. For both divisions, the changes that were anticipated (in response to the initial open-ended question and in response to prompting) tended to be changes which were perceived to be either already underway (and which respondents, therefore, already had some experience of) or likely to occur in the very near future (at least within the next two years). For the tooling division, this was the case for 93% of the anticipated changes for which time-line data were available; for the production division, it was the case for 72% of these changes. In other words, there was little evidence in these data of an awareness of changes likely to occur in the more distant future. For both divisions, only 5% of the changes for which time-line data were available were changes that were estimated by respondents to be 'more than five years away'. This finding provides further support for the conclusion in point 3. above that neither division (at least at the shop floor level) appeared to support a strongly future-oriented culture.

5. An analysis of the attributional data for 'change' respondents provided some evidence to suggest that the divisions might differ in terms of attributional 'style'. This difference might be conceptualised broadly in terms of a 'reactive' versus a 'proactive' orientation to change (in this case, anticipated change). Among tooling division respondents, there was a marked tendency to see change as 'reactive', that is, as a response to events, circumstances etc. over which the division was perceived to have little control. Anticipated changes in this division were commonly attributed to factors such as: (i) the downsizing and restructuring of the division, and its relocation to the site of the company's main manufacturing and assembly operations; (ii) the introduction of Award Restructuring (with its implications for job redesign and employee training); and (iii) increasing pressure (on the division and the company in general) to survive and remain competitive.

This same attributional 'style' also emerged in the production division data, with references, for example, to change being a consequence of (i) increasing competitive pressure; (ii) the introduction of Award Restructuring; (iii) technological change; and (iv), the forthcoming introduction of a new model vehicle. However, in addition to attributions of this kind, there was also evidence in these data of a perception among respondents that change was more 'proactive', in the sense of being initiated from

within the division and motivated by an explicit commitment on the part of divisional management (and supervision) to improve divisional operations and to enhance the experience of work for divisional members. In this sense, there were references to anticipated changes being a consequence of (i) a drive on the part of divisional management to increase the efficiency of divisional operations and improve quality; and (ii) a commitment on the part of divisional management to develop the division's human resources (for example, through fostering a more open communication climate between workers and their supervisors, keeping workers well-informed, implementing job enrichment strategies for workers, and encouraging the development of a positive social climate in the division).

The above conclusions are supported by the results of a subsequent analysis (albeit a fairly rudimentary analysis) which involved, first of all, listing all of the attributions made by respondents from each division (in relation to anticipated changes that were mentioned spontaneously and in response to prompting) and, secondly, classifying these attributions according to whether they were indicative of a 'reactive' or 'proactive' orientation to change. For the tooling division, 83% of respondent attributions could be classified as 'reactive' and 10% could be classified as 'proactive'. In contrast, for the production division, 53% of respondent attributions could be classified as 'reactive' and 38% as 'proactive'. (For both divisions, there were a number of attributions that could not easily be classified as either 'reactive' or 'proactive'.) Of course, these results must be interpreted with a degree of caution since they are based on numbers of attributions, rather than numbers of respondents. In other words, no consideration was given in this analysis to the extent to which single respondents made the same attribution in relation to a number of the changes that they anticipated.

6. An analysis of seniority differences between the 'change' and 'no change' respondents for each division provided some evidence to suggest that, in the production division, these two groups might differ in terms of this demographic. For example, in response to prompting about the likelihood of future change (with respect to each of the listed activity categories), the supervisors from this division were more inclined, as a group, to give 'change' rather than 'no change' responses. Specifically, there were nine activity categories out of ten for which the number of supervisors indicating 'change' exceeded the number of supervisors indicating 'no change'. Moreover, for eight of these categories, there were no supervisors represented in the 'no change' responses

(that is, for each of these eight categories, all of the supervisors who were presented with the associated prompt question gave a 'change' response). In contrast, the 'wages' employees from this division were more inclined, as a group, to give 'no change' rather than 'change' responses. In this case, there were nine activity categories for which the number of 'wages' employees indicating 'no change' exceeded the number of 'wages' employee indicating 'change'. However, for all but one of these categories, there was some representation of 'wages' employees in the 'change' responses.

In contrast to their counterparts from the production division, supervisory staff from the tooling division were, as a group, no more inclined to give either 'change' or 'no change' responses. Specifically, there were five out of ten activity categories for which the number of supervisors indicating 'change' exceeded the number of supervisors indicating 'no change'. The reverse was true for four of the ten activity categories and, for one category, the number indicating 'change' was equivalent to the number indicating 'no change'. The picture for 'wages' employees from the tooling division was similar to that for 'wages' employees from the production division. That is, as a group, 'wages' employees from the tooling division were more inclined to give 'no change' rather than 'change' responses. Specifically, there were seven out of ten activity categories for which the number of 'wages' employees indicating 'no change' exceeded the number of 'wages' employees indicating 'change'; the reverse was true for the remaining three categories.

Given the problem of missing data referred to previously, as well as the different representation of supervisory staff and 'wages' employees in the two samples (for example, supervisors represented 50% of the tooling division sample, but only 26% of the production division sample), the above findings must be interpreted with some caution. However, to the extent that they may be indicative of a more general trend in each division, it is interesting to speculate briefly as to what they might mean. The finding that, for both divisions, the 'wages' employees were more inclined, as a group, to anticipate 'no change' rather than 'change' is perhaps not surprising and is consistent with the status of this group as generally less well-informed than their superiors about changes which are likely to occur in the future. The finding that supervisory staff from the tooling division were less likely than their counterparts from the production division to anticipate change is more difficult to explain. It may, however, reflect the general context in which evaluations by tooling division respondents were being made. As

indicated, the tooling division had been in a state of decline for a number of years. It currently supported a considerably diminished workforce and, at the time of the present study, the downsizing effort was not yet complete. Some of the respondents in the present study had opted to accept a retrenchment 'package'; some had opted to remain with the company; and others were, as yet, undecided. As such, it seems reasonable to suggest that the context for tooling division respondents was one in which there was considerable uncertainty about what the future might hold (and hence, more ambivalence about whether or not change would occur).

7. Finally, the analysis of future context data, reported in this chapter and in Appendix D2, provided some evidence to suggest that evaluative data – in the form of respondent attitudes, whether positive or negative, to changes that they anticipated – may constitute an important source of cultural information. In particular, these data may provide clues about the extent of the group's resistance to, or support for, particular changes that the organisation might wish to implement. For example, it was found that there was considerable ambivalence among respondents from the tooling division about the anticipated change towards more involvement of divisional workers in training in the future. As noted, one of the main reasons for this ambivalence lay in a concern about the relevance of training for the division's older employees. These employees, it was argued, would experience more difficulty in adjusting to the 'academic' demands of a return to training than their younger counterparts. There was also some evidence in this division of strongly negative attitudes towards the anticipated increase in the involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving. On the one hand, problem-solving was considered to be a supervisory, rather than a worker, responsibility; on the other, it was argued that the types of problems which were typically encountered in this division were too complex to be solved by teams whose members included shop floor workers. Clearly, if the changes anticipated by these respondents were to be successfully implemented in this division, attitudes such as these would need to be taken into account, and explicitly managed as potential impediments to the change process. The point might also be made that such attitudes, even if shared by a minority of organisation members only (this was the case for the above attitudes to worker involvement in group problem-solving), are still likely to have an impact on the change effort, particularly if they are held by more senior, and hence more powerful, members of the organisation.

Unfortunately, because respondents were not consistently presented with questions about the desirability/undesirability of the changes that they anticipated, there was insufficient evaluative data upon which to draw any firm conclusions about emergent trends in either division.

Methodological issues arising from the findings for the future context

A number of methodological issues arose in the course of conducting the analysis of future context data. These issues are outlined below and, where relevant, their implications for understanding culture in work organisations are discussed. Where appropriate, suggestions are also made about how this section of the present interview might be modified for use in subsequent research.

1. The trade-off between breadth and depth. As indicated, the data set upon which the above findings were based was somewhat incomplete. This problem of missing data arose as a consequence of the design of the interview schedule. Given the time available (a total of two hours for a two-part interview) and the fact that respondents were free to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses (this was a critical feature of the interview design), it is clear now that the interview schedule was too ambitious with respect to the number of issues which it attempted to address. It might, therefore, have been more realistic to seek information about fewer prompts. In this way, all of the questions associated with a particular issue could have been covered, with time available for respondents to provide important qualifying and elaborative detail.

An important lesson for the design of integrated approaches (such as the present approach based on a semi-structured interview) is that one should attempt, from the outset, to determine what constitutes a reasonable, and manageable scope, for the interview. In making this decision, one should be mindful of the inevitable trade-off in such approaches between the amount of structure that can be imposed and the degree of flexibility that can be accommodated.

2. Interpretive inconsistency. As for the analyses of past and present context data, conducted previously, the analysis of future context data revealed a degree of interpretive inconsistency among respondents. For example, there was evidence to suggest that respondents from the production division differed in terms of the criteria they used to evaluate the likelihood of a change, in the future, in the involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving. As argued in Appendix D2 (pp. 733-737), the evaluations of some respondents were based on a consideration of the likelihood of a

reintroduction of the Team Concept; for others, they were based on a consideration of the likelihood of a change, in the future, in the involvement of divisional workers in AQAP meetings. Interestingly, there were no obvious differences between these two groups in terms of respondent tenure (that is, it was not the case that the former were all longer-serving employees with experience of the Team Concept, while the latter were shorter-serving employees with experience only of the more recent AQAP initiative).

Clearly, it is important to know about interpretive differences of this kind. Such knowledge may have implications for understanding the culture of the group – how widely shared it is (a lot of interpretive inconsistency would suggest a lack of sharedness) and whether or not there are any sub-cultures operating within the group (with inconsistencies such as the above possibly serving as markers for sub-cultural boundaries). Of course, where a high level of interpretive inconsistency exists, there are implications for the extent to which data can be aggregated and meaningful conclusions drawn from the findings. In the context of the present study, it is difficult to know how to deal with this problem and perhaps all that one can do is to simply acknowledge that it exists. A longer term solution, however, may be to revise the current approach so that, instead of breaking up the data for each individual respondent and then aggregating and analysing responses to specific questions, one might classify individual respondents on the basis of their overall pattern of responding and then group them according to similarities which emerge. It is possible that an approach such as this, whereby individuals rather than responses are aggregated, might be culturally somewhat more sensitive than the current approach – in the sense of providing a clearer indication of both the degree of ‘sharedness’ of the group’s culture and the extent to which different sub-cultures are supported within the group.

3. Future orientation and responsiveness to change. As indicated, the above finding that respondents from both divisions anticipated relatively few changes in the future, with respect to the role of the workers in their division, and that there was often not a lot of consensus about the changes which were anticipated, was interpreted to mean that, in neither division, was the prevailing culture strongly future-oriented. Such an insight, which it can be argued would not have been obtained had information about the future context not been sought, may have important implications for understanding organisational responsiveness to change. For example, it may be that change is easier to bring about in organisations where the members can be shown to have developed a

reasonably well-articulated view of the future (through thinking and talking about it a lot) than in organisations where members' thinking appears to be more focussed on, say, the past context of their experience than on the anticipated future context.

An interesting possibility for future research would be to repeat the present study with a group of respondents likely to be more future-oriented in their outlook than respondents comprising the present sample. (These respondents might be drawn from a higher level in the current organisation or, alternatively, from a different organisation altogether.) The findings of such a study, when compared with the findings of the present study, would allow for some assessment of the extent to which differences in time-orientation actually do exist. Furthermore, on the basis of comparative research of this kind, one could begin to address the issue of whether or not a group's time-orientation (whether past, present, or future) influences its responsiveness to change.

4. Integrating contextual domains. While an attempt was made, in the above analysis, to offer an historical interpretation of the future context data (that is, to interpret data pertaining to the anticipated future in the context of data pertaining to the past and the present), this was often very difficult to achieve. In other words, the links between the three contextual domains considered thus far (namely, the past, the present, and the anticipated future) were not always evident. This suggests that organisation member perceptions about what the future is likely to hold with respect to any given issue, will be influenced by more than just organisation member history with respect to that issue. In other words, the former is not determined solely by the latter. This is not to say, however, that historical data (including data pertaining to the present context of organisation member experience) have *no* relevance for the interpretation of future context data. For example, the finding in the present study that all but one of the available respondents from the tooling division anticipated an increase, in the future, in the involvement of divisional workers in training (see Appendix D2, p. 754) has meaning only when one has some knowledge about the history of worker involvement in training in this division. At the very least, one needs to know about how much training the workers in this division are receiving at the present time, since without this knowledge, there is no yardstick against which to interpret respondents' prediction that there will be 'more' training for divisional workers in the future.

5. The Importance of attributional data. The findings of the analysis of future context data provided further support for the argument (made previously in the context

of the analysis of historical data) that attributional data may constitute a valuable source of cultural information. It is suggested, therefore, that in any subsequent revision of the current interview schedule, those questions that ask respondents about why particular changes will occur or, alternatively, why they will not occur, should be retained. Moreover, given their potential for tapping culture in the group, these questions should be regarded as high priority questions, and hence every effort should be made to ensure their inclusion in the administration of the interview. The point can also be made that, to the extent that particular types of attributions emerge consistently in response to questions about both experienced and anticipated changes, then claims about there being an attributional 'style' that is unique to the group, and that differentiates the group from other groups, are further validated.

6. The importance of evaluation questions. The above argument with respect to attributional data also applies to evaluative data. That is, given the potential cultural significance of evaluative data (for highlighting sources of resistance to, or support for, change), questions about the desirability/undesirability of anticipated changes should be retained in any subsequent revision of the current interview schedule. As above, such questions should also be regarded as high priority questions and hence presented consistently in relation to each of the changes that a respondent anticipates. As argued previously, the finding that particular attitudes – either highly positive or highly negative – are held by a small minority of organisation members only, should not be dismissed as being insignificant. Such attitudes, particularly if held by senior members of the organisation, may prove to be critical in either enabling, or constraining, the changes with which they are associated, should these be introduced.

Finally, it is worth noting that, in the current interview schedule, the above questions about the desirability/undesirability of anticipated changes can be seen as foreshadowing subsequent questions concerning respondent beliefs about the 'ideal'. In this sense, an individual's responses to each of these questions should provide some measure of the individual's consistency with respect to his/her reported beliefs and attitudes. For example, if the individual indicates that (s)he considers an anticipated change towards more involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving to be highly undesirable, then one might expect that the individual would subsequently argue against such a change when asked to comment on his/her beliefs about the 'ideal' role for workers with respect to this activity.

6.3.3 The 'other' context

The purpose of questioning in this section of the interview was to gain some insight into the extent of respondents' awareness of the role played by workers in other organisations and whether or not, in their experience, this role differed substantially from the role played by workers in their current organisation. Of course, as the reader will recall, the broader rationale for this focus on respondents' experience with respect to the 'other' context was the argument, by some culture researchers (see Louis (1983) and Wilkins and Ouchi (1983), cited previously), that an important condition for the development of highly cohesive and highly localised cultures may be the extent of the group's social isolation from other groups. Specifically, it has been proposed that, where a group has little knowledge of alternatives to its current experience, the emergent culture is likely to take the form of what Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) have called a 'clan' culture; conversely, where a group has had significant exposure to alternatives which contradict its current experience, the emergent culture is likely to be more socially fragmented.

As indicated, the format of questioning which was followed in this part of the interview differed from that followed in the other sections in that only the initial open-ended questions were presented. These questions were not followed, as they were in the other sections, by the presentation of the closed or 'prompt' questions. Specifically, respondents were first of all asked whether or not they were aware of what it was that the workers in other organisations did. Where some awareness was indicated, information was then sought about the source of respondents' knowledge, whether direct experience (that is, experience of having worked elsewhere) or indirect experience (in the form, for example, of (i) knowledge acquired through professional or other work-related contacts; (ii) knowledge acquired through socialisation with people from other organisations (including the respondent's spouse and/or friends and acquaintances); or (iii) knowledge acquired via the media). These preliminary questions were then followed, where appropriate, by the two standard open-ended questions which asked respondents about whether or not they perceived any differences between their current organisation and their 'other'⁸⁹ organisation, first of all, with respect to the 'main duties' of workers (in this case, how workers went about performing their work), and secondly, with respect to the 'other activities' in which workers were engaged.

⁸⁹ In the event that a respondent had had experience of more than one 'other' organisation, (s)he was asked to talk only about that organisation with which (s)he was most familiar.

In the section that follows, the results of the analysis of 'other' context data are discussed. The reader is reminded that, as for the analyses conducted previously, no distinction was made in the present analysis between responses to the two open-ended questions concerning, respectively, the 'main duties' and 'other activities' of workers. Again, the decision to aggregate the responses to these questions was made on the basis of inconsistencies that emerged in respondents' definitions of what constituted a 'main duty' and what constituted an 'other activity'. The findings for the tooling division are presented first, followed by the findings for the production division. Then, by way of an overall conclusion to this section, the findings for the two divisions are briefly compared and some general comments are made regarding the usefulness of obtaining information about the 'other' context for understanding culture in work organisations.

The Tooling Division. As indicated in Table 6.3, there were six respondents from the tooling division (50% of the sample for this division) who indicated that they had 'no knowledge' of what it was that the workers in other organisations did. These respondents included four supervisors (one senior supervisor and three first-line supervisors) and two 'wages' employees (both with leading hand status). When prompted, five of these respondents attributed their lack of knowledge to their having either no work experience or very little work experience (which dated back many years) outside of their current organisation. The sixth respondent was somewhat unique, first of all because he was a relative newcomer to the tooling division (with only six years service) and, secondly, because he had, for many years prior to commencing his current job, operated his own 'one-man' panel-beating business. This respondent indicated that, apart from his early apprenticeship training, he had had no other experience in "a really big company".

The remaining six respondents from this division (50%) indicated that they had 'some knowledge' of what it was that the workers in other organisations did. These respondents included two supervisors (one senior supervisor and one first-line supervisor) and four 'wages' employees (including two leading hands and one shop steward). Three of these respondents indicated that they had had direct experience of working in another organisation. In all cases, this experience involved work of a similar nature to that which the respondent currently performed. The remaining three respondents had knowledge of other organisations that was acquired through indirect experience. Specifically, all of these respondents had learned about other organisations

from outsiders with whom they had some professional or work-related contact. For example, one respondent indicated that, in his role as the vice president of the Pattern Makers Association, he regularly attended meetings of this association and participated in visits to pattern shops in other organisations.

There was no difference between respondents who indicated 'no knowledge' and respondents who indicated 'some knowledge', in terms of their length of service with the company. For the former, the mean length of service with the company was 27 years and for the latter, it was 24 years. However, among respondents who reported 'some knowledge', those with direct experience of working in another organisation tended to be shorter-serving employees than those whose knowledge had been acquired through indirect experience. For the former, the mean length of service with the company was 16 years and for the latter it was 33 years.

As shown in Table 6.3, of the six respondents who reported 'some' knowledge, there was one who indicated that, in his experience, there was no difference between what workers did in his current organisation and what they did in other organisations with which he was familiar. The remaining five respondents mentioned a total of fourteen differences (four respondents mentioned three differences each, and one respondent mentioned two differences) and these were subsequently categorised into the twelve 'difference' categories shown in Table 6.3. As indicated, there was little consensus among these respondents in the differences that they reported. Specifically, ten of the twelve 'difference' categories were represented by only one respondent each, with the remaining two (namely 'Social Activities' and 'Worker-Supervisor Communication') being represented by two respondents each. This finding is quite consistent with what one might expect given that each of these respondents was reporting experience (whether direct or indirect) which was associated with a different 'other' context.

It is perhaps of more interest to note that some of the differences mentioned by these respondents were differences that one might associate with more general, possibly more observable, characteristics of an organisation. For example, there were references to differences with respect to technological sophistication, production efficiency, the flexibility of work schedules, and the organisational climate (specifically, how 'happy' workers were). The point should be made that this focus on general differences, rather than on differences more directly related to the role of workers (ie. what workers do), was not unique to the data pertaining to the 'other' context. As noted previously

(Section 6.3, pp. 361-362, point 4.), this was a pattern of responding that emerged in responses to the open-ended questions about experienced changes (the past context), anticipated changes (the future context), and desired changes (the 'ideal' context). As suggested previously, it may be that where respondents had difficulty answering these open-ended questions (perhaps because of difficulties in conceptualising the notion of 'the role of workers'), they resorted to commenting upon differences/changes associated with more general, and perhaps more salient, characteristics of their work environment.

Given the broad rationale for the inclusion, in the present method, of questions about the 'other' context, perhaps the most significant feature of the 'difference' data for the tooling division is that they contained little evidence to suggest that the respondents concerned had significant knowledge (whether acquired through direct or indirect experience) of a more active role for workers. Of the fourteen differences that were mentioned, there were perhaps three (21%) which might be interpreted as, at best, only suggestive of the possibility that the workers in respondents' 'other' organisations might have a more active role than the workers in their current organisation. These differences included (i) a reference by one respondent to there being a flatter hierarchy of authority in the 'other' organisation and, as a result, closer communication between workers and their supervisors; (ii) a reference by a second respondent to workers in the 'other' organisation being more humanly treated and trusted more; and (iii) a reference by a third respondent to workers in the 'other' organisation having to be more flexible and multi-skilled. It should be noted that the single references to the three 'difference' categories – 'WA-Responsibility/Accountability', 'Information Meetings', and 'Safety Meetings' – all involved negative comparisons. In other words, the workers in 'other' organisations were reported to have less involvement in activities associated with each of these categories than the workers in respondents' current organisation.

One possibility for the analysis of 'other' context data that was suggested by the findings reported above was to attempt some classification of all of the differences that were reported in terms of whether they indicated a positive or a negative comparison. It may be that differences between groups in this regard – that is, in the extent to which groups draw consistently favourable, or consistently unfavourable, comparisons between themselves and other groups – may be culturally significant. Of the fourteen differences mentioned by respondents from the tooling division, eight (57%) could be classified as indicative of a positive comparison (in the sense that the 'other' organisation was seen

in a more positive light) and five (36%) could be classified as being indicative of a negative comparison (with the 'other' organisation being seen in a more negative light). It should be noted that, in order to make some of these classifications, it was necessary to know about the respondent's more general evaluation – whether positive or negative – of the 'other' organisation in question. This was the case, for example, for the difference indicated in the reference, by one respondent, to the workers in the 'other' organisation being more flexible and multi-skilled. There was one difference out of fourteen – a reference to the use of different materials, different equipment etc. in the 'other' organisation – which could not easily be classified as indicative of either a positive or a negative comparison.

Finally, an analysis of the 'other' context data for common thematic content provided evidence of a perception, among some respondents from the tooling division, that differences between the 'current' and 'other' contexts, where they emerged, could be explained by organisational size. Specifically, there were four respondents from this division who shared the view that smaller organisations, by virtue of their size, provided workers with a qualitatively different (more positive) experience of work than larger organisations. For example, smaller organisations were able to support more social activities for workers than larger organisations; in smaller organisations, it was possible for there to be closer communication between workers and their supervisors; and in smaller organisations, workers had no option but to become multi-skilled and learn to do "everything that was available". It is perhaps worth making the point that this attempt to explain differences between organisational contexts in terms of organisational size (a variable which can be seen to be largely outside of the control of, say, operational management within an organisation) is consistent with the overall attributional 'style' (of change being controlled by external forces) which appeared to prevail in the tooling division, and which has been described elsewhere. We turn now to a consideration of the findings for the production division.

The Production Division. As indicated in Table 6.4, there were three respondents from the production division (16% of the sample for this division) who indicated that they had 'no knowledge' of what it was that the workers in other organisations did. These respondents were all 'wages' employees and included one female and two males. Two respondents attributed their lack of knowledge to their long years of service (in each case, more than fifteen years) with the present company. The third respondent,

who had only three years service with the present company indicated that, prior to joining this company, he had only ever worked in a voluntary capacity. The implication was that he had had no relevant experience elsewhere on which to base a comparison with his current experience.

There were sixteen respondents from the production division (84% of the sample) who reported having 'some knowledge' of what it was that the workers in other organisations did. These respondents included five supervisors (two senior supervisors and three first-line supervisors) and eleven 'wages' employees. All of the former were males, while the latter included four females and seven males. In terms of the nature of their experience of other organisations, there were nine respondents who reported direct experience of having worked elsewhere and eight respondents who indicated that their knowledge of other organisations had been acquired through indirect experience⁹⁰. For the former, their experience of work in 'other' contexts was quite diverse. Some of these respondents reported past work experience which, like their current experience, was also in manufacturing (for example, reference was made to employment in a clothing factory and a table-tennis factory). For others, however, their past experience had been in quite different fields (with reference, for example, to work as a furniture removalist, as a bricklayer in the construction industry, in a service station, in a laundry, in a school canteen, and in the army). This finding can be contrasted with the associated finding for the tooling division (whereby respondents' past work experiences tended to involve work that was similar to, rather than different from, that which they currently performed). The difference between the two divisions in this regard can probably be accounted for by differences in the occupational status of employees from each. All of the respondents from the tooling division were qualified tradesmen, while the majority of respondents from the production division required no formal qualifications for the work that they performed.

The eight respondents from the production division who indicated that their knowledge of other organisations had been acquired through indirect experience included (i) six respondents who had friends and/or a spouse who worked elsewhere; (ii) one respondent who had been exposed to information about other organisations (specifically, examples of 'excellent' companies) in the context of 'management'

⁹⁰ One respondent indicated that he had knowledge of other organisations acquired through both direct and indirect experience. Hence, the numbers of respondents in these two groups totalled seventeen and not sixteen.

training that he had received in his current organisation; and (iii) one respondent who had been required to visit other organisations as part of his current work duties, and who had also learned about other organisations through reading about them.

As for the tooling division, the 'no knowledge' and 'some knowledge' respondents from the production division did not differ in terms of their length of service with the company. For the production division, the mean length of service with the company for respondents in both of these groups was 13 years. However, and again as for the tooling division, this demographic did discriminate among respondents from the production division who reported 'some knowledge' of other organisations. Respondents from this group who had direct experience of other organisations were, on average, shorter-serving employees than respondents whose experience of other organisations had been acquired indirectly. For the former, the mean length of service with the company was nine years, and for the latter it was 16 years.

As indicated in Table 6.4, of the sixteen respondents from the production division who reported 'some knowledge' of other organisations, there were four who indicated that there was no difference between their current and their 'other' organisation, in terms of what it was that workers did (ie. the 'role' of workers). It is interesting to consider briefly the various grounds upon which these respondents based their evaluations of 'sameness'. One respondent judged his current and 'other' organisation to be similar on the grounds that the workers in both were engaged in housekeeping and social activities. A second respondent based his evaluation on his view that "...all large organisations are the same [in that] people on the bottom rung just get so frustrated". The third and fourth respondents both made reference to the subordinate role played by workers in their current and 'other' organisation. In their own words, and with reference specifically to their 'other' organisation:

...you still had someone you had to answer to, and be responsible to, and so really, you know, business is business wherever you are. ('wages' employee)

It was just the same. You never saw the bosses. There was a leading hand, and they told you what to do, and showed you what to do... You wasn't involved in nothing, only your job. ('wages' employee)

These responses are of interest primarily because of the insights that they offer into how respondents see their current organisation. What emerges quite clearly in all of the above responses is a perception that the role of the workers in the production division is passive rather than active.

At this point, it should be noted that, of the twelve respondents represented in the 'difference' data shown on Table 6.4, there were two who also mentioned similarities between their current and their 'other' organisation. Interestingly, the above theme concerning the subordinate role of workers was also evident in these data. In one case, the respondent judged his current and 'other' organisation to be similar on the grounds that, at the social functions held by each, one could always observe a clear separation between management and workers, such that they sat in different places and interacted very little with one another. The other respondent (a senior supervisor) argued that it was a feature of the Australian work culture in general for workers to feel frustrated by managers who consistently failed to acknowledge their worth to the organisation. As this respondent saw it, a commonplace attitude of workers towards management was that "[Management] are a bunch of bloody arseholes. They don't listen to us, they don't talk to us". The respondent went on to advocate a general change in management 'style' whereby managers should become "less confronting and more working with [workers] as a team".

As indicated, there were twelve respondents from the production division who mentioned one or more differences between their current and their 'other' organisation. In all, these respondents mentioned a total of thirty four differences. The majority mentioned between one and three differences each, with the maximum number of differences mentioned by a single respondent (in this case, a supervisor) being seven. These differences were subsequently categorised into the thirteen 'difference' categories shown in Table 6.4⁹¹. As for the tooling division, there was not a lot of consensus among respondents from the production division about the differences that they mentioned. Eleven of the thirteen 'difference' categories were represented by no more than three respondents each. The remaining two categories, ('Individual-Skills/Attitudes/Behaviours' and 'Social Activities') were represented by five and six respondents, respectively. Again, this finding is hardly surprising given that the comparison made by each of the respondents concerned was in relation to a different 'other' context.

It was also the case, as for the tooling division, that some of the differences that were mentioned were differences of a more general nature, rather than differences one might

⁹¹ The numbers in each of the 'difference' categories shown in Table 6.4 are numbers of respondents, rather than numbers of differences. Given that some respondents mentioned more than one difference in a given 'difference' category, the total number of differences mentioned (ie. 34) is more than the sum of the tabled differences (ie. 31).

expect would have a direct bearing on the role played by the workers in an organisation. For example, there were references to differences with respect to workload (specifically, the “pressure of production”), with respect to various conditions of work including safety, pay and other benefits, and with respect to organisational recruitment practices. The explanation offered previously in relation to this particular feature of the present data set obviously also applies here.

In terms of differences suggesting knowledge (whether acquired through direct or indirect experience) of a more active role for workers, the findings for the production division were, again, similar to those for the tooling division. Of the thirty four differences that were mentioned by respondents from this division, there were perhaps seven (21%) which could be classified in this way. These included (i) a reference by two respondents to the workers in their ‘other’ organisation having more responsibility and autonomy in relation to the work which they performed; (ii) a reference by two respondents to there being more training for the workers in their ‘other’ organisation; (iii) a reference by one respondent to there being more positive worker-supervisor communication in his ‘other’ organisation, such that “if [workers] had an idea, it had to be listened to – you couldn’t sweep it under the carpet”; (iv) a reference by one respondent to there being more teamwork in his ‘other’ organisation such that “there was a lot more interaction [between workers] and there was a lot more helping each other and trying to solve problems quickly and easily...”; and (v) a reference by one respondent to workers in her ‘other’ organisation attending more ‘information’ meetings.

The same classification of differences, in terms of whether they indicated a positive or negative comparison, was attempted for the production division as for the tooling division. Of the thirty four differences mentioned by respondents from the production division, twenty three (68%) could be classified as indicative of a positive comparison (in the sense that the ‘other’ organisation was seen in a more positive light than the current organisation) and nine (26%) could be classified as indicative of a negative comparison (with the ‘other’ organisation being seen in a more negative light than the current organisation). The remaining two differences could not easily be classified as being indicative of either a positive or a negative comparison. On the basis of these findings, there does appear to be a tendency among respondents from the production division to see their own organisation in a less favourable light than other organisations

with which they are familiar. Of course, the question arises as to what such a tendency might signify more generally about the nature of the group in which it emerges. Perhaps it is indicative of an overall low level of job satisfaction among the members of the group? Alternatively, perhaps it is simply a manifestation of the more general human tendency to believe that the 'grass is always greener on the other side'?

It is perhaps worth mentioning here that the above classification of responses (as opposed to respondents) may exaggerate the picture somewhat. This is because a given respondent may judge his/her 'other' organisation to be very similar, overall, to his/her current organisation, but may then go on to mention several specific, but possibly quite incidental, positive (or for that matter negative) characteristics of the 'other' organisation. The point is that, if one were to simply classify each respondent as having made either a favourable, or an unfavourable, judgement about his/her current organisation in relation to some other organisation, then one might get a more accurate picture of the extent to which the group displays a tendency towards either positive or negative comparisons with other groups.

Finally, as for the tooling division, the 'other' context data for the production division were analysed for common thematic content. Nothing of particular interest was revealed by this analysis.

The 'other' context: Summary of key findings

The above analysis of 'other' context data revealed a number of similarities and differences between the two divisions in terms of respondents' exposure to other organisational contexts and their experience of the role of workers in other organisations. A summary of these similarities and differences is provided below.

1. There was evidence to suggest that, as a group, the respondents from the tooling division had more limited, and narrower, direct experience of other organisational contexts than their counterparts from the production division. A similar pattern emerged in the findings for respondents whose knowledge of other organisations was based on indirect, rather than direct, experience.

It was suggested that the difference between the two divisions, in terms of the variability of respondents' experience of other organisations (whether direct or indirect), was probably a reflection of differences in the occupational status of respondents from each division. Given that respondents from the tooling division were all qualified tradesmen, one might expect that any experience of 'other' organisational contexts

which they had acquired either in the course of, or on becoming qualified, would be in areas similar to that in which they currently worked. In the same way it might be argued that, given that the majority of respondents from the production division lacked any formal work qualifications, they would be more likely, as a group, to have more varied employment experience.

2. Given the relatively small number of respondents in the sample for each division, it is difficult to say anything conclusive about the extent to which the above findings might reflect differences in respondent demographics. Nevertheless, it is perhaps still worth commenting on some trends which emerged in this regard. For example, with respect to seniority, it is worth noting that four of the six supervisors from the tooling division indicated that they had 'no knowledge' of what it was that workers in other organisations did. In contrast, all of the supervisors from the production division reported 'some knowledge'. The point can be made that, such a trend, if it were to emerge in a larger population (whose findings could be subjected to statistical analysis), could have important implications for understanding organisational (divisional) culture. Specifically, one might predict the development of a more 'bounded' culture in an organisation in which the majority of supervisory staff (whom one can argue are typically in positions of some power and influence) claim no knowledge of what Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) have referred to as 'institutional alternatives', than in an organisation in which the majority of supervisory staff report some knowledge of such alternatives.

As noted, respondent length of service with the company failed to discriminate between the 'no knowledge' and 'some knowledge' groups for each division. While most of the respondents in the 'no knowledge' group were, as one might expect, longer serving employees, there was one respondent in each of these groups who was a shorter serving employee. Both of these respondents reported that, while they had had past experience of working elsewhere, this experience had been such that it could not meaningfully be compared with their current experience. Length of service with the company did, however, discriminate among the 'some knowledge' groups for both divisions. Specifically, for both divisions, respondents whose knowledge of other organisations had been acquired through direct experience (ie. through having worked elsewhere) had, on average, shorter service with the company than respondents whose knowledge of other organisations had been acquired through indirect experience (ie.

through various work-related contacts and professional affiliations, through socialisation with friends and/or a spouse working elsewhere, and via the media). This finding is hardly surprising given that, to the extent that one has worked elsewhere prior to joining one's current organisation, there will be less time available to spend in one's current organisation.

Finally, for the production division (where the sample included male and female respondents), there was no indication of a trend suggesting that the above findings might, in some way, be related to gender differences.

3. Among the 'some knowledge' groups for both divisions, there was a minority of respondents only (one out of six respondents from the tooling division (17%), and four out of sixteen respondents from the production division (25%)) who reported no difference between their current and their 'other' organisation. For the production division, an analysis of the criteria upon which these respondents made their evaluations of 'sameness' provided some interesting insights into respondent perceptions of their current organisation. In particular, there was evidence of a perception that the role of workers in the production division was predominantly passive and that there existed, in the division, a clear 'subordinate-superior' relationship between workers and their supervisors.

4. For both divisions, there was a majority of respondents in the 'some knowledge' group who made reference to one or more differences between their current and their 'other' organisation. As indicated, in neither division, was there much consensus among these respondents about the differences they mentioned. The point was made that this finding was consistent with what one might expect given that the 'other' contexts to which respondents were referring were, in all cases, different (ie. no two respondents reported having had experience in the same 'other' organisation).

As indicated, for both divisions, the 'difference' data included a number of references to differences of a more general nature, such as, differences with respect to technological sophistication, production efficiency, workload, and various conditions of work. That the focus in these data was not (as intended) solely upon differences likely to have a direct bearing on the role of divisional workers was perhaps indicative of some difficulty, among respondents from both divisions, in conceptualising the notion of the 'role of workers'.

It was also the case that the 'difference' data, for both divisions, contained few references to differences that might be indicative of a more active role for workers. In other words, there was little evidence to suggest that, through their experience of other organisations (whether acquired directly or indirectly), the respondents from either division had gained much knowledge about a more active role for workers. In this sense, it might be concluded that the 'other' context data that were generated by this study would, if anything, serve to confirm rather than disconfirm, respondents' existing views about the role of workers in an organisation.

5. For both divisions, the 'difference' data were analysed further to determine whether or not there were any trends in how respondents regarded their 'other' organisation – whether more favourably, or alternatively more unfavourably, than their current organisation. For both divisions, a majority of the differences mentioned could be classified as indicative of a positive, rather than a negative comparison (in the sense that the 'other' organisation was seen in a more positive light than the current organisation). Two possible explanations were offered for this finding. On the one hand, it was argued that consistently positive references to 'other' organisations could be indicative of low job satisfaction with one's current organisation. On the other hand, it was suggested that such a finding may simply be a manifestation of the more general human tendency to believe that the 'grass is always greener on the other side'.

6. As indicated, for both divisions, the 'other' context data were analysed for common thematic content. Apart from some evidence in the tooling division data of a perception that, where differences between one's current and 'other' organisation emerged, these could be explained largely by differences in organisational size, this analysis revealed little of interest. Again, this finding is not surprising given that, in all cases, the 'other' contexts to which respondents referred were different.

'Other' context: Methodological issues

Having summarised the key findings of the above analysis of other context data, we turn now to a consideration of some of the methodological issues that were raised by this analysis. Of particular interest here is the extent to which other context data can contribute to our understanding of culture in work organisations. There is also the question of the adequacy of the present method for providing insights into the nature and extent of respondents' awareness of 'institutional alternatives'. Specifically, what

aspects of the present method should be retained and what revisions should be made? In the summary points that follow, each of these issues receives some attention.

1. Isolation from other groups is important. The findings above provided some support for the argument, in the literature, that a group's social isolation from other groups may be an important condition for the development of highly cohesive and highly localised cultures. As indicated, there was evidence to suggest that, as a group, respondents from the tooling division had more limited, and narrower, experience of other organisational contexts than their counterparts from the production division. This finding is not inconsistent with the overall assessment of the tooling division as supporting a somewhat more homogeneous, and definable, culture than the production division (this assessment being made on the basis of evidence from the present study, as well as impressionistic data gathered by the author over several years in her role as a 'researcher participant' in each division). It would appear, therefore, that there is some empirical support for the inclusion, in the present study, of a focus on the 'other' context of respondents' experience.

Of course, in order to more convincingly demonstrate the value of 'other' context data, one would require a more extreme comparison – in terms of the degree of exposure of group members to 'institutional alternatives' (particularly those which contradict members' current social reality) – than that offered by the two divisions in the present study. The reader is reminded that, even though respondents from the tooling division appeared to have been somewhat more socially isolated than their counterparts from the production division, in neither division was there much evidence of exposure to significantly different cultural alternatives. In fact, the point was made that, if anything, respondent experience of other organisational contexts would have served to confirm, rather than disconfirm, existing views (in this case, about the role of workers in an organisation).

2. Importance of occupational status. As indicated, the above analysis of other context data provided some evidence to suggest that the occupational status of group members (in this case, the distinction was between members with trade qualifications and those with no formal work qualifications) may influence the nature of their exposure to other organisational contexts. While this finding is hardly surprising (and one might be criticised for stating the obvious), it nevertheless has important implications for understanding the role of 'other' context experience in shaping the

group's culture. In particular, one should be alert to the possibility that group member experience of other organisational contexts may be acting primarily to reinforce occupational sub-cultures currently represented in the group.

3. Nature of other organisations is important. A third point, which is related to point 2. above, is that, where a respondent indicates some knowledge (whether acquired directly or indirectly) of other organisations, one should go on to ask about the specific nature of those other organisations – whether they are in the same business as the respondent's current organisation, or whether they are different types of organisations altogether. Information of this kind may give some insight into the relevance of a respondent's experience of other organisations to his/her attitudes to, and evaluation of, his/her current organisation. For example, in the context of the present study, experience of work in another car manufacturing company (and, in particular, contradictory experience) would no doubt constitute more significant 'other' experience (in terms of its influence on the current culture) than experience of, say, work as a bricklayer or as a furniture removalist.

4. Sameness criteria. As indicated above, some interesting insights into respondent perceptions of their current organisation were provided by the analysis of the criteria upon which respondents judged their current and their 'other' organisation to be similar. The implication of this finding for the analysis of 'other' context data, in general, is that one should focus not just on the differences which respondents mention, but also on the similarities.

5. Favourable versus unfavourable comparisons. The analysis of 'other' context data might also usefully include some assessment of the extent to which respondents consistently make either favourable or unfavourable comparisons between their current organisation and other organisations about which they have some knowledge. The value of information of this kind is that it could highlight differences between groups in terms of the cultures they support. However, as suggested by the results reported above, there is also a possibility that such information may constitute evidence of more generally held stereotypic views (in this case, the view that 'the grass is always greener on the other side'). Given this possibility, one must be cautious about making claims, on the basis of information of this kind, to have tapped a cultural phenomenon that is unique to the group being investigated.

6. Respondents versus responses? Finally, the results of the above analysis of other context data raised the question again as to whether, in the present study, it would have been better to analyse respondents (in terms of each individual's overall pattern of responding), rather than responses (to specific interview questions). As indicated, the latter approach can lead to some distortion in the representation of respondent experience that is offered. Of course, this problem will be quite serious where there are many responses that represent the views of a minority of respondents only. Fortunately, this was not the case for the other context data that were generated by the present study. As indicated above, for both divisions, most of the respondents who mentioned differences between their current and their 'other' organisation, mentioned between one and three differences each. In other words, it was not the case that most of the differences that were mentioned were mentioned by one or two respondents only.

6.3.4 The 'ideal' context

Questioning in this section of the interview was designed to provide some insight into respondents' views about the 'ideal' role for workers, that is, what it is that workers in an organisation, such as the respondent's current organisation, ideally should do. As indicated in the introduction to this study (see Section 4.1.2, pp. 262-270), findings from Study II, along with arguments in the literature concerning the prescriptive function served by cultural beliefs and assumptions (Sackmann, 1991; Smircich, 1983a), provided the rationale for the inclusion, in the present method, of questions about the ideal. The possibility was suggested that responses to these questions might be expected to be more 'culture bound' in organisations which support deeply embedded cultures than in organisations whose cultures are less entrenched.

The specific format of questioning which was followed in relation to the 'ideal' context was, as indicated previously, the same as that followed in relation to the first three contextual domains, namely, the present context, the past context, and the anticipated future context. Respondents were first of all presented with two open-ended questions that asked about whether or not, if the respondent was in charge of an organisation such as his/her current organisation, there would be anything that the respondent would change about either the 'main duties' of workers (ie. their primary task) or the 'other activities' in which workers were engaged. Respondents were then presented with the same prompt questions as previously. Again, where necessary, and in order to facilitate responding to the questions in this section, respondents were

reminded of what they had said in their responses to these same questions (both the open-ended and the prompt questions) asked previously in relation to the present context. By way of illustration (in this case in relation to a prompt question), an example of the kind of assistance that was given in this regard was: 'You have said that, at the present time, there is no involvement of the workers in your division in safety meetings, apart from the occasional safety talk given by the section supervisor. If you were in charge of this division, would you want to make any changes to that, or would you be happy with the way it is?'

With respect to the format for reporting results in this section, it will be seen that, as previously for Sections 6.3.1 and 6.3.2, the results of the analysis of open question data pertaining to the ideal context are reported first, followed by some initial results from the analysis of the prompt question data (the greater part of this latter analysis being reported in Appendix D3). A summary of the key findings for the ideal context (which draws on the analysis of data presented in this section and in Appendix D3) is then provided. In this summary, particular attention is given to similarities and differences between the divisions and what these might mean in terms of understanding the culture of each division. Following this, consideration is given to the question of whether or not a focus on the ideal context can contribute anything of value to an understanding of organisational culture. The section concludes with a discussion of some of the main methodological issues which arose in the course of conducting the analysis of ideal context data and which have implications for how the present method might subsequently be revised.

Findings for the open questions

Tooling Division. As shown in Table 6.3, in response to the initial open-ended question(s)⁹², there were four respondents from the tooling division (33% of the sample for this division) who indicated that, in their opinion, there should be no change in what it was that the workers in their division did (either with respect to their 'main duties', or with respect to any 'other activities' in which they were engaged). These respondents included three first-line supervisors and one 'wages' employee (with leading hand

⁹² In some cases, respondents were presented with two open-ended questions, the first asking about desirable changes with respect to the 'main duties' (ie. the primary task) of divisional workers and the second asking about desirable changes with respect to the 'other activities' in which workers were engaged. In other cases, these two questions were combined into one so that respondents were simply asked about desirable changes with respect to any aspect of what workers did (whether in relation to their 'main duties' or their 'other activities').

status). All four respondents were longer serving employees (whose length of service with the company ranged from twenty five years to thirty three years).

The remaining eight respondents from the tooling division (67% of the sample) each advocated some change with respect to what it was that the workers in their division did (in terms of their main duties and/or their other activities). These respondents included three supervisors (one first-line supervisor and two senior supervisors) and five 'wages' employees (including three leading hands and one shop steward). Four of these respondents were longer-serving employees (with between seventeen and forty years' service with the company) and two were shorter-serving employees (each with six years' service with the company).

In all, the eight 'change' respondents advocated twenty specific changes⁹³. The maximum number of changes advocated by a single respondent was four, and the minimum number was one (mean=2.5 changes per respondent; median=2.5 changes). As shown in Table 6.3, these changes were represented by eleven activity categories. Table 6.3 also shows that there was little consensus among respondents about the changes they advocated. There were seven activity categories (out of eleven) for which changes were mentioned by a single respondent only. Moreover, the maximum number of respondents advocating change with respect to a given activity category was only three (25% of the sample for this division and 38% of 'change' respondents). This was the case for 'WA-Responsibility/Accountability' and 'Social Activities'. With respect to the former, all three respondents advocated some form of increased responsibility for the workers in their division. Specifically, one respondent advocated more involvement of divisional workers in "running the shop" and also suggested that there were some workers who could be involved in costing jobs. A second respondent argued that workers should be encouraged to follow a job through "from the beginning right to the end" and, in the process, learn how to solve their own problems rather than "having to be told what to do". And a third respondent argued that workers "should be involved in their own shop as if it was their own home". This included having the power to change things (presumably associated with methods of work) that the worker did not like, and which he considered could be made more "practical". All three of these respondents were 'wages' employees (with one being a shop steward and two being leading hands).

⁹³ As previously, the numbers shown for each category represent numbers of respondents and not numbers of responses (ie. changes). Since some respondents advocated more than one change within a given category, the total number of changes advocated (ie. 20) is more than the sum of the tabled changes (ie. 17).

The three respondents who advocated some change with respect to 'Social Activities' all argued for more involvement of divisional workers in such activities. These respondents included one 'wages' employee (a leading hand) and two supervisors (one first-line supervisor and one senior supervisor). Specifically, one respondent argued that the tooling division should follow the example of the organisation in which his son worked, whereby, at the end of each week, employees got together for "drinks and nibbles and [a] yarn". This practice, it was argued, would serve to "make people happy, make them feel as though they are wanted". In a similar vein, a second respondent argued that there should be more socialisation of divisional members with one another (through informal gatherings as well as through clubs, such as sporting clubs) and suggested further that such a change could help to avoid "this 'them and us' business" between workers and their supervisors. And a third respondent – a supervisor – argued for the introduction of what he called "beer and bickie sessions" to be held "at least once a month". As illustrated in the following excerpt from the interview, the underlying purpose of these sessions, as the respondent saw it, was for the supervisor to surreptitiously learn about what workers really thought – that is, to learn about the things of 'real' importance to workers, which workers would be likely to talk about with one another, but which they typically would not discuss in the presence of their supervisors:

...and usually after a few beers, they tell you what they think. And [you should] listen to that. *Interviewer:* So this would not be just social, but it would be a sort of feedback session about work? *Respondent:* Well, that is for you and me to know, that it would be feedback. But as you probably know, you go to any of those gatherings, the first beer is 'Ha, Ha', the second beer is 'How are you going, mate?', and the third beer they start to talk about things that they would never dare to tell you. (first-line supervisor)

This excerpt is of some interest, and has therefore been given some attention, because it provides a nice illustration of the way in which a respondent's elaborations and qualifications – in this case, in relation to the argument that there should be more involvement of divisional workers in social activities – can provide deeper level insights into how the respondent views his/her world. We learn, in this case, that the respondent's view of workers is such that, in order to know what workers really think, one must create a situation in which workers can, in a sense, be 'tricked' into saying things that, normally, "they would never dare to tell you". No mention is made by this respondent of the value of developing a climate of trust in which workers feel quite at ease to express their real concerns.

Perhaps the most noteworthy finding associated with the present analysis is that, despite the fact that, at this point in the interview, respondents had had considerable exposure to prompt questions (asked in relation to the present context, the past context, and the anticipated future context), which might be expected to cue them to possible other activities in which workers might engage, the number of changes which respondents advocated spontaneously, in response to the open-ended questions about the 'ideal' context, was relatively few. As above, there were four respondents who advocated no changes, and eight respondents who advocated, on average, 2.5 changes each. Moreover, it is interesting to note that only four (out of ten) 'prompted' activity categories were represented by these changes. In other words, while there was reasonable scope for respondents to describe an 'ideal' role for workers which differed from their current role – and indeed, if social desirability effects had been operating, one might have predicted such an outcome – this did not occur. It would appear, therefore, that there is some support for the conclusion that, as a group, respondents from the tooling division, have a relatively bounded view of what it is that the workers in their division ideally should do.

Finally, in analysing the present data set, consideration was given to the extent to which the changes that were advocated could be classified as indicative of a more 'active' role for workers. Of the twenty changes that were spontaneously mentioned by respondents from the tooling division, there were eleven (55%) that could be classified in this way. These included: (i) six references (by three respondents) to the desirability of some form of increased responsibility for divisional workers (these changes have been described above); (ii) one reference to the desirability of introducing a profit-sharing scheme for workers; (iii) one reference to the desirability of more involvement of workers in planning related to the design of their jobs; (iv) one reference to the desirability of involving workers in group problem-solving with other divisional personnel (such as planners); (v) one reference to the need for workers to keep records of problem-solving decisions; and (vi) one reference to the need for improved divisional communications whereby there would be more opportunities (meetings) for workers to "air their views". These changes were mentioned by five respondents in all (42% of the sample for this division, and 63% of the 'change' respondents from this division), including four 'wages' employees (one who was a shop steward and two with leading

hand status) and one supervisor. Two of the 'wages' employees were shorter serving employees, each with only six years' service with the company.

It should be noted that the argument above, concerning the potentially valuable insights that can be gained from an analysis of respondents' elaborations on, and qualifications of their responses, also applies here. This can be illustrated with reference to the specific changes described in points (iv) and (v) above which advocated, respectively, more involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving and more involvement of divisional workers in record-keeping. Both of these changes were advocated by the same respondent, namely the supervisor (and incidentally, the same supervisor whose data have been quoted in some detail above). It was clear from an analysis of the elaborations and qualifications associated with this respondent's initial reference to each of these changes that there were two key purposes which the changes were intended to serve, namely, quality control and cost control. Nowhere in these data was there any reference to the potential motivational function that might be served by such changes.

Thus, even though the specific changes proposed by this respondent might be classified as indicative of a more 'active' role for workers, there was no evidence to suggest that this was consistent with what McGregor (1960) has described as a Theory Y view of workers. In fact, if one considers this respondent's interview as a whole, the impression gained is of a supervisor who is strongly Theory X in his views about workers. For example, one finds evidence of a belief that workers are motivated primarily by money (indicated in the perception that workers would not attend meetings, training courses etc. that were held after hours, unless paid to do so); there was evidence of support for a rigid hierarchy of authority whereby workers were expected to always seek help from their immediate superior (typically a leading hand) and not from a fellow worker; and there was evidence of a belief that problems associated with quality and efficiency were best solved through increased supervisory control. On the basis of data such as these, one can again ask the question of whether or not, in the present study, the unit of analysis should have been the respondent (and his/her entire profile of responding), rather than the response.

The findings for this respondent can be contrasted with those for the other four 'change' respondents who could be classified as advocating a more 'active' role for divisional workers (with respect to one, or more, of the activities in which workers

engaged). All of these respondents conveyed the impression of having some sense of the human resource implications of the change they advocated. For example, reference was variously made to: (i) the increased loyalty and sense of belonging that would result from giving workers more responsibility (eg. by involving them in quoting on jobs); (ii) the value of consulting workers on the shop floor because of their proximity to, and by implication their superior knowledge of, the job (and problems associated with the job); and (iii) the desirability of a “people person” approach, one characteristic of which was to involve workers “in their own shop as if it was their own home”. One possible methodological implication of these contrasting findings is that, in any future administration of the present interview schedule, it may be useful to seek information about why respondents see as desirable the change(s) they advocate. We turn now to a consideration of the open question data pertaining to the ‘ideal’ context for the production division.

Production Division. As indicated in Table 6.4, there were three respondents from the production division (16% of the sample for this division) who spontaneously expressed the view that there should be no change in what it was that the workers in their division did (either with respect to their ‘main duties’, or with respect to ‘other activities’ in which they were engaged). All of these respondents were ‘wages’ employees, with varying tenure (five, eight, and nineteen years of service with the company, respectively).

The remaining sixteen respondents from this division (84% of the sample) each advocated some change in what it was that the workers in their division did. These respondents included the five supervisory staff from this sample and the remaining eleven ‘wages’ employees. Length of service with the company, for this group, was highly variable and ranged from three years to 30 years. In all, 49 specific changes were advocated by these 16 respondents. Most of these respondents advocated between one and three changes each, with the maximum number of changes advocated by a single respondent being eight (mean=3.1 changes per respondent; median=3 changes). As indicated in Table 6.4, these changes were represented by fourteen activity categories⁹⁴. In general, and as for the tooling division, there was little agreement among respondents from the production division about the changes they advocated. There were ten activity

⁹⁴ As indicated in the previous footnote, the sum of the tabled changes (in this case, 46) is less than the total number of changes mentioned (in this case 49) because some respondents mentioned more than one change within a given activity category.

categories (out of fourteen) for which changes were mentioned by no more than four respondents (that is, by no more than 21% of the entire sample for this division, or 25% the 'change' respondents).

As shown in Table 6.4, however, there was one activity category that was relatively well-represented (in terms of the number of respondents advocating change within that category). This was 'Planning Meetings', with nine respondents in all (47% of the entire sample for the division, and 56% of the 'change' respondents) arguing for more involvement of the workers in their division in some form of planning. These respondents included the five supervisory staff in the sample and four 'wages' employees. Specifically, seven respondents made reference to the desirability of workers having a role with respect to the planning (design) of their own job(s) and/or the general layout of work in the plant as a whole. The following excerpts are illustrative of the comments made by this group:

I think [I would get workers involved] in the planning of areas... I think that the best people that know how to plan a job are the people on the job. They know the easiest way they can get that job done, well most of the smart ones [do] anyway. ('wages' employee)

[Workers] should be involved in the process planning... See everything runs on a process, what they call a process planning sheet. The engineers say 'It's got to be done this way' but they haven't tried it... They say 'Oh, we've got to do it this way, this way, this step, this step'. When you come and build it, it won't go together because they haven't tried it on the shop floor. ('wages' employee)

There's a real need for operators to get involved in the way they process their product – I mean, they know best how to produce it, and some of those guys out there have had a lot of experience doing the types of work they're doing, but we tend not to find the time to draw that out of them... the way that they actually get around to building the part, they're the people out there that should be [doing it]. (senior supervisor)

I would say 'Right, [we're] going to have a new concept. This Saturday, I'm bringing you all in on overtime [and] what we're going to do is we're going to completely strip the area out. What I want you to do is... here's the job we've got to do, figure out the best way we can do it... We've got to run at 350 a day. Do you think that moving the truck in here, or doing this here, is going to be dangerous?' ...[the work layout] has to be user friendly. They're the users – it's got to be friendly to them. (first-line supervisor)

The reader will note that a theme which is articulated more or less explicitly in each of the above excerpts is that, because of their 'hands-on' knowledge and experience of production tasks, shop floor workers are thought to be in a better position than many other divisional personnel to advise on decisions about job design and plant layout.

In addition to the above, there was one respondent (a first-line supervisor) who argued that workers should have some input into planning decisions about where they would work. In this respondent's own words:

I think I would like to find out from the people what areas they would really like to work in. I don't think that happens a lot at the moment. I feel we've got a lot of people here who work in areas that they're not really suited to, for whatever reason. That would be one thing that I'd try... [to] find out exactly what they would like to do. Obviously, we've still got to build motor vehicles where you can't just shift everybody around. That would be something I'd have in the back of my mind... to try and get people in areas where they are happy to work. (first-line supervisor)

And finally, there was one respondent (also a first-line supervisor) who argued in favour of shopfloor workers becoming involved in planning of a more strategic nature. The respondent cited the example of SPC, an Australian fruit processing company that used a collaborative approach to decision-making to help it survive a major financial crisis that it faced in the early 1990's. One important outcome of this company's approach was that all company personnel agreed to a four day working week, thereby significantly reducing the company's expenditure on wages and salaries. It is worth commenting briefly on the context in which this particular change was advocated. When the respondent was first asked about whether or not, if he was in charge, he would make any changes to the 'main duties' of the workers in his division, he replied by saying that, by way of a short-term solution to what he saw as the division's lack of competitiveness, he would de-unionise the plant and then he would employ all ethnic labour. In his own words:

I will be quite honest with you. If I was a manager on the short-term looking at it... I would get myself right out of the vehicle industry and the union situation as it is at the moment... because by tying them up to a vehicle award, I am not competing with other production industries... then I would employ the place – and I will be quite honest with you – with Chinese or Vietnamese, or something like that, because with those sort of people, with ethnics... (first-line supervisor)

The respondent then proceeded to elaborate on what he described as his "other option" for dealing with the division's lack of competitiveness, namely, the change described above whereby divisional workers would have a role in strategic planning.

The important point illustrated by the above data is that one's interpretation of any given response, when it is analysed in isolation from the context in which it was made, is likely to be quite different from one's interpretation of that same response, when analysed within the context in which it was made. The question again arises as to whether or not, in the present study, it would have been better to have treated

respondents, rather than responses, as the primary unit of analysis. Such an approach could potentially provide a more coherent picture of each individual respondent in terms of what it is that (s)he values and considers important. Of course, should such an approach be adopted, it would still be the case, as with the current approach, that qualitative data (in the form of elaborations on, and qualifications of, responses) would be critical to one's evolving understanding of the individual.

As shown in Table 6.4, after 'Planning Meetings', the next best represented activity categories were 'WA-Job Rotation', 'Information Meetings', and 'Attend Training'. Each of these categories was represented by five respondents (26% of the entire sample for this division, or 31% of the 'change' respondents for this division). With respect to the activity category 'WA-Job Rotation', the five respondents concerned – all 'wages' employees – shared the view that there should be more job rotation for divisional workers. In each case, there was some reference to the quality of work life implications of such a change. In particular, it was felt that job rotation would serve to alleviate employee boredom. It was also suggested that job rotation could make for more friendly relations between workers, since it would alleviate the frustration that workers currently experienced – and which they inevitably took out on one another – as a result of being "stuck on the same job". Reference was also made to the implications of job rotation for improved work quality (the argument being that the longer one spent on the same job, the more likely it was that mistakes would go unnoticed), as well as for improved safety (that is, fewer accidents).

In the case of 'Information Meetings', there were four respondents – all 'wages' employees – who shared the view that workers should be better informed than they currently were. Two of these respondents made reference to the need for workers to have more specific job-related information (pertaining, for example, to problems with parts, job design specifications, and quality criteria). One respondent made a general reference to the desirability of having more regular State of the Nation meetings, and one respondent emphasised the importance of information meetings for keeping rumours in check. The fifth respondent – a senior supervisor – had a somewhat different perspective, in that he was concerned with the flow of information upwards, rather than downwards. This respondent argued that management should seek more information from workers – "draw on [workers'] experience" – about problems which

they had encountered in the course of working on the current model. In this way, these same problems could be prevented from occurring in subsequent models.

Finally, with respect to the activity category 'Attend Training', all five respondents argued that the workers in their division should be more involved in training than they were at the present time. These respondents included three 'wages' employees, one first-line supervisor and one senior supervisor. There was considerable variability among these respondents in the particular form(s) of training they were advocating. In one case, it was suggested that the more experienced operators in the division should be given responsibility for showing the less experienced operators "the wrong and the right ways of doing the jobs". A second respondent (the senior supervisor) expressed the view that workers should always be adequately trained in "new processes" before having to execute these processes in the actual production setting. This same respondent also advocated a form of 'train-the-trainer' course for skilled operators. In his own words:

...they need to be better able to train the guy they're working with, if they're a skilled operator... because we've got some very skilled operators that aren't good at passing on their skills. (senior supervisor)

A third respondent argued that there should be more "formal" training for workers (in the sense of training provided by experts), specifically in the area of spray painting. According to this respondent, the situation at the present time was such that:

...the spray painting we got here is, if your overalls fit, you are sort of a spray painter. They don't have any sort of formal training or anything like that...
...there's a few of us that got trained properly, and the rest of them nowadays just get thrown in the booth and they say 'This the gun, this is the part, paint it.'
('wages' employee)

And finally, a fourth and fifth respondent argued for more training for workers in relation to some specific aspect(s) of their job. In one case, the emphasis was on training in relation to quality requirements as well as in relation to changes in job processes; in the other, the emphasis was on training for workers in problem-solving skills. In the words of the latter respondent (the first-line supervisor):

I'd like to train people up to basically solve their own problems, give them [the] tools if you like to attack some of the problems that frustrate them as individuals.
(first-line supervisor)

As for the tooling division, there was little evidence of social desirability responding in the open question data for the production division. The reader will recall the argument made previously that a likely indicator of social desirability responding would

be the finding that many of the 'prompted' activity categories were well-represented (in terms of the numbers of respondents mentioning change with respect to these categories). The main rationale for this argument was that, up to this point in the interview, respondents had had considerable exposure to the prompt questions (asked in relation to the present context, the past context, and the anticipated future context) which were designed to cue them to possible other activities in which workers might engage. In the case of the tooling division, it will be recalled that there were four 'prompted' activity categories (out of ten) that were represented by the open question data. The level of representation was very low for three of these categories (in each case, change was mentioned by one respondent only), while for the fourth category it was somewhat higher (with change being mentioned by three respondents, comprising 25% of the entire sample for this division, and 38% of all 'change' respondents).

In the case of the production division, the pattern of responding was somewhat different, with the representation of 'prompted' activity categories being variable, rather than poor. As shown in Table 6.4, there were six 'prompted' activity categories (out of ten) that were represented by the open question data for this division. One of these categories was relatively well-represented (with nine respondents, comprising 47% of the entire sample and 56% of 'change' respondents, mentioning change in this category); a further two categories were represented to a reasonable extent (in each case, change was mentioned by five respondents, comprising 26% of the entire sample and 31% of 'change' respondents); and the remaining three categories were relatively poorly represented (with change being mentioned by four or less respondents, comprising 21% or less of the entire sample or 25% or less of 'change' respondents). This variable representation of 'prompted' activity categories can also be seen as inconsistent with what one would expect if there was a social desirability bias influencing responding. In fact, what it does suggest is that, in responding to the open-ended questions about the 'ideal', respondents from the production division were exercising some judgement and voicing their own opinions. They were not responding indiscriminately to these questions.

Finally, and also as for the tooling division, the open question data for the production division were analysed to determine how many of the changes that were mentioned could be classified as indicative of a more 'active' role for workers. Of the forty nine changes that were mentioned, there were twenty (41%) which could be classified in this

way. A number of these changes have already been described. These include (i) all nine changes that were advocated in relation to worker involvement in planning activities; (ii) two of the changes advocated in relation to worker involvement in training (specifically, the reference by one respondent to the need for workers to be trained in problem-solving skills, and the reference by another respondent to the need for 'train-the-trainer' courses for workers); and (iii) one of the changes advocated in relation to the activity category 'Information Meetings' (with the specific reference being to the desirability of more upward communication whereby managers (supervisors) should seek information from workers about problems which they were experiencing with the current model).

In addition to these changes, there were a further eight changes which were classified as indicative of a more 'active' role for workers. Four of these changes were represented by the activity category 'WA-Responsibility/Accountability'⁹⁵. Specifically, there was one respondent (a 'wages' employee) who argued that workers should be involved in, and have some responsibility for, work carried out in the 'pilot' phase of manufacturing a new model vehicle. According to this respondent, the situation at the present time was such that:

It's only the leading hands that are involved in [pilot parts] anyway. ...we won't get to know about them until we actually have to. To be involved in the beginning would be nice, but we're not involved in the beginning... When they're all ready for us to produce and assemble, then we'll get to know about them. ('wages' employee)

This respondent also advocated more overall responsibility for the workers in her division:

I think responsibility is important in your job, and you need to sort of feel you can handle it... I don't think they've got enough responsibility. You seem to have, like, [a situation where] 'You just stand there and push the buttons and put them in there, and we'll worry about the rest of it'.

A second respondent (also a 'wages' employee) argued that divisional workers should have more responsibility for activities associated with the "running of the plant", such as, stock control and quoting/costing activities. And a third respondent (a first-line supervisor) argued that divisional workers should have more responsibility for "[solving] their own problems".

⁹⁵ These four changes were mentioned by three of the four respondents who spontaneously mentioned a change (or changes) associated with this activity category. The fourth respondent advocated a 'non-active' change, arguing that the responsibilities of 'wages' employees with leading hand status should change to include more involvement in direct production.

A further two 'active' changes were represented by the activity category 'Group Problem-Solving'. Specifically, one respondent (a 'wages' employee) argued for the reintroduction of the team meetings that had been held in the past as part of the Team Concept initiative. In the respondents own words:

I think myself, I would go back to having a team meeting... Perhaps only once a month, but I would go back to that. I think there's a lot of good can come out of those. Because, there's a lot of people – we've got two or three very clever people here that are really good on ideas... (wages' employee)

A second respondent (a senior supervisor) argued that there should be more collaboration between shop floor workers and "trades and maintenance type people" for the purpose of testing out workers' ideas as well as solving problems which workers encountered on the job. In this respondent's own words:

The problem we've got in the past is that a lot of people come up with a lot of good ideas, but we haven't got anyone to make it, we haven't got the bits, or we haven't got the toolmaker to spare, or we haven't got the fitter to spare... if the assembly area have got a problem, I'd give them a maintenance guy and a toolmaker to work with them full time. If paint's got a problem, I'd give them a maintenance guy and a toolmaker to work for them, and do their jobs, and have these guys actually working for the shop floor people. (senior supervisor)

The remaining two 'active' changes that were advocated by respondents from the production division were represented by the activity categories 'HRM-Reward' and 'Worker-Supervisor Communication' respectively. With respect to the former, and as illustrated in the following excerpt, the respondent concerned (a supervisor) argued that the division's operating reward system should be changed to promote what was essentially a more 'active' role for workers:

...I would change the reward system. Because at the moment a lot of the ideas that are coming from people on the floor, I feel that there's not a lot of rewards given back to them. If we as a group – and possibly this may happen in the future – if we as a supervisory group could reward a person fairly for using his initiative, coming up with an idea that we know is going to work, and reward him a lot more quickly than what is happening at the moment with our suggestion scheme... I think that would result in a lot more ideas coming from the people themselves. (first-line supervisor)

With respect to the latter, the respondent concerned (also a first-line supervisor) argued for a change in the nature of the communication between workers and their supervisors. Specifically, he suggested that supervisors should encourage workers more to come up with ideas and, further, that they should then "be good to [their] word" and act upon these ideas.

The twenty 'active' changes described above were mentioned by eleven respondents in all (representing 58% of the entire sample for this division and 69% of the 'change' respondents). These respondents included all five supervisory staff and six 'wages' employees. There was no difference between the 'active change' respondents and the 'non-active change' respondents in terms of either their length of service with the company (for former mean=14.18 years; for latter mean=10.75 years) or their gender.

At this point, the question arises as to whether or not, in terms of their overall pattern of responding to the open-ended questions, respondents from the production division differed significantly from their counterparts in the tooling division. A review of the findings associated with the quantitative data suggests that the divisions were, in fact, very similar. Specifically, 84% of respondents from the production division compared with 67% of respondents from the tooling division advocated some change with respect to what it was that the workers in their division did; on average, production division respondents mentioned 3.1 changes each compared with 2.5 changes each for tooling division respondents; the total number of activity categories represented by these change data was fourteen for the production division and eleven for the tooling division; and the number of 'prompted' activity categories represented by these data was six for the production division and four for the tooling division. With respect to the analysis of 'active' versus 'non-active' changes, 41% of the changes advocated by production division respondents were classified as 'active', compared with 55% for the tooling division; these data represented the responses of eleven respondents from the production division (58% of the sample for this division) compared with five respondents from the tooling division (42% of the sample for this division).

As indicated, the conclusion suggested by these findings is that, in terms of their overall pattern of responding, respondents from the two divisions appeared to be very similar. Having said this, however, it is worth noting that, for all but one of the specific findings reported above, the production division was better represented than the tooling division. In other words, respondents from the production division were somewhat more likely than their counterparts from the tooling division to spontaneously advocate change; the average number of changes mentioned per respondent was slightly higher for the production division than it was for the tooling division; the number of 'activity' categories represented by these changes (essentially, the number of different types of changes that were mentioned) was somewhat greater for the production division than for

the tooling division; and so on. This trend is not inconsistent with the author's impression (gained over several years as a researcher participant in each division) of the production division as being somewhat less culture bound (and hence, possibly somewhat more accommodating of change) than the tooling division.

This trend can also be interpreted in the light of findings from the present study. For example, the analysis of data pertaining to the past context provided evidence to suggest that the production division had had more exposure to change over time than the tooling division and, moreover, that it had been exposed to more different types of change (including changes likely to challenge existing ways of doing things eg. the introduction of the Team Concept). There was also evidence from the qualitative data associated with the above changes (that is, the changes advocated in relation to the 'ideal' context) that there would be more support in the production division than in the tooling division for what has been described as an 'active' role for workers. In particular, respondents from the production division seemed better able than their counterparts from the tooling division to articulate (describe in detail) the 'active' changes they advocated (see, for example, the excerpts quoted in Appendix D3 on p. 850, concerning changes in worker involvement in planning activities). It was also the case that these data typically contained more references than the associated tooling division data to the human resource management implications (in particular, the motivational implications) of the changes advocated.

Finally, it is interesting to note that, whereas three of the four 'no change' respondents from the tooling division were supervisory staff, there were no supervisory staff among the 'no change' respondents from the production division. In other words, all five of the supervisory staff who were included in the production division sample advocated some change with respect to what it was that the workers in their division did. Furthermore, of the three supervisors from the tooling division who advocated some change, two mentioned changes which, if realised, would be unlikely to influence, to any significant degree, the role of workers in the division (in terms of, say, a shift towards a more 'active' role for workers). In contrast, all five of the supervisory staff included in the production division sample mentioned at least one change that could be classified as supportive of a more 'active' role for workers. These findings may be of some significance given the argument that the more senior one's position in an

organisation, the more influential one can be in either resisting, or enabling, changes which are proposed.

Differences between the open and prompt questions

From Tables 6.3 and 6.4, it can be seen that, for both divisions, the presentation of the prompt questions in relation to the 'ideal' context served to provide additional information (over and above that provided by the open-ended questions) regarding respondent views about what the workers in their division ideally should do. As the reader will recall, this discrepancy between responses to the open-ended questions and responses to the closed questions (prompts) has been noted previously in relation to each of the other contextual domains for which the format of questioning included both open-ended and closed questions (specifically, the present context, the past context, and the anticipated future context). The point should also be made that, in the case of the 'ideal' context, the discrepancy suggested by the tabled data for each division might have been even more marked, had the problem of missing data in relation to the prompt questions not been so pronounced⁹⁶. Nevertheless, the discrepancy is still evident and is particularly clear in the case of 'Information Meetings' for the tooling division and 'Safety Meetings' for the production division. With respect to the former, it can be seen from Table 6.3 that there were no respondents from the tooling division who spontaneously (that is, in response to the initial open-ended question(s)) advocated a change in the role of divisional workers with respect to 'Information Meetings'. However, when subsequently prompted, seven respondents from this division (out of ten who were presented with this prompt) argued in favour of some change with respect to this activity category. Similarly, and as shown in Table 6.4, there were no respondents from the production division who spontaneously advocated a change in the role of divisional workers with respect to 'Safety Meetings'. However, when subsequently prompted, thirteen respondents from this division (out of sixteen who were presented with this prompt) argued in favour of some change with respect to this activity category.

The question again arises as to what this discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses might mean. As previously, the argument that prompting may have had the effect of 'putting words into people's mouths' was not well-supported by the data. That is, it was not the case, as one would expect if this argument were valid, that prompting consistently (that is, across the entire range of prompt questions) resulted in

⁹⁶ This problem is described in more detail on pp. 448-449 (see Table 6.7 and the associated discussion).

significantly more respondents from each division advocating change. Instead, the size of the discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses varied considerably from one activity category to another (with this effect being more pronounced for the production division than for the tooling division).

There are several other more plausible explanations for this discrepancy, all of which have been referred to previously in the course of discussing other findings from this study. These include:

1. It may be that the unprompted data (that is, the responses to the initial open-ended questions) represent respondent perceptions (beliefs etc.) about those issues that are particularly salient to them at a given point in time. The prompt data, on the other hand, may represent respondent perceptions (beliefs etc.) about issues which are of lesser significance to them. With respect to the present findings, it might be argued that the issue of, say, worker involvement in planning (in particular, in relation to job design) was of greater, and more immediate, concern to the respondents from the production division – in the sense, perhaps, of being seen as in need of more improvement – than the issue of worker involvement in safety meetings. This explanation is consistent with the finding that a significant proportion of the respondents from this division spontaneously advocated a change with respect to the former, whereas the changes advocated with respect to the latter were elicited only through subsequent prompting.

It is perhaps worth making the point here that, in this section of the interview, respondents were essentially being asked whether or not they thought that the role of the workers in their division could be improved upon in any way, and if so, how. The findings for both divisions suggested that respondents felt somehow better equipped to answer this question than the previous open-ended question(s) concerning anticipated changes in the role of divisional workers in the future. It will be recalled that, in response to the latter, the 'anticipated' changes that were mentioned tended to be changes of a very general nature (for example, various technological changes), rather than changes that one might readily associate with the more specific issue of 'the role of workers'. In contrast, the types of changes mentioned in response to the open-ended question(s) about the 'ideal' were changes that were more obviously, and more directly, related to the issue of 'the role of workers'. For example, there were references to the desirability of introducing job rotation for workers and to the desirability of supporting more involvement of divisional workers in planning activities, in training, and in social

activities. The point is that it seemed easier for respondents to comment on how they thought the role of divisional workers could be improved upon than for them to comment on how the role of divisional workers might change in the future. This finding suggests that the four contextual domains of interest in the present study may not be equally accessible, in terms of the ease with which respondents can answer questions about each. Moreover, it is possible that the accessibility of a given contextual domain may vary depending on the specific issue that constitutes the focus of the interview. It may be, for example, that if the issue had been 'technology' (and not, as in the present case, 'the role of workers'), then respondents might have found it easier to answer questions about the future context with respect to this issue than questions about the 'ideal' context.

2. A second possible explanation for the difference between spontaneous and prompted responses, observed for the 'ideal' context, is that respondents may have had a relatively poorly articulated notion of what might constitute an 'ideal' role for workers. Hence, in the absence of any prompting about this issue (that is, in response to the initial open-ended question(s)), one might expect that respondent accounts of how the current role of workers could be improved upon would be somewhat limited. With the addition of specific prompting, however, a more comprehensive profile of the 'ideal' role of workers might be expected to emerge.

3. And finally, there is the argument that the prompt questions serve to reveal respondent knowledge that is assumed or taken-for-granted. With reference to the present data set, a case in point may be the prompt data for 'Safety Meetings' for the production division. As indicated in Table 6.4, there were thirteen respondents from this division (68% of the sample) who, when prompted, argued in favour of some change in the role of divisional workers with respect to workplace safety. A closer analysis of these data revealed that all but one of these respondents had advocated an increase in the involvement of divisional workers in safety activities. It can also be seen from Table 6.4 that there were no respondents from this division who spontaneously advocated a change with respect to this activity category. It is possible that, for these respondents, attention to safety was an area of assumed importance. Hence, respondents did not think to mention it in response to the initial open-ended question(s), but rather they required specific prompting to bring this information to the surface.

Of course, it is not possible to say with any certainty whether or not any one of the above explanations has more validity (in the sense of being more strongly supported by the data) than the others. It may even be that each explanation is valid in so far as it serves to explain some aspect of the data set under analysis.

The prompt questions: Some initial findings

Table 6.7 presents the results of prompting in relation to the ideal context for *both* the tooling division and the production division (previously these data were presented separately as part of Table 6.3 and Table 6.4 respectively). Specifically, Table 6.7 shows the representation of 'prompted' activity categories for each division in terms of: (i) the total number of respondents from each division who advocated change with respect to each activity category, including those who provided this information spontaneously, in response to the initial open-ended question(s) (the latter are represented by the numbers in parentheses); and (ii) the total number of respondents from each division who advocated change as a percentage of the total available sample for each division. In addition, for each division, there is a column for 'missing data' which shows the number of respondents who were either (i) not presented with the prompt question or (ii) presented with the prompt question, but who misunderstood what was required and gave a response which subsequently could not be coded. This latter group comprised a small minority only of the 'missing data' respondents.

It can be seen that, with respect to the above data set, the problem of missing data was quite pronounced⁹⁷, particularly in the case of the tooling division. As indicated, for this division, data were missing for six respondents (50% of the sample) for each of the following three activity categories: (i) 'Union Meetings'; (ii) 'Help Other Workers'; and (iii) 'Worker-Supervisor Communication'. In view of the magnitude of this problem, the decision was made not to analyse the entire data set (that is, the data for all ten activity categories), but rather to analyse only those data pertaining to activity categories that were relatively well-represented.

The specific criterion that was applied was that activity categories for which there were missing data for more than 25% of respondents, from either division, would be excluded from the analysis. Using this criterion, four activity categories were excluded, namely: (i) 'Safety Meetings' (with excessive missing data for the tooling division); (ii) 'Union Meetings' (with excessive missing data for both the tooling division and the

⁹⁷ An explanation for the problem of missing data has been offered previously in relation to the findings for the future context (see Section 6.3.2, pp. 400-401). This same explanation also applies here.

Table 6.7 'Ideal' context: Representation (in terms of numbers and percentage of respondents) of 'prompted' activity categories for the Tooling Division and the Production Division.

Activity Category	Tooling Division n=12			Production Division n=19		
	number of respondents	missing data	%	number of respondents	missing data	%
<i>Planning Meetings</i>	6 (1)	1	55%	16 (9)	1	89%
<i>Information Meetings</i>	7	2	70%	13 (4)	3	81%
<i>Group Problem-Solving</i>	5 (1)	3	56%	8 (2)	4	53%
<i>Safety Meetings</i>	2	5	29%	13	3	81%
<i>Union Meetings</i>	2	6	33%	5	5	36%
<i>Help Other Workers</i>	2	6	33%	5	7	42%
<i>Record Work-Related Information</i>	5 (1)	3	56%	8	4	53%
<i>Attend Training</i>	4	3	44%	16 (5)	1	89%
<i>Social Activities</i>	7 (3)	3	78%	9 (2)	3	56%
<i>Worker-Supervisor Communication</i>	6 (1)	6	100%	12 (4)	3	75%

Note: The numbers in parentheses show the number of respondents, of the total indicated, who advocated change spontaneously, that is, in response to the open-ended question.

production division); (iii) 'Help Other Workers' (also with excessive missing data for both divisions); and (iv) 'Worker-Supervisor Communication' (with excessive missing data for the tooling division).

Apart from these four activity categories, the data pertaining to a fifth category, namely, 'Social Activities' were also omitted from the analysis. This decision was essentially a practical one, the main aim of which was to make the task of analysing and writing-up the data for this section of the interview more manageable. The decision to exclude 'Social Activities', rather than any of the other five remaining activity categories, was made on the grounds that the specific activities subsumed under this category could be seen as being less directly related to the issue at hand, namely, 'the role of workers', than the specific activities subsumed under the other categories.

The outcome of these various omissions was that the final analysis was reduced to those data pertaining to only five out of the original ten activity categories. These were: (i) 'Planning Meetings'; (ii) 'Information Meetings'; (iii) Group Problem-Solving;

(iv) 'Record Work-Related Information'; and (v) 'Attend Training'. It can be seen from Table 6.7 that similarities (in terms of the number of respondents from each division advocating change) were indicated for three of these categories, and differences were indicated for two. The former included 'Group Problem-Solving' (with a difference score of 3%), 'Record Work-Related Information' (also with a difference score of 3%), and 'Information Meetings' (with a difference score of -11%). The latter included 'Attend Training' (with a difference score of -45%) and 'Planning Meetings' (with a difference score of -34%). The results of the analysis of data pertaining to each of these activity categories are reported, in full, in Appendix D3.

'Ideal' context: Summary of main findings

The summary results which are presented in this section draw on the findings reported above as well as on the findings of the analysis of ideal context prompt data reported in Appendix D3. These results are as follows:

1. In response to the initial open-ended question, in which respondents were asked 'If you were running an organisation like this one, would you make any changes to what workers do (ie. to the role of workers)?', a majority of respondents from both divisions argued in favour of some change. Specifically, 67% of tooling division respondents advocated change, compared with 84% of production division respondents. The point should be made that all of the changes mentioned by these respondents could be regarded as realistic and sensible, given respondents' respective work environments. In other words, while questions about the 'ideal' could potentially encourage respondents to give extreme responses – that is, responses reflective of some utopian ideal, rather than 'reality-based' responses – in the present study, this did not occur. For example, respondents variously talked about the desirability of divisional workers having more responsibility than they did currently, the need for more socialisation among divisional members at all levels of the hierarchy, the potential value of introducing job rotation for workers, the need for improved training and communications in the division etc.

2. For both divisions, the number of changes advocated spontaneously (that is, in response to the initial open-ended question) by any given respondent was small. For the tooling division, each respondent advocated, on average, 2.5 changes; for the production division, 3.1 changes were advocated, on average, by each respondent⁹⁸. It was also the case that, for both divisions, there was little consensus among respondents about the

⁹⁸ As reported previously, there was no difference between these mean scores and their associated medians.

nature of the changes they advocated. For the tooling division, spontaneously advocated changes fell into eleven change categories, with the best represented of these (namely, 'WA-Responsibility and Accountability' and 'Social Activities') being mentioned by only three respondents each. For the production division, spontaneously advocated changes were classified into fourteen change categories. One of these (namely, 'Planning Meetings') was reasonably well-represented, with nine respondents mentioning changes in this category. However, as for the tooling division, the remaining change categories for this division were relatively poorly represented. Specifically, there were three change categories (namely, 'WA-Job Rotation', 'Information Meetings' and 'Attend Training') with changes mentioned by five respondents each and there were ten change categories with changes mentioned by four or less respondents.

3. With respect to the findings summarised in point 2. above, it was suggested that, while the magnitude of the difference between the divisions suggested by these findings was small, the direction of the difference was not inconsistent with what one might have expected, given both impressionistic data and data pertaining to the other contextual domains of interest. In other words, the finding that respondents from the production division spontaneously advocated somewhat more changes, on average, than their counterparts from the tooling division, and that there was somewhat more variability in the types of changes which they mentioned (as indicated in the number of activity categories represented by these changes) was not inconsistent with evidence suggesting that the production division was less 'culture-bound' than the tooling division.

4. The analysis of spontaneously advocated changes in terms of whether they reflected an 'active' or a 'passive' orientation indicated that the two divisions were roughly equivalent in this regard. For the tooling division, 45% of the changes advocated in response to the open-ended question could be classified as unambiguously reflecting an 'active' orientation⁹⁹, compared with 41% of changes advocated by production division respondents. Differences were, however, indicated in the number and seniority of the respondents advocating these changes. In the tooling division, the changes classified as 'active' were mentioned by a minority of respondents (4/12 or 33% of the sample for this division), all of whom were 'wages' employees; in the production division, the changes classified as 'active' were mentioned by a majority of

⁹⁹ It will be recalled that, on the basis of qualifying data, two of the eleven 'active' changes for this division were subsequently reclassified as 'passive' changes.

respondents (11/19 or 58% of the sample for this division), and these respondents included supervisory staff as well as 'wages' employees. In addition, the 'active' changes advocated spontaneously by production division respondents appeared to be somewhat better articulated (in the sense of being described in more detail) than the 'active' changes advocated by respondents from the tooling division.

The above differences between the divisions were not inconsistent with findings from the other contextual domains suggesting that the production division was somewhat more 'Theory Y' in its orientation to the role of workers than the tooling division. The point should be made, however, that while the ideal context data for the production division (when considered alone) might lead to the conclusion (by change agents, for example) that initiatives consistent with 'Theory Y' assumptions would be readily accepted in this division, findings pertaining to respondents' past experience of such initiatives suggest that this might not be the case. As indicated, there was evidence to suggest that past initiatives associated with the Team Concept were experienced negatively by some divisional members and, in this sense, one might expect there to be a degree of wariness in response to any reintroduction of such initiatives.

5. The analysis of responses to the open-ended question in terms of respondent demographics revealed that all five of the supervisory staff from the production division sample advocated change spontaneously, compared with three of the six supervisory staff from the tooling division sample. It was also found that all of the 'no change' respondents from the tooling division sample (including 'wages' employees and supervisory staff) were longer-serving employees (whose length of service with the company ranged from twenty five to thirty five years). For the production division, both the 'change' and 'no change' groups included longer-serving and shorter-serving respondents.

6. In neither division did responding to the open-ended question about the 'ideal' context appear to be influenced significantly by social desirability effects (which might have been expected, given respondents' previous exposure, on three separate occasions – in the context of questioning about the present, the past, and the anticipated future – to prompting about worker involvement in a range of activities identified a priori by the researcher). As indicated, 'prompted' activity categories were represented poorly in the open question data for the tooling division. Specifically, of the ten 'prompted' activity categories, only four were represented in the open question data for this division. Of

these, three contained a change (or changes) mentioned by three respondents. In the case of the production division, while six of the ten 'prompted' activity categories were represented in the open question data for this division, the number of respondents advocating change (or changes) within each of these six categories was variable and ranged from four to nine respondents. If responding had been significantly influenced by a social desirability bias, one might have expected that 'prompted' activity categories would have been better, and more consistently, represented in these open question data than was in fact the case.

7. As for the other contextual domains of interest, the addition of closed (ie. prompt) questions following on from the initial open-ended question served to provide a more complete picture of respondents' views about, in this case, the 'ideal' context than if respondents had been presented with the initial open-ended question only. As above, the argument that this finding might simply be a consequence of social desirability responding (whereby prompting served to 'put words into respondents' mouths) was ruled out on the grounds that, for both divisions, the effects of prompting (in terms of the numbers of respondents advocating change in response to any given prompt) varied from one 'prompted' activity category to the next¹⁰⁰. In this sense, then, responses to prompting could be interpreted largely at their 'face value' such that, where changes were advocated, they could be seen as changes which were regarded by respondents as being genuinely desirable. It was also the case that, where prompting resulted in a significant proportion of respondents arguing in favour of a given change, one could often identify the links between the desired change and some aspect of respondents' current, past, or anticipated future experience. For example, the finding that, in response to prompting, more than half of the respondents from the production division argued that there should, ideally, be more involvement of divisional workers in training could fairly readily be interpreted in the context of the drive for improved quality (one aspect of which was an emphasis on the importance of the training function) which was currently underway in this division.

8. With respect to the direction of the changes respondents advocated in response to prompting, all of these changes but one involved a shift towards increasing, or otherwise improving, the involvement of divisional workers in the activity about which respondents were prompted. The exception was a change that was advocated by one

¹⁰⁰ This was the case even taking into account the problem of missing data associated with this contextual domain.

respondent from the production division who argued that there should be less involvement than there was currently of divisional workers in record-keeping activities.

9. As was the case for the other contextual domains of interest, the analysis of respondents' elaborations on and/or qualifications of their responses (associated with the five 'prompted' activity categories referred to above) provided some interesting additional insights into similarities and differences between the two divisions, that would not have been obtained had the analysis focussed only on those data that could be easily quantified. Briefly summarised, some of these additional insights were:

- (i) The 'no change' respondents from the tooling division differed from their counterparts from the production division in that they were more likely to express explicit opposition to change. Moreover, this opposition tended to be underpinned by an allegiance to traditional views (for example, about the respective roles of supervisors and workers and about how work should be performed and jobs designed). In contrast, respondents from the production division were not only less likely to express explicit opposition to change, but in the notable instance in which they did – some production division respondents indicated that they were opposed to more worker involvement in group problem-solving activities – the opposition arose from respondents' negative past experience of a team initiative in the division. Indeed, among the respondents from this division, a 'no change' response was more likely to be indicative, not of opposition to change, but rather of satisfaction with things, as they were at the present time.
- (ii) The analysis of qualitative data provided evidence to suggest that, as a group, production division respondents were somewhat more fluent about, or better able to articulate, some of the changes that they advocated than their counterparts from the tooling division. For example, they tended to elaborate more on their 'change' responses (this was particularly evident in the data pertaining to 'Group Problem-Solving' and 'Planning'), often providing good reasons for why they considered a particular change to be desirable. It was also the case that, for some of the 'prompted' activity categories (notably, 'Information Meetings' and 'Record Work-Related Information'), there was more consensus among respondents from the production division than there was among respondents from the tooling division about the specific nature of the changes being advocated. The point was made that these findings probably reflected the greater past or current exposure of

production division respondents, either to the specific activities in question, or to related activities.

- (iii) An analysis of the thematic content of the qualitative data provided evidence that respondents – in one or both divisions – held a number of themes in common. For example, respondents from both divisions, when arguing in favour of more worker involvement in record-keeping, made reference to the important control function that was served by this activity. Among those respondents from the production division who advocated more worker involvement in training, there was a shared view that such a change was necessary if the quality of production in the division was to improve. Interestingly, there was little recognition among the respondents from either division of the potential motivational value of increasing the involvement of divisional workers in either of these activities. This analysis also provided evidence of a perception, among the ‘change’ respondents from both divisions, that while increased worker involvement in planning activities was considered to be desirable, this involvement should be restricted to operational planning activities, and should not extend to strategic planning activities.

10. The trends in respondent demographics that emerged from the analysis of the open question data (see point 5. above) were also evident in the data pertaining specifically to the ‘prompted’ activity categories¹⁰¹. As previously, there was no representation of supervisory staff from the production division in the ‘no change’ responses. This was the case across all five of the ‘prompted’ activity categories that were included in this analysis. For the tooling division, supervisory staff were marginally better represented than ‘wages’ employees in the ‘no change’ data, while ‘wages’ employees were better represented in the ‘change’ data. With respect to the former, for three of the five activity categories, the number of supervisory staff who gave ‘no change’ responses exceeded the number of ‘wages’ employees who gave ‘no change’ responses. With respect to the latter, there were four activity categories out of five for which the number of ‘wages’ employees giving ‘change’ responses exceeded the number of supervisory staff giving ‘change’ responses. It was also the case for the tooling division that the ‘no change’ respondents were more likely to be longer-serving than shorter-serving employees. No such trend in respondent tenure was observed for

¹⁰¹ The reader is reminded that some respondents spontaneously made reference to changes associated with ‘prompted’ activity categories. The analysis of data pertaining to the ‘prompted’ activity categories, in terms of respondent demographics, did not distinguish between these spontaneous responses and responses to specific prompting.

the production division. Whether or not this finding has any cultural significance is hard to say given that longer-serving employees made up the majority of the tooling division sample, while in the production division sample, longer-serving and shorter-serving employees were more equally represented.

11. The analysis of 'ideal' context data (pertaining to each of the five 'prompted' activity categories) in terms of the broader context of respondents' experience produced somewhat variable results. That is, there were some activity categories for which, for either or both divisions, the links between the 'ideal' context data and data pertaining to the other contextual domains of interest were more evident than they were for others. For example, these links were particularly evident in the case of the production division data on 'Group Problem-Solving'. One could see how, for some of the respondents from this division, their negative past experience of a team initiative, had influenced the way in which they thought about this activity in the 'ideal' context. These respondents tended to be opposed to the idea of a change towards a more active role for divisional workers with respect to this activity. In a similar vein, the finding that, among other respondents from this division, there existed support for such a change could also be explained fairly readily. As indicated, this finding might have been predicted given the positive attitudes towards a more active role for workers with respect to 'Group Problem-Solving' that emerged in the future context data. This finding was also consistent with what one might have expected given the considerable exposure, over recent years, of the members of this division to a range of activities intended to foster a more active role for workers.

As suggested by findings reported in Appendix D3, the links between the 'ideal' context data and data pertaining to the other contextual domains were not always as apparent as they were in the case of 'Group Problem-Solving' above. One general trend worth mentioning in this regard is that, for some of the activity categories, the percentage of respondents from the tooling division who advocated change in the 'ideal' context was somewhat higher than might have been expected given the limited exposure – in the past, at the present time, and in the anticipated future – of the members of this division to worker involvement in the activities associated with these categories. For example, despite the fact that respondents from this division reported no exposure to worker involvement in planning activities in the past or at the present time, and that a small minority of respondents only anticipated that this would change in the future,

more than half of the respondents from this division (55%) subsequently, in response to prompting, espoused the view that divisional workers ideally should be involved in such activities. In attempting to explain a finding such as this, one cannot entirely rule out the possibility of there being some social desirability bias in responding. The observation that some of the changes advocated by respondents from the tooling division were poorly articulated, and that there was often considerable variability among respondents in the specific types of changes (within a given activity category) which they advocated, may in fact lend some support to this explanation. On the other hand, however, there is the explanation (offered previously) that, where support for change in the 'ideal' context was espoused, it could be interpreted as indicative of a genuine desire for change on the part of respondents.

Finally, there are two possible, and not unrelated, implications of the finding that 'ideal' context data could not always be understood in terms of data pertaining to the other contextual domains. The first is that the contextual analysis attempted in the present study is likely to be limited by the fact that it was issue-specific – it was concerned with understanding the broader context of respondent experience with respect to a single issue (whether worker involvement in training, planning activities etc.) only. It may be that, for any given issue, the explanation for data pertaining to the 'ideal' context (or any other context for that matter) may become apparent only through knowledge about some other issue. A good example of this is provided by the tooling division 'ideal' context data on 'Information Meetings'. On the basis of data pertaining to the other contextual domains, one could not readily have predicted the strong support for a change towards more and improved information dissemination for divisional workers (70% of respondents advocated such a change) that was indicated in the 'ideal' context data. However, given knowledge about the current decline of the division and the prevailing climate of anxiety and uncertainty, it was hardly surprising that respondents expressed their desire for what, in effect, was improved communications in the division.

The second implication of a failure to establish strong links between 'ideal' context data and data pertaining to the other contextual domains is that information about the 'ideal' context is valuable in its own right. That is, it provides insights that would not otherwise have been obtained. To the extent that this is the case, there is support for the approach in the present study of including questions specifically concerned with

respondent experience in the 'ideal' context. This leads us onto the next section in which a more detailed examination of the value of seeking information about the 'ideal' context is offered.

Information about the 'ideal' context: What does it add?

The findings of the analysis of 'ideal' context data suggest that there are several important ways in which an attempt to understand the culture of an organisation (group) can benefit from the inclusion of questions about the 'ideal' context of respondent experience. These are as follows:

1. Information about the culture's 'boundedness'. Data pertaining to the 'ideal' context can provide some insight into the 'boundedness' of an organisation's (group's) culture. This is because questions about the 'ideal' can be seen as inviting respondents to think beyond the boundaries of their experience (in their current organisation) and to imagine some alternative, and from their perspective, preferred way of doing things. In this sense, evidence that one is dealing with a relatively 'bounded' culture would be suggested by the finding that respondent notions of the 'ideal' remain anchored in – rather than deviate from – respondents' existing experience.

The results of the analysis of 'ideal' context data suggest that there may be a number of different sources of data – which should be considered as a whole, rather than singly – that can inform our understanding the 'boundedness' of the organisation's (group's) culture. In particular, consideration should be given to:

- (i) The percentage of respondents in the group who advocate change. The finding that a high percentage of respondents advocate change – in particular, in response to the open-ended question, rather than in response to prompting – may be indicative that the group in question is not strongly culture bound.
- (ii) The average number of changes that are advocated per respondent. This information will give some insight into the group's breadth of vision for change. As above, where the average number of changes advocated per respondent is high, this may signal that one is dealing with a culture that is not strongly bounded.
- (iii) The specific types of changes which respondents advocate and, in particular, the extent to which these changes represent a departure from the way things are done at the present time. In the present study, the classification of changes into whether or not they were indicative of an 'active' or a 'passive' orientation towards the role of divisional workers was a useful means of obtaining this information.

- (iv) The extent to which respondent views about the 'ideal' contain references to the past, or to tradition. In the present study, this information was derived from an analysis of the 'no change' data – in particular, respondent attributions about why they considered change to be undesirable. It can be argued that the more strongly bounded the culture, the more likely it is that references to the past will emerge in data pertaining to the 'ideal' context.
- (v) The extent to which respondents are able to clearly articulate the changes they advocate. A high level of articulation suggests that respondents have acquired some knowledge about the changes which they are espousing – whether through thinking or talking about them, or through some form of experience (which may, for example, have increased their awareness of the need for, or desirability of, change). There is some evidence from the present study that respondents who are able to clearly articulate the changes which they advocate may be less strongly culture bound in their thinking than respondents who are less fluent in talking about change.

2. Information about the group's responsiveness to change. A second important way in which 'ideal' context data can be of value is that they can provide some insight into the extent of support for change within the group. The specific data likely to be of most relevance/interest in this regard include:

- (i) Data pertaining to the percentage of respondents who advocate change. A high degree of support for change would be suggested by the finding that a high percentage of respondents advocated change. This would be the case particularly where the need for change was argued spontaneously, rather than in response to prompting.
- (ii) Demographic data pertaining to the seniority of the respondents who advocate change. As argued previously, while there may be good support for change among respondents lower in the organisational (divisional) hierarchy, change efforts may ultimately be stymied by resistance from more senior members of the group. While the latter may be fewer in number than the former, they are likely to be more influential – because of their seniority – in determining the outcome of organisational change efforts. It can be argued, therefore, that information of this kind is likely to have important practical implications for approaches to the implementation of change.

3. A source of confirmatory information. A third argument in support of the inclusion of questions about the 'ideal' context is that 'ideal' context data can serve to confirm insights obtained from an analysis of data pertaining to the other contextual domains of interest. For example, in the present study, 'ideal' context data served to confirm insights about:

- (i) The value of qualitative data for 'making sense of' quantitative data. As with the other contextual domains, the analysis of respondent elaborations on their responses to questions about the 'ideal' context helped to clarify the meaning of these responses. For example, it provided information about the specific types of changes respondents considered to be desirable and the extent to which these changes represented a departure from current practices. It also provided information about the meaning of 'no change' responses – whether they were indicative of actual opposition to change or whether they implied satisfaction with current practices.
- (ii) The relative importance of particular themes. The finding that a particular theme emerges in the data pertaining to, not one, but a number of contextual domains lends support to the conclusion that the theme has considerable salience for respondents. For example, in the present study, it was found that respondents from both divisions shared the view that record-keeping served primarily a control function. This theme emerged in the data pertaining to four of the five contextual domains of interest (with the exception being the 'other' context).
- (iii) The value of including 'prompt' or closed questions in addition to the initial open-ended question(s). As with the other contextual domains for which prompt questions were included – that is, the past, the present, and the anticipated future – prompting about the 'ideal' context served to provide a more comprehensive picture of respondent views about how things should change than if questioning had included the initial open ended question only.
- (iv) The value of attributional data for understanding the culture of the group. As for the other contextual domains, respondent attributions – in this case, about why particular changes were considered to be desirable or undesirable – constituted a valuable source of cultural data. For example, the reader will recall that the attributional data associated with the 'no change' responses of tooling division

respondents contained evidence of a strong allegiance to tradition among the members of this group.

Methodological issues arising from the findings for the 'ideal' context

The above analysis of 'ideal' context data served to highlight a number of problems with the present method, some of which would appear to be more readily resolved than others. It also provided information about how the present method might be revised in order to more fully capitalise on some of its strengths. A brief summary of these various methodological issues is provided below:

1. The trade-off between breadth and depth. As indicated, in this section of the interview, there was a considerable problem with missing data, associated specifically with the prompt or closed questions. The reader is reminded that that this problem was encountered previously – albeit to a somewhat lesser extent – in relation to questioning about the future context. Moreover, it was suggested previously that the problem of missing data in the present study could be attributed to an interview schedule which attempted to cover more questions than was realistic given the time available.

While it is clear that any revision of the present method should involve a reduction in the length of the interview schedule, the question remains as to how best to achieve this. The reader is reminded that the broad aim of the interview was to tap organisation member beliefs and assumptions about the essential nature of workers, as reflected in members' thinking about the role of workers. Interview questions were developed around two main topics, each of which was addressed in a separate interview lasting about one hour. The first topic was concerned with what workers do (in terms of their main duties and other activities in which they are engaged) and the second topic was concerned with the characteristics of 'good' workers (the results for this topic being omitted from this thesis). One obvious strategy for reducing the length of the interview schedule would be to focus on one of these topics only. In this way, one could reasonably expect to present all of the questions pertaining to that topic (including open-ended and prompt questions, 'Why?' questions etc.) in the time available.

A second strategy would be to reduce the number of prompt questions. The reader is reminded that, for the section of the interview concerned with what workers do, there were six prompt questions (the first comprising six parts), all of which were intended to be asked, not once, but on four separate occasions – in relation to the present context, the past context, the anticipated future context, and the 'ideal' context. Clearly, if the

number of these prompts was to be reduced, the result would be a significant overall reduction in the length of this section of the interview protocol.

There are, however, two main arguments against adopting this second strategy. The first relates to the rationale for the design of prompt questions and to the fact that the present study was essentially investigative (ie. concerned with the development of a new method, rather than with the evaluation of an existing method). As indicated, one important aim of the prompt questions in the present study was that they should cue respondents to information (whether about worker activities or characteristics of 'good' workers) which they might have provided – but which they did not provide – in response to the initial open-ended question(s). Furthermore, in designing the prompt questions, an attempt was made to ask about activities (behaviours etc.) that could be classified according to McGregor's (1960) Theory X, Theory Y dichotomy. Given these two aims, and taking into account the investigative nature of the study, it was necessary that the prompt set (associated with each of the topics being explored in the interview) be reasonably inclusive (in the sense of representing a range of worker activities, behaviours etc.). This is not to say, however, that with more research into the value of particular prompt questions, one could not reduce the number of these questions to a 'critical' few.

A second argument against reducing the number of prompt questions is that, because the prompts (within a given prompt set) asked about activities (behaviours etc.) that were broadly related, the findings associated with one prompt (or with a number of prompts) could help to explain the findings associated with another prompt. A good example of this can be found in the findings reported in Appendix D3 (pp. 848-853) for 'Planning Meetings' for the 'ideal' context. As indicated, a large majority (89%) of respondents from the production division argued – with reasonable fluency – that the workers in their division should ideally be more involved in planning activities than they were at the present time. This finding, at first, seemed somewhat surprising given reports indicating that the workers in this division had never had any involvement in planning activities (such activities being potentially indicative of a more 'active' role for workers). However, when considered in the light of data pertaining to some of the other activity categories in this prompt set (notably 'Information Meetings', 'Group Problem-Solving', and 'Attend Training'), this finding could more readily be understood. As indicated, these data provided good evidence that the workers in this division had had

considerable exposure over time to activities that could be regarded as similar to planning in the sense of potentially contributing to a more 'active' role for workers.

2. The 'individual' versus the 'response' as the unit of analysis. The above analysis of 'ideal' context data drew further attention to a limitation of the present method that has already been well-documented. This limitation concerns the argument that the unit of analysis might more appropriately have been the individual (and his/her overall pattern of responding), rather than the individual's response (to specific questions). One manifestation of this limitation in the 'ideal' context was that, while a respondent could present as a strong advocate for a particular change (that might, for example, imply support for a more 'active' role workers), knowledge of that respondent's overall pattern of responding may provide contradictory information about the respondent's likely 'in practice' support for such a change. In other words, inconsistencies between a respondent's espoused values and his/her likely values 'in practice' are more easily overlooked when the individual's response is considered in isolation from the individual's overall pattern of responding.

3. General versus specific accounts of the 'ideal'. A third limitation of the present method which was highlighted by the analysis of 'ideal' context data concerned a tendency among some respondents to talk about the 'ideal' in general, rather than specific, terms. This created a problem for the subsequent broader contextual analysis of data pertaining to the 'ideal' context. For example, it was reported in Appendix D3 (pp. 813-816) that, while a majority of the respondents from the tooling division (70%) advocated a change with respect to the activity category 'Information Meetings', the emphasis in these change data tended to be on the need for improvements in divisional communications, in general, rather than on the need for improvements specifically associated with the involvement of divisional workers in information meetings. In the subsequent contextual analysis of these data, one was therefore confronted with the problem of trying to interpret general information in the context of more specific information (which had been provided in response to questions about the past, present, and anticipated future).

4. The value of asking 'Why?' With respect to 'what worked' in the present method, the analysis of 'ideal' context data provided further evidence of the value of 'Why?' questions for surfacing information of potential significance for understanding the culture of the group. Moreover, from this analysis, it can be concluded that

attributional data associated with 'no change' responses (in other words, explanations for why a particular change was seen as undesirable) proved to be as valuable in this regard as attributional data associated with 'change' responses (that is, explanations for why a particular change was seen as desirable). It is, therefore, recommended that, in any subsequent revision of the present method, it should be a requirement that respondents are asked 'Why?' in relation to all of their 'change' and all of their 'no change' responses.

CHAPTER SEVEN

STUDY III: PART 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

7.1 Introduction

The overall aim of Study III was to develop a method for understanding culture which would be more resource efficient than traditional ethnographic approaches, while at the same time offering insights into deeper level culture that could not be obtained through the use of quantitative methods. In developing this method, the researcher drew on insights from the two studies leading up to Study III, as well as on her understanding of the cultures of the two participating divisions, which had evolved over a prolonged period of time spent in each. Central also to the development of the method was a concern to bridge the gap (or at least go some way towards doing so) between the operationalisation of organisational culture and its conceptual treatment. A well recognised problem in this area of research (see, for example, Rousseau 1990; Schein, 1985) is that, while conceptual treatments of organisational culture adequately convey its complexity (with references, for example, to the taken-for-granted nature of cultural beliefs and assumptions and the grounding of these beliefs and assumptions in the organisation's history), operationalisations of culture often over-simplify the concept and fail to capture its true 'essence'. In attempting to address this problem, as well as to capitalise on insights gained from the researcher's own empirical work, the method which was developed for use in Study III combined the following key features: (i) it took the form of an 'issue-focussed' interview; (ii) the interview was semi-structured – it combined open-ended with closed questions and was sufficiently flexible to allow respondents to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses; (iii) the interview sought to operationalise key contextual variables thought to be important for an understanding of organisational culture; and (iv) the interview provided for the assessment of organisational attributions as a possible source of data from which inferences about culture could be made.

In the present chapter, an attempt is made to draw together the main findings of Study III (and the insights obtained from these findings) in order to provide some

evaluation of the extent to which the aims of this study were met. The discussion in this chapter is divided into three sections. The first section provides an evaluation of each of the key features of the method in terms of their specific contribution to an understanding of organisational culture. The second section offers a more general evaluation of the method. Particular attention is drawn to the strengths and weaknesses of the method relative to other methods for understanding culture. And the third section considers some of the possible directions for future research which are suggested by the findings of Study III.

7.2 Evaluation of the method: Key features

7.2.1 Issue-focussed interview

The interview developed for use in the present study was designed to uncover cultural beliefs about the essential nature of workers. In terms of Schein's (1985) typology, beliefs in this area can be regarded as constituting a sub-set of the beliefs represented by his third category, 'The Nature of Human Nature'. Moreover, as Schein himself has acknowledged, there is a direct link between beliefs in this area and the beliefs with which McGregor (1960) was concerned in his Theory X, Theory Y classification of managerial assumptions. The specific focus of interviewing in the present study was on respondents' perceptions of the role of workers, elicited through questions about what workers did, in terms of both their primary or core activities and other activities in which they were engaged.

Arguments in favour of an issue-focussed interview

As indicated in the introduction to Study III (see Section 4.1.2, p. 258), the exploratory nature of this work and the associated need to be able to evaluate the method's capacity for tapping cultural phenomena, was an important argument in support of the use of issue-focussed interviewing. In terms of an overall evaluation of this feature of the method, there are a number of additional, and to some extent more general, arguments which can be made in its defence. These include:

1. An issue focussed interview has the advantage of allowing comparisons to be made across individuals and research settings (Sackmann, 1991). This was particularly important in the present study for two reasons. First, a key element of the validation of the method used in this study was the extent to which it could reveal differences between the participating divisions which the researcher had become aware of through her involvement in each (on a relatively continuous basis over a period of approximately

three years). Second, a hoped-for outcome of this research was that it would offer a practical means whereby aspects of an organisation's 'deeper-level' culture could be systematically assessed. This would enable one to evaluate changes in culture over time, make comparisons between the cultures of different work organisations, and examine the relationship between organisational culture and change.

2. Another argument in favour of the use of issue-focussed interviewing – and one which has implications for the assessment of organisational culture more generally – concerns the pervasive nature of culture. This is the idea that “culture is not only deep, but also broad” (Pettigrew, 1990, p.268) and that expressions or manifestations of it are likely to be found in all facets of organisation life. This characteristic of culture makes it naïve to think that one could arrive at an understanding of an organisation's (group's culture), in its entirety, in a single even though lengthy interview. At the same time, it can be argued that, given culture's pervasiveness, the adoption of a focus for interviewing, *however narrow*, is still likely to provide insights into some aspect of the culture of the organisation (group) being studied. Indeed, it might even be argued that methods for understanding culture which are issue-specific enable a more in-depth analysis of culture than methods which are more broadly focussed. In this sense, the former might be better suited to revealing 'deep' culture, even though with respect to a single issue only, whereas the latter might be expected to provide more general, but also more superficial, insights into culture.

3. Finally, in the event that an organisation needs to conduct a cultural audit for practical purposes, issue-focussed interviewing, which can provide insights into highly specific aspects of the organisation's culture, is likely to be of more value than completely unstructured interviewing. For example, if the aim of the audit is to assess the organisation's 'readiness' for a particular change, it would be useful for change agents to know about those specific aspects of the culture likely to have the most significant implications for the success of the change effort. Such knowledge could help to reveal sources of organisational resistance to change and may also provide insights into how to manage change more effectively. To take an example from the literature, knowledge that an organisation has traditionally supported values of innovation will help change agents to understand the resistance to change that is likely to be encountered if the organisation – perhaps for reasons of survival – decides to adopt an imitative strategy (Gagliardi, 1986). In the context of the present study, it can be argued

that cultural beliefs about the 'role of workers' are likely to have significant implications for the success of any organisational change effort which requires for its success a redefinition of the traditional role of workers. More will be said about this later in the discussion.

Given the above arguments, it can be concluded that the adoption of a specific focus for interviewing constituted an important and valuable feature of the present method. There would also appear to be some support for the conclusion that investigations of culture, more generally, could benefit from such an approach. The question remains, however, as to whether or not the issue of choice in the present study (namely, the 'role of workers') was relevant and appropriate given the aims of the study. Further to this, there needs to be some evaluation of the specific questions which were asked in order to elicit information about this issue. Were these questions the 'best' questions or can alternative, more useful questions be suggested?

The 'Role of Workers': An evaluation of the issue chosen

With respect, first of all, to the relevance of the issue, the point can be made that this was largely established prior to Study III being carried out. As indicated in the introduction to Study II (see Section 3.1, pp. 156-157), the choice of a focal point for interviewing was not made arbitrarily. On the contrary, there was good evidence – both from the researcher's previous empirical work in the participating divisions, as well as from her more general experience of the divisions – to suggest that the issue was one of considerable salience to participants in the research. Thus, one important confirmation of the relevance of the issue was its emergence in the data. Of course, one should be mindful here of the influence of the researcher's level of access to the organisation. The point has been made previously that the nature of the emergent issues in any data set is likely to be influenced significantly by the particular organisational level at which the research is being carried out. This, of course, has important implications for the a priori identification of a suitable issue. More will be said about this in a later section.

Apart from the emergence of the issue in the data, the fact that there existed, in the literature, a useful typology (namely, that developed by Schein (1985)) for the classification of beliefs associated with this, and other issues, provided further confirmation of the issue's relevance. A third, and more general argument which validates the issue of choice in the present study is that, over the last decade or so, considerable attention has been given, in the organisational change literature, to the

effectiveness, or otherwise, of organisational change efforts which require for their success a fundamental shift in organisation member thinking about the respective roles of workers and supervisors (Clark, 1993; Dawson, 1994). For example, Total Quality Management (TQM) programmes, with their emphasis on employee empowerment, the redesign of work around semi- and fully autonomous teams, and more open and participative styles of management, have constituted a major focus of this literature (see, for example, Dawson and Palmer, 1995; Kerfoot and Knights, 1995; Wilkinson, Marchington, Goodman and Ackers, 1992).

The important point – at least in the context of the present discussion – is that much of this research (which often takes the form of case study investigations into single research settings) documents the limited success of these change efforts and the equivocal results which they produce (see, for example, Dawson, 1996; Guest, Peccie, and Fulcher, 1993; Meyer and Stott, 1985; Wells, 1982 cited in Blunt, 1986). Moreover, attempts to explain such findings often draw attention to role of the organisation's culture in impeding the change effort. For example, in their case study account of a TQM programme which was introduced into British Rail in the early 1990's, Guest et al. (1993) provide a nice illustration of the durability of organisational culture and its ability to slow the change process. They show how, despite extensive training of senior and middle management in the principles and practices of TQM, the behaviour of personnel at this level continued to reflect the beliefs and values of the organisation's traditional bureaucratic culture. While the TQM programme had resulted in some excellent ideas for quality improvements being generated by junior members of the organisation, these ideas were typically not approved for implementation. Rather the most successful ideas, in terms of implementation, were those which had been devised by senior managers. Thus, while there was support in principle for employee empowerment, in practice, the effects of a strongly bureaucratic culture were still very much in evidence.

The study by Meyer and Stott (1985) also provides a good illustration of how organisational culture can act to impede organisational change. These researchers were interested in why Quality Circles (QCs), which were a Japanese management innovation, were experiencing so little success in America. Their research took the form of a case study investigation of two companies which had introduced QCs. Of particular interest, in the context of the present study, is the account provided by the

authors of some of the main problems which their companies had experienced in the running of team ('circle') meetings. Some of these problems quite clearly had their origins in the traditional (cultural) role expectations of participants in the meetings. For example, there were reports of supervisors dominating the discussion in meetings and attempting to impose their ideas on the group. There were complaints that, while supervisors were 'open' in team meetings, they reverted to more traditional supervisory behaviour on the shop floor, rarely asking subordinates for their ideas, and ignoring subordinates' suggestions for change. And finally, some subordinates reported that, as a consequence of their supervisor's behaviour in team meetings, they had lost respect for their supervisor's abilities. The point can be made that, if there had been some assessment of the culture of these two organisations (with respect specifically to prevailing beliefs about the respective roles of workers and supervisors) prior to the introduction of QCs, it may have been possible to have anticipated, and devised strategies for dealing with, problems such as these.

On the basis of the three arguments presented above, it can be concluded that the issue of choice in the present study, namely, the 'role of workers' constituted an appropriate and relevant focal point for interviewing. There remains, however, some uncertainty about the suitability of the specific questions that were asked in order to elicit information about this issue. The reasons for this uncertainty are elaborated upon below.

The 'Role of Workers': An evaluation of the questions asked

While the questions in Part A of the interview were effective in so far as they generated rich information about workers' activities (as perceived by respondents in relation to a number of different contextual domains), there was a sense in which they may have been too 'academic'. In other words, the questions that were asked – namely 'What are the main duties of workers?' and 'What else do workers do?' (modified, as necessary, and repeated for the past context, the future context, the other context, and the 'ideal' context) – may not be the kinds of the questions that organisation members typically give much thought to. Another criticism of these questions is that they ask about an issue (ie. workers' activities) which, to use Sackmann's (1991) terminology, could be seen to be more open to 'factual' definitions, rather than 'customary' (ie. cultural) definitions. In other words, these questions may not have been as "sensitive to

culturally specific interpretations” (Sackmann, 1991, p. 182) as was desirable, given the aims of the study.

Interestingly, the preliminary results for Part B of the Study III interview (which, as indicated, are not reported in this thesis due to space constraints), along with the researcher’s experience of administering the interview, provided evidence to suggest that the questions asked in this part of the interview – concerning the characteristics of ‘good’ workers – may have been somewhat better equipped than the questions in Part A to elicit cultural information about the role of workers. Specifically, there was a sense in which respondents felt more at ease with, and could identify more with, the subject of these latter questions. Moreover, based on the preliminary analysis of data, and drawing again on Sackmann’s work, this subject seemed to be more “sensitive to culturally specific interpretations” than the subject of the questions asked in Part A¹⁰². In retrospect, this evaluation is perhaps not surprising since, when one asks a question such as ‘What does a worker in this organisation have to do to be thought of as a ‘good’ worker?’, one is essentially in the arena of organisational norms and, as Rousseau (1990) and others have noted, norms constitute one of the family of elements thought to make up an organisation’s culture. Of course, one advantage of the present method is that it seeks information, not just about respondents’ perceptions of prevailing norms (in this case associated with being thought of as a ‘good’ worker), but also about their beliefs in relation to these norms (inferred from data pertaining to the respondents’ views about the ‘ideal’ as well as data pertaining to the broader context of respondents’ experience of these norms). Norm indicators, such as the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI) (Cooke and Lafferty, 1986), provide an assessment of the former only.

The above argument that questions about the characteristics of ‘good’ workers may, in fact, have been more effective for eliciting information about the role of workers than questions about worker activities, has important methodological implications. It suggests that, when designing questions for use in the assessment of organisational culture, one should not attempt to directly convert existing dimensions or categories of culture (of which many have been proposed in the literature) into questions. In the present study, the question ‘What do workers do?’ can perhaps be seen as too direct an attempt to elicit information about the ‘role of workers’. In this sense, the ‘best’

¹⁰² Because of time constraints, and because the data analysis for Part A of the interview was already well underway, it was considered unrealistic, for the purpose of this thesis, to proceed further with the analysis of Part B data.

questions may be those which are only indirectly related to the issue or dimension of interest, but which will nevertheless generate information from which inferences about the issue, or dimension, can be made. Attempts by psychologists to measure individual personality provide a useful analogy in this respect. Personality measures do not ask respondents directly whether they regard themselves as being, say, introverted or extroverted. Rather, respondents are presented with a number of more general questions (eg. about activities in which they may like to engage) and, from their responses to these questions, inferences are made about their degree of introversion or extroversion.

7.2.2 Semi-structured interview

The choice of a semi-structured interview for use in the present study was based on the argument that such an approach could draw on the complementary strengths of qualitative and quantitative methods. On the one hand, it offered a means whereby 'rich' data (of the kind usually associated with purely qualitative methods) could be generated and, on the other, it allowed for the systematic analysis and comparison of data (a particular strength of quantitative methods).

As indicated, the interview schedule included both open-ended and closed questions. The former permitted respondents to respond in their own terms and to voice their own thoughts and insights, while the latter required respondents to give a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer or, alternatively, to choose their response from a number of pre-determined response possibilities. A second important feature of the interview was that it was designed to be sufficiently flexible to allow respondents to elaborate on and/or qualify their responses (perhaps through the use of examples). And finally, while the aim was to maintain a relatively standardised format for questioning¹⁰³ – whereby all respondents would be presented with the same basic set of questions in roughly the same order – respondents were given some latitude to explore areas of interest not directly addressed by the interview questions, if they chose to do so.

The discussion which follows provides an evaluation of the use of a semi-structured format for interviewing in the present study. Particular consideration is given to the value of combining open-ended with closed questions and to the value of allowing respondents to elaborate on and qualify their responses.

¹⁰³ Clearly this was necessary if more systematic and comparative analyses of the data were to be carried out. There was also a concern to minimise the effects of researcher bias (eg. the tendency of a researcher to explore some issues and ideas in more depth than others, based on his/her own interests and values), which has been recognised as a particular problem for interviews which adopt a more 'informal conversational' style (Patton, 1990).

(i) Open-ended and closed questions

The main focus of the evaluation in this section is on that aspect of the method whereby respondents were presented with an initial open-ended question which was followed immediately afterwards by the presentation of a series of closed questions or 'prompts'. As indicated, the former asked about what it was that workers did, in terms of both their primary task ('main' job) and other activities in which they were engaged. The latter asked about worker involvement in a number of pre-specified activities (identified by the research as possible activities in which workers might engage and chosen to represent McGregor's (1960) Theory X-Theory Y dichotomy). This particular combination of open-ended and closed questions was asked, first, in relation to the respondent's present experience and subsequently (and with appropriate modifications to tense etc.) in relation to the respondent's past, anticipated future, and 'ideal' experience.

Of course, there were other open ended and closed questions, apart from these, with which respondents were presented. For example, there were questions which were designed to elicit information about the extent and frequency of worker involvement in particular activities, there were questions seeking information about the time frame of particular changes that respondents had experienced, or were anticipating, and there were 'Why?' questions aimed at revealing respondents' causal beliefs. While the discussion in this section will consider the value of some of these questions, for others, their evaluation is more appropriately reported elsewhere (for example, 'Why' questions are obviously reviewed in the section on 'Attributions').

An important finding of the present study was that the combination of the initial open ended questions followed by prompt questions, which sought information about the *same* issue, consistently (that is, for all four contextual domains) provided more information than would have been obtained had respondents been presented with the open-ended questions only or, alternatively, with the prompt questions only. Stated another way, while there was a degree of overlap between worker activities mentioned spontaneously and worker activities identified in response to prompting, the discrepancy between spontaneous and prompted responses was, for all four contextual domains, considerable. One conclusion suggested by this finding is that activities elicited only in response to prompting may be less salient to respondents – in terms of their definitions of what workers do – than activities elicited spontaneously. Indeed, the findings of the

present study provided reasonable support for this conclusion. The reader is reminded briefly of the production division data on training. While there were no respondents from this division who spontaneously mentioned that divisional workers were involved in training, in response to prompting, almost two-thirds of respondents reported some worker involvement in this activity. However, a strong theme which emerged in the qualitative data associated with these responses was that workers' access to training was entirely contingent on production demands in the division, so that at times of high production, training activities tended to be suspended. It was argued, therefore, that training was likely to constitute a peripheral, rather than a central, activity in respondents' definitions of what workers do.

A similar, but somewhat more general conclusion which is suggested by the finding that there was a marked discrepancy between respondents' spontaneous and prompted responses is that the respondents and the researcher differed, at least to some extent, in the way in which they thought about the role of workers¹⁰⁴. More specifically, activities which the researcher considered could be reasonably included in one's definition of the role of workers (ie. 'what workers do') were different from many of the activities which emerged as being most salient in respondents' definitions. Of course, while this can be regarded as a useful insight in itself, it does raise the question of what specifically is to be gained from the addition of the prompt questions. There are perhaps three arguments of relevance here, each of which is outlined below.

Arguments in favour of prompt questions

1. Prompt questions provide additional information. The present study clearly demonstrated that prompt questions offer a useful means for getting more information. Indeed, the point can be made, that with one exception¹⁰⁵, all of the prompt questions – whether they were asked in relation to the present, the past, the anticipated future, or the 'ideal' – always generated some positive responses (that is, 'yes' responses in the case of the present context, and 'change' responses in the case of the past, anticipated future, and 'ideal' contexts). Moreover, for both divisions, prompting often generated a positive response from a *majority* of respondents in the sample. While it might be

¹⁰⁴ The reader is reminded that, in the present interview, the prompt questions related to the second open question only. That is, they asked about activities in which workers might engage *in addition to* their 'main' job. In this sense, the prompts were not intended to cover the range of activities that might be included in a comprehensive definition of the role of workers.

¹⁰⁵ For the tooling division, there were no respondents who reported a change from the past to the present in the involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving.

argued that the extra information provided by the prompts may lack salience for respondents, in terms of their definitions of the role of workers, when combined with the information generated spontaneously, it nevertheless gives one a more complete understanding of the issue (in this case 'what workers do') than one would otherwise have.

2. Prompt questions may elicit information which signals a culture in transition.

Another argument in favour of the presentation of prompt questions, in addition to the initial open-ended questions, is that prompting may elicit information about changes – in this case, in workers' activities – which could have implications for a future redefinition of the role of workers. In other words, while activities elicited in response to prompting may lack salience in respondents' *current* thinking about what workers do, such activities may, over time, become more central to prevailing definitions of the role of workers. Indeed, based on evidence from the present study, such an outcome might reasonably be predicted for the production division. A number of respondents from this division shared the view that, over recent years, divisional management had become increasingly committed to the development of a more 'active' role for workers. To the extent that management's efforts in this regard were successful, one might predict that, if the present interview was readministered, in say five years' time, respondents' spontaneous accounts of what workers do may well contain more references to activities indicative of a more 'active' role (activities such as planning, group problem-solving, training etc.) than do their current accounts.

3. Prompt questions can be a stimulus for the emergence of themes and attributions.

The addition of prompt questions can increase the likelihood that particular themes and types of attributions which are associated with the issue being investigated will emerge. This is because the prompts provide respondents with additional focal points for their thinking about the issue (in this case, they ask about other activities in which workers might engage), thereby encouraging them to explore the issue in more depth than they might do if presented only with the initial open-ended question. This is important since, as will be argued subsequently, thematic and attributional data can offer critical insights into how respondents think about, and interpret, the issue.

4. Prompt questions can reveal assumed knowledge. A fourth, and final, argument in support of the inclusion of prompt questions – and one which challenges the notion that information elicited in response to prompting will always have less salience for

respondents than information elicited in response to the open-ended questions – is that prompting can potentially reveal assumed knowledge. This is the idea that there may, for example, be particular activities which are so central to respondents' definitions of the role of workers that they have come to be taken-for-granted and will require some form of prompting to bring them to the surface. The evidence in support of this argument came, not from the present analysis, but from the analysis of Part B data. Specifically, despite evidence suggesting that, in the tooling division, quality had always been very much on the agenda¹⁰⁶, a minority of respondents only made spontaneous reference to the importance of producing quality work, when asked about what one had to do to be thought of, by one's supervisor, as a 'good' worker. However, when respondents were subsequently asked to rate the importance of this worker characteristic in determining one's status as a 'good' worker, all respondents rated it as either 'very important' or 'moderately important'. A possible explanation for this finding is that, in this division, 'producing quality work' had come to be regarded as such a basic (taken-for-granted) requirement of one's role and status as a tradesman, that most respondents did not think to mention it in response to the initial open-ended question, but rather they required prompting in order to explicitly acknowledge its importance.

Prompt questions and the problem of social desirability responding

Of course, where there is a marked discrepancy between respondents' spontaneous and prompted responses, one also needs to consider the possibility that prompting is having the effect of 'putting words into people's mouths'. There was, however, little evidence in the present study of significant social desirability effects. First, the number of 'positive' responses to prompt questions – whether they were asked in relation to the present context, the past context, the anticipated future context or the 'ideal' context – was variable. That is, in some cases, a majority of respondents in the sample gave 'positive' responses to prompt questions, whilst in others, 'positive' responses were recorded for a minority of respondents only. If social desirability effects had been marked, one might have expected greater consistency in this regard than was observed. Second, social desirability responding would predict that, after initial exposure of

¹⁰⁶ Historical data from the Study III interview provided evidence to suggest that the members of this division had a significant shared history (in most cases, spanning more than twenty years) in which there had been an emphasis on producing quality work. Study I also provided insights into the importance of quality in this division. There was evidence, for example, that notions of quality were central to the tradesman's sense of pride and self-worth and also helped to explain the position of considerable status which he occupied in the industry.

respondents to the prompt questions (in relation to the present context), 'prompted' activities would begin to be increasingly well-represented in respondents' answers to the subsequent open-ended questions. Thus, by the time one came to the open-ended question about the 'ideal' role for workers, one would expect respondents to be well-primed to provide 'socially desirable' responses to this question. In fact, what was found was that, for the tooling division, 'prompted' activities were very poorly represented in open question data for the 'ideal' context, and for the production division, the representation of these activities was highly variable. This finding not only constituted evidence of the relative absence of social desirability effects but it also provided some unexpected validation of these open question data (that is, the data could be taken at their 'face value' as indicative of a genuine desire, on the part of respondents, for change).

It is interesting to speculate briefly as to the possible reasons for the relative absence of social desirability effects in the present study. Four such explanations come to mind and these are outlined below.

1. One explanation is suggested by the types of questions that were being asked. Questions which seek information about what workers do at the present time, or about what they did in the past (whether in the respondent's current, or 'other' organisation), are essentially 'knowledge questions' (Patton, 1990). They are asking for factual information and, in this sense, may be less susceptible to social desirability effects than questions which ask about respondents' opinions, values, and feelings. However, these latter types of questions were also included in the interview (obvious examples being 'Why?' questions and questions about the anticipated future and 'ideal' contexts).

2. It is possible that the in-depth nature of the inquiry, along with the intensive questioning of respondents about the issue (respondents were asked about their experience of the issue in relation to five contextual domains and, where relevant, were also asked for examples), had the effect of counteracting any tendency in respondents to provide quick responses that would satisfy some social desirability criterion. This kind of responding might be expected to be more prevalent in, say, questionnaire measures which require respondents to distinguish between their 'actual' and 'ideal' on a number of different dimensions (one example being Harrison's (1975) (unnamed) questionnaire for assessing organisation).

3. A third explanation lies in the fact that respondents in the present study were all drawn from the lower levels of their divisional hierarchy (ie. the sample comprised predominantly shop floor workers and their immediate supervisors). It may be that personnel at these lower levels are simply less well-informed about, and less aware of, what constitutes a socially desirable orientation towards any given issue, than say more senior divisional personnel (eg. management personnel). The latter might be expected to have had more exposure, through their participation in training and development programmes, to various ideas and concepts currently 'in vogue' in academic thinking about the experience of work.

4. A fourth factor influencing the absence of social desirability effects in the present study may have been the interviewing skills and experience of the researcher, which enabled her to establish a close and positive relationship with all participants in the study. This explanation has important practical implications for the use of the present method, a discussion of which will be provided in a subsequent section.

On the basis of the discussion above, there would seem to be good support for the present approach of combining open-ended questions with prompt questions. This particular feature of the method did offer a means for obtaining comprehensive information in a relatively economical way, while at the same time being faithful to the perspectives of respondents. Having said this, one revision to the method which has been suggested is a reduction in the number of prompt questions. The presentation of six prompts (the first comprising six parts) on four separate occasions (in relation to the present, past, anticipated future, and 'ideal' contexts) did extend the interview time perhaps more than was desirable. This resulted in a problem with missing data in the last section of the interview which asked respondents about their experience in the 'ideal' context. While it has been argued that a reasonably inclusive prompt set was necessary given the exploratory nature of this research, a possible goal for future research in this area would be to reduce the number of prompt questions to a 'critical' few.

Another problem with the prompt questions – apart from there being too many of them – was that the attempt to identify, a priori, activities representative of McGregor's (1960) Theory X/Theory Y dichotomy met with limited success only. With the benefit of hindsight, this outcome might have been predicted. Whether or not a particular activity could be regarded as more or less indicative of a Theory X or a Theory Y

orientation was dependent upon the meanings which respondents attached to the activity. For example, while the involvement of workers in record-keeping activities could reasonably be seen as indicative of an 'active' (Theory Y), rather than a 'passive' (Theory X) role for workers, there was little evidence in the present study to suggest that this was the case. On the contrary, a theme which emerged strongly in the qualitative data associated with this activity category (in particular, for the production division) was that record-keeping served primarily a quality control function. There was little recognition of the motivational value of involving workers in record-keeping – the idea being that workers' jobs will be enriched if they have some means of obtaining information about the effectiveness of their performance (Hackman and Oldham, 1976).

While much of the above discussion has been concerned with the finding, in the present study, that there was a marked discrepancy between respondents' spontaneous and prompted responses, the point should be made that, in some other research setting or with research participants drawn from a different level of the organisational hierarchy (eg. senior management), one could conceivably get more overlap between these two sets of responses. Such a finding would suggest that the categories used by the research participants to describe their experience (in relation to the issue being investigated) were very similar to the categories which the researcher had identified (perhaps on the basis of his/her review of the literature) as being potentially relevant. In this sense, the open question data (respondents' spontaneous responses) could be seen as providing some validation of the categories represented by the prompt questions. Of course, one would also have to consider the possibility of there being a social desirability bias in respondents' spontaneous responses, particularly where respondents had been drawn from the more senior levels of the organisation's hierarchy. This is because, as suggested above, personnel at these levels are likely to be more aware of, and better informed about, what constitutes 'socially desirable' thinking, than personnel at lower levels of the hierarchy.

Arguments in favour of specific information questions

As indicated above, the interview developed for use in the present study included a number of other open-ended and closed questions, in addition to those already discussed. At this point it is appropriate to comment briefly on the value of some of these additional questions, in particular, the probe questions which were designed to provide more specific information about the activities in which workers reportedly

engaged. It will be recalled that, for each of the worker activities which a respondent identified (not including the worker's main job or primary task), the respondent was asked to estimate the extent of worker involvement in the activity (eg. 'How many workers attend information meetings?') and the frequency of worker involvement in the activity (eg. 'How often do workers attend information meetings?').

The results of the present study suggest that one advantage of questions such as these is that they provide good information about the degree of consistency, or inconsistency, which exists in respondents' perceptions of the particular aspect(s) of organisational life about which they are being asked. Such information may be of value to management, particularly where it contradicts management's perceptions. For example, management may believe that there is widespread awareness in the organisation of its commitment to increasing the level of training for employees. Questions such as the above, however, may reveal that organisation members perceive the level of employee involvement in training to be very low. Alternatively, they may reveal that organisation members have highly variable perceptions of the level of employee involvement in training. Either way, information of this kind is likely to be useful to management. It may, for example, alert management to the need to more actively communicate the organisation's training efforts to all employees.

The results of the present study also provided evidence to suggest that the use of probe questions, of the kind described above, can provide more reliable information than questions which require respondents simply to provide a rating of the particular aspect(s) of their experience about which they are being asked. In other words, it is preferable to ask respondents direct questions, for example, about how many workers attend training, and how often, than it is to ask them to indicate the level of worker involvement in training on a scale from, say, 'a very high level' to 'a very low level'. This is because respondents can differ markedly in their interpretations of the various response categories which are included in a rating scale. The same objective level of training can be interpreted by one respondent as 'a very high level' and, by another, as 'a very low level'. Moreover, there was evidence from the present study to suggest that interpretive differences of this kind may reflect differences in the historical context of respondents' experience (eg. respondents who have had a long history in which the level of training activity has been very low are likely to judge any current increases in training as being more significant than would respondents who had had considerably more

exposure to training over time). This criticism of rating scales – namely, that there can be considerable variability in respondents' interpretations of the various response categories which they include – is not new, and has been addressed more directly, and in much more detail, by other researchers (see, for example, Budescu & Wallsten, 1985; Clarke, Ruffin, Hill, & Beaman, 1992).

(ii) Elaborations and qualifications

As indicated, an important feature of the present method was that the interview was designed to be sufficiently flexible to allow respondents to elaborate on and/or qualify their responses. This is not to say that interviewees were free to 'ramble' unconstrainedly. On the contrary, the interviewer (in this case, the researcher) had a relatively active role in guiding respondents' elaborations and qualifications. Specifically, if respondents provided information that was quite clearly relevant to the issue about which they were being asked, then they were allowed to continue uninterrupted. If respondents offered no elaborative or qualifying information, and if time permitted, then the interviewer intervened with a prompt question, such as, 'Can you tell me more about that?' or 'Can you give an example?'. And if respondents provided information which clearly lacked relevance to the issue about which they were being asked (this was typically not immediately apparent), then the interviewer attempted to redirect the focus of the interview with a comment such as 'What you are saying is very interesting, and we might come back to it later. However, for now, I wonder if we can talk about...'.

There are a number of factors likely to influence the success of the above approach to interviewing. First, while the approach is relatively straightforward in the sense that it requires no highly specialised skills for its use, it is nevertheless probably desirable that the interviewer has some basic interviewing skills¹⁰⁷. A second, possibly more important prerequisite, and one which has been acknowledged in the literature on qualitative interviewing (Buchanan, Boddy, & McCalman, 1988; Patton, 1990), is that the interviewer should be the kind of person who is genuinely interested in the lives and experiences of others. Essentially, this is the argument that: "If what people have to say about their world is generally boring to you, then you will never be a great interviewer" (Patton, p.279). And third, consideration should also be given to the possibility that, in the present study, the attempt to get good qualitative data was made easier by the

¹⁰⁷ The researcher's previous training as a psychologist was advantageous in this regard.

researcher's relatively long association with the research organisation and the participants in the research. Of course, the question remains as to just how critical such an association might be. Is it the case, for example, that there is some minimum period of time which one would need to spend in the research setting in order to maximise the usefulness of the present approach to interviewing?

Arguments in support of allowing respondents to elaborate on and/or qualify their responses

In terms of an overall assessment of this feature of the method, the results of the present study provided strong support for an approach in which respondents are given some latitude to elaborate on and/or qualify their responses. Such an approach offers a number of important advantages, each of which is discussed below.

1. Qualitative data can provide insights into meaning. Qualitative data (in the form of respondents' elaborations on, and qualifications of, their responses) can provide important insights into the meaning which respondents attach to those aspects of their experience about which they are being asked. More specifically, these data would seem to be critical for the interpretation of information provided in response to the standardised interview questions. For example, while the latter may reveal a perception among organisation members that the organisation supports a certain level of training activity, this information, by itself, tells us little about how organisation members think about training and what training actually means to them. Knowledge of this kind, which is highly context-specific, is unlikely to be revealed unless one has access to the kind of 'rich' data that are generated when respondents elaborate on, and qualify, their responses.

To continue with the example above, a thematic content analysis of the elaborative and qualifying data on 'training' provided evidence of a number of important themes in respondents' thinking about the involvement of divisional workers in training. Some of these themes were common to both divisions, whilst others emerged in the data for one division only. For example, respondents from both divisions shared the view that training was provided primarily in response to the organisation's needs, with little consideration given to the individual's needs and little recognition of the potential motivational value of involving workers in training. There was also a perception among respondents from both divisions that workers were reluctant to attend training if this required an investment of their own time for which they were not financially

compensated. Differences between the divisions also emerged. For example, while there was evidence, in both divisions, of negative attitudes towards training, these attitudes arose out of different concerns. In the tooling division, respondents were concerned about the lack of 'task' relevance of the training which was currently provided. They also expressed concern about the relevance of training for older workers and they questioned the fairness of the current expectation that older workers (along with their younger peers) should retrain for the purpose of becoming multi-skilled. In contrast, in the production division, respondents' negative attitudes towards training were underpinned by their cynicism about the division's current efforts to satisfy government legislation (regarding an organisation's minimum acceptable commitment to training) by classifying, as 'training', almost any activity which did not involve direct production. The important point has been made previously that it is hard to imagine how insights such as these, which are highly context-specific, could have been obtained if a more structured quantitative approach to data collection had been used. It simply would not have been possible to have identified, a priori, the range of questions that one would need to ask in order to obtain this information.

Given the widely accepted conceptualisation of organisational culture as comprising an organisation's system of shared meanings (Louis, 1983; Schein, 1985), it might be argued that the *sine qua non* of any method which seeks to understand organisational culture is that it should have the capacity to reveal meaning. As illustrated above, in the present study there was good evidence that the qualitative data generated constituted an important source of information about meaning. There was also evidence from the present study to suggest that the value of such information, apart from its general cultural significance, is that it can highlight similarities and differences within and between groups that might not otherwise be revealed.

More specifically, qualitative data of the kind referred to above can reveal inconsistencies – both between respondents and between respondents and the researcher – in the meanings which they attribute to the language and terms used in the interview questions. For example, in the present study, it was found that respondents from the production division differed in their definition of the term 'training'. For some respondents, 'training' was defined as encompassing both informal 'on-the-job' training and formal 'off-the-job' training whereas, for others, the term was interpreted to mean formal 'off-the-job' training only. Of course, these different definitions influenced

whether or not respondents gave a 'Yes' or a 'No' response in answer to the closed question: 'Are the workers in your division involved in any training or professional development activities?' The apparent inconsistency which was suggested by the initial finding that some respondents reported that divisional workers were involved in training, whilst others reported that they were not, could be resolved by an analysis of the qualitative data which, in this case, suggested that a 'Yes' and a 'No' response could mean essentially the same thing (namely, that the training provided in this division was predominantly 'on-the-job' training, rather than more formalised 'off-the-job' training). One important methodological implication of a finding such as this is that one cannot assume that respondents who give a 'Yes' response constitute a qualitatively different group from respondents who give a 'No' response. More generally, the existence of any interpretive inconsistency raises questions about the extent to which data from one group (in this case, the reference is to data generated by the standardised interview questions) can be reliably aggregated and compared with data from another group.

2. Qualitative data can reveal differences between groups. A second advantage of qualitative data which was suggested by the findings of the present study is that they can reveal differences between groups (divisions) that may not be apparent in information provided in response to the standardised questions. For example, on the basis of such information, the tooling division and the production division appeared to be very similar in terms of respondents' current experience of the involvement of divisional workers in training. Specifically, all of the respondents from the tooling division and two-thirds of the respondents from the production division reported that the workers in their respective divisions attended training; in all cases, this information was provided in response to prompting, rather than in response to the open-ended question; and in both divisions, there was considerable variability in respondent estimates of the extent and frequency of worker involvement in training. On the basis of this information, then, it was difficult to distinguish between the divisions. However, a subsequent analysis of the qualitative data associated with these responses provided evidence of some important 'thematic' differences between the divisions. As indicated above, a theme which was unique to the production division concerned the perception that training was provided only when production demands were low. A theme which was unique to the tooling division concerned the perception that training was more appropriate for younger workers than older workers, and that it was unfair to expect older workers to

retrain in order to become multi-skilled. The point can be made that differences of this kind, which are unlikely to be revealed using more highly structured quantitative approaches, may have critical implications for how managers and change agents should go about introducing and managing change (in this case, in relation to worker involvement in training) in each of these groups.

3. Qualitative data can expose 'superficial' differences. In contrast to the above, a third advantage of qualitative data is that they can show where differences, between individuals or groups, which are suggested by information provided in response to the standardised interview questions may be more apparent than real. Evidence for this might be indicated in the finding that the thematic content of respondents' elaborations and qualifications was the same, despite differences in their responses to the standardised questions. An example from the present study is that, in the production division, the qualitative data on 'training' and 'information meetings', for both 'Yes' respondents and 'No' respondents (ie. respondents reporting that workers were involved in these activities as well as respondents reporting that workers were not involved in these activities), contained evidence of the theme that worker involvement in non-production activities was contingent on production demands. One important implication of this finding is that, as above, it cannot be assumed that respondents who give a 'Yes' response necessarily constitute a qualitatively different group from respondents who give a 'No' response.

Importance of a systematic approach to qualitative data analysis

The above discussion has presented some of the main arguments in favour of an interview design which is sufficiently flexible to allow respondents to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses. Broadly speaking, this feature of the method allows for the generation of 'rich' qualitative data, without which one's understanding of data generated in response to the standardised questions is likely to remain at a relatively superficial level. The point should be made, however, that in order to maximise the usefulness of this feature of the method, one's approach to the analysis of the qualitative data that are generated should be as systematic as possible. There are two main reasons for this.

1. First, a systematic analysis of the qualitative data can provide one with relatively reliable information about the prevalence of (ie. degree of consensus about) particular themes. This is important given the conceptualisation of organisational culture as an

organisation's system of *shared* meanings (Louis, 1983; Schein, 1985), and also given the criticism that descriptive studies of culture often fail to demonstrate how much consensus actually exists (Rousseau, 1990a). There are a number of sources of information which will be of value in determining a theme's prevalence. The most obvious is the number of respondents in the group who give responses which contain evidence of the theme. It is useful to know, for example, that a particular theme emerges in the responses of 80% of respondents, as opposed to, say, 10% of respondents. Of course, access to this information assumes that one's sample is sufficiently large for the theme, if it is present, to emerge. The point can be made that, if the present study had involved, say, two or three participants only from each division (instead, as was the case, 12 participants from the tooling division and 19 from the production division), then it is questionable whether some of the themes which emerged as being important, would have been identified at all. There is also an argument that, if one was seeking a comprehensive understanding of organisation-wide attitudes and opinions in relation to some issue, then one may need to sample from different levels of the organisational hierarchy. This is because a theme which emerges in the data from respondents at one level of the hierarchy may not emerge in the data from respondents at another level.

The strength of a particular theme will also be indicated in the presence, or absence, of disconfirming evidence. For example, in the present study, a small number of respondents from each division commented on the essentially passive role which workers played in information meetings. As they saw it, workers were either not asked to contribute in these meetings or, if they were, they were typically reluctant to participate. The point was made that, while this theme was not strongly supported by the data (in terms of the numbers of respondents who made comments reflecting the theme), the absence of any views to contradict it suggested that it might, in fact, be more central to an understanding of the issue being investigated (in the case, the nature of workers' involvement in information meetings) than it had, at first, appeared to be.

A third source of information about the strength of a particular theme is the emergence of the theme in respondents' comments about a number of difference issues. In the present study, the production division theme that worker involvement in non-production activities was contingent upon production demands emerged in the qualitative data associated with respondent accounts of worker involvement in a number

of different activities (including information meetings, training, and group problem-solving). As argued above, one advantage of the inclusion in the present method of prompt questions in addition to the open-ended questions was that it provided more opportunities for particular themes and types of attributions, if they were present, to find expression.

2. Apart from the argument that a systematic approach to the analysis of qualitative data is necessary in order to demonstrate the degree of consensus that exists in relation to emergent themes, such an approach can also be advocated on the grounds that it allows the researcher to keep a check on his/her own biases. Given the widely accepted view that any research inquiry (regardless of the philosophical paradigm which informs the research design) is likely to be influenced, at least to some extent, by the researcher (Bryman, 1988; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991), it is not difficult to imagine how, in the present context, a researcher might be inclined to selectively report (even though unconsciously) those issues and themes that align most closely with his/her particular world view (personal predispositions, values etc.). In this sense, a systematic analysis of the data (which involves, for example, providing quantitative evidence of the strength of particular themes) will go some way, at least, towards correcting this tendency.

7.2.3 The operationalisation of context

As has been argued previously (see Section 4.1.2, pp. 262-270), while conceptual treatments of organisational culture generally acknowledge the highly context-specific nature of cultural beliefs and assumptions, operationalisations of culture – both quantitative and qualitative – often fall far short of demonstrating a genuine commitment to context. With respect to this shortcoming, the present method attempts to provide a systematic means of evaluating contextual aspects of culture. In this section, this feature of the method is discussed. Specifically, consideration is given to the relative merit of each of the contextual domains of interest (in terms of what each contributes to our understanding of the culture), as well as to the value of integrating contextual information.

An appropriate starting point for this evaluation concerns the question of whether or not it is necessary to ask specific questions about context in order to obtain a context-specific understanding of respondents' experience. In the present study it was found that, to some extent at least, respondents did spontaneously refer to contextual domains other than the present context when commenting on their experience in relation to the

present context. Moreover, an analysis of these spontaneous references to context provided some interesting, and potentially culturally significant, information. For example, in both divisions, there were more spontaneous references to the past context than to any other contextual domain (whether the anticipated future context, the 'other' context, or the 'ideal' context). It was also found that respondents from the production division made more spontaneous references to the anticipated future and 'ideal' contexts than did their counterparts from the tooling division. And, in neither division, did respondent accounts of their present experience contain any significant spontaneous reference to the 'other' context. The point can be made that these findings were not inconsistent with what one might have expected, given each division's particular circumstances. Of course, in other organisational cultures, the representation (spontaneously) of contextual domains other than the present context in data pertaining to the present context, may well differ.

The above results suggest that one can obtain some reasonably interesting contextual information without asking specific questions about context. The problem remains, however, that the amount of contextual information which is generated spontaneously is likely to be very limited. As reported previously, in the present study, the number of spontaneous references by a single respondent to any given contextual domain, other than the present context, was typically very small. Moreover, there was considerable variability in the content areas represented by these spontaneous references. It can be argued, therefore, that if one's aim is to obtain comprehensive and systematic information about respondents' experience in relation to a number of different contextual domains, then one should ask specific questions about context, rather than rely for this information on contextual data that are generated spontaneously. The results of the present study provided strong support for this argument in so far as the information generated by specific questions about context was indeed more systematic (in the sense that it provided a basis for comparative analyses) and more comprehensive than the information which respondents provided spontaneously in their accounts of their experience at the present time. We turn now to a consideration of the relative merit of each of the contextual domains of interest, as suggested by the findings of the present study.

The past context: Advantages

The contextual domain which emerged as being perhaps the most valuable – in terms of the quantity and quality of data generated by questions asking about respondents' experience in relation to this domain – was the historical context. In general, respondents (from both divisions) were able to talk with ease about how their past experience differed from, or was similar to, their present experience in terms of the various issues about which they were asked. The point has been made previously that, because the past constitutes an already experienced phenomenon (as opposed to something which one might expect to experience, or which one would like to experience), respondents may be better able to access and articulate information pertaining to their past experience than, say, information pertaining to their anticipated future, or ideal, experience. It may also be that, where the past context emerges as having particular significance, the culture of the group(s) being investigated may be more strongly rooted in the past than in any other contextual domain.

The findings of the present study provided evidence of a number of specific advantages associated with seeking information about respondents' experience in relation to the past context. Since these have been discussed in detail elsewhere (see Section 6.3.1 pp. 371-384), it is sufficient in the present context to offer a brief summary only of the main advantages. These are as follows:

1. Knowledge of the past context of respondents' experience can *facilitate the more accurate interpretation of data pertaining to respondents' experience in the present context*. This is the idea that past experience offers a kind of 'yardstick' against which respondents evaluate their present experience. Because this 'yardstick' is likely to differ for different individuals (groups), an understanding of it is essential if one is to 'make sense of' present-time data. A nice illustration of this was provided by the tooling division data on training. There was evidence that the respondents from this division, because of their long history of little or no worker involvement in training, were more sensitive than were their counterparts from the production division (for whom a less well-defined training history emerged) to current shifts in the emphasis on this worker activity and, hence, more likely to interpret such shifts as instances of specific and significant change. It is worth making the point here that, in questionnaire measures of culture, the historical context is likely to similarly influence respondents' interpretations of the various response categories contained within a given rating scale. To extrapolate

from the above example, respondents may be asked to rate how often workers are involved in training – whether ‘frequently’, ‘occasionally’ or ‘rarely’. Evidence from the present study suggests that respondents (either within or between groups) may vary considerably in their interpretations of these response categories, depending on the nature of their past experience in relation to this worker activity. This is a problem that questionnaire measures of culture fail to address.

2. Knowledge of the past context of respondents’ experience can *help to explain apparent inconsistencies and contradictions in data pertaining to the present context*. A good example of this was provided by the production division data on worker-supervisor communication. As indicated, respondents from this division (who were themselves shop floor workers) tended to hold negative views about the overall quality of worker-supervisor communication in the division at the present time, while at the same time making reference to the positive communication relationship which they, as individuals, had with their own supervisor(s). One explanation for this apparent inconsistency was that respondents’ past experience in this regard (in the past, worker-supervisor communication had reportedly been very distant) was continuing to influence their general, or overall, evaluation of their present experience, despite the existence of evidence, at an individual level, to negate it. The suggestion was made that, in culture change, there may well be a ‘lag’ between the occurrence, or experience, of any given change and the registration of that change in the ‘world view’ of organisation members. In other words, the residual effects of past experience may continue to influence organisation member thinking about their present experience for some time after the change has occurred.

3. A third advantage of obtaining information about the historical context of respondents’ experience is that such information can *highlight differences between groups that may not be revealed in data pertaining to the present context of respondents’ experience*. For example, while the tooling division and the production division were found to be roughly equivalent in terms of the level of worker involvement in group problem-solving which they currently supported (for both divisions, this was reportedly very low), an analysis of the historical data associated with this activity category showed that the divisions had markedly different histories in this regard. Specifically, the tooling division had had a long and stable history of little or no worker involvement in group problem-solving (ie. the status of this worker

activity was the same at present as it had been in the past). In contrast, there were two periods in the history of the production division in which divisional workers had had considerably more involvement in group problem-solving than they had at the present time. The first was during the early years of the division's start-up when, as part of the Team Concept initiative, work was organised around semi-autonomous teams, and the second was associated with a more recent quality assurance initiative. Neither of these initiatives appears to have been particularly successful and organisation member experience of both seems to have been predominantly negative. The point was made that information of this kind, which would not have been obtained had one's method of data collection focussed on the present context of respondents' experiences' only, is likely to have important practical implications for the implementation (in either division) of any future change in relation to this worker activity.

4. Finally, information about the historical context of respondents' experience can *provide important insights into the nature and extent of the individual's (and the group's) exposure to change*. There was good evidence from the present study to suggest that the two divisions differed markedly in this regard. While the details of this difference have been elaborated upon previously (see Section 6.3.1, pp. 376-379), the overall conclusion that was reached was that the tooling division had had a long and relatively stable history (spanning some 20 years at least) during which the role of workers (as suggested by worker involvement in various activities) appears to have changed very little. In contrast, in the production division, there was evidence that divisional members had had more exposure, during the ten years or so of this division's history, to changes of the kind likely to impact upon the role of workers. As suggested, an important practical implication of this finding is that the degree of a group's past exposure to change might be expected to influence the group's responsiveness to future change – with groups only minimally exposed to change likely to be more resistant to future change than groups in which the experience of change is more common. Of course, in the case of the latter, consideration should be given, not only to the quantitative dimension of the change experience, but also to the qualitative dimension. If the experience of a past change has been predominantly negative (as in the group problem-solving example above), then one might expect to encounter resistance to, rather than acceptance of, a related change in the future.

Specific versus general information about the past

It is appropriate at this point to remind the reader that an important feature of the present method, which distinguishes it from more unstructured qualitative approaches, was that it sought specific, rather than general, information about context. Thus, with respect to the past context, an attempt was made to establish detailed 'event histories' for individual respondents. In other words, for every change that a respondent mentioned (either in response to the open-ended questions or in response to a specific prompt question), (s)he was asked to indicate (i) when the change had occurred (approximate year), (ii) for how long before the change (ie. for how many years) things had been the same, and (iii) why the change had occurred. If the respondent indicated that there had been no change from the past to the present, then (s)he was asked to indicate for how long things had been the same (ie. for how many years). The highly specific contextual information which was generated by these questions proved to be valuable for a number of reasons. First, it enabled a more thorough and more accurate assessment of 'sharedness' to be made. Not only was it possible to establish the extent to which respondents agreed that a particular change had occurred, but it was also possible to demonstrate the extent of their agreement about when, and why, the change had occurred. Information of this kind can be used to further substantiate one's claims about the strength, or alternatively the weakness, of the group's culture. Moreover, as will be argued in a subsequent section, information about respondents' causal attributions may have important implications for one's approach to the implementation and management of change within the group.

A second advantage of the information which was generated by the above questions was that it enabled some assessment to be made of the relative time span of respondents' experience. Thus, rather than being restricted to talking about a respondent's past in very general terms, it was possible to establish, for each event or change that was mentioned, just how far back the respondent's past actually extended. In other words, one could obtain highly specific information about the 'yardstick' against which a respondent was evaluating his/her present experience.

The important point to make in the context of the present discussion is that, contrary to what one might have expected, this 'yardstick' did not always bear a direct relationship with the respondent's seniority or, more particularly, length of service with the organisation (division). In other words, what constituted a respondent's

psychologically salient past often differed from what constituted his/her chronological past. A good example was provided by the production division data on worker-supervisor communication. Among the respondents from this division, there were some who reported that, in the past, worker-supervisor communication had been more open than it was at the present time, whilst there were others who argued that it had been more distant. An analysis of the time-line data associated with these perceived changes showed that, in the case of the former, the reference or 'yardstick' was the very recent past, while in the case of the latter it was the distant past. Moreover, these contrasting perceptions of change could not be explained in terms of respondent length of tenure with the organisation (division). Notably, those for whom the 'yardstick' was the very recent past included both shorter serving and longer-serving employees. By way of a further illustration of this phenomenon, the reader is reminded that it was not uncommon for respondents from the tooling division to make reference to a past which extended beyond their date of commencement with the organisation. In other words, for these respondents, their reference or 'yardstick' was past knowledge which they had acquired, not directly, but through socialisation with their coworkers.

The notion that a respondent's psychologically salient past may differ from his/her chronological past (as reflected in length of service with the organisation/division) has important implications for the delineation of groups for organisational culture research. It suggests that, contrary to the traditional delineation of groups in terms of boundaries suggested by respondent demographics (eg. age, tenure, seniority, functional unit etc.), one might identify cultural groupings based on observed similarities in the *subjective* histories of respondents. To this end, it is clearly important that one's method is able to provide some fairly specific information about the nature and time-frame of the events (changes) which have made up each respondent's past experience.

The point should be made that this concern with how one should go about delineating groups for organisational culture research is not new. For example, Hofstede et al. (1990) have argued that: "Determining what units are sufficiently homogeneous to be used for comparing cultures is both a theoretical and an empirical problem" (p.289). In their major study of the cultures of twenty organisational units (see Section 1.6.2, pp. 108-113), Hofstede et al. dealt with this problem by seeking management's advice as to which particular units in their organisation were the most culturally homogenous and, hence, the most suitable for inclusion in the study. It was found that, while the

results of the research failed to confirm management's judgement 'in a few cases', the approach was nevertheless quite satisfactory. In an attempt to address this problem more directly, Rentsch (1990) conducted a study in which she examined the relationship between social interaction and organisational meanings (see Section 1.6.2, pp. 114-116). Central to this research was the idea that, given the importance of social interaction in the development of shared meanings, one should be able to identify cultural groupings (groups of individuals who interpret events similarly) by focussing on individuals who interact with one another. As indicated previously, while the findings of the research were largely supportive of this idea, Rentsch herself posed the question as to what other variables, apart from interaction, might predict similar event interpretation.

The future context: Advantages

While respondents in the present study were able to talk with relative ease about their past experience with respect to the role of workers, and how it differed from their experience at the present time, they appeared to have some difficulty envisaging how the role of workers might change in the future. There was little evidence, in either division, of any significant orientation towards the future. In response to the open-ended question(s), very few changes were anticipated (per respondent) and there was little agreement among respondents about the nature of these changes. This picture did not change markedly with the addition of prompt questions in the sense that, for most of the prompted activity categories, a minority of respondents only from each division anticipated some change. It was also the case that anticipated changes (whether mentioned spontaneously or in response to prompting) tended to be changes that were either already underway or considered likely to occur in the very near future. And finally, the point can be made that, in response to the initial open-ended question(s), the changes that were mentioned tended to be changes of a very general nature (notably, an anticipated move away from specialisation towards multi-skilling in the tooling division, and general technological changes in the production division). While these changes would clearly have implications for the future role of workers, respondents typically did not elaborate (in their spontaneous responses) on what these might be.

While the above findings might lead one to conclude that, in the present study at least, future context data proved to be less valuable than data pertaining to the past context, such a conclusion denies the potential significance of what was found. In other words, the finding that a particular group is not strongly future-oriented and that its

members have some difficulty envisaging what organisational life (or some aspect of it) might be like in the future, can be (indeed, should be) regarded as being of equal significance, from a cultural perspective, to the finding that a group is strongly-future oriented and that group members have a more clearly articulated view of what their future will be like. With this in mind, we turn to a consideration of some of the main advantages of including a focus on the future context, as suggested by the results of the present study. These are as follows:

1. Data about the future context of respondents' experience can *provide insights into the extent of a group's orientation toward the future*. The results of the present study provided some useful insights into the possible sources of this information. These include:

- i) the number of respondents in the group who anticipate change;
- ii) the average number of changes anticipated per respondent;
- iii) the degree of consensus among respondents about the types of changes which they anticipate;
- iv) the time-frame of the changes that are anticipated (eg. whether already underway, likely to occur in the near future, or likely to occur in the distant future); and
- v) the level of articulation indicated in respondents' descriptions of the changes which they anticipate.

The point should be made that information pertaining to these various sources is probably best considered as a whole. In other words, the more pieces of evidence that one has which are suggestive of a strong, or alternatively, a weak, future orientation in the group, the more reliable one's judgement in this regard is likely to be.

A possible practical implication of a group's future orientation is that it may influence a group's responsiveness to change. Is it the case, as one might predict, that change will be easier to bring about in a strongly future-oriented group in which group members have a well-articulated and positive view of their future, which is consistent with the change, than in a group in which there is a weak future-orientation and in which members have a poorly articulated view of their future? Clearly, this is a question which might usefully be explored through further research in this area.

2. A second argument in favour of the inclusion of a focus on the future context is that, in the present study, useful information was obtained both about respondent

attitudes toward anticipated future change and respondent attributions about why change was considered likely to occur. As above, information of this kind is also likely to have implications for the *group's responsiveness to change*. For example, in the tooling division, there was evidence that some respondents were strongly ambivalent in their attitudes toward an anticipated increase in the involvement of divisional workers in training. One of the main reasons for this ambivalence lay in a concern about the relevance of training for the division's older employees. There was also some evidence in this division of strongly negative attitudes toward an anticipated increase in the involvement of divisional workers in group problem-solving. Such a change was seen, by some, as a threat to the traditional authority and responsibility of the supervisor. Attitudes such as this, particularly if they are held by more senior organisation members (who are likely to have more responsibility for the change process and more power to influence it), could act to significantly impede change. In order for change to be successful, it would be important, therefore, for such attitudes to be both understood and carefully managed.

Attributional data were also interesting in this regard. As reported in Section 6.3.2 (pp. 406-407), there was some evidence that the two divisions differed with respect to respondent attributions about why future change would occur. As a group, respondents from the tooling division were somewhat more inclined than their counterparts from the production division to see change (in this case, anticipated change) as 'reactive', that is, as a response to events, circumstances etc. over which the division was perceived to have little control. Thus, the respondents from this division commonly attributed change to factors such as: (i) the downsizing and restructuring of the division, and its relocation to the site of the company's main manufacturing and assembly operations; (ii) the industry-wide initiative to multi-skill workers; and (iii) and increasing pressure (on the division and the company in general) to survive and remain competitive. While similar kinds of attributions appeared in the corresponding production division data, these data also contained explanations for change which were indicative of a more 'proactive' orientation. For example, there were references by some respondents to a commitment, on the part of divisional management, to develop the division's human resources (by fostering a more open communication climate between workers and their supervisors, by improving information to workers etc.), and there were references to a drive by divisional management to increase the efficiency and quality of production

operations in the division. The question arises as to whether or not these different attributional 'styles' might influence each group's responsiveness to change. In other words, is change more likely to be accepted if it is seen as proactive, rather than reactive? Again, this is an interesting question for further research.

As for the past context, the findings and insights generated by the future context data could not have been obtained had respondents not been asked some very specific questions about their anticipated future experience. The reader is reminded that, for each of the changes which a respondent mentioned, (s)he was asked to indicate when (ie. in how many years' time) (s)he thought the change was likely to occur, and why. While respondents were not asked specifically for their opinion as to the desirability (or undesirability) of the changes which they anticipated – this information tended to emerge in the elaborative and qualifying data – the potential importance of attitudinal data for understanding change suggests that a standardised question seeking this information could usefully be included in any revision of the present method.

3. A third advantage of including a focus on the future context is that future context data *can serve to confirm, and indeed strengthen, findings associated with other contextual domains*. In the present study, this insight derived mainly from the results of the thematic content analysis and the analysis of attributional data. With respect to the former, there were a number of themes which emerged in the future context data which had been encountered previously (ie. in data pertaining to the present and past contexts). Examples include the shared perception among tooling division respondents that training was not relevant for older workers, and the shared perception among production division respondents that record-keeping served primarily a production control function. With respect to the latter, the tendency for respondents from the tooling division to attribute anticipated future changes to events perceived to be largely outside of their control (and their division's control) had been encountered previously in relation to changes that this group had already experienced. There was also some evidence from the present study to suggest that future context data – specifically, data pertaining to respondent attitudes about the desirability/undesirability of anticipated future changes – may foreshadow respondent views about the 'ideal' context and, in this sense, provide some measure of the internal consistency of respondents with respect to their reported attitudes and beliefs.

4. A fourth advantage, which is of interest from a methodological, rather than a practical, point of view is that, in the present study, *future context data served to further confirm the value of particular features of the present method*. For example, these data provided further evidence of the value of qualitative data (in this case, providing insights into how respondents talked about anticipated future changes, and what their attitudes toward these changes were) for giving meaning to responses to standardised questions (in this case, providing information about the content and time frame of anticipated future changes). Future context data also provided further confirmation of the value of including specific prompt questions in addition to the open-ended questions. While a majority of the prompted activity categories were represented by a minority of respondents only from each division, it was still the case that there were some categories for which a majority of respondents in each division anticipated some future change (notably 'Safety Meetings' and 'Attend Training' for the tooling division, and 'Record Work-Related Information' and 'Attend Training' for the production division). The point can be made that this information would not have been obtained had respondents been presented with the open-ended question(s) about the future context only.

Organisational culture: An influence on future expectations, and influenced by future expectations. A final issue which needs to be addressed in this section concerns the extent to which the rationale for including a focus on the future context in the present method – namely, that a group's culture will influence, and be influenced by, the future expectations of group members – was supported empirically. Certainly, there was some evidence to suggest that respondents' experience in the past and present contexts might influence both their expectations about the likelihood of future change and their attitudes toward that change. For example, the finding that, for both divisions, a minority of respondents only anticipated a future change in the involvement of divisional workers in planning activities was quite consistent with each division's history in this regard. As reported previously (see Section 6.3.2, p. 389 and p. 393), in neither division had there ever been much involvement of divisional workers in such activities. An example of the influence of past experience on attitudes toward anticipated future change was provided by the tooling division data on anticipated changes in the involvement of divisional workers in training. While a majority of respondents from this division anticipated an increase in the involvement of divisional

workers in training in the future (a result largely of the current industry-wide initiative to multi-skill workers), the existence of strongly ambivalent attitudes toward this change was not surprising given an historical context in which workers' (typically qualified tradesmen) technical skills were largely taken-for-granted, and in which any training beyond the training of new apprentices would probably have been regarded as superfluous. The point should be made that links, such as the above, between data pertaining to the historical context and data pertaining to the future context were more readily established for some worker activities than for others, suggesting that respondents' future expectations will be influenced by more than just the historical context of their experience.

With respect to the argument that a group's culture may be influenced by, rather than influence, the future expectations of group members, the results of the present study provided no evidence to confirm, or disconfirm, this view. In fact, it is difficult to know just what would constitute reasonable evidence in this regard. Perhaps one would need to show that, over time, group members' accounts of their past experience had changed in response to some anticipated future change. The higher education sector might constitute a relevant setting in which to conduct a study of this kind. In recent years there have been a number of major changes in this sector, some of which have had important implications for the role of academic staff. Academics (in certain discipline areas at least) are now required to teach much larger classes than they were in the past, they have less decision-making authority than in the past (due to the appointment of 'professional' managers and the implementation of formal managerial controls), and the notion of 'academic freedom' has been gradually eroded by the implementation of formal systems of performance measurement designed to increase accountability in all areas of academic activity (for a detailed treatment of these, and other, changes in the higher education sector, see Parker, Guthrie & Gray, 1999). Given these changes (which are already underway and likely to continue for some time into the foreseeable future), one might predict that academics' accounts of their past experience (life in the university in the past) might become increasingly positive.

Other context: Advantages

In the present study, the analysis of 'other' context data provided some evidence that, as a group, respondents from the tooling division had had less experience of 'other' organisational contexts than their counterparts from the production division and,

moreover, that this experience had been less variable in terms of the types of work and organisations represented. This finding was not inconsistent with the overall assessment of the tooling division (based on evidence from the present study and also impressionistic data) as supporting a more homogeneous, and definable, culture than the production division. The present study therefore offered some empirical support for the argument in the literature (Louis, 1983; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) that information about a group's social isolation from other groups (ie. 'other' context data) can help to explain the strength or 'boundedness' of the group's culture. At the same time, however, there was little evidence from the present study to suggest that either division was *strongly* 'other' oriented. Although respondents from the production division appeared to have been somewhat less socially isolated than their counterparts from the tooling division, the nature of their experience of 'other' organisations had been such that (as for the tooling division) it would probably have confirmed, rather than disconfirmed, their prevailing beliefs and values (in this case about the role of workers). Of course, this finding is not to deny the value of seeking information about the 'other' context. On the contrary, and as argued above in relation to the future context, the finding that a group is not strongly 'other' oriented is potentially as significant, from a cultural perspective, as the finding that a group has had considerable experience of other organisations which have offered exposure to culturally different ways of thinking.

Overall, then, there would appear to be reasonable support for the inclusion, in the present method, of a focus on the 'other' context of respondents' experience. However, as argued above (in relation to the past and future contexts), information about respondents' experience of other organisations is likely to be most valuable when it is specific, rather than general. The advantage of specific information is that it provides one with a clearer understanding of just what the relevance of the group's 'other' experience might be, in terms of the potential influence of that experience on the group's culture. The findings of the present study suggest that there are a number of different pieces of information that might usefully be gathered in this regard. For example:

1. Information should be sought about the numbers of respondents in the group who have some knowledge of other organisations (with respect to the issue about which they are being asked). Associated with this, one might also ascertain how respondents acquired this knowledge, whether directly (ie. through working elsewhere) or indirectly

(eg. through some kind of professional or work-related association with other organisations, through interaction with friends or family members who work elsewhere, or through hearing about other organisations in the media). The distinction between knowledge acquired directly and knowledge acquired indirectly rests on the assumption that the former is likely to be more relevant (in terms of its potential influence on respondents' current thinking) than the latter. At the same time, however, the potential significance of the latter should not be ignored.

2. Where direct experience is indicated, information might be sought about (i) the type(s) of organisation(s) in which the respondent has worked previously (eg. industry sector and type of industry) and (ii) the respondent's occupational status in his/her other organisation(s). With respect to the former, the greater the similarity between the respondent's current and other organisation(s), the more relevant is the comparison between the two likely to be. In the present study, there was considerable variability among respondents from the production division in the types of organisations which were represented in their 'other' context data. Some of these organisations were similar to the respondent's current organisation in that they were in the same industry sector (eg. a clothing factory, a table-tennis factory), whilst others were very different (eg. a service station, a school canteen). It might reasonably be argued that, in the case of the former, the respondent's current and 'other' experience could more meaningfully be compared than in the case of the latter. It is perhaps also worth making the point here that there was one respondent from the production division whose current and 'other' organisations were so dissimilar as to make it difficult for him to offer any comparison of his experience of each.

In the present study, occupational status emerged as a second demographic variable of potential significance for understanding the relevance of respondents' 'other' experience. The 'other' context data for the tooling division were most revealing in this regard. Where direct experience of having worked elsewhere was reported this involved, in all cases, work as a qualified tradesman (whether as a toolmaker, pattern maker, draftsman etc.). For respondents in this division, occupational status also clearly influenced the nature of their indirect experience of other organisations (eg. one respondent indicated that his knowledge of other organisations was based primarily on what he had learned as a result of work done in his role as vice president of the Pattern Makers' Association). These findings suggest that one advantage of seeking

information about the respondent's occupational status in his/her 'other' organisation is that such information might alert one to the possible influence of occupational subculture, as opposed to organisational culture (or subculture). Indeed, it has been argued that occupational grouping constitutes an important source of subcultural development (emergence) in work organisations, and one which has been largely overlooked by scholars who attempt to understand organisational cultures (Trice, 1993). Whether or not the present method should be revised to include a separate focus on 'occupational' context, in addition to the current focus on the 'other' context, is a question which remains to be answered.

3. Finally, one should also seek to establish the extent to which respondents' 'other' experience (in relation to the issue being investigated) is similar to, or different from, their current experience. It can be argued that similar experience in 'other' contexts is likely to confirm or reinforce respondent thinking about their current experience, whereas different, and in particular contradictory, experience in 'other' contexts may lead to a questioning of current experience.

The present study provided some evidence to suggest that, where similarities are indicated, one might usefully examine the criteria upon which respondents' evaluations of 'sameness' have been made. This information can provide interesting insights into respondent perceptions of organisational life in the current context (in this case, in relation to the role of workers). For example, in the production division, evaluations of 'sameness' tended to be made on the basis of observations that, in the respondent's 'other' organisation (as in his/her current organisation), workers had little autonomy and were always answerable to the person above them, workers "never saw the bosses", and workers had little involvement in anything except their immediate job. As argued previously (see Section 6.3.3, p. 420), these data suggest an underlying perception, among the respondents concerned, that the role of workers in the production division at the present time was essentially passive.

Where differences between a respondents' current and 'other' organisation(s) are indicated, consideration might be given to the number of differences mentioned per respondent (as a potential indicator of the significance of the group's 'other' experience), as well as to the content of the differences mentioned. In the present study, respondents from both divisions mentioned, on average, very few differences each (between two and three) and there was little consensus among respondents in the kinds

of differences which they mentioned. With respect to this latter finding, the important point has been made that, despite the diversity in the types of differences mentioned (this was hardly surprising given that no two respondents had had experience of the same 'other' organisation), the nature of these differences was such that they would have been unlikely to have seriously challenged respondent thinking about the role of workers in their current organisation. It would appear, therefore, that in addition to examining the content of differences between respondents' current and 'other' organisation(s), consideration should also be given to the values implicit in these differences.

In the present study, the analysis of elaborative and qualifying data associated with responses to questions about the 'other' context was not particularly revealing. That is, there was no evidence of any significant common thematic content in these data. The point has been made previously (see Section 6.3.3 pp. 426) that this finding was hardly surprising given that, in all cases, the 'other' contexts to which respondents referred were different. It was also the case that the analysis of 'other' context data in terms of respondent demographics revealed little of interest. There was, however, some evidence that supervisory staff in the tooling division sample had had less experience of 'other' organisations than supervisory staff in the production division sample. The point was made that, if this finding was to be replicated in a larger sample (and its statistical significance established), it could have important implications for understanding the cultures of the groups in question. Specifically, one might predict a more 'bounded' culture in the former than in the latter.

Finally, the results of the present study provided some evidence to suggest that one might usefully examine the nature of the comparisons (whether favourable or unfavourable) which respondents make between their current and 'other' organisation(s). The emergence of particular trends in this regard (ie. consistently favourable or consistently unfavourable comparisons) may constitute evidence of respondent satisfaction with their current organisation. That is, low satisfaction would be indicated in consistently positive references to 'other' organisations, whereas high satisfaction would be indicated in consistently negative references. An alternative, and no less plausible, explanation for the emergence of such trends would, however, be that they are indicative of more general psychological tendencies (eg. the tendency for people to believe that the 'grass is always greener on the other side'). Support for such

an explanation would, of course, raise questions about the value of 'other' context data for explaining the 'boundedness' (or diffuseness) of the group's culture. One should, therefore, be alert to the possibility that the findings of an analysis of 'other' context data may be confounded by the influence of psychological tendencies which may be widely distributed in the general population.

Ideal context: Advantages

In the present study, the rationale for including a focus on the 'ideal' context of respondents' experience was that data pertaining to this contextual domain could provide further insights into the 'boundedness' of a group's culture (over and above those suggested by data pertaining to the other contextual domains). This view is consistent with conceptual treatments of organisational culture which emphasise the prescriptive function of cultural beliefs and assumptions (see, for example, Sackmann, 1991 and Smircich, 1983). If culture sets the boundaries for how organisation member *should* think about, and behave in response to, their experience of organisational life, then one would expect that, in strongly bounded cultures, member responses to questions about the 'ideal' (how they think things ought to be) would be likely to be more culturally constrained than they would be in less bounded cultures.

The results of the present study provided some support for this argument. That is, as one might have predicted, the tooling division emerged as being somewhat more culture bound than the production division in terms of respondent views about the 'ideal' (in this case, about how the role of divisional workers ideally should change). The open question data were particularly revealing in this regard. At this point in the interview, respondents had had considerable exposure (through presentation of the prompt questions) to a range of possible other activities (including activities suggestive of an alternative, more active, orientation to the role of workers) in which workers might become involved. Interestingly, the tooling division open question data contained no significant reference to any of these activities. These data also revealed that, as a group, respondents from the tooling division were somewhat less inclined than their counterparts from the production division to spontaneously advocate change (supervisors, in particular, argued for 'no change') and that, on average, respondents mentioned fewer changes each. It was also the case that respondents from the tooling division were often not as articulate as respondents from the production division about the changes which they mentioned (eg. they elaborated less on these changes) and they

were somewhat less inclined to advocate changes that were indicative of an 'active' (as opposed to a 'passive') orientation to the role of workers. Where such changes were advocated, they were in all cases mentioned by 'wages' employees and not supervisory staff. Finally, there was more evidence in this group of explicit opposition to change which, in this case, was rooted in an allegiance to traditional views and practices (concerning the respective roles of workers and their supervisors)¹⁰⁸.

While it might be argued that, in the present study, inferences about the boundedness of the cultures of the two divisions could have been made on the basis of historical data alone (eg. there was good evidence that, in the tooling division, the role of workers had remained relatively unchanged for a long period of time), this is not to deny the important confirmatory value of data pertaining to the 'ideal' context. There is also the argument that, where one is dealing with a culture which is undergoing change (the tooling division can be seen as an example of such a culture), it would be wrong to make predictions about cultural boundedness solely on the basis of historical data. In this case, the kind of evidence that would more convincingly demonstrate boundedness would be the finding that, despite the changes which organisation (group) members were currently experiencing, the influence of their past experience could nevertheless still be seen in their accounts of the 'ideal'. Apart from these more general arguments in favour of a focus on the 'ideal' context, the results of the present study served to highlight a number of specific advantages of seeking information about the 'ideal' context of respondents' experience. These are described briefly below.

1. Data pertaining to the 'ideal' context data can *provide insights into the degree of support for, or resistance to, change which exists in the group*. Results from the present study suggest that potentially important indicators in this regard include the number of respondents in the group who advocate change along with the number of changes advocated per respondent (the latter providing an index of the group's breadth of vision for change). Consideration might also be given to the level of articulation indicated in respondents' descriptions of the changes which they advocate. It may be that respondents who can talk quite fluently about particular changes (perhaps elaborating on why change is desirable) will be more accepting of these, and related, changes (should

¹⁰⁸ The point has been made previously (see Section 6.3.4 p. 451 that, while the magnitude of the difference between the two divisions suggested by the above findings was quite small, the trends which emerged were in all cases in the expected direction.

they be implemented) than respondents whose comments suggest that they have given little thought to the changes which they advocate.

2. On the basis of data pertaining to the 'ideal' context, it may be possible to *identify those group members most likely to support change and those most likely to resist it*. In the present study, there was some evidence to suggest that, in the tooling division, supervisory staff may be less supportive of change (in relation to the role of workers) than 'wages' employees, and longer-serving employees may be less supportive of change than shorter serving employees. These findings are consistent with research reported in the literature (Poblador, 1990) suggesting that age and seniority are inversely related to adaptability to change. Interestingly, similar trends were not observed in the production division data. As reported previously (see Section 6.3.4 pp. 455-456), there was no representation of supervisory staff in the 'no change' responses (both spontaneous and prompted) for this division, and there was no evidence that length of service influenced a respondent's support, or lack of support, for change. Of course, findings such as these may have important practical implications for the selection of personnel for participation in, and possibly even the leadership of, organisational (group) change efforts.

3. Data pertaining to the 'ideal' context can *provide information about why there is resistance to change*. The present study provided evidence of an interesting difference between the two divisions in this regard. In the tooling division, resistance to change tended to be underpinned by an allegiance to traditional views (in this case, about the respective roles of workers and their supervisors), whereas in the production division, the opposition to change that was expressed (it will be recalled that there was less evidence of explicit opposition to change in the production division than in the tooling division) had its roots in respondents' negative past experience of a previous change initiative, namely, the Team Concept. Again, information of this kind is likely to have important practical implications for how change agents might go about implementing and managing change within each division. The point should be made that the above insights emerged from an analysis of respondents' spontaneous elaborations on their 'no change' responses. Given the obvious value of such insights, it seems reasonable to argue that, in any subsequent revision of the present method, information should systematically be sought regarding respondent perceptions about why particular changes are seen as desirable or, alternatively, as undesirable.

4. Fourth, 'ideal' context data can *provide information about the specific kinds of changes that are likely to be supported or resisted*. As suggested by the results of the present study, this information may not always be evident from an analysis of data pertaining to the past context. For example, in their responses to questions about the 'ideal' context, respondents from the tooling division espoused more support for an increase in the involvement of divisional workers in planning and group problem-solving activities than might have been predicted given their relatively long history of little or no worker involvement in these activities. The point can be made that these espoused changes might more readily be interpreted in the context of the division's current circumstances (eg. a major downsizing effort was underway in the division and the division was being relocated to the main plant, which was perceived to support less traditional management practices) than in the context of past experience. In a similar vein, the support in this division for a change towards more, and improved, communications between workers and their supervisors is perhaps best understood as a response to the considerable uncertainty and anxiety which respondents currently felt in the face of their own, and the division's, changing circumstances. Given the view of organisational culture as dynamic, rather than static, a focus on the 'ideal' context may therefore serve to highlight support for change which may be a product of a culture in transition.

Apart from information about the content of the changes which are advocated, consideration should also be given to the values implicit in these changes. The aim here is to establish the extent to which the changes advocated represent a departure from current thinking and practice. In the present study, it was interesting that, while there was support in both divisions for an increase in the involvement of divisional workers in planning activities, the consensus was that workers should be involved in operational planning only and that it was inappropriate for them to be involved in planning of a more strategic nature. Another, perhaps more graphic, illustration of the importance of understanding the values implicit in the changes which respondents advocate is provided by one respondent from the tooling division (a first-line supervisor) who advocated an increase in the involvement of divisional workers in record-keeping activities. It was clear from this respondent's elaborations on his 'change' response that the main purpose of this change, as he saw it, was to provide supervisors with the means by which they could more effectively monitor their subordinates' performance.

On the basis of the discussion above, there would appear to be good support for the inclusion, in the present study, of a focus on the 'ideal' context of respondents' experience. Not only can 'ideal' context data provide general information about the boundedness of the group's culture, but they can provide additional highly specific information about the group's likely responsiveness, or resistance, to change (in terms of 'How much?', 'Who?', 'What?', and 'Why?'). Information such as this will clearly be of considerable value to personnel who are responsible for the implementation and management of organisational (group) change.

5. A final advantage of 'ideal' context data, as suggested by the findings of the present study, is that they can *provide confirmation of findings associated with the other contextual domains* (eg. they can provide additional evidence of the existence of particular themes). It was also the case that, in the present study, 'ideal' context data served to further confirm the value of particular aspects of the method (such as, the inclusion of prompt questions in addition to open-ended questions, the emphasis on allowing respondents to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses, and the inclusion of 'Why?' questions).

Integrating cultural contexts

In the discussion above, consideration has been given to how information about respondents' experience in relation to a number of different aspects, or domains, of context (other than just the present context) can contribute to an understanding of the culture of the group. A separate evaluation of each of four contextual domains – the past context, the anticipated future context, the 'other' context, and the ideal context – has been offered. The question now arises as to what might be gained from integrating, or considering as a whole, information pertaining to these various contextual domains. What, if anything, does the profile of organisation (group) member experience, which is suggested by the combined findings for each domain, tell us about the organisation's (group's culture)?

There would appear to be two main arguments in favour of integrating contextual information.

1. The first is that it enables one to build a more convincing case for the strength (or boundedness) of culture than would be possible given access to information pertaining to one (perhaps two) contextual domains only. In other words, to the extent that there are demonstrable links between the group's experience in relation to a number of

different contextual domains – for example, if it can be shown that the group's past experience influences members' future expectations or their attitudes toward the future, and if member accounts of the ideal can be shown to be, in some way, constrained by their past experience – then it can reasonably be argued that one is dealing with a culture that is strongly (rather than weakly) bounded. Moreover, to the extent that there is consistency in how members talk about, and explain, their experience in relation to these different contexts (indicated, for example, in the emergence of common themes and attributions), then one has further support for a claim of cultural boundedness.

The results of the present study provided reasonable support for this argument. The profile of respondents' experience (suggested by the combined findings for each contextual domain) which emerged for the tooling division was more coherent than it was for the production division, suggesting a more bounded culture in the former than in the latter. As indicated, the tooling division had a longer and more stable past than the production division and it appeared to be somewhat more socially isolated (in terms of respondents' experience of 'institutional alternatives'); the division was not strongly future-oriented and there was evidence of opposition to anticipated future change which had its roots in an allegiance to traditional views and practices; and respondents from the tooling division were somewhat less likely than their counterparts from the production division to perceive a need for change in the 'ideal', and more likely to express opposition to such change. This distinction between the two divisions, in terms of the boundedness of their cultures, was consistent with impressionistic data (gathered by the researcher over a prolonged period of time spent in each division), as well as with the findings of previous studies conducted as part of this research. The point can be made that, had the method used in the present study sought information about the present context of respondents' experience only, this difference between the divisions would not have emerged. While data pertaining to two contextual domains (say, for example, the present and past contexts) would undoubtedly have been more revealing in this regard, a much more convincing case for any claim about boundedness can be made when one is able to draw on information pertaining to all five contextual domains.

2. A second argument in favour of integrating contextual information is that it can provide insights into the relative impact of different contextual domains on the current thinking of organisation (group) members. In other words, it can highlight the extent to which organisation member thinking may be dominated by a particular contextual

domain (whether the past context, the anticipated future context, the other context, or the 'ideal' context). In the present study, there was evidence to suggest that, for both divisions (but, in particular, for the tooling division), the contextual domain which was dominant (in terms of its influence on the current thinking of divisional members) was the past context. For example, for both divisions, respondent accounts of their present experience contained more spontaneous references to the past context than to any other contextual domain; in neither division was there evidence of significant exposure of divisional members to 'institutional alternatives' (the 'other' context); in neither division was there evidence of a strong future orientation; and, for both divisions, the influence of past experience could be seen in member expectations about, and attitudes toward, the future, as well as in their accounts of the 'ideal'.

Given the context in which the present study was carried out (ie. the automotive industry, a company with a long history, and two divisions in which longer-serving employees were well represented, at least at supervisory and management levels), the finding above that the cultures of the two divisions appeared to be more strongly past-oriented (than, say, future, other, or 'ideal', oriented) was perhaps not surprising. It is quite conceivable, however, that in different industry sectors, and in different types of organisations, the relative impact of these different contextual domains might be quite different. For example, one might expect that in high-technology companies, where survival depends very much upon keeping abreast of rapid change, organisation member thinking would be more strongly dominated by the future context (ie. by member expectations about the future) than by the past context. Employees from these companies might be expected to have a more articulate and longer-term vision of their future than respondents from the present study, as well as be more accepting of future change. In management consulting firms, organisation member thinking might be expected to be more strongly oriented toward the 'other' context than the past context. Not only do these firms typically employ people from a number of different occupational groupings, but they also place a high value on individual flexibility and the recruitment of people with a proven 'track record' in other organisations. And in a government department concerned with policy development in, say, the area of workplace reform (eg. with respect to discrimination on the basis of gender, age, ethnicity etc.), one might expect that the 'ideal' context would emerge as a dominant

contextual domain. Clearly, one interesting possibility for future research would be to use the present method to verify predictions such as these.

There is also the argument that, given contemporary changes in the world of work – whereby new entrants to the workforce are likely to be highly mobile, in terms of both job and career changes (Naisbitt & Aburdene, 1990); whereby organisations are increasingly contracting out all but their most essential services, in addition to increasing their casual and part-time labour force (Handy, 1990); and whereby organisations are no longer ‘stockpiling’ people and notions of a ‘job-for-life’ have become a thing of the past (Handy, 1996) – the importance of the past context (for explaining organisation members’ current thinking) is likely to decrease, relative to other contextual domains, simply because organisation members lack a significant shared history (in their current organisation). This possibility raises questions about the value of the organisational culture concept in the longer term. If organisational culture is dependent, for its evolution, on the passage of a considerable period of time – the ‘coral reef’ notion of culture (Kantrow 1987) – then is it the case that organisations of the future will be increasingly unlikely to develop strong cultures because their membership lacks a significant shared history? Alternatively, do changes such as those described above signal the need for a reconceptualisation of organisational culture which takes into account the possible importance of contextual domains other than the past and the present contexts, which have constituted the dominant focus up until now? If this was the case, one may be able to demonstrate the existence of ‘strong’ cultures in organisations (groups) which lack a significant history in time, but in which members nevertheless share a common, and strongly held, view of their world which derives from the influence of some other contextual domain (eg. the anticipated future, the other, or the ideal).

7.2.4 Respondent attributions and organisational (group) culture

A final feature of the present method to which the reader’s attention is now drawn is its focus on respondents’ causal attributions. It will be recalled that, for every change that a respondent mentioned (whether an already experienced change or an anticipated change), information was sought about why the respondent thought that the change had occurred, or would occur. In the present study, the analysis of these attributional data provided evidence of an interesting difference between the two divisions. Among respondents from the tooling division there was a strong tendency to attribute change to

circumstances perceived to be beyond the control of divisional members (including divisional management). Change was seen as primarily reactive – a response to pressure from the unions, compliance with government legislation, compliance with changes in company strategy etc. In contrast, in the production division there was evidence of a perception (though not as widely shared) that change was the result of considered and planned action on the part of the division's new management, who were generally regarded as being more strongly committed than their predecessors to the development of the division's human resources. This difference between the divisions served to highlight the potential value of attributional data. In particular, it suggested that organisations (groups) may develop their own unique 'styles' of attributing cause and that these styles may be culturally determined.

The analysis of attributional data from the present study also suggested the interesting possibility that causal attributions may provide clues as to the success, or otherwise, of planned change within an organisation. For example, if organisation members are consistently positive in their attributions about why change has been implemented, and if these positive attributions continue to be made even in the face of changing circumstances (say, for example, the departure of a particularly charismatic manager who was the original architect of the change), then the change might be judged to have been successful.

The above hypotheses or hunches suggest that the study of attributions may constitute a very fruitful area for organisational culture research in the future. This theme is explored in more detail in the final section of this chapter (Section 7.4).

7.3 Evaluation of the method: Comparison with extant approaches and practical considerations

The aim of the previous section was to offer some evaluation of each of the key features of the present method, namely, (i) an 'issue-focussed' interview, which was (ii) semi-structured, which (iii) sought information about respondents' experience in relation to a number of different contextual domains, and which (iv) sought information about respondent perceptions of the causes of experienced, as well as anticipated, events (ie. attributional data). In this section, a more general evaluation of the method is offered in terms of how the method compares with existing approaches to understanding (assessing) organisational culture. Consideration is given, first of all, to the value of the method relative to existing quantitative approaches and, secondly, to the value of the

method relative to existing qualitative approaches. This section also considers some of the main implications of the findings of the present study for the use of the method in practice. For example, is there an optimal sample size beyond which the use of the method is likely to become unwieldy? How important is time spent in the research setting to the quality of the data gathered? What researcher skills are required? etc.

7.3.1 Comparison with extant approaches

(i) Advantages when compared with quantitative methods

One important limitation of questionnaire measures of organisational culture, as suggested by the results of the present study, is that they typically focus on the present context of respondents' experience only, and pay no attention to any other contextual domain. Evidence from the present study suggests that, in the absence of information about the past context, for example, one's ability to accurately interpret and 'make sense of' present-time data is likely to be seriously limited. Perhaps more importantly, however, a broader contextualist approach, of the kind adopted in the present study, can provide insights into the extent to which organisation (group) members are committed to particular ways of thinking and behaving. This is essentially the notion of 'boundedness', one indicator of which will be the extent to which member beliefs about the 'ideal' can be shown to be constrained by long-established ways of thinking and behaving. The problem with questionnaire measures of culture is that they provide no insight into the group's commitment to the 'culture' as perceived at the present time. For example, norm indicators, such as the Norms Diagnostic Index (Allen & Dyer, 1980) and the Organizational Culture Inventory (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986), provide a measure of respondents' perceptions of the normative behaviours which prevail in the organisation at the present time. The issue of whether or not respondents are committed to these norms – in the sense that, at some basic level, they believe in their inherent worth – is simply not addressed. Sathe (1985) makes the important point that people can comply with behavioural norms without being committed to them, offering external justifications for their behaviour, such as, "We are doing this because it is required of us" (p. 246).

In this sense questionnaire measures can be regarded as being of limited value only, when compared with the present method, in terms of their capacity to provide critical information about the organisation's (group's) likely responsiveness to change. The point is that one cannot assume that there will be resistance to change simply on the

basis of the finding that particular behavioural norms are perceived to prevail which are inconsistent with (and perhaps even contradict) the norms required for successful change.

A second limitation of questionnaire measures of organisational culture, which has been recognised in the literature (see, for example, Rentsch, 1990), and which is confirmed by the results of the present study, is that they provide no insight into the 'meaning', or interpretive framework which informs the individual's response to questionnaire items. The present study provided evidence that differences in meaning could occur at a number of different levels. First, individuals (or groups) could differ in the meanings which they attached to, in this case, the various worker activities about which they were asked. There was some variability, for example, in respondent definitions of activities such as 'training' and 'helping other workers'. For example, 'training' was loosely defined by some respondents as incorporating both informal on-the-job, as well as formal off-the-job, training activities, whereas for other respondents, their definition was more narrow and included formal off-the-job training only. Similarly 'helping other workers' was defined by some respondents as simply 'lending a hand', whereas for others it involved the formal provision, by experienced operators, of guidance and assistance to newcomers. While inconsistencies of this kind might be expected to be encountered in respondent interpretations of the behaviours about which they are asked in norm indicators – behaviours such as 'training', 'feedback', 'cooperation', 'commitment', 'responsibility', 'opposition' etc. – these indicators provide no means by which such inconsistencies might be revealed. A clear advantage of the present method in this regard is that respondents are given the opportunity to elaborate on, and qualify, their responses. Indeed, it might even be argued that the use of various prompts (including 'Why' questions) encourages respondents to provide this information.

Apart from inconsistencies in respondent interpretations of the particular activities/behaviours about which they are asked, differences may also be encountered in the meanings which respondents attribute to the descriptive terms associated with these activities/behaviours. Thus, descriptors such as 'fair' (as in 'fair practices'), 'challenging' (as in 'challenging tasks'), 'effective' (as in 'effective communication'), which are frequently used in questionnaire measures of organisational culture, might be expected to mean different things to different people. The same argument applies to

descriptive terms which have a quantitative dimension in the sense that they represent expressions of amount, degree, probability etc. In the present study, there was some evidence to suggest that respondents from the tooling division, because of their long history of no worker involvement in training, may have been more sensitive than their counterparts in the production division to changes in the involvement of workers in training, and hence also more likely to 'overestimate' the objective amount of training currently provided. The important implication is that, depending upon the 'yardstick' which they use to evaluate their present experience, individuals (and groups) might be expected to differ in their interpretations of what constitutes, for example, 'a lot of' or 'a high level' of worker involvement in any given activity. In the same way, respondent interpretations of descriptors such as 'regularly' (as in 'regularly plan', 'regularly review', or 'regularly meet'), 'some' (as in 'some input'), and 'moderately difficult' (as in 'moderately difficult goals'), which appear in questionnaire measures of organisational culture, are likely to be subject to differences in interpretation. Moreover, this problem is also likely to arise in relation to the response options from which respondents are expected to choose when completing questionnaire measures of organisational culture. For example, the Organizational Culture Inventory (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986) asks respondents to indicate, on a five-point scale, the extent to which organisation members are expected to engage in particular behaviours. The specific response categories include: 1=Not at all; 2=To a slight extent; 3=To a moderate extent; 4=To a great extent; and 5=To a very great extent. Evidence from the present study suggests that respondent interpretations of these various response options may well differ depending upon the 'yardstick' (or interpretive framework) which informs their evaluations of the behaviours in question.

Finally, the present study provided evidence that emergent themes may constitute a third level at which differences in meaning could be encountered. This is the idea that the way in which people talk about the activities (or behaviours) about which they are asked can provide important insights into the unique meanings attributed to these activities (or behaviours). A nice illustration of this is provided by data from the present study pertaining to the activity category 'Help other workers'¹⁰⁹. While the two divisions were similar in that a majority of respondents from each reported that, at the present time, the workers in their division provided help to other workers, if and when

¹⁰⁹ These data are discussed in Appendix D1, pp. 681-685.

they needed it, an analysis of the thematic content of the elaborative and qualifying data associated with these responses provided evidence of an interesting difference between the two divisions. Among tooling division respondents there was a shared view that 'giving help' was legitimate only in the context of the superior-subordinate relationships defined by the chain of command. Thus, while a qualified tradesmen could legitimately give help to an apprentice, if he himself needed help, he should seek this help, not from a fellow tradesman (though this did happen in practice), but rather from his leading hand or immediate supervisor. In contrast, respondents from the production division emphasised the importance of interpersonal relationships in determining the helpfulness of the workers in this division towards one another. Specifically, if a worker was perceived to be a 'bludger' (ie. lazy and seeking to avoid work), then (s)he was unlikely to receive help from a coworker.

Data from Part B of the interview¹¹⁰ – concerned with the characteristics of 'good' workers – provide a further illustration of how the thematic content of respondent elaborations and qualifications can highlight differences in meaning (both within and between groups). While a majority of respondents from the tooling division indicated that, in order to be thought of as a 'good' worker, it was either 'very important' or 'moderately important' for workers 'to come up with ideas for how to improve things', an important contingency which applied to this behaviour was that it was valued only if the ideas were judged by those in authority (eg. supervisors) to be 'good' ideas. Interestingly, there was no evidence that this same contingency applied to innovative behaviour in the production division.

The two examples above have been included because they have a direct bearing on questionnaire measures of organisational culture which ask about norms of support, on the one hand, and norms of task innovation, on the other. For example, in the Norms Diagnostic Index (Allen & Dyer, 1980), respondents are asked to indicate the extent of their agreement or disagreement with the statement that: 'It's a norm around here for people to help each other with on the job and personal problems'. In the Kilmann-Saxton Culture-Gap Survey (Kilmann & Saxton, 1983), respondents are asked to indicate which of the two norms, 'Encourage new ideas' and 'Discourage new ideas', best describes the actual norm operating in their group. In contrast to the present method, which offers a means whereby important contingencies (attitudes, qualifying

¹¹⁰ As indicated, the analysis of these data are not reported in this thesis.

comments etc.) which might be associated with these behaviours can be revealed, questionnaire measures offer no means for generating understandings of this kind.

The failure of questionnaire measures of organisational culture to address this problem of differences in meaning – which, as shown above, can exist at a number of different levels – has two important implications. The first is that the aggregation of like responses to questionnaire items assumes a reasonable degree of interpretive consistency and, as evidence from the present study suggests, such an assumption would appear to be unfounded. The second is that questionnaire measures, by ignoring the meaning dimension of the data which they generate, disregard what is potentially critical cultural information. In other words, differences in meaning (within or between groups) may be culturally determined and, as such, the analysis of meaning offers a potentially valuable source of cultural data. To draw on one of the examples above, what is important from a cultural perspective is not the extent to which organisation members share a perception that, say, selection and promotion practices in the organisation are ‘fair’, but rather it is organisation member *beliefs about what constitutes ‘fair practice’* with respect to selection and promotion. Notions of ‘fairness’ may be culturally determined and, as such, they may provide a basis for differentiating one group from another.

On the basis of the above arguments – and evidence attesting to the importance of both context and meaning as ‘carriers’ of cultural information – it would seem reasonable to conclude that questionnaire measures of organisational culture offer, at best, a superficial understanding of the concept only. Moreover, while it is true that advocates of the use of such measures admit that they are unsuitable for tapping culture at its deepest level (ie. at the level of basic beliefs and assumptions) (Rousseau, 1990), the question remains as to just how different many of these measures are from measures of the earlier concept of organisational climate, which were developed in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s (see, for example, Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Stern, 1970). A simple review of some of the items which appear in questionnaire measures of organisational culture and organisational climate – see Table 7.1 – serves to illustrate just how similar quantitative approaches to the operationalisation of these two concepts are.

In addition to the above arguments in support of the current method, there are two further advantages which the method offers when compared with questionnaire measures of organisational culture. First, the use of open-ended questions facilitates the

Table 7.1 A comparison of items from questionnaire measures of Organisational Culture and Organisational Climate

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE: NORMS	ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE
<p><i>Dimension: Support</i> Its a norm around here for people to help each other with on the job and personal problems. It's a norm around here for people not to treat each other as just a pair of hands. (Allen & Dyer, 1980)</p>	<p><i>Dimension: Support/personal relations</i> Most people here seem to be especially considerate of others. (Stern, 1970) When I am on a difficult assignment I can usually count on getting assistance from my boss and co-workers (Litwin & Stringer, 1968)</p>
<p><i>Dimension: Task Innovation</i> It's a norm to: ...encourage new ideas. ...discourage new ideas. It's a norm to: ...try new ways of doing things. ...don't 'rock the boat'. (Kilmann & Saxton, 1983)</p> <p><i>Dimension: Conventional</i> To 'fit in' and meet expectations: ...cast aside solutions that seem different or risky. (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986)</p>	<p><i>Dimension: Readiness to Innovate</i> New ideas are always being tried out here. Unusual or exciting plans are encouraged here. (Stern, 1970) Our management is willing to take a chance on a good idea. (Litwin & Stringer, 1968)</p>
<p><i>Dimension: Confrontation</i> It's a norm around here for people to confront negative behaviour or negative norms constructively. (Allen & Dyer, 1980)</p> <p><i>Dimension: Avoidance</i> To 'fit in' and meet expectations: ... 'lay low' when things get tough. To 'fit in' and meet expectations: ...make 'popular' rather than necessary decisions. (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986)</p>	<p><i>Dimension: Conflict</i> The best way to make a good impression around here is to steer clear of open arguments and disagreements. (Litwin & Stringer, 1968)</p>
<p><i>Dimension: Dependent</i> To 'fit in' and meet expectations: ...never challenge superiors. (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986)</p>	<p><i>Dimension: Questioning Authority</i> People avoid direct clashes with senior personnel at all costs. (Stern, 1970)</p>

emergence of dimensions (in this case, activity categories) which are salient to respondents. A common criticism of quantitative approaches is that they are typically developed around researcher-derived categories, which may lack relevance in the particular context in which the research is being carried out (Ott, 1989; Jones, 1988). Second, compared with questionnaire measures of organisational culture, in which the focus is very much on generalities (ie. norms, values etc. which capture something about the group as a whole), the present method can provide insights into the extent to which the individual's personal experience may be discrepant from his/her perception of the situation in general. The example has been given of how, in the present study, respondents from the production division tended to make positive evaluations of the communication relationship that they had with their own supervisor(s), while at the same time holding fairly negative views about the communication climate that prevailed in their division as a whole. Moreover, the argument has been made that discrepancies of this kind (in respondent perceptions of the 'specific' versus the 'general') may be an indication of culture change in progress, whereby the residual effects of past experience may continue, for some time, to influence organisation member perceptions of the 'general', despite experience, at an individual level, which signals the onset of change.

(ii) Advantages when compared with qualitative methods

When compared with existing qualitative approaches to the study of organisational culture, the main advantage of the present method is that it is much more systematic in its approach to culture analysis. As such, inferences about cultural beliefs and assumptions which are suggested by the results are arguably more reliable, since they are made on the basis of data which are systematically collected and analysed. The point can be made that, while qualitative accounts of culture often make for interesting and entertaining reading – they are typically highly descriptive and have some of the same qualities as a 'good story' – for this same reason, they can leave one feeling frustrated and seeking answers to questions about the research method (eg. Just how much time did the researcher spend in the research setting? Just how many interviews were conducted, and what questions were asked?), the approach to data analysis (eg. How did the researcher manage the data from 'multiple' interviews? Were conversational data treated differently from formal interview data?), and the reliability of the evidence presented (eg. Just how widely shared is a view which is represented by the comments of one or two research participants?).

The above concerns about qualitative (or ethnographic) accounts of organisational culture echo some of the more formal criticisms which have been made of ethnographic fieldwork in general. For example, Emerson (1987, cited in Bryman 1991, p.210) argues that much modern ethnography fails to adequately specify the "interactional practices" (essentially 'the method') and the "textual practices" (essentially, the approach to data analysis) which produce the ethnographic account. Emerson is also critical of the tendency for many fieldwork projects to be of very short duration and for participation in the research setting to be intermittent. With respect to this last point, and as noted previously, one ethnographic study which has been proposed as a model for how research into organisational culture should be conducted, namely Whyte's (1943) seminal study on 'Street Corner Society' (Bryman, 1991), involved three years of continuous fieldwork. In qualitative studies of organisational culture, the time spent in the field is typically much less than this. Where the period of fieldwork is specified (and often it is not), it rarely exceeds one year (see, for example, studies included in Jones et al. (1988)). Moreover, it is not uncommon in qualitative accounts of culture to find references to the research having been conducted 'part-time', or 'over a period of 'x' months', leaving open the question of just how much contact the researcher has had with the research setting and the participants in the research.

The advantage of the present approach, compared with extant qualitative approaches, is not only that it is more systematic in terms of its method and approach to data analysis (ie. it offers a specific set of questions and a means for comparing data within and between groups), but it is also more systematic in terms of its attention to questions of 'sharedness' and questions concerning the role of context in shaping culture. With respect to the former, and as suggested above, a source of frustration in reading qualitative accounts of organisational culture is that claims about commonality or 'sharedness' (eg. in relation to group member interpretations, attitudes, perceptions, practices etc.) are often made with very little supporting evidence. It is not uncommon to find such claims illustrated with the comments of one, or perhaps two, research participants only, with no indication given of just how representative the views (attitudes etc.) of these participants are. This can be the case even when the research has reportedly involved many hours of in-depth, individual interviews with significant numbers of organisational personnel. A good example is provided by Bate's (1984) study of cultural impediments to change and problem resolution in three large

manufacturing companies in the United Kingdom. Bate reports that the research in two of these companies¹¹¹ involved more than one hundred interviews (in all), generating 400 hours of audio-tape. In addition, the data set for these two companies included 200 hours of recorded company meetings. On the basis of 'repeated readings' of the transcripts of these interviews and meetings, Bate identified six dimensions of organisational culture which he argued would impact negatively on organisational problem-solving. What is noteworthy in the context of the present discussion is that the evidence documented in support of these dimensions takes the form of a series of individual quotes – between one and three – illustrating the various different aspects of each dimension. The participants whose comments are quoted are not differentiated in terms of the organisation to which they belong, and no indication is given of how strongly their views are supported by other participating members of their organisation. For other similar examples, see Snyder's (1988) account of a culture change effort in an aircraft factory, Meyerson's (1991) study of ambiguity and the occupational culture of hospital social work, and Martin's (1992) multi-perspective study of the culture of a large Fortune 500 company. While studies such as these – which provide no empirical evidence of 'sharedness' despite clearly 'having the numbers' to do so – are commonplace, some exceptions do exist. For example, in their study of the role of the founder in the culture creation process, Martin, Sitkin, and Boehm (1985) not only address the issue of 'sharedness' conceptually, but they also provide empirical evidence of the extent to which it is demonstrated in their data.

Of course, there are some qualitative accounts of organisational culture which provide very scant information about the research method, and in which there are no details whatsoever about the size or demographic characteristics of the sample (see, for example, Bartunek & Moch, 1991; Fine, 1988; and Young, 1991). Studies such as these are possibly open to even stronger criticism with respect to the 'cultural' interpretations that they offer.

It can be concluded, therefore, that qualitative approaches, at least in practice, generally fail to offer convincing empirical evidence that particular views (attitudes, beliefs etc.) are shared and can, in this sense, be regarded as cultural. The present method offers a number of clear advantages in this regard. First, the use of standardised questions (asked about a specific issue) makes it relatively easy to assess the degree of

¹¹¹ The extent of data collection effort in the third company is not specified.

unanimity, or diversity, of opinion which exists in the group. Second, the qualitative aspect of the method offers a means whereby group members are able to clarify their responses and this, in turn, facilitates the more accurate assessment of 'sharedness'. Third, there is an emphasis on the systematic analysis of data (including qualitative data and data generated in response to the standardised questions) which, while it might be espoused in qualitative accounts of culture, is not always apparent from the way in which these accounts are constructed. And fourth, the present method offers the possibility of sampling, not widely, but sufficiently well to provide insights into 'sharedness' if it exists.

In addition to being more systematic with respect to its treatment of 'sharedness', the present method is also more systematic in terms of the attention it gives to context. The interview focuses on a single issue (in this case, the 'role of workers') and asks about respondents' experience of this issue in relation not only to the present context, but also in relation to the past context, the anticipated future context, the 'other' context, and the 'ideal' context. An examination of the links between respondents' experience in relation to these different aspects, or domains, of context can provide insights into the way in which respondent thinking about the issue at the present time may have been shaped, and how it may be continuing to evolve. One important advantage of the method, in this sense, is that it provides a direct and systematic means of assessing, for example, the impact of respondents' past experience (whether in their current organisation or in some 'other' organisational context) on their perceptions, and thinking about, their current experience, their anticipated future experience, and their 'ideal' experience.

This attempt in the present method to operationalise specific dimensions, or domains, of context, and to make inferences about culture based on the linkages between them, contrasts markedly with the treatment of context which one finds in purely qualitative studies of organisational culture. While advocates of a qualitative approach espouse a commitment to context – and certainly the methods which they use, when compared with quantitative methods, are more likely to generate data which are relevant to the specific social milieu in which the research is carried out – the question remains as to how truly contextualist many qualitative studies of culture actually are. If one defines 'contextualism' as a commitment to understanding events, actions etc. "in [their] wider social and historical context" (Bryman, 1988, p.65), then can a qualitative study which

is ahistorical and which reports only on respondent perceptions, attitudes etc. at the present time (the study by Bate (1984) described above is one such example, and there are many others) be regarded as being genuinely contextualist in its approach?

Even though there are a number of qualitative studies in which the importance of the historical context is explicitly acknowledged (see Section 4.1.2, pp. 263-264), it is not always made clear how past events, and the meanings attributed to these events by organisation members, have influenced organisation member thinking at the present time. For example, in his study of culture change in a British boarding school, Pettigrew (1979) espouses the value of a longitudinal approach for such a study on the grounds that, among other things, it allows one to examine "the impact of one drama [critical event] on successive and even consequent dramas" (p.571). However, the empirical evidence which is subsequently offered in support of this argument is scant to say the least. There is a single paragraph only in which the author makes reference to certain myths which he argues were important in generating and sustaining organisation member commitment to change. No data are presented which provide a convincing demonstration of how members' experience of past events, and their interpretations of these events, have influenced their thinking about subsequent events.

It is also the case that in studies of this kind, the link between the past and the present often seems to be more of an assumed link than a link which has been established through independent and empirically derived evidence. For example, in Snyder's (1988) study of culture change in an aircraft factory, a link is made (it is not clear by whom – whether the researcher, or the manager responsible for the change effort) between employees' current attitudes, behaviours etc. (eg. low morale, fear of telling the truth etc.) and their exposure, over time, to autocratic and demeaning styles of management, as well as their history of "having been viewed as losers by other organizations within the company" (p.198). While this link makes good sense intuitively, no data are presented which illustrate its veracity from the perspective of the employees concerned. The present method is able to avoid this criticism since it requires all respondents in the sample to be presented with the same basic set of questions. Moreover, these questions seek highly specific information about the nature, timing, and perceived reasons for, changes which respondents have experienced (in this case, in the role of workers) from the past to the present. Another observation about the Snyder study which is worth making is that, while it includes an account of two crises in

the history of the research organisation, nothing is said about the nature of the link between these events and the subsequent experience of culture change in the particular division of the organisation which is the central focus of the research. In other words, the primary purpose of the account would appear to be simply to 'set the scene' in much the same way as a summary of respondent demographics in a study such as the present study does. While this is entirely reasonable, it does alert one to the possibility that qualitative accounts of organisational culture may include historical data without necessarily being truly contextualist in their approach.

With respect to their treatment of context, it is also the case that qualitative studies of organisational culture, apart from their focus on the present context and sometimes also the past context, typically pay no attention to other aspects of context which have appeared in conceptual treatments of organisational culture (namely, the anticipated future, the 'other' and the 'ideal'). In contrast, the present method offers a means whereby respondents' experience in relation to the range of different aspect of context which have emerged as being conceptually important can be systematically examined.

Finally, the point can be made that, while advocates of qualitative approaches are likely to object to the use of standardised questions in the present method on the grounds that they bias the research towards issues of interest to the researcher, and constrain the emergence of issues of interest to (and salience for) the participants in the research, such approaches are themselves not immune to the effects of this kind of researcher bias. The classic illustration of this, which appears in the anthropological literature, is of course Freeman's (1983) refutation of Mead's (1928) ethnographic account of the experience of adolescence in Samoa. Freeman argues that Mead's depiction of Samoan adolescence as a relatively idyllic period, devoid of the considerable emotional stress and conflict associated with adolescence in America and elsewhere (a view which Freeman's own research, and the work of others, subsequently refuted), was underpinned by her strong commitment to the ideology of cultural determinism – the notion that human behaviour was determined by cultural, rather than biological, influences. The argument can be made, therefore, that while a supposed advantage of unstructured qualitative approaches is that they are more faithful to the perspectives of the participants in the research, in practice, they may be equally susceptible to bias resulting from the researcher's particular interests and predispositions as are more structured approaches.

7.3.2 The present method: A tool for use in culture change?

In the discussion above, consideration has been given to some of the main strengths of the present method when compared with existing quantitative and qualitative approaches to the study of organisational culture. While the method offers some clear advantages over these approaches – it is more focussed and systematic in its treatment of context, it draws attention to the importance of the ‘meaning’ dimension, it deals with the issue of ‘sharedness’ more convincingly etc. – one important limitation of the method, it might be argued, is its very narrow focus on a single category of cultural beliefs only (in this case, beliefs about the ‘role of workers’). This characteristic of the method means that it is unable to deliver the kind of rich and comprehensive account of culture (with its multiple manifestations) that an intensive ethnographic study (such as that carried out by Whyte (1943)) is likely to produce. The point can also be made that it would be unrealistic, within a single study, to try to use the method, which is designed to tap a sub-set of the beliefs represented by only one of Schein’s (1985) broad dimensions of culture (ie. the dimension labelled ‘The Nature of Human Nature’), to generate a profile of an organisation’s (group’s) culture in which all five of the dimensions included in Schein’s typology were represented. Such a task would simply be unmanageable given the detailed and highly specific information which the method is designed to generate in relation to a single belief category.

While the present method might well be criticised on the grounds that it is too narrowly focussed, there are two important points which can be made in defence of the method. The first concerns the exploratory nature of the present research. As indicated previously (see Section 1.1 of this chapter), the aim of this research was not to produce a comprehensive description of the cultures of the two participating divisions, but rather it was to develop a method for understanding deeper-level culture which would have some predictive value, and which could be used to make systematic comparisons of culture (across research settings, over time etc.). The choice of an issue-focussed interview for the present study was therefore very important from a methodological point of view.

The second point is that an issue-focussed approach is limited only if the aim of the research is to arrive at an understanding of an organisation’s (group’s) culture in its entirety (and it is questionable whether indeed that is possible). If, however, the aim is to understand some specific aspect of the culture – and this might be entirely appropriate in the context of, say, a specific organisational change effort – then a method such as the

present method is likely to be of considerable practical value. The idea here is that, for any given (relatively focussed) change which an organisation might wish to implement, there are likely to be specific beliefs and assumptions, the presence or absence of which will have implications for the success of the change. Thus, an important question which change agents might ask is 'What beliefs and assumptions are necessary for the success of this change and are these beliefs and assumptions consistent with, or antagonistic to, those supported by the organisation's current culture?' The value of the present method in this regard is that it can be readily adapted to evaluate beliefs and assumptions which are specific to (in the sense of having implications for the success of) the particular change which an organisation might wish to implement. The point might also be made that, given the nature of basic beliefs and assumptions, it is unlikely that the influence of any particular set of beliefs and assumptions will be confined to a single domain of organisation member experience only. Thus, even though the present method deals with just one aspect of an organisation's (group's) culture, it is likely that the insights which it generates will have implications for a broader understanding of the organisation's (group's) culture as a whole.

In view of the above, what is perhaps most distinctive about the present method, when compared with existing approaches for assessing organisational culture, is its ability to inform one's understanding of, and approach to, organisational change. In particular, the method can provide insights into (i) the likely resistance to a given change; (ii) where resistance to (and also support for) the change is located; (iii) the reasons for resistance to the change; and (iv) how well the change effort is progressing. A brief summary of some of the specific sources of data which are likely to generate these different insights is provided below.

1. Likely resistance to change?

Relevant data sources include:

- i) historical data showing the extent of the group's exposure to change over time in relation to the issue of interest;
- ii) attitudinal data, including attitudes toward anticipated future, and 'ideal', changes in relation to the issue;
- iii) data highlighting the extent of the group's future orientation in relation to the issue; and

- iv) 'other' context data providing insights into the extent of the group's exposure to alternative ways of thinking about, and behaving in response to, the issue (ie. 'cultural alternatives').

2. Where resistance to (and support for) change is located?

Time line data (pertaining to when particular changes in relation to the issue are perceived to have occurred, and how far back periods of 'no change' have extended) can be used to identify organisation members who share similar histories. Groupings of this kind may, in turn, facilitate the identification of resisters to, and supporters of, change.

3. Reasons for resistance to change?

Relevant data sources include:

- i) historical data pertaining to the nature of the group's past experience with respect to the issue of interest (eg. whether positive or negative);
- ii) common themes which emerge in how organisation members talk about the issue;
- iii) attributional data highlighting organisation member perceptions about the reasons for experienced, or anticipated, changes in relation to the issue; and
- iv) 'ideal' context data highlighting reasons for a lack of support for change in relation to the issue (ie. why organisation members see change as undesirable).

4. Progress with the change effort?

There are a number of possible indicators of the success of the change effort including:

- i) attributional data indicating the extent to which the change is seen as proactive, as opposed to reactive;
- ii) the prevalence of positive, as opposed to negative, attitudes in how organisation member talk about the change;
- iii) an emerging discrepancy between member perceptions of the organisation as a whole (which may continue to be anchored in the past) and member perceptions of their own individual experience (which may reflect the impact of the change); and
- iv) changes over time in the pattern of responding to open-ended and closed questions.

7.3.3 Practical considerations

It has been argued above that the present method offers some important advantages over existing qualitative and quantitative approaches. It has also been suggested that the method might be most valuably used as a tool for understanding organisational change and, in particular, for providing insights into a group's likely cultural responsiveness to change. In this section, some tentative guidelines are offered regarding practical issues associated with the use of the method. Consideration is given to three key issues, namely, (i) sampling and sample size; (ii) the need for, and optimal duration of, researcher involvement in the research setting; and (iii) the personality and skill requirements of the researcher.

(i) Sampling and sample size

Given the relatively detailed and in-depth information which the present method is designed to generate, it would be unrealistic to attempt to use the method with very large samples, such as those which can be accommodated in studies using purely quantitative methods. Interviewing in the present method (whether focussed on the current issue of the 'role of workers' or on some other issue) is likely to take up to one and a half hours per respondent. Added to this is the time required for transcribing the interviews (this is recommended given the amount of qualitative data with which one will have to deal) and then analysing the data. While the data collection and analysis requirements of the present method necessarily constrain the size of the sample that can be accommodated, the specific numbers of participants that might be included in any given study will clearly depend upon the resources available. Relevant considerations in this regard will include whether or not the research is being carried out by a single investigator or a research team, the time scale of the project (this may be set by the participating organisation and may, or may not, be able to be negotiated), and the availability of funds for clerical assistance (in particular, for interview transcription). The sample size is also likely to be influenced by the individual time commitments of participants in the research. More senior members of the organisation may be less accessible in this regard than members at lower levels of the organisational hierarchy.

On the basis of her experience in the use of the present method, it is this researcher's opinion that a sample size of around twenty participants could be managed by a single investigator, assuming reasonable participant availability, some clerical assistance, and working within a total time frame of around four to six months. A sample of this size

would appear to be reasonable not only from a practical point of view but also from a methodological point of view. With twenty participants (whether they constitute a single group for study, or perhaps two sub-groups), one can be reasonably sure of picking up on commonalities in the views, attitudes, etc. of group (sub-group) members, to the extent that these exist. A sample of this size is also sufficiently large to alert one to the possible existence of sub-group differences (which may be investigated through subsequent research involving wider sampling of the sub-group membership).

As with sample size, there are no hard and fast rules to guide decisions about the composition of the sample. The choice of participants for the research will depend upon a number of factors, not the least of which will be the purpose for which the research is being carried out. If, for example, the aim of the research is to provide information about a group's likely cultural responsiveness to change, then one might be advised to sample from among those group members likely to be most effected by, and/or most influential in determining the success of, the change. Of course, given the well-documented influence of organisational gatekeepers on the process of carrying out research in organisations (see, for example, Easterby-Smith et al. 1991), the researcher may have little discretion in decisions about who should participate in the research and may be granted access to a narrow band of the organisation's membership only. Apart from these considerations, there are a number of other factors which may guide the selection of participants for research using the present method. These are briefly as follows:

1. To the extent that one is dealing with a relatively homogeneous group, in which members differ with respect to a range of demographic characteristics (such as age, gender, length of service with the organisation etc.), sampling may be guided by an attempt to represent those demographics for which the most marked differences exist. If, for example, both longer-serving and shorter-serving employees are well-represented in the group as a whole, then one might select a sample in which this difference is reflected. If, on the other hand, shorter-serving employees are very poorly represented in the group as a whole, then one might sample from among the longer-serving employees only. In the absence of any other information, representative sampling of this kind is probably advisable.

2. Sample selection may be guided by existing theory or research which highlights the potential, or actual, importance of various personal (demographic) characteristics for

understanding the issue being investigated. For example, if the aim of the research is to assess a group's likely cultural responsiveness to change, then, given previous research suggesting a positive relationship between age and resistance to change (see, for example, Poblador, 1990), one might select a sample which includes both older and younger employees.

3. Sample selection may be guided by information that becomes available only as the research unfolds. For example, data from the initial interviews may alert one to the potential importance of some personal (demographic) characteristic not previously considered. Subsequent sampling might then be guided by this information. Patton (1990) has suggested that this kind of flexible and emergent approach to sampling is entirely appropriate for qualitative research designs.

4. Research participants might be selected on the basis of information provided by key informants. It will be recalled that, in his study of the cultures of twenty organisational units (from ten different organisations), Hofstede et al. (1990) relied on management's judgement as to whether or not a unit was culturally homogeneous and, therefore, suitable for inclusion in the study.

While it might be desirable to select a highly diverse sample in which participant variability with respect to a range of personal (demographic) attributes is represented, the point should be made that there will necessarily be a trade-off between the number of sub-groups that can be included in the sample, and the size of each sub-group. An obvious caveat in this regard is that the number of participants in each sub-group should be sufficiently large to enable sub-group differences, if these exist, to be detected, as well as to provide information about common themes etc. which cut across the sub-groups.

One final point that can be made in relation to the issue of sampling and sample size is that research using the present method, while it is unlikely to involve very large samples, could reasonably act as a precursor to research using more structured quantitative approaches. For example, the former might provide insights into dimensions or aspects of participant experience which are of particular relevance, and these might constitute the focus of subsequent research using quantitative methods which are selected to focus on those dimensions¹¹². The advantage of the latter is, of

¹¹² For a detailed discussion of the various ways in which qualitative research (in the context of this discussion, the present method is perhaps more appropriately classified as qualitative than quantitative) may facilitate quantitative research, the reader is referred to Bryman (1988, ch.6).

course, that they enable one to sample more widely, thereby allowing differences between groups to be tested using inferential statistics.

(ii) Researcher involvement in the research setting

Experience with the use of the present method suggests that some involvement of the researcher in the research setting, prior to as well as during data collection, is highly desirable. The value of this can be argued on a number of grounds, including:

1. To the extent that the researcher is able to spend some time participating in the research setting and building a relationship with the people who may subsequently be included in the study, the more reliable the information generated by the research is likely to be. Of course, this argument is particularly applicable where one is seeking information of a personal and/or potentially sensitive nature. It was the researcher's impression that, in the present study, the relative absence of social desirability responding was due in part to the close and trusting relationship which had been established between the researcher and the research participants.

2. Involvement of the researcher in the research setting can provide valuable information about how the method might be adapted to make it more relevant to the particular context in which the research is to be carried out. The type of adaptation required might be quite simple and may involve little more than changing some of the language (terms) used in interview questions. Alternatively, if the aim of the research is to provide information that will facilitate the implementation and management of a particular change, then a more substantial adaptation involving, for example, a shift in the central focus of interviewing, may be required.

3. Knowledge of the research setting helps to ensure the selection of a suitable sample for study. The more time that the researcher is able to spend in the research setting, the better his/her knowledge of the setting is likely to be. In this sense, a flexible approach to sampling, whereby the identification of participants is gradual and depends on insight gained over time, and as the research unfolds, will enable one to gain maximum advantage from the time spent in the research setting.

4. Knowledge of the setting being studied facilitates the more accurate interpretation of the data that are gathered. It can also provide insights into the extent to which trends which emerge in the data may reflect more general characteristics of the group as a whole.

Clearly, there will be a number of practical considerations which will influence how much time the researcher is able to spend becoming familiar with the research setting. For example: (i) time constraints may be imposed by the participating organisation; (ii) if the research is being carried out in conjunction with a change effort, the time scale for the change may set the limits; and (iii) the researcher is likely to have other commitments which will influence how much time (s)he can devote to the research. These considerations aside, given that research using the present method is concerned with understanding aspects of an organisation's (group's) deeper-level culture, it would be desirable, in the author's opinion, for researchers using the method to try to negotiate a period of involvement in the research setting of around two to three months. Moreover, this involvement should, ideally, be continuous (say, two to three days per week) rather than intermittent. In the event that this 'ideal' is unable to be realised, one's attitude should be that a period of say two weeks continuous involvement of the researcher in the research setting is still preferable to no involvement whatsoever.

(iii) Personality and skill requirements of the researcher

The point has been made previously (see Section 7.2.2, p. 481) that a researcher using the present method should ideally have some basic interviewing skills, as well as be the kind of person who has a genuine curiosity about, and interest in, the lives and experiences of others. Given the semi-structured nature of interviewing in the present method and the requirement that each respondent be asked the same basic set of questions (presented in approximately the same sequence), it is not necessary for the researcher to have the kind of sophisticated interviewing skills (developed through long experience) required for entirely open-ended and unstructured interviewing. At the same time, however, the simple mechanical presentation of interview questions is unlikely to contribute to the development of a climate for interviewing in which respondents will willingly elaborate on, and qualify, their responses. In this sense, the researcher might be expected to possess at least some of the skills required for good qualitative interviewing, in particular, the ability to establish rapport, effective two-way communication skills, and knowing when to probe for more information (whether for the purpose of clarification, elaboration etc.).

While the success of the present method does not require the researcher to be highly experienced and skilled in the art of interviewing, it is important that, over a period of some time spent in the research organisation, the researcher is able to establish and

maintain a positive relationship with the people (including organisational gatekeepers, participants in the research etc.) with whom (s)he will be associated during the course of carrying out the research. As suggested above, this is because, among other things, the aim of the research is to understand deeper-level and potentially sensitive aspects of organisation member experience. It is beyond the scope of the present discussion to provide a detailed account of the various practical issues involved in building and maintaining a positive research relationship in the context of research carried out in organisations. This is a subject which has received considerable attention in the literature on management and organisational research and it is appropriate, therefore, to refer the reader to sources such as Bryman (1988) and Easterby-Smith et al. (1991). Suffice to say that some of the skill and personality characteristics which will help to ensure the researcher's success in this regard will be:

- i) as above, an interest in, and curiosity about, the lives and experiences of others;
- ii) considerable interpersonal sensitivity;
- iii) good communication skills and an ability to respond empathically;
- iv) an awareness of ethical issues and a commitment to protecting the interests of participants in the research; and
- v) an ability to maintain a stance of impartiality and neutrality (ie. a commitment to ensuring that one's own biases and prejudices do not unduly influence the research process).

7.4 Suggestions for future research

The results of Study III (along with insights obtained from the other studies conducted as part of this research) suggest a number of interesting possibilities for future research. Each of these is described below and, as will be seen, each is concerned with providing information which will, in some way, contribute to our understanding of how best to go about measuring, or surfacing, culture in organisations. In other words, the main focus of these various research 'ideas' is on methodological issues. Three different types of studies are suggested, namely, (i) those which might be conducted using the existing data set (ie. the Study III data set); (ii) those which involve collecting additional data using the present method (ie. the method developed for use in Study III); and (iii) those in which data collection involves the use of some of other measure(s) of organisational culture/climate, either alone or in combination with the present method.

7.4.1 Research using the existing data set

1. In the present study, the approach to data analysis has been to aggregate individual responses to specific questions and then to look for any commonalities which emerge in these responses. One of the main problems with this approach, as suggested by the results of the study, is that it is not sensitive to intra-individual inconsistency. In other words, it does not pick up on inconsistencies between an individual's responses to specific questions and the overall pattern of responding for that individual. Such an approach is also somewhat limited when it comes to dealing with inter-individual differences, such as, differences between respondents in their interpretations of specific questions, and differences with respect to the amount of information that respondents provide (eg. some respondents might mention many differences between, say, their current and their 'other' organisation, whilst other respondents might mention only a few). The point has been made previously that a possible alternative approach to data analysis, which may help to overcome some of these problems, would be to adopt as the unit of analysis, the individual rather than the response. This would involve analysing the overall pattern of responding for each respondent, and then grouping respondents based upon the similarities which emerge (a kind of qualitative equivalent of a cluster analysis in quantitative research). Such an approach may be culturally more sensitive than the present approach in the sense of providing a clearer indication of both the degree of 'sharedness' of the group's culture and the extent to which different sub-cultures are supported within the group. The value of such an approach could be explored empirically by conducting a re-analysis of the existing Study III data set.

2. The present study provided some evidence that groups for organisational culture research might usefully be delineated in terms of similarities which emerge in respondents' subjective (as opposed to chronological) histories. An interesting study for future research would, therefore, be to conduct a more systematic analysis of the existing 'time-line' data (ie. the data pertaining to respondent perceptions of changes which have occurred from the past to the present, the timing of these changes, and the duration of the 'no change' periods prior to the onset of change). The aim would be to group those individuals who shared similar 'time-line' data (with respect to the same changes of course) and then to examine the extent to which the resultant groupings were meaningful in other respects (eg. homogeneous in terms of group member attitudes, their way of talking about particular issues, their notions of the 'ideal' etc.). An

alternative to this approach would, of course, be to use the present method solely for the purpose of delineating the groups for study. Having done this, one could then use a more superficial, and hence practical (with respect to data collection and analysis) measure of organisational culture (say, a norm indicator), to examine whether or not there were significant 'cultural' differences between these groups.

3. As suggested previously in this chapter (see Section 7.2.4, pp. 511-512), the study of attributions may constitute a very fruitful area for organisational culture research in the future. Attributions may provide clues as to the strength of an organisation's culture (a high degree of 'sharedness' in members' causal attributions may be indicative of a strong culture) and also to the content of the culture (ie. the particular beliefs and assumptions which it supports). With respect to the latter, it can be argued that organisation member attributions may be culturally determined such that certain kinds of cultures may give rise to particular attributions or attributional 'styles'. This argument closely parallels Moscovici's (1984) argument in the social representations literature that representations (ie. shared ways of knowing) determine the nature of the attributions that people make. If attributional 'style' is culturally determined, then one might expect that attributional data would constitute a valuable source of information from which inferences about an organisation's underlying culture might be made.

While the study of attributions has traditionally been concerned with individual perceptions of causality (Greenberg and Baron, 1995), there is now a sizeable body of research in which the focus is on organisational (ie. collectively realised) attributions (see, for example, Bettman & Weitz, 1983; Salancik & Meindl, 1984; Smircich & Stubbart, 1985). However, as far as this author is aware, there have been no studies of organisational culture which have sought to understand culture through the analysis of shared attributions. A useful starting point in this regard might be to conduct a more sophisticated analysis of the attributional data contained within the existing data set. The reader is reminded that the analysis of these data which has been conducted thus far has been fairly rudimentary. The focus has been on one set of attributions only, namely, those associated with changes (whether experienced or anticipated) that respondents have reported, and these attributions have been analysed in terms of a single dimension only (ie. a Proactive/Reactive dimension). Future research might, therefore, explore the possibility of reanalysing these attributions using a more sophisticated coding system. It might be possible, for example, to adapt an existing system such as the Leeds

Attributional Coding System (LACS) – developed by Stratton, Munton, Hanks, Heard, and Davidson (1988) for use primarily in a family therapy context – for use with the present data set. The LACS provides for the classification of attributions in terms of five bi-polar dimensions: (i) Stable/Unstable; (ii) Global/Specific; (iii) Internal/External; (iv) Personal/Universal; and (v) Controllable/Uncontrollable. One advantage of a reanalysis of this kind is that it would enable richer and more detailed comparisons of respondent attributions (both within and between divisions) to be made. The classification of a large number of attributions in this way¹¹³ would also enable one to test the hypothesis that each division supported its own unique ‘style’ of attributing cause.

Finally, one might extend the analysis to look at *all* of the attributional data contained within the Study III data set. In other words, rather than just focus on attributions associated with specific changes (these were made in response to the standardised ‘Why?’ questions), one could also look at spontaneously generated attributional data. It might be interesting, for example, to conduct a more systematic analysis of respondent explanations for why the workers in their division did, or did not, participate in particular activities (such as training, information meetings, safety meetings etc.). The data for both divisions contained explanations for participation, such as, ‘It’s compulsory to attend’, and ‘They go in order to avoid work’, and explanations for non-participation, such as, ‘They have to do it in their own time’ and ‘They don’t get paid to attend’. To the extent that attributions of this kind can be shown to be widely shared among the members of a group, one might reasonably infer that the culture of the group supports predominantly Theory X (as opposed to Theory Y) beliefs about the nature of workers.

7.4.2 Research involving additional data collection with the present method

1. While it has been argued previously that researchers using the present method should ideally spend some time becoming familiar with the setting and subjects of their research (see Section 7.3.3, part (ii)), the question remains as to just how critical this might be to the effective use of the method. It would be interesting, therefore, to conduct a study comparing insights generated by the method when used with, and without, a period of researcher involvement in the research setting. Is it the case that the former are markedly more reliable and more in-depth than the latter? The point should

¹¹³ In the present study, separate analyses of attributions associated with each of the changes that were mentioned were carried out.

be made that a likely outcome of researcher involvement in the research setting, apart from improved rapport with research subjects, is that certain revisions may be made to questions in the interview protocol. Of course, this would need to be taken into account when comparing the results for the 'no involvement' group with those for the 'some involvement' group.

2. Given the possibility that researcher bias may influence the results of interviewing using the present method, a useful study for future research would be to compare the results of interviewing using a number of different interviewers. The subjects for such a study would need to be selected from a culturally homogeneous group and then allocated randomly for interviewing by different interviewers. One would also need to ensure that interviewers selected for participation in the study were similar with respect to the basic skill and personality requirements for carrying out research using the present method (see Section 7.3.3, part (iii)). To the extent that interviewing using different interviewers produced discrepant results, one might then go on to look more closely at what the possible sources of bias may have been. The author is unaware of any checks on this kind of reliability which have been carried out in relation to qualitative studies in the organisational literature.

3. The question of whether or not organisational cultures might be differentiated on the basis of contextual orientation (ie. whether they are more past-oriented, future-oriented etc.) is one that might readily be addressed through further research using the present method. As suggested previously in this chapter (see Section 7.2.3, pp. 509-511), the method could be used to test predictions about the likely dominant contextual orientation in a number of different kinds of organisations. Such a study might include: (i) a long-established, family-owned company with a stable workforce and operating in a relatively stable market (as an example of a company likely to have a strong past orientation); (ii) a high technology company (as an example of a company likely to have a strong future orientation); (iii) a management consulting firm (as an example of an 'other'-oriented organisation); and (iv) a government department concerned with policy development in some area of, say, social or workplace reform (as an example of an 'ideal'-oriented organisation). The finding that different kinds of organisations did in fact support different contextual orientations would not only serve to validate the inclusion, in the present method, of a focus on these different aspects of context, but it would also raise important questions about the traditional conceptualisation of

organisational culture as being determined largely by an organisation's past. Of course, one might also find that, within a given organisation, there may be different contextual orientations to different issues. For example, an organisation may be future-oriented in its thinking about technology, but past-oriented in its thinking about, say, the role of workers. As a consequence, new technology, which could be used to enrich the role of workers, might be used in such a way as to reduce workers' autonomy further¹¹⁴.

Related to the arguments in point 4. above, the present method might also be used to look more closely at the influence of occupational or professional sub-cultures. In Section 7.2.3 (p. 511), it was suggested that a possible implication of contemporary changes in the world of work, such as, the increasing mobility of the workforce (Naisbitt & Auberdene, 1990), is that the conditions required for organisation members to develop a significant shared history may be increasingly unlikely to exist. As such, organisational cultures may become increasingly diffuse and, in some organisations, the influence of occupational, or professional, sub-cultures may come to dominate. One might even predict a kind of 'shifting' culture in organisations in which the representation of different occupational, or professional, sub-cultural groupings is subject to change.

A possible study for future research in this area would be to use the present method to investigate the relative influence of organisational culture as opposed to occupational, or professional, sub-culture. One might do this by selecting two organisations (ideally, with different organisational cultures) each of which had, in recent years, experienced the entry of a particular occupational or professional group, say, computer technicians. The study would involve the analysis and comparison of the cultures of four groups: two groups of computer technicians (one from each organisation) and two groups drawn from the general membership of each organisation. Ideally, subjects selected for participation in the study should be similar with respect to tenure. If it was found that the two computing sub-cultures had more in common with each other than either did with its respective 'organisational' culture, then one might conclude that, in this case, the influence of professional sub-culture was stronger than the influence of organisational culture. An obvious practical implication of such a finding would be the

¹¹⁴ The reader is referred to Zuboff's (1988) argument that many computer and information technologies can be used either to 'automate' or 'informate' aspects of work operations. The former involves replacing human skills, whereas the latter requires the development of new skills and competencies.

importance for managers to develop a good understanding of the cultures of the various occupational or professional groups which are represented in their organisation.

4. Another interesting study for future research would be to use the present method to explore the degree of insight which the members at one level of an organisation's hierarchy (say, managers) have into the experience (or culture) of members at another level of the organisation's hierarchy (say, workers). It will be remembered that the focus of interviewing in Study III was on the 'role of workers', that is, what workers do. As an extension to this study, it might be interesting to compare workers' perceptions of their own role with managers' perceptions of the role of workers and also with managers' expectations about how workers would be likely to see their own role. Alternatively, one could compare managers' perceptions of their own role with workers' perceptions of the role of managers and also with workers' expectations about how managers would be likely to see their own role. The finding that there were marked discrepancies between these different sets of perceptions and expectations may have important cultural implications. For example, if it was found that managers had very little insight into how workers perceived their own role or, alternatively, that workers had very little insight into how managers perceived their own role, then one might expect that a change effort which required for its success a change in the role of either workers or managers would be likely to encounter some problems. An important initial step in implementing such a change may be to identify, and seek to correct, misperceptions of this kind.

5. It has been suggested above (see Section 7.3.2) that the present method might be most valuably used as a tool for understanding organisational change. A possible study which might go some way towards validating this claim would be to investigate the sensitivity of the method to changes in organisation member experience (perceptions, attitudes etc.) which might occur over time as a result of the implementation of a particular organisational change. In such a study, interviewing might be conducted before, during, and after the implementation of the change.

7.4.3 Research involving data collection with other measures, alone or in combination with the present method

1. Another study with essentially the same objective as the study proposed in point 5. above (namely, to validate the use of the method as a tool for understanding organisational change), would be to investigate the relative strengths of a number of

different methods for assessing organisational culture (including the present method) in terms of their ability to provide information likely to be of value for understanding organisational change. The methods selected for review might include: (i) unstructured interviewing; (ii) interviewing using the present method; and (iii) a questionnaire measure such as the Organisational Culture Inventory (OCI) (Cooke & Lafferty, 1986). A possible approach would be to collect data, using each of these methods, just prior to the implementation of some change. Then, on the basis of the results obtained, one might try to predict how the change will proceed – its likely outcome (whether successful or unsuccessful), the kinds of resistance likely to be encountered etc. These predictions could then be compared with the actual experience and outcome of the change. Given that the results of research using each of the different methods could not be made available to the participating organisation prior to the implementation of change, one might anticipate some difficulty in getting access to an organisation for the purpose of conducting a study such as this. While access is unlikely to be granted in the context of a major organisational change effort, it may however be able to be negotiated if the change in question is a relatively minor change.

2. It is possible that the present method might valuably be used in combination with an existing, more structured, measure for organisational culture (such as, the OCI). Two alternative approaches can be suggested here. First, one might use the present method to identify those issues (aspects of experience etc.) which are most salient to group members. A more structured approach could then be used to conduct a wider investigation of these issues (ie. an investigation involving a more representative sample of the organisation's membership). Second, one might use the more structured approach for the initial identification of key dimensions, after which the present method could be used to explore these dimensions 'in-depth', as well as to clarify any inconsistencies in the data generated by the former.

3. The results of Study III provided some interesting insights into the kinds of questions that might be asked in order to obtain a deeper-level (as opposed to more superficial) understanding of organisation member experience. For example, questions seeking clarification of the meaning of responses, questions asking respondents to elaborate on their responses, and questions asking respondents to comment on their attitudes toward particular events (changes etc.) emerged as being important in this regard. A useful study for future research would be to look at the extent to which

existing quantitative measures of organisational culture (which can be criticised on the grounds that they offer only superficial insights into culture) might benefit from the addition of questions such as these. A possible approach would be to compare the quality of the information generated by a measure such as the OCI, administered in its current form and administered with revisions (ie. with the addition of questions of the kind suggested above). For one group, the revisions could be presented in the context of a face-to-face interview, conducted after respondents had completed the questionnaire, and for another group, they could simply be written into the existing questionnaire format. While one might predict that the OCI (or other questionnaire measure) followed by interviewing would produce the best results, it may be that a simple written adaptation of the measure could also result in markedly better (ie. richer, more in-depth) information being generated than that provided by the measure in its current form.

4. Another potentially useful area for future research, as suggested by insights obtained from Study III, would be to look more closely at the importance of understanding meaning in the analysis of organisational culture. One study that might be conducted in this regard would be to select items from an existing questionnaire measure, such as the OCI, and to ask members at different levels of an organisation (eg. managers, supervisors, and workers) to describe how they interpret these items. The finding that there were marked differences in the interpretations of members at these different levels may have important cultural implications which one might subsequently investigate more closely. Of course, to the extent that marked interpretive differences did emerge (whether between or within the membership at these different levels), one would also have to address the methodological implications of such a finding. This is because an important assumption underlying the use of measures such as the OCI is that respondents' interpretations of the items in these measures will be the same and, moreover, that they will be consistent with the interpretations intended by the researcher.

5. One final possibility for future research, as suggested by insights obtained from Study III, would be to look more closely at the extent to which organisation members' individual experience with respect to any given issue, is consistent with their evaluation of (and attitude toward) that issue at a more general, organisational level. An important finding of Study III was that respondents could hold negative attitudes towards some aspect of organisational life in general (eg. the communication climate which prevailed

in their division as a whole), whilst at the same time describe their individual experience in relation to that aspect of organisation life (eg. the communication relationship which they had with their own supervisor(s)) in very positive terms. As suggested, a possible 'cultural' explanation for this incongruity may be that organisation member perceptions of the 'general' may continue to be influenced by the residual effects of past experience, even after the implementation of certain changes (the initial impact of which may be registered at an individual or 'specific' level only) which may challenge those perceptions.

Given that questionnaire measures of organisational culture typically ask about the 'general', rather than the 'specific' (for example, in the Norms Diagnostic Index (Allen & Dyer, 1980) each item begins with 'It is a norm around here...'), it would be interesting to conduct a study in which, following the administration of a culture questionnaire, respondents were asked to comment on their individual experience with respect to each of the core dimensions being tapped by the questionnaire. If the study was conducted in the context of a recently introduced change, one might anticipate that the experience of change may be reflected in the finding that, on a number of dimensions and for a significant number of respondents, there were discrepancies between these two sets of data. It is also possible that discrepancies of this kind might alert one to the existence of sub-cultural differences which would be unlikely to be detected using measures in which the unit of analysis is the organisation as a whole.

7.5 A concluding comment

In conclusion, this thesis has hopefully taken some first steps towards the development of a method for investigating organisational culture which, on the one hand, is capable of accessing deeper-level cultural beliefs and assumptions and, on the other, is more practically useful than traditional ethnographic approaches. While the method proposed clearly requires further development in order to achieve the aims envisaged for it, it is this researcher's firm conviction that efforts towards this further development – of the kind suggested by some of the above proposals for future research – would constitute a worthwhile endeavour. At the present time, our capacity to understand organisational culture is limited by the constraints of the methods available. On the one hand, there are quantitative measures which can provide insights into the surface elements of culture only and which are, therefore, of questionable value for informing our understanding of important organisational issues, such as organisational

change. On the other hand, there are qualitative measures which can provide 'rich' descriptions of organisational culture, but which provide no means whereby systematic comparisons (for example, of the cultures of different organisations or of culture in the same organisation over time) can be made. The hope is that the further development of methods such as that proposed will lead to a useful alternative to existing approaches, and will serve as the kind of methodological advance that scholars, such as, Ott (1989) and Reichers and Schneider (1990) believe is needed in order for the organisational culture perspective to achieve maturity.



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