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THE PART-TIME SOUL: CASE STUDIES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF CULTURE AND FLEXIBILITY IN IRISH RETAIL

BY

Roland Tormey BSocSc

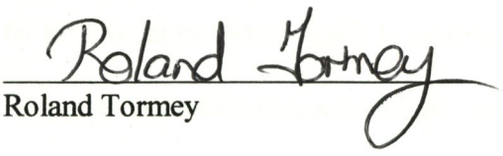
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SUMMARY

Post-modern organisational analysis claims to have identified a post-modern organisational form. This new organisational form is alleged to be non-bureaucratic, flexible, opaque in organisation and to involve the management of culture and identity. This research project assessed the likelihood that such organisational forms could exist by looking at potential conflicts between different aspects of such an organisational form. The question which this research set out address was: what is the interaction between the management of culture and the management of flexibility in commercial organisations? It is possible to identify two ways in which different types of flexibility may limit the capacity of a company to manage culture. On one hand, the mobilisation of certain types of flexibility is likely to give rise to changes in the material situation of a firm's employees. This may mean shorter or different working hours, or less take home pay. Whether or not this can be reconciled with the management of culture is not something that can simply be asserted (as the post-modernists do) or denied (as the materialists do). It is an empirical question that must be subject to empirical analysis. On the other hand, it is possible that the mobilisation of certain types of flexibility may lead to fragmentation of a firm's employees into self-contained groups who have little contact with each other, and who share little with each other by way of knowledge and values. This moving mosaic organisational form may also be difficult to reconcile with the management of culture. This too is a question that must be addressed empirically. These are not questions which have been adequately addressed in Ireland or internationally. As Rosenthal *et al.* note: "to date there has been more attention to theoretical critique and argument than to substantiation of these positions. More fundamentally, there is a lack of good quality empirical data on *employee's experiences* of these initiatives, a gap that limits understanding regardless of research perspective (italics in original) (1997: 489).

I carried out three cases studies of medium to large retail concerns in Ireland. The primary methods of data collection and analysis were qualitative, though in order to ensure the capacity for data triangulation, data was collected in the form of semi-structured interviews with management and with staff, focus group interviews, surveys and documentation. National level data from Central Statistics Office surveys was also used to help locate the case studies within a broader context. I looked at the retail trade since retail is an example of a loose labour market/tight product market situation and since retail is one of the largest sectors of the Irish economy employing over 11 per cent of the population.

I identified that the material effects of flexibility do give rise to what Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977) would term a 'necessary' limit on the management of culture in the case studies. I also identified that the fragmentation effects of flexibility were also discernible in all case studies. However it was possible to identify that one case study was far more successful at managing culture than the other two. This was due to the highly bureaucratised organisational form practising what Foucault has termed techniques of discipline, particularly "hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification" (1977: 220). However, given the fundamental nature of the profit/cost discourse and given the fact that the subject (i.e., the employee) is always active within the techniques of discipline, the company's success is always partial. Therefore I conclude that there are unsustainable tensions between flexibility and cultural management and that the reports of the demise of the bureaucratic organisation are greatly exaggerated.

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

> Stretching above the organizational base of Fordist enterprises was a pyramid of control, designed in a classically bureaucratic fashion. At its apex this radiated from the product division to the central organs of calculation and control. In the pyramid of control, according to both the formal theory and the practical application of it in organisational design, authority would reside in individuals by virtue of their incumbency in office and/or expertise. These offices would be organised hierarchically, with compliance being to superordinate instruction expressed in terms of universal fixed rules. . .Organisational responses to [changes in the economy] became evident in the 1980s and it is in order to explicate these that the concept of postmodern organizations has been coined (Clegg, 1990: 178 - 180).

Post-modernity, Identity Management and Flexibility

The quintessential symbol of modernity was the bureaucratic organisation. It is, perhaps, no surprise then, that the supposed advent of a period called post-modernity should be heralded by the obituary notices of bureaucracy. Central to the social trends which are referred to as post-modernity is the passing of bureaucracy as we know it - a hierarchical, pyramidal organisational form, characterised by clarity of rules and regulation, and promotion according to clearly laid out criteria - and its replacement by a post-modern organisational form (Clegg, 1990).

Central also to this new post-modernist project is the management of identity. As Hargreaves notes "Postmodernity brings changes not only in *what* we experience, in our organisations and institutions, but also in *how* we experience, in our fundamental sense of self and identity" (1994:69). If, as Lash suggests, (1988) post-modernity can be understood as a process of de-differentiation of the social world, then perhaps even the key unit of humanism - the self - can become de-differentiated from the world around it as the boundaries between the self and the surrounding world are broken down (Giddens,

1991). In sociology in general, a move towards post-structuralism opens identity up to examination and makes it a focus of research (du Gay, 1996:1). In organisations too, change is said to be afoot; in management studies it is claimed that the perennial question of obtaining the worker's consent to be managed can be addressed through the management of the worker's identity. As Edwards (1979) noted, the modern company does not just want the worker's labour. It wants the worker's soul.

It is not the first time that writers have claimed to have detected a shift in the nature of society. Marx built his material conception of history on the idea that there were fractures in history as western societies moved from, for example, feudalism into capitalism. Future fractures could be expected as capitalism gave was to socialism and to communism. In fact, some of the prophets of post-modernism take Marx as their benchmark, arguing that "much of what Marx says finds clear parallels in the transformation of the organisation of production which is part of the process of postmodernization" (Crooks *et al.*, 1992:169). It seems the process of de-differentiation is not applied to human history as a very modernist process of differentiation and separation of historical eras is carried out by those who trumpet the death of just such a project!

While some of the prophets of post-modernity are rigorous in their approach, many use the term as a way of disguising their lack of rigour as prophecy. It would be a mistake, for example, to assume that Crook *et al.*, (1992), or even figures as respected as Hargreaves (1994) or Clegg (1990) have subjected their ideas to a rigorous test for counter-factual evidence. Some are downright confused in their analysis. Clegg, for example presents Foucault as one of the icons of post-modernity (1990: 15) while failing

to realise that Foucault's conception of disciplinary power is profoundly modernist and prefaced on the bureaucratic model of organisation. Overall, it is far from clear if there is any value - other than the material value which accrues to academics who write about 'new' phenomena - in any of the focus on post-modernity. It is my contention that the current view of post-modern organisations is wrong in at least one key respect. The literature suggests that the management of identity and a destruction of traditional hierarchical bureaucratic organisation in favour of a shifting and opaque organisational form (Clegg, 1990; Toffler, 1990) which uses staff and skills in a flexible way (Hargreaves, 1994; Crooks *et al.*, 1992) are both part of the same process of post-modernisation or de-differentiation. There are good grounds for arguing that these two processes are mutually exclusive and therefore cannot be understood as being part of the same process. This is the empirical question with which this research deals.

Underlying this question is a concern with the relationship between social structure and identity. Traditionally, sociology has tended to view identity as a function of social location, whether this was location in a cultural group (for Structural-Functionalism) or class location (for Marxism). Both these traditions tended to operate quite separately from action-based perspectives which were often regarded as vaguely un-sociological because of their failure to deal with issues of social structure. While there was some concern in Structural-Functionalism for the identity of the worker (e.g., Mayo [1933]), it was primarily within the Marxist tradition that the relationship between identity and work was problematic. For Marx, the state of the worker under capitalism was a state of alienation. He noted that "Labour's realisation is its objectification. Under these economic conditions [i.e., under capitalism] this realisation of labour appears as *loss of realisation* for the workers; objectification as *loss of the object and bondage to it*;

appropriation as *estrangement, as alienation*" (italics in original) (Marx, 1959:63). Given this fact - and for Marx it was an objective scientific fact - how did one account for the lack of a proletarian revolution?

Marx's followers ascribed the lack of a proletarian revolution to an ideological stranglehold - a hegemony - which was exercised by the ruling classes and the 'intellectuals' who operated on their behalf. This particular formulation was put forward by the Italian writer Antonio Gramsci who argued that the state and civil society, controlled by intellectuals of the capitalist class, secured this ideological hegemony. Gramsci saw competing forces as being engaged in a war of position - a continual battle for hearts and minds. Various strategies could be employed by either side, therefore, for Gramsci, any description of the control strategies employed by the agents of capitalism was historically specific. Like Marx, Gramsci was given to the identification of historical epochs, and saw a new epoch being born in the United States of America during the period of his writing (1926 - 1936), an epoch he referred to as Fordism.

For Gramsci, Fordism was unique in the way it had made production the centre of society. For him this was possible because of an absence of the "viscous parasitic sedimentations left behind by past phases of history", such as a non-productive aristocracy. He continues:

> Since these preliminary conditions existed, already rendered rational by historical evolution, it was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour by a skilful combination of force (destruction of working class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. Hegemony is born here in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries. (1971: 285)

Although under Fordism hegemony is born in the factory - that is, the maintenance of the alienated identity of the worker happens mainly at the point of production - Gramsci goes on to note that the precise manner in which this is to happen cannot be deduced at the time of writing. Burawoy (1979) laments this failure on Gramsci's part and attempts to fill the gap by identifying the processes through which consent to be managed is obtained by the employers. In the machine shop which he studied, these processes were (a) an internal labour market, (b) an internal state and (c) game playing by the workers.

Although Burawoy's account was and is a significant contribution to Labour Process studies, the advent of post-structuralism in sociology has now overtaken his analysis to some extent. The death of the grand-narrative or meta-narrative (Lyotard, 1984) made its way into sociology, allowing Knights to write that the problem with Burawoy is that like Marx he has a "tendency to fall back on an essentialist theory of human nature . . . he assumes that the absence of conditions through which to express 'the potentiality of the human species' is experienced as a deprivation for which compensation must be sought by constituting work 'as a game'. In other words he defines what it means to be a person, first and foremost, through the activity of creative labour" (1990: 311). For Knights, as for Davies (1990), Collinson (1992) and du Gay (1996) identities other than class identities must also be recognised. These writers also argue that the role of the individual in the constitution of their own identity has been insufficiently understood.

Here lies the perennial tension in sociology: the San Andrea fault that runs through the relationship between structure and action. A focus on identity is too individualist for the structuralists, a focus on structure is to modernist for the post-structuralists. Those who scout this terrain without adequate conceptual tools are likely to slip. This can be seen in

the work of du Gay who tends towards individualism and simply notes of social structure that its effects are complex and ambiguous. Such regualities and social groupings will be fleeting and transitory, he says. With this, any serious discussion of the way in which social structure gives rise to regularities in practice is forestalled. Du Gay also claims that one should not emphasise the traditionally "privileged site of management/worker relations" (1996: 156) in search of regular patterns of social action.

While it makes absolute sense to expect that the action of the subject will be informed by a variety of different structuring factors some of which may operate in contradictory ways, it is fair to ask if du Gay has gone too far. Certainly he is at odds with Gramsci's contention that within the workplace at least, the identity and the sense of identification which the employee develops is likely to be influenced by workplace factors and that central to these factors is the employer/employee relationship. The work/pay nexus, embodied in the employer/employee relationship, is a specific type of relationship which is central to the organisation of the workplace in capitalist companies. Therefore the question of how identity and identification relates to the employee's consent to be managed is one that is likely to be, as Gramsci suggests, mediated primarily at the location of this nexus: usually the workplace.

The work/pay nexus can be constituted in a number of different forms, one of which involves the use of employee flexibility by employers. Like cultural management, flexibility is one of the pillars of the post-modern organisation. In fact, the coherence of post-modern organisational analysis depends on both flexibility and cultural management being compatible. Therefore, both the coherence of post-modern organisational analysis and the role of the material world in post-structuralist analysis can be addressed

empirically in an analysis of the relationship between flexibility and the management of identity in contemporary workplace organisations. If we look at the management of identity in a situation in which flexibility is mobilised in a fashion which affects the material situation of employees (through low pay, flexible working hours, reduced security etc.) we can identify the ways in which these two factors inter-relate. We can identify if the material relationship between employer and employee places a barrier on the limits of the management of identity, if it needs to be mobilised in certain ways in order to manage identity or if the two are unrelated. In short, we can see if the company can get the worker's soul part-time.

In this respect a study of the relationship between the management of identity and flexibility in the capitalist workplace can address two related issues which are central to the concerns of contemporary sociology. First, it provides a means of identifying if one can meaningfully talk about post-modern organisations in the manner which is now in vogue. This in turn sheds considerable light on the sort of *fin de millénaire* futurology which claims to identify a shift in society towards a form identified as post-modern. Second, it can help us start to identify if there are material issues being ignored in some of the contemporary philosophically idealist writing on workplace identity. It allows us to see if there are issues deriving from the material conditions of the work/pay nexus in capitalist societies which need to be taken into account.

Content and Organisation

This thesis looks at the relationship between attempts to manage identity in the workplace and a number of different aspects of relationships in three medium or large Irish retail concerns. In particular I focus on pay and conditions of work, numerical

flexibility, and management strategies such as communications, training and career development. In Chapter two I review the existing literature on the areas of Human Resources Management (HRM), the management of culture, sociological conceptions of identity and group identification. This chapter shows that there are a number of gaps in the literature on workplace identity, gaps which can be addressed through a post-structuralist reading of identity. Some of the available work is methodologically or conceptually flawed. Nor does the literature address the key issue of the relationship between flexibility and the management of identity. Furthermore, in Ireland, we have very little of the sort of organisational ethnography which could meaningfully address these issues.

Chapter three identifies the methodology used in the study. It shows the value of a case study methodology and identifies the key elements which enable case study research to be done productively. Chapter four identifies the context of the research. It introduces the story of Irish retail and the stories of its heroes and villains. It identifies and describes the pressures which ensure that the retail trade is a perfect test case for the management of identity. Chapter four is also concerned with mapping out the context of the research. It produces the results of the macro element of this study - a description of the retail trade and its workforce, based on an analysis of a number of the available national level surveys. It then describes the case study stores and their context.

Chapter five begins the presentation of the data from the case studies by looking at the management's view of the management of culture and identity in the stores. It looks at the relationship between bureaucracy, clarity and organisational management in the work of the managers. It shows that in all three stores the management were interested in the

management of identity. Given the level and nature of management training in the stores, this in itself is an interesting finding. It details the management's view of the constraints and opportunities to the management of culture which are posed by material issues and it identifies the way in which they seek to use key levers of HRM such as communication, training and career development in the management of culture and identity.

Chapters six and seven present the data on the staff in the case study stores. Chapter six looks at the forces for division within the stores. Material factors are an important constraint to the management of identity, operating as a necessary limit on the extent to which the staff identify with the management. The fragmentation effects of part-time and short-term work are also a factor, causing the disintegration of the staff into small groups whose members identify with each other and share common understandings amongst themselves. Chapter seven looks at a number of factors which have been identified as useful to companies in the management of culture. The key themes here are clarity and bureaucracy, the involvement of the staff within the processes of identity management, and the extent to which the staff are provided with a means to constitute themselves within their work. Chapter eight concludes by summarising the main findings of the case studies. It identifies that the tensions between the processes of flexibility and identity management throw into question the possibility that both are processes which can be said to be working in tandem in the development of post-modern organisations.

CHAPTER TWO - THE LAND THAT TIME FORGOT

Introduction

A lot has been written about post-modernity, much of it nonsense. While some authors have tried to be coherent in their approach, others have used post-modernity as an excuse for disguising a lack of rigorous thought as prophesy. This is particularly true in relation to the post-modern prophets of profit in management studies. In this chapter I map a passage through some of this area. Having briefly defined the main terms of the chapter, I look at the literature on post-modern society and particularly on the changes which are said to be taking place in the workplace. From there I will turn to the literature on the more rigorous end of post-modern management prophesy, Human Resources Management (HRM). I will explore the definitions of cultural management and flexibility in more detail and show that the way in which flexibility and cultural management interacts is an important topic for empirical exploration.

Since the way in which culture is understood and measured is a good deal more contentious than the understanding of flexibility, I will then return to that theme. I will show that, in order to concretise the demands of the post-modernist HRM, writers in this field tend to rely on highly modernist understandings of culture and organisations rather than the more compatible models of organisation found in post-structuralist organisational analysis. In this respect, much of the literature on the management of culture seems to exist in a world in which the last thirty years of sociological debate did not happen - the land that time forgot. Finally I will return to the empirical literature on HRM, flexibility and cultural management and identify a number of gaps in that literature.

The issue which is central to this chapter is whether or not culture can be successfully managed in a flexible environment. Both cultural management and flexibility are central to the post-modern project. Both are key elements within the major modern movement in Personnel Management - HRM. Yet despite their importance at a theoretical level, important empirical questions remain to be answered about their relationship with each other in practice.

Definition of Terms

The terms which are at the centre of this research, HRM, cultural management, and flexibility are all contested terms. In the course of this chapter I will deal with each of them in some detail. Therefore at this stage I will simply offer a cursory definition of each term, a definition which will be elaborated upon and explored later in this chapter. By HRM I mean a movement in management practice and management studies which focuses on attempts to gain increased profit through the implementation of four key goals: strategic integration, commitment, flexibility/adaptability and quality (Guest, 1987). By cultural management I mean attempts by managers and owners of companies to realise two of these goals, commitment and quality, through the management of the identity and culture of the workforce. By flexibility I mean numerical flexibility (such as that achieved through the use of short-term or part-time work), functional flexibility (such as that achieved through training of employees and the use of team working) and financial flexibility (such as that achieved by the previous two kinds of flexibility as well as through pay variation and individualised contracts). Since I am interested in the interaction between flexibility and cultural management I am particularly interested in two of the possible effects of flexibility - effects which may be logically thought to

impinge on the management of culture. These are: the effect on the material conditions of employees such as through the use of part-time or short-term work, non-fixed working schedules and low pay; and the social effects on the company's culture due to the limiting of the amount of time employees spend in work because of the use of part-time or short-term work.

Post-modernity and Work

In his review of writings on post-modernity and work, Andy Hargreaves identifies seven different themes which are key to the post-modern project. They are: flexible economies; globalisation; the death of certainties; the moving mosaic as an organisational form; the self and identity; safe simulation; and compression of time and space (1994: 47). Each of these are said to be a process or series of processes which are currently in operation and which are shaping a new post-modern working world. While Hargeaves expends much effort looking at the paradoxes within each of these key themes, he does not address the issue of the relationship between them. Whether each one can be said to constitute a jigsaw piece which together create a bigger picture, or whether each can be said to be a different process going in a different direction to at least some of the others, is not a question he raises. In this he is not alone. Within studies of work more generally, the possibilities for paradoxical processes (and the effects of these paradoxes in practice) have not been the focus of the attention they deserve. One such possibility for paradox arises with the twin themes of flexibility and the management of culture and identity. On one hand it is argued that it is possible to manage people's culture (indeed, their very identity) to get them to identify with, and therefore commit themselves to, the firm and its good. On the other hand it is argued that the new workplace will be characterised by all the types of flexibility noted above. Such flexibility is sometimes said to exist within

an organisational pattern characterised as a moving mosaic. Where such flexibility means a material change for employees, the possibility of reconciling it with cultural management depends on the extent to which the management can successfully re-define for employees their view of their material situation. The employees will have to come to define low pay, or less favourable working conditions as a good thing, and they will have to do this in a situation in which they spend less time in the company and have less contact with management and other staff. Perhaps the best expression of this view is the 'tough love' philosophy. In its most extreme case, management could seek to define loss of one's job, not as a betrayal, but as an example of the firm's love for its employees. After all, a good parent does not just exhibit 'soft care' for his or her children. That would make them slovenly. A good parent will always show love, even when it is tough on the, as yet, untutored child:

> People need to be developed, but this will not be achieved by treating them with soft care, by allowing issues to be smoothed over without being properly addressed. To treat people without care will cause them and, therefore the business, to diminish. Experience suggests that the needs of people and the business will be best met if we treat ourselves with 'tough love' . . . It is very easy to forget when endeavouring to develop people and to care for them, and even to love them, that the needs of the business must come first. Without that, there can be no lasting security. A fool's paradise in which effort is concentrated only on the present well being of the staff, without regard for the future, will eventually disintegrate and it may well be the staff that suffer most. (Quoted in Legge, 1995a: 89).

While this separation of material 'reality' from its commonplace meaning goes to the heart of the break between modernity and post-modernity, the practical functioning of this break in everyday workplaces has not been explored to a sufficient extent. Even when it has been explored there are difficulties. While much of the normative literature which outlines what should be done is couched in post-modern terms making post-modernist assumptions much of the empirical research tends to fall back on very

modernist understandings of culture, of identity and of commitment. This is among the key gaps in the literature which this research project addresses.

Human Resources Management

Within the literature on workplaces much of the work promoting both flexibility and cultural management comes within the Human Resources Management (HRM) literature. Before addressing that aspect of the literature I will briefly outline some preliminary remarks about HRM.

At its most basic HRM is about managing employees within a workplace setting. It is about ensuring that the employees in a firm are engaged in the activities that the firm should want them engaged in. It is about control of the firm's employees (Guest, 1991:151-152). What is interesting and novel about HRM is the particular manner in which it goes about the job of controlling the workforce. While earlier models of management were based on attaining control (Braverman, 1974), or compliance and consent (Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979), HRM is about gaining the employee's commitment. What this specifically means is often ill defined but it is generally taken to mean that the employees identify with the firm in a fashion which leads them to want to act for the good of the firm as defined by management. This 'identification' is called a culture of commitment, the 'good' is often called quality, and it is these twin goals which managers are said to hope to realise when managing culture. A focus on cultures of commitment have been identified as the major difference between HRM policies and the Industrial Relations/Personnel Management policies of old (Beer *et al.*, 1985; Guest, 1987; Guest 1995; Legge, 1989; Legge, 1995a). Making control internal to the worker, having them committed to their work rather than simply acquiescent is deemed to bring a

number of benefits to the firm which will help to keep the firm competitive in a new post-Fordist economy. This commitment will cause the worker to go that step further for the company without the company having to pay them extra to do so. This means the generation of a culture of quality. Together, commitment and quality constitute the expected outcomes of the management of culture: they mean getting the soul for the company store without having to buy it. Under HRM the worker will willingly provide it.

The things that are called HRM

HRM studies is not an uncontested field. There are debates about the nature of HRM. In fact, there is little agreement as to what HRM actually is. This will need to be addressed before we can address the substantive issue. Despite the fact that the term has been used in a widespread manner since the mid 1980s, and has been knocking around for considerably longer, the first question on the pen of almost every author ever since has been 'What is HRM?' (see: Guest, 1987; 1989; 1991; Legge, 1989; 1995a; Storey, 1989; 1995; Blyton and Turnbull, 1992). Legge, for example, (1995a:64-91) distinguishes between normative models (what HRM should be), descriptive-functional models (what HRM is) and critical-evaluative models (how does HRM function to control and exploit people). Storey (1989) distinguishes between hard and soft models and between strong and weak models. Some (e.g.: Poole, 1990) identify HRM as an academic subject while others (e.g.: Guest, 1987) identify it as something that managers do.

One way out of this morass of meanings is to look at HRM as having different levels of abstraction. The first two levels of abstraction deal with HRM as an activity of

management, the third deals with it as an activity of social researchers. Empirical models or models based on research as to what people do when they do what they call HRM would constitute the lowest level of abstraction, the most concrete level. This level may roughly correspond to Legge's descriptive models. At this level it is possible to draw up a list of HRM-type policies: the things Human Resource Management does. In fact this has been done by Storey who included in his list performance related pay, individualised contracts, increasing rate and directness of communication, continual training and the use of teamwork (1992:35).

Clearly Human Resources Managers do these things for various reasons. They have a set of beliefs or assumptions about what they wish to achieve and how to achieve it. This theoretical level is the second level of abstraction. This level roughly corresponds to Legge's normative models. It is here that models of what Human Resource Managers should be doing and why are articulated. In that sense, this is the level of the ideal of management practice. We will return to two of the commonly cited definitions of HRM, those of Walton (1985) and Torrington and Hall (1987), when we look at horizontal differentiation of HRM. It is important to note that the empirical and the theoretical levels are very clearly inter-related. In an empirical sense, HRM is about how managers have negotiated what they think they should be doing in a normative sense. Their normative models are then created and re-created in the interaction between what they think they should be doing and what they feel they can do.

In a peculiar and confusing manner the term HRM is also used to describe the study of these two levels. The study of HRM includes a critical understanding of the more concrete levels both in terms of understanding HRM as an exploitative social entity

(Legge's Critical-Evaluative model) and in terms of attempting to explore and articulate the beliefs and assumptions more clearly. For example, in the introductory editorial to the *International Journal of Human Resources Management* Poole describes HRM as a subject "involving a synthesis of elements from international business, organisational behaviour, personnel management and industrial relations" (1990:1-2). For ease of reference this third level would be better described as HRM Studies.

The nature of HRM

Having identified the different types of thing people have in mind when referring to HRM, we can turn our attention to what is HRM's nature. In her reviews of the normative definitions (1989; 1995a) Legge identifies a number of elements common to the otherwise disparate definitions. She says:

> In the majority of these normative definitions several common themes stand out: that human resources policies should be integrated with strategic business planning and used to reinforce an appropriate (or change an inappropriate) organisational culture, that human resources are valuable and a source of competitive advantage, that they must be tapped most effectively by mutually consistent policies that *promote commitment* and which, as a consequence, foster a *willingness in employees to act flexibly* in the interests of the 'adaptive organisation's *pursuit of excellence*' (italics added. 1995a:66).

There are a number of elements within this. HRM is about profit. It is about making more profit through being strategic in engineering a culture of commitment and of quality or excellence, and through the mobilisation of employee flexibility. These elements can be traced back to the conceptual map of HRM proposed by Beer *et al.* (1985), a model which is itself popular with a range of authors (see for example: Sisson *et al.*, 1994; Hendry, 1995; Hollinshead and Leat, 1995; O'Brien, 1998). Within this conception, some focus on the range of human resource outcomes as outlined in the Beer *et al.* model (or as developed for this side of the Atlantic by Guest, 1987:516; 1992:129).

They focus on these outcomes - the Four 'C's of Commitment, Competence, Congruence and Cost-Effectiveness (or as Guest has it Strategic Integration, Commitment, Flexibility/Adaptability and Quality) - and they explore the various means of attaining these outcomes in different situations (see for example: Hendry, 1995; Hollinshead and Leat, 1995). While some authors add to the list (see for example: Torrington, 1994) because of the specific circumstances which they are referring to, the core list as outlined by Guest is commonly accepted in the European English language literature.

As Legge notes (1998: 18) this goal based understanding of HRM can be seen as somewhat "old fashioned" in so far as it draws on material between five and ten years old. The more recent approach, that of Storey (1992), Huselid, (1995), Wood (1995; 1996) and others is to look for specific human resource policies, policies aimed at achieving these goals. The difficulty with this alternative approach is that it prioritises one set of policies directed at these goals over other policies simply on the basis that some are deemed to be best practice for unclear reasons. I, like Legge, have stuck with the 'old fashioned' approach.

One other theme, mentioned by Legge, which runs through much of the HRM literature is the importance of congruence or 'fit' between the different goals and their respective policies (Legge, 1989; 1995a; 1995b; 1998; Storey, 1992; 1995; Roche, 1995; Gunnigle, 1998; O'Brien, 1998). The question of fit raises the possibility that HRM is not in fact a coherent model of management at all. A number of authors have treated HRM as having different factions within the over-arching model described above. One of the most abiding categorisations of different understandings of HRM (Hendry and Pettigrew,

1990; Legge, 1995a; 1995b; Sisson 1995; Storey, 1995; Gunnigle 1998; Monks *et al.*, 1998; O'Brien, 1998) is that proposed by Storey (1989) who differentiates between a 'hard' and a 'soft' HRM. In this distinction hard HRM focuses on the bottom line of manipulating people in order to maximise profit. It reflects a utilitarian instrumentalism. The focus is, essentially, on the *Management* of Human Resources. It is embodied in the following sentiment: "Underpinning human resources management is the idea that the management of human resources is much the same as any other aspect of management, and getting the deployment of right numbers and skills at the right place is more important than interfering with people's personal affairs" (Torrington and Hall, 1987 quoted in Legge, 1989: 25). On the other hand, soft HRM focuses on the development of the human beings in the company, with the emphasis being on *Human Resources*, rather than Management. It reflects a developmental humanism and is expressed in the following sentiment: "The New HRM is composed of policies that produce mutuality - mutual goals, mutual influence, mutual respect, mutual rewards, mutual responsibility" (Walton, 1985 quoted in Legge, 1989: 23). This distinction between the hard and the soft ends of HRM exists at a normative level. In practice it becomes difficult to devise suitable criteria for measuring hardness or softness of HRM and consequently this division becomes unclear. Therefore this hard/soft division is probably best seen as indicative of a range of potential tensions within HRM (Legge, 1995a: 67) rather than as a useful conceptual model in its own right. Essentially there are a range of potential tensions between different goals (in Beer's terms 'HRM outcomes') - the different goals may not 'fit'. Of these tensions, those that are of interest here are the possible tensions between commitment and quality (i.e., the management of culture) on one hand and flexibility on the other. In the next two sections I will deal with this issue, first by looking at the literature on the management of culture and then by looking at the

literature on the mobilisation of flexibility.

HRM debates and the management of culture

In much of the writing on HRM 'commitment' is synonymous with 'developing a sense of identity' which is synonymous with developing or managing a 'strong culture'. These three terms tend to be used interchangeably. This, in turn, is generally tied to the development of quality. In this section I will begin with a short discussion on the nature of quality - a theme that will be explored in greater depth later. I will then look at the philosophical idealism which is a central to HRM debates and identify that there are important research questions that have yet to be addressed in relation to the management of identity in HRM.

Quality is an ill defined concept (Monks *et al.*, 1998), and one which is likely to differ between companies and economic sectors. Monks *et al.* use the 'Q Mark' symbol as a measure of quality while the International Standards Organisation (ISO) model is could also be used. However, it is likely that many companies which have not sought or attained such external validation of quality also believe themselves to be practising quality management. While Rosenthal *et al.* (1997) have tried to identify a single model of what quality means in one sector of the economy (the retail sector), in reality there are a number of distinct models of what might constitute quality even in this one sector (Pollert, 1995). While there are some constants in the quality literature (such as remaining close to the consumer [Quinn, 1990; du Gay, 1996; Rosenthal *et al.*, 1997]), in general, what a quality initiative means in practice is likely to be what the management mean by it. As such, at its most basic, quality may simply mean doing things the way the management want you to do them. To get the staff to this position they are thought to

have to identify with the company and therefore be willing to make an effort for the good of the company, in much the same way as people who identify with a particular country will risk their lives by going to war for that country. Therefore the question of the management of commitment and quality is a question of identity management.

While modernist management writings have noted the role of material reality in the generation of, and management of, culture, the HRM literature often leaves this boundary behind. An example of the modernist approach is that of Schein. While his model shows a number of signs of philosophical idealism, (behaviours are said to be nothing more than manifestations of underlying basic beliefs, for example) he does note that culture is created "in learning to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration" (Schein as quoted in Legge, 1995a:188). Other authors note that behavioural change is an important step towards cultural change since people's basic assumptions will change to accommodate their new behaviours (for a discussion of this area see Ogbonna, 1990; Ogbonna, 1992: 74). In other words, it is commonly held that the material world will shape and be shaped by the ideal world. While the research literature on the management of culture has tended away from a philosophically idealist position much of the normative HRM literature has tended in the opposite direction. For example, one focus of the HRM literature has been on the use of symbols (rather than material factors) to effect cultural change. Tyson (1995) argues that many of the attempts to understand HRM are misplaced as they do not attempt to explain HRM as the management of the symbolic environment. In the same way as financial managers operate in a symbolic environment concerned with abstract symbols representing cash flows, or marketing managers operate in a symbolic environment concerned with the image of the product, so Human Resource managers operate in a symbolic environment

concerned with the symbolism of the organisation and what actions mean to people. Other authors have also emphasised the use of the symbolic landscape to bring about the type of culture required. Deal and Kennedy (1982) focus on the myths and stories of the organisation and the need for leadership in creating new organisational myths to give meaning to the required culture. Pfeffer (1981 quoted in Alvesson, 1991:207) claims that "symbols are the very stuff of management behaviour. Executives, after all, do not synthesise chemicals or operate lift trucks; they deal in symbols". Similar pronouncements can be found in Peters (1978) and Sathe (1985). There are many different foci for such a change in image. Woodall (1996: 33) notes a change of language in Service Co., one of her case studies, while Ogbonna (1990) notes the importance of new leadership in bringing about corporate change, since leaders symbolise a great deal about how things are done. Overall, we could conclude, as Rosenthal *et al.* do, that "The (re)structuring of individual subjectivity through managerial ideology or discourse is a central theme of much of the critical literature on excellence, HRM and TQM [Total Quality Management]" (1997: 494)

Of course, management academics and gurus are not alone in focusing their attention on symbolism. The importance of the image is a major preoccupation of post-modern sociology. What is central to this notion of symbolism, is that you can make any material entity (signifier) mean anything (signified) (These terms, though not the context of their use, derive from de Saussre [1974]). Material things can have a meaning detached and re-attached almost at will. The collection of sounds which make up any word - take the word 'lunch' as an example - could be detached from their meaning (a light meal eaten around the middle of the day) and given a whole new meaning (the slightly damp feel one gets on one's skin a few minutes after stopping exercising). The collection of syllables in

the word 'lunch' have no more connection with one meaning than with another. There is nothing in them which condemns them to a single usage.

Keenoy and Anthony (1992) push out the bounds of this relativism. They note that HRM cannot be understood as an ideology to "obscure or explain the irksome problem of reality that confuses our understanding of the world and our place in it", instead "the aspirations of contemporary attempts to reconstruct and manage organisational cultures begin to suggest that [the terms of the HRM language] no longer represent a kindly escape from the real world but that they *are* the real world" (italics in original, 1992:236). In other words, they argue reality is what is taken to be real. A number of post-modern theoretical positions are presented in support of this including that of Zukav ("'Reality' is what is taken to be true" [1980:328]) and an explanation that this is a social phenomenon of the shift under post-modernity to the manufacturing of image rather than product. Other authors present a more orthodox understanding of HRM as ideology. Legge for example notes that HRM can be seen as "a mask for the less acceptable face of enterprise culture" (1995a:87), and Horowitz subjects the HRM phenomenon to 'an ideological analysis' (1990). The discussion around the use of the terms 'rhetoric' or 'reality' is part of this debate (Sisson, 1994; Legge, 1995a; Watson, 1996).

If we presume, as many of these writers seem to do, that the material world can be separated from its commonplace meanings by managers then the context of the management of culture should not matter all that much. It should be possible to generate a culture of commitment in a low pay, highly flexible workplace. The opposite is also true: if a culture of commitment cannot be generated in such an environment then this assumption of post-modern ideologues come under question. In HRM terms, this is

sometimes articulated through the question of whether or not HRM policies can be universally applied to all situations (Legge, 1995a; O'Brien, 1998). Purcell (1989) suggests, for example, that the appropriate manner for managing human resources will depend on the nature of the market in which the company operates and its market share. While this approach betrays much of the incrementalism which characterises managerial approaches to HRM (Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley, 1997) it is not consistent with the more universalistic orientation of the literature more generally. As I will show below there is some empirical literature addressing this issue but its conclusions are far from clear cut.

For many authors however, the material world remains stubbornly attached to its meanings. For Turner and Morely for example, the conflict of interests between management and staff is described as being an objective fact (1995: 114). Perhaps the point has been expressed in most straight forward terms by Willmott who notes that while HRM strives to accomplish changes in the meaning of what is important in a job "employment relations remain the Achilles heel of post-modern management practices". He continues:

> . . .to translate this thesis into less mealy-mouthed terms, there remains a conflict between the buyers and sellers of labour power - that is between capital and labour. This conflict can be varnished by diverse post-modern efforts to transform the identities of employees into loyal and committed servants of the corporation. However it meets its limits whenever an expectation of even a minimal sense of fairness and reciprocity between employer and employee, acquired and sustained outside the sphere of work, is impugned. (Willmott, 1995: 45)

Attractive and familiar as this position is, after de Saussre, we have to ask whether or not it is accurate rather than simply asserting its validity. Certainly many of those offering a post-structuralist analysis would see here a "tendency to fall back on an essentialist

theory of human nature" (Knights, 1990: 311). Knights argues that it is a mistake to privilege the relationship between buyers and sellers of labour power as being the most fundamental relationship in the workplace. For him, as for Davies (1990), Collinson (1992) and du Gay (1996), identities other than class identities must also be recognised. This does not necessarily mean that the employer/employee relationship is unimportant, only that its nature must be subject to examination rather than simply being assumed.

HRM and the mobilisation of flexibility

If the material world is to limit the management of culture then the mobilisation of flexibility in the company is likely to play a role in this, because in at least some respects flexibility means a material change for employees. However, as this section will show, flexibility may impact on cultural management in other ways also, particularly through possible changes in organisational structure.

Flexibility can be understood in a number of ways. Within his model of the flexible firm, Atkinson (1984) identifies three types of flexibility. They are *numerical flexibility, functional flexibility* and *financial flexibility*. Numerical flexibility refers to a situation where employees can be called in or let go as is demanded by the workload. This may mean workers on flexible contracts (of which, the most extreme form is the zero-hour contract), the use of part-time work, outsourcing or it may require the hiring and firing of staff as demand for the product dictates. Functional or task-oriented flexibility refers to a situation where the same people are skilled enough to be able to switch jobs or move from task to task as required. For the employee this may mean teamwork, getting training or having to be willing to change work situation and skills on a periodic basis. Financial flexibility underlies the other two. For the employees it may mean the company

not paying any standard rate. It may mean pay varying depending on skills and performance. It may mean pay being negotiated with each individual rather than set scales and increments negotiated with employees as a group or with their representation. This is sometimes referred to as 'individualising the employment relationship'. It is not envisaged that a single type of flexibility be adopted by any company. The three are seen as mutually supportive (Atkinson, 1984; Magnum and Magnum, 1986).

This model of flexibility is much debated. The extent to which Atkinson's model represents a material reality has been questioned (Pollert, 1988a; Pollert, 1988b; Pollert, 1991; Marginson, 1991). The main body of evidence suggests that the flexible firm has not arrived to any great extent. In summarising the research evidence Gunnigle, Heraty and Morely (1997) note: "despite the appeal of the flexible firm scenario in some quarters, the research evidence so far suggests that change in this area would appear to be more closely aligned with gradual incrementalism than a radical post-industrial futurology" (1997: 63). Yet at the same time there is clear evidence of a growth in flexible working practices. As Bielenski *et al.*, have noted in relation to patterns of numerical flexibility "In most European countries there seems to be a general trend towards a de-standardisation of working time. The old norm of full-time, life-long employment with normal working hours from Monday to Friday during the day-time may become just one of the many different patterns of working time" (1994: 289). Therefore, even if the sort of paradigm shift that some like to envisage has not taken place, flexible working patterns are an important issue and not to be dismissed.

Gannon and Nolan (1997) have argued that the flexibility debate should not be focused solely on atypical work forms but on all workers. They argue that contingent workers:

> . . . form a ring that expands and contracts around a core of regular employees. Because temporary and part-time workers often are paid lower wages and few or no fringe benefits, many managers believe they are cheaper than core employees. . . The objective is to convert as much labour as possible from a fixed asset to a variable cost. Not only is the ring in the core-ring model getting bigger, but the core is starting to look like the ring. In many companies in the US, everyone is in one sense a contingent worker. (Gannon and Nolan, 1997: 112 - 113).

While Gannon and Nolan may be overstating the case somewhat, they do draw attention to the fact that flexibility, in the way in which it is articulated by Atkinson, is likely to be a material issue for more than just the contingent worker in the company's periphery. It is likely to materially touch all workers in some way. It is logical to hypothesise that in so far as flexibility is likely to affect the material situation of workers it may have an effect on the capacity of management to manage culture. This can happen in a number of ways. Full-time permanent workers may loose overtime or regularly scheduled shifts as part of a flexibilisation process. This may impact on their sense of identification with their employers. In their study of changes in industrial relations in Ireland, for example, Turner and Morely found that flexible working practice was the single biggest reason for discussion between shop stewards and management (1995: 35-36). They also found a relationship between decreasing overtime and worsening industrial relations (1995: 105). These findings are suggestive of a relationship between increasing flexibilisation and a declining sense of identification with the firm. Flexibility may impact in other ways too. Some employees may find that only part-time work is available when they actually want full-time work, others may find that the sort of part-time work they want is unavailable due to demands from the management for flexibility. Whether or not this material change in circumstance will act as a universal constraint on the management of culture is unclear. This is a question that requires empirical study.

This is not the only type of flexibility proposed in the post-modern management literature. Organisational flexibility is sometimes seen as hastening a new organisational form. Kanter *et al.* (1993) note that technological change and competition are:

> hastening the evolution of an organisational model that defines the boundaries of organisations as fluid and permeable. . . thus organisational action in the new model needs to be viewed in terms of *clusters of activity sets* whose membership, composition, ownership and goals are constantly changing, and in which *projects* rather than *positions* are central. In such an image of an organisation the bonds between actors are more meaningful and ongoing than those of single market transactions but less rigid and immutable than those of positions in authority structures (1993: 3).

This model of post-modern organisation is akin to that found in work by Piorre and Sabel, (1984) Mulgan (1989), Clegg (1990) Crooks *et al.* (1992) and Parker (1992). Such models have also found some purchase in Irish writings (see Heraty and Morely on the "virtual organisation", [1998: 111] for example). Clegg's work is notable because he claims to have found evidence that such post-modern organisations exist in the current economic environment which he characterises as the post-modern world. His examples include Benetton, master bakers in France and small businesses in Asia. Clegg, borrowing from Lash (1988), claims that the essential characteristic of the post-modern organisation is de-differentiation. If modernism was characterised by differentiation in organisation, post-modernism can be said to be characterised by de-differentiation in 'disorganisation'. Toffler calls this sort of disorganisational structure a *moving mosaic:*

> composed not on a flat solid wall, but on many shifting see-through panels, one behind the other, overlapping, interconnected, the colours and shapes continually blending, contrasting, changing. . . instead of a power-concentrating hierarchy, dominated by a few organisations, we move towards a multidimensional mosaic form of power (1990: 216).

It is questionable as to how this disorganisational form can be reconciled with a managed culture. The models of Toffler, and Kanter in particular seem to be diametrically

opposed to notions of a unitary culture or a managed culture. In practical terms this may not be an issue since Thompson suggests that the moving mosaic may by a myth designed to move attention away from a change in the mechanisms of control (1993: 193). He argues that flexibilisation of employment structures or de-centralisation of organisational structures should not be seen as part of a broader shift towards a moving mosaic, instead it is simply bureaucratisation in another form with a focus on behavioural rather than task specification. He claims that the focus on corporate culture which goes with a focus on flexibilisation is in fact part of this focus on behavioural specificity.

Even if the companies which are held up as good examples of a moving mosaic are in fact highly bureaucratised in a less obvious way, this does not mean that the concept is without value. It is logical to suggest that people who spend less time in the workplace due to being on part-time or short-term contracts will have less contact with their work colleagues and with their managers. This will diminish their capacity for interaction with others and thereby lessen their capacity to form relationship with people across the company. They may have less contact with managers or supervisors. This may in turn limit the capacity of those groups to manage the culture of these flexible workers effectively. Such a situation may lead to exactly the sort of organisation described by Toffler. This in turn may raise serious problems for those who wish to manage culture.

Drawing on the flexibility literature then, it is possible to identify two ways in which the different types of flexibility identified by Atkinson may limit the capacity of a company to manage culture. On one hand, the mobilisation of certain types of flexibility is likely to give rise to changes in the material situation of a firm's employees. This may mean shorter or different working hours, or less take home pay. Whether or not this can be

reconciled with the management of culture is not something that can simply be asserted (as the post-modernists do) or denied (as the materialists do). It is an empirical question that must be subject to empirical analysis. On the other hand, it is possible that the mobilisation of certain types of flexibility may lead to fragmentation of firm's employees into self-contained groups who have little contact with each other, and who share little with each other by way of knowledge and values. This moving mosaic organisational form may also be difficult to reconcile with the management of culture. This too is a question that must be addressed empirically.

However, as I noted at the outset and as I will show in the next section, the interpretation of the empirical findings within the literature is problematic. In addressing these questions much of the literature tends to avoid post-structuralist conceptions of identity and to fall back on outdated, stereotypically modernist understandings of culture. Unfortunately, this means that even when the literature addresses these questions it tends to do so in ways that are unhelpful. It is to this literature that I now turn.

The Managerialist Tradition in Cultural Research

The managerialist tradition of research contains the mainstream of management studies, industrial relations and Human Resources Management literature which deals with the idea of cultures of commitment. It is co-terminus in most important respects with the functionalist tradition in sociology. For that reason I will use the terms functionalist and managerialist interchangeably. This tradition would probably not recognise itself as united by a theoretical framework. Certainly, the model of culture and social identity which underlies this model is rarely if ever noted explicitly. In this it differs from the critical tradition which is compelled to make its underlying model explicit, if only because

the underlying model questions so many deeply held assumptions of mainstream management studies academics. The first question then, is what is the model of culture underlying HRM formulations about the nature of culture and the manner in which certain cultural formations can be achieved? It will be clear that in what follows I have, to some extent, caricatured managerialist writing in order to conceptualise clearly the core model of culture. With so many authors writing on this topic all of whom are engaged in debate with each other on one point or another, no single model would satisfy everyone, but the core conceptualisation provided here is accurate.

There is much debate within this tradition about what culture actually is. Certain terms are used and debated and a wide variety of definitions are presented and discussed. One celebrated discussion identifies 164 different meanings of the word culture (Kroeber and Kluckhorn., 1963). However, the underlying model of culture is uncontested. This is a functionalist model of culture, remarkably similar to the notion of culture popular in US sociology of the 1950s and early 1960s (Meek, 1988; Golden, 1992; Legge, 1995a). This functionalist model of culture has a number of basic attributes. For the functionalist, *culture is a set of values, beliefs and norms which is stable, exists before people and is internalised by them. It is a variable within a social system - the firm - which can be understood as a body, with interrelated institutions/organs.*

Culture is a set of values, beliefs and norms

A culture is "the sharing of certain important beliefs" (Tichy, 1982: 62); it is "values, assumptions, beliefs, expectations, attitudes and norms that knit a community together" (Kilman *et al.*, 1985:5). It has both material and non-material manifestations. In other words there are both common ways of doing things and common values and beliefs. The

sharing of values, norms and beliefs is also held to be meaningful in terms of our self-definition - our identity. If I am said to be Irish it is because I share in Irish culture.

These common values and beliefs underlie the common ways of doing things in a coherent manner. This means that people do the things they do, because the believe certain things and hold certain values. The values and beliefs give rise to the actions. For example, in one of the best known and most frequently cited models of culture - that proposed by Schein (1985) - there are three levels of culture identified. These are the material level of artefacts and creations (including overt behaviour) and the two non-material levels of values and basic assumptions. The material level of artefacts and creations are caused by the deeper levels. As Legge says in describing Schein's model: "The basic assumptions which refer to the organisation's relationship with its environment, the nature of truth and reality, the nature of human nature, activity and relationships are, in Schein's view, the essence of organisational culture; the artefacts and values being just manifestations of that culture" (1995a:189). Culture is internally consistent, in so far as people do not habitually do things which go against their basic assumptions. In fact such a thing would be impossible when their assumptions are manifest in their actions (or in Schein's terms 'behaviour'). For Schein this statement about the nature of the world becomes a methodological statement, as basic values can only be read from people's actions. To put this another way, by definition my basic assumptions lead to my behaviour since my basic assumptions can only be identified from looking at my behaviour. Williams *et al.* identify this internal consistency in this way; "[an individual's beliefs and values] exist in a network of beliefs and attitudes which are usually logically consistent, mutually reinforcing and resistant to change" (1993:66).

This last point is one that many authors would take issue with. As I will show later, writers on values, norms and beliefs as diverse as Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci have noted that culture is anything but consistent and mutually reinforcing. Other aspects of this understanding of culture are also questionable, including its very basic value. The relationship between shared identity and shared norms, values and beliefs is not as straightforward as it made out here. I will return to these themes later.

Culture exists before people and is internalised by them

While there is a debate as to whether culture is shared (Tichy, 1982; Sathe, 1983; Schein, 1985; Salama *et al.*, 1994) or held in common (Williams *et al.*, 1993), essentially there is no debate about the fact that while culture is not agreed between people (in some sort of democratic manner), it exists where the same values and beliefs and norms are held by a group of people. There is a general consensus that culture is internalised by the organisation's members in a broadly similar fashion. In this sense culture exists before the person. It has at some stage been "invented, discovered or developed in learning" and has "worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel" in relation to common problems. (Schein, 1984 as quoted in Legge, 1995a: 188). As Williams *et al.* note, there is a "reasoning process whereby individuals come to accept and agree with the beliefs, attitudes and values of other members. Over time, individuals come to accept as correct particular goals, methods, and ways of doing things" (1993: 29). For some authors the person is not even active as a learner or an internalising agent. Culture is instead something that is 'offered' to them upon joining the organisation, (Linstead *et al.*, 1992). People hold the same values and beliefs and they act in a similar manner. Unless the people are in the 'first generation' of a particular culture, it is something they learn or

internalise rather than create.

One consequence of this is the stability of culture. A culture does not, by and large, change without something changing it. Lewin's (1951) frequently used model of cultural management necessitates a first stage identified as the 'unfreezing' stage. This model, 'the unfreeze - change - refreeze' model, underlies almost all change strategies in the reported empirical literature. (Legge, 1995a; Woodall, 1996). Clearly, therefore, the culture is found in a frozen or static state. This is not to say that the cultural system is viewed as a closed system - it could not be if managers are to manage a culture. Cultures can change, due to change in membership, changing technology or changing external context. What it means is that cultures are not in a natural process of change or discovery. They are relatively stable, requiring some impetus to start the unfreezing process.

Again, this basic belief about the nature of culture is one that is challenged. Sims *et al.*, for example, describe organisations as being "intimately connected with the way that people create meaning for themselves, with others, during their working lives. As we interact with others at work, we bring our personal histories and our past experiences with us - finding common ground, compromising, disagreeing, negotiating, coercing. This is a vibrant, mobile process, often full of tensions, frustrations and possibilities" (1993: 6). Organisational culture is seen by some as a continually emergent reality. Again, I will return to this theme below.

The organic analogy

According to the organic analogy the organisation is a system, in the same way that a body is (Meek, 1988). For example, Salama *et al.* use the image of organisational personality to help explain organisational culture (1994:22). The different parts of the organisation each have a role to play, a function to perform. Crucially, one of the roles that must be fulfilled, is the role of setting aims and objectives and deciding how to achieve them. This is the role of the head and is fulfilled by the management.

As Legge notes "the organic functionalist perspective encourages the view that the 'head' of the organism (its senior management) have a directive role in developing its collective consciousness, and that 'healthy' ('strong') cultures are both reflective and facilitative of organisational adaptation and growth ('success')" (1995a:186) Meek cites Schein in this regard as having noted that "Organisational cultures are created by leaders, and one of the most decisive functions of leadership may well be the creation, the management, and - if and when that may become necessary - the destruction of culture" (1988:198). This idea is further articulated by the number of authors who argue that change in culture requires change 'at the top' (see for example: Silverzweig and Allen, 1976; Tichy, 1982; Sathe, 1985; and Graves, 1986).

What is ignored in this is the question of power. Unlike Gramsci, Lukes, and Clegg, the authors within the management literature do not ask whose interests is served by the head. Once more, I will return to this theme later.

Culture is a functional attribute of a firm

Culture is an attribute of a social entity; in this case, a firm. While there is a national culture beyond the firm and possibly a set of sub-cultures within the firm, essentially the firm and the culture have the same boundaries. This fact is so taken for granted that it is rarely stated. It is implied by such terms as Organisational Culture or Corporate Culture. Both terms assume that there is a culture which has the same boundaries as the organisation. The frequently cited assertion that culture is something an organisation has, (Smircich, 1983) has often been a focus of attention for the statement of ownership (i.e., it is generally read as culture is something an organisation *has*). It could just as easily be read as culture is something an *organisation* has.

Just as the body requires all its organs functioning in the correct manner to continue to survive, the system which is the firm requires all of its institutions, including its culture to be functioning. Just as the body could not live without a brain or a liver, the firm could not live without its institutions behaving in an appropriate manner. The survival of the organisation is predicated on having the correct type of culture. The culture must be appropriate for the circumstances. In this respect, the idea that cultures can be changed is subject to a higher moral order of survival. Woodall notes (1996:26) that much of the literature in this area pays no attention to the ethical considerations of cultural management. In this she is as wrong as she is right. They are in fact subject to a higher ethical concern - the survival and growth of the entity which is the firm. The firm as an entity must be able to survive, adapt and grow in the context it finds itself (in our case a capitalist market system). The wellbeing of individual cells within the body are of small concern within this noble enterprise.

Culture is a variable

Culture is something an organisation 'has'. It is something that is distinct from the structures of the organisation, and it is something that can be measured. In fact it is something that can be measured in numerical terms. This is often referred to as a positivist approach in the literature (although the term positivism is best used to describe an underlying philosophical methodology rather than any particular method).

Particular aspects of a culture - including the extent to which it is a culture of commitment - can be measured and can be correlated with other measured variables. One widely used example of this is the Organisational Commitment Questionnaire as developed by Porter *et al.* (1974). As Mathieu *et al.* (1990) point out in their review of empirical studies this measure has been widely used (103 out of 174 reviewed studies). Even critiques of this widely used measure focus on alternative numerical measurements of organisational commitment (Benkhoff, 1997). Other studies try to measure such things as trust in a similar fashion (Turner and Morely, 1995).

There is a great deal of attention paid to statistical association. Correlation and association between variables is the common currency of such research (Guest, 1992; Legge, 1995a). There is a great deal of attention in the literature paid to contingency factors to evaluate their impact on organisational culture. Commitment, for example, is statistically related to age, level of education, confirmed job expectations, responsibility and the capacity in the job for self-expression according to one review of the research (Guest, 1992).

Corporate culture and structural functionalism

This functionalist model of the organisational culture basically shares many characteristics with the model of culture employed by Parsons (1979) and other structural-functionalists thirty years ago. It utilises the organic analogy, emphasising the extent to which the body (which is to say, the firm) has a stable personality (culture) which is directed by the head (management). The nature of that personality can be measured in numerical terms and changes in it can be understood by identifying factors which are correlated with personality change. This will allow the head to better manage the changes it needs to keep the body alive. As I have noted at various points, this understanding of culture is one that has been questioned at almost every turn. The failure of mainstream management literature to engage with these questions means that much of this literature has very limited usefulness. It is to this critique that I now turn.

The Inter-subjective Construction of Identity

In one of the many 'When Dinosaurs Ruled The Earth' monster movies, a group of First World War sailors find themselves on a new continent in the south Atlantic. They discover that time has stood still here and the dinosaurs still roam the plains. The movie was called *The Land That Time Forgot.* In reading a great deal of the functionalist literature on the management of culture one ends up empathising with the forlorn sailors trapped in a word evolution has passed by. The critique of the functionalist model is not new. This is an old debate, one which mainstream sociology has had as far back as the 1950s and 1960s. However, it is a debate which has passed this particular area by. What is even more odd is that in order to articulate in practice the very post-modern ideas about managing identity and the separation of signifier and signified, the literature tends to move back to a very modernist ontology (via structural-functionalism) and a

modernist epistemology (via an almost exclusive reliance on quantitative research). The post-modernist ideas which gave rise to questions of managing identity tend to be ignored. There is a need, therefore, for bringing post-structuralism back in.

Apart from this rather profound oddity, there are other elements to the critique of managerialist literature which it is necessary to articulate here. In doing so I will expand upon the theoretical basis of my own research. I will address two epistemological issues, namely (a) the construction of identity, meaning and identification and (b) the subject for analysis; and two ontological issues, namely (c) the limits to discursive power, and (d) the relationship between power and identity. Each of these issues draw heavily on post-structuralist writings.

Culture and identity, a turbulent relationship

For the functionalists, the purpose of dealing with questions of culture is to get at the person's sense of identity. According to the literature, this is in order to create a workforce which identifies with the company, although, theoretically, any sort of culture should be able to be created. The terms 'culture of commitment', 'strong culture' and 'unitary culture' all imply an identification with the firm and its management. The difficulty with this idea is that the 'stuff' of the functionalist model of culture is not the 'stuff' of identity. Our sense of self and our sense of allegiance is not tied in any straightforward way to norms, values and beliefs.

An alternative to the functionalist model is to be found in the view that identity (in the sense of being part of a particular group) is something that is socially constructed rather than given: it is "something which is produced in historically specific contexts and it

emerges, changes and adapts in meaning over time" (O'Connell, 1994: 112). Tovey *et al.* (1989:9), for example, identify ethnicity as being a "symbolic meaning system, a way for a 'people' to organise social reality". Rather than drawing from a list of characteristics which are thought to be universally important in assigning identity ('racial' stock, language, fundamental cultural values, unity of cultural expression and so on), the symbols which come to define identity are chosen and their meaning constructed by the group and others in interaction. A symbol which may prove vitally important in defining one group (shared language, for example), may not be salient at all for another group.

If the symbols which identify someone as in-group or out-of-group are not necessarily tied to a system of values, norms and beliefs, it is not terribly important for a people to share a way of life: it is important that they have some symbolic basis on which they can meaningfully identify with each other. As O'Connell notes in relation to the criteria for belonging to an ethnic group "[i]t is through the processes of interaction with other cultural groups, *whereby certain features are interpreted as giving a group its identity*, that ethnicity is constructed. Over time, some of these features take on new meaning as they become associated with the group's sense of peoplehood and aspirations" (*italics added.* 1994: 113). Or, as Cohen puts it, "Ethnic group formation is a continuing and often innovative cultural process of boundary maintenance and reconstruction" (1978: 397). Identity, in this formulation, is clearly a more contingent, more flexible and more active concept than in the functionalist model. As Cohen puts it: "...identities of members and categorisations by others is more or less fluid, more or less multiple, forming nesting hierarchies of we/they dichotomizations" (1978: 359).

As we will see below, this should not be read as implying that there are no power

relations involved in the construction of group identities. Different positions or groups may bring different power-bases to the process of identity formation. It does mean that a simple correspondence between shared characteristics identified as culture and shared identity cannot be assumed.

The purpose of the corporate culture project is to generate a workforce who identify with the firm. This is articulated in any number of terms used, including 'commitment', 'unitary culture' and 'univocal culture'. Culture is seen as being the medium of identification. It is assumed that if we get the right culture, then people will, by definition, identify with the group, since the right culture is one which causes identification. However, someone may well share the same values, beliefs and norms I do (cooking and eating Asian and Italian food, watching American movies and football, and valuing Socialism), without identifying themselves as Irish. Identity and norms, values and basic assumptions do not necessarily go hand in hand.

In order to make sense of people's sense of identity we have to find out what symbols are meaningful to them in terms of their own sense of identity. These symbols may change from time to time and from place to place. What it means to be Irish in west Belfast may be quite different to what it means to be Irish in south County Dublin. For this reason we must access the employee's own sense of what the meaningful symbols of identity are, rather than come from outside with a ready-made set of symbols which are deemed to be important by the researcher. The managerialist tradition has tended to impose a sense of the relative importance of values on the researched subject.

Anthropologists identify this issue through the distinction they draw between etic and

emic modes of analysis. An etic analysis is one which involves working from what is sometimes called an objective position, it involves imposing an analysis on the research phenomenon. When we talk of measuring the number of people in poverty using a poverty line, or measuring who it at-risk of educational disadvantage, we are using an etic mode of analysis. When we use the frame of reference of the researched subject (their subjective understanding of their experiences and their actions), then we are using an emic mode of analysis (Silverman, 1993: 24; Vidich and Lyman, 1994: 26). The managerialist tradition uses an etic analysis. It imposes a hierarchy on values rather than exploring the values which become a focus for identity. As Legge remarks in relation to Schein: "The basic assumptions which refer to the organisation's relationship with its environment, the nature of truth and reality, the nature of human nature, activity and relationships are, in Schein's view, the essence of organisational culture" (1995a:189). In other words a selection of basic assumptions are designated as 'worthy' and these become the basis of culture. This is then measured using pre-formulated questionnaires which are presumed to be transferable from location to location without reference to the focus of identity in each place. People are not asked what is meaningful for them. The validity of symbols of identification is assumed and imposed. A more valuable approach will necessitate an emic analysis. This involves identifying the terms of reference of the researched subject and identifying the symbols of identity which are meaningful for them before exploring identity.

Deciding the Subject

Because the managerialist tradition is concerned with the profitability of the firm, the firm is the starting point of their analysis. When talking about corporate culture, they start with the corporation and assume that it has something which can meaningfully be

called a culture. This is not necessarily the best way forward. It may make more sense to first identify what it is that is shared and only then identify the group by looking at who shares this.

The functionalist model would prefer both things to be true. Culture is, after all, the values, norms and basic assumptions shared by a group. You need both to have a culture. And they do regard values, norms and beliefs as being important. After all, that was their reason for getting into the cultural management business to begin with. The functionalist model identifies the organisation as the group and then makes culture an attribute of this group - something the organisation has. In practice therefore, functionalists prioritise the group. This means that, according to the functionalists, we can talk of a corporate culture even where the only shared value is a taste in biscuits. This is clearly demonstrated by the fact that a number of authors have addressed themselves to the creation of a 'strong culture' (for example: Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1985). The fact that an organisational culture can consist of nothing more than a shared taste for biscuits is implicit in the idea that one needs to create a culture which is 'stronger' - that is, a culture which shares more than just a taste in confectionery. The biscuit-focused-culture would be, in this formulation, a 'weak' culture. In fact, it is precisely because culture is something that is seen in a pre-identified group that the cultural management literature exists in the first place. It is because you need to identify the group first, and only then try to find their culture, that you can end up with a situation where they share nothing meaningful at all.

This is also part of the etic analysis offered by the managerialist literature. The notion of the group is an imposed notion. The researched subject belongs to the group we say

they belong to even if they have no emotive attachment to the group. The categorisation is an imposed one. The social entity (the firm or the nation which is the subject of inquiry) is something that is defined in terms of external criteria. It is 'objectively' defined in terms of such attributes as where a person was born, how long they lived in certain places, where they work. The researcher selects the criteria (in our case the criterion is based on where the person works) and ascribes a person membership of the group based on these criteria. The subject has no say in the issue. In other words, the functionalists impose an order on the world rather than look at how the world is ordered.

This difficulty has been noted by a number of authors, both inside and outside the functionalist tradition. Smircich (1983), for example, makes a distinction between understanding culture as a variable - something an organisation has (as the functionalist model does) - or understanding culture as a 'root metaphor' - something an organisation is. Proponents of this second understanding of culture see the organisation as a negotiated order, stemming from the action and interaction of the people who make it up and give it meaning. This has been described (Meek, 1988: 293) as the "socially emergent" view of culture. This is similar to the approach of Sims *et al.* (1993). They note that "there is a gulf between the lived experience of organising and being organised by others, with its uncertainty and confusion, and the tidy, rather sanitised, texts of organisational behaviour" (1993; vii). For them, it does not make sense to look at the organisation as a solid entity. Rather, a process of organising is what is important. This means looking at "the stories and gossip which we trade, the deals we strike, the games we play and the moral dilemmas we face in organisations" (1993: 1).

The question which I set out at the start of this chapter was whether or not culture could

be managed in flexible workplaces. Since this question identifies the firm as its subject I will look at firms in answering the question. I will need to start with the workplace as the basic unit of analysis. However, by adopting an emic approach to analysis I am not constrained by that pre-constructed unit. I will return to this issue in more depth in the next chapter.

Sovereignty, discursive power and its limits

One of the classic difficulties with the functionalist model was its treatment of the concept of power - or to be more precise - its failure to deal with the concept of power. In the functionalist model of a social world that works well, power (exercised on behalf of the organism/society/firm) is for the good and is not problematic. Power is rightfully invested in a sovereign - the head of the body. This head is chosen by a process which gives it a moral duty and right to rule. This process could be the divine ordination of kings or it could be democratic selection. In the world of work, it is the market which decides who will rule. Since the market is the means through which the greatest happiness of the most people will be achieved, selection by the free market is a process invested with moral weight. The sovereign power of the manager, invested by the power of the market, is good.

This image brings to mind a scene in Monty Python's *The Holy Grail* in which King Arthur finds himself engaged in conversation with two of his subjects who are not overly impressed by his claim to supreme executive authority. He feels he must explain:

> ARTHUR: I am your king!
> WOMAN: Well, I didn't vote for you.
> ARTHUR: You don't vote for kings.

> WOMAN: Well, how did you become king then?
> ARTHUR: The Lady of the Lake, [in the background, angels sing] her arm clad in the purest shimmering samite, held aloft Excalibur from the bosom of the water signifying by Divine Providence that I, Arthur, was to carry Excalibur. [singing stops] That is why I am your king!
> DENNIS: Listen -- strange women lying in ponds distributing swords is no basis for a system of government. Supreme executive power derives from a mandate from the masses, not from some farcical aquatic ceremony.
> ARTHUR: Be quiet!
> DENNIS: Well you can't expect to wield supreme executive power just 'cause some watery tart threw a sword at you!
> ARTHUR: Shut up!
> DENNIS: I mean, if I went around saying I was an emperor just because some moistened bint had lobbed a scimitar at me they'd put me away!
> ARTHUR: Shut up! Will you shut up!
> DENNIS: Ah, now we see the violence inherent in the system.
> ARTHUR: Shut up! [Arthur starts to beat up Dennis]
> DENNIS: Oh! Come and see the violence inherent in the system! --- [he shouts]Help! Help! I'm being repressed!
> ARTHUR: Bloody peasant!

Arthur has to walk away, a sovereign by doubtful means and defeated in conversation by bolshie peasants. It seems that being the sovereign does not always guarantee power. In a similar fashion, the question of the exercise of power in a company needs to be studied in a way that the functionalist model seems unable to comprehend. This is particularly true in relation to power over the definition of the symbolic environment.

As Clegg (1989) points out, for centuries, the discussion around power has centred on the legitimacy of sovereignty. This has distracted attention from the discursive aspect of power. He notes that Foucault argues for a reversal of Hobbes' focus on the sovereignty of power. Foucault argues we should study "the myriad bodies who are constituted as peripheral subjects as a result of the effects of power" (1980: 39).

For Foucault, power is articulated when someone is able to fix the meanings of something. This he holds in common with the position of both the HRM proponents and

some of their critics, including Keenoy and Anthony. His distinctive contribution is to remove a notion of sovereignty from the equation. This is because anyone can win the discussion. As Clegg notes "central to Foucault's conception of power is its shifting, inherently unstable expression in networks and alliances. Rather than the monolithic view of power as a 'third dimension' incorporating subjectivities, the focus is much closer to Machiavelli's strategic concerns or Gramsci's notion of hegemony as a 'war of manoeuvre' in which points of resistance and fissure are at the forefront" (1989: 154-155). (The reference to the 'third dimension' is a reference to Lukes' model which I will discuss below.) The power to change meanings is not something one side has and another side has inflicted upon them. It is engaged with by both parties in every interaction.

This has obvious parallels with what I have already referred to as the socially emergent view of culture. Shared meanings - culture - emerge from the operation of discursive practices - human interaction. Power is articulated by those who can fix meanings, that is, those who can manage culture. In one sense this reverses the model put forward by the managerialsts. For them, the manager has power and can therefore manage culture. For Foucault, those who can manage culture are those who can wield power. In theory, this could be anyone engaged in the process of negotiating meaning. Some have moved in this direction. Derrida (1976) and some of his followers have pushed this to absurd extremes in which everything is up for negotiation all the time. But, clearly, there are limits to this. As Legge (1995a) notes, the management voice may be one voice in the debate but it may bring with it some symbolic resources which make it more important for the outcome of the interaction than others. The question remains, what are these limits. While Clegg notes that a "sociological framework is required in which neither the

indetermination of the free floating signifier nor the determination of the priviliged economic subject holds sway" (1989: 179), he does not fully answer how this can happen.

While everything may be up for discussion, clearly not everything is up for discussion all the time. Some things are agreed on and taken for granted. This allows the interaction to take place in the first place. Berger and Luckmann (1966) note that some meanings become Knowledge. They are abstracted from the individual, made separate from his or her control and take on an existence of their own. They are Reified (Lukacs, 1971). While no meanings are ever universal knowledge (they are 'indexical' to situations as Garfinkel [1967] would have it), they do constitute knowledge in particular places at particular times.

Clegg notes that there are rules in a given situation which, although they are not universally fixed, are at least *relatively* fixed. He says:

> Social games rarely if ever correspond to the ideal conditions of pure games *per se*. The rules will not be as static and idealised as in chess or some other game but will instead be far more fragile, ambiguous, unclear, dependent upon interpretation, and subject to either reproduction or transformation depending on the outcome of struggles to keep them the same or to change them this way or that. (1989: 209).

While there are rules, the extent to which "Rules are Rules" varies (Sims *et al.*, 1993:22). Since rules are simply fixed patterns of meaning they can be called into question. However, the extent to which they can be called into question depends in part on who has control over negotiating them and the external supports for them. At the end of the day most of the rules are likely to be stacked in favour of the management and few of them are likely to be negotiable (Thompson and Bannon, 1985: 93; Thompson, 1993:

200).

Clegg supports this. His major concern is with the stability of managerial influence within the company. However we can turn this around and note that the same thing which accounts for the stability of their influence is also that which helps to limit the ease with which negotiation can be opened up on meanings. In turn, the possibilities for management inherent in the management of culture also contains pitfalls. Opening up the constitution of meaning for negotiation may open up the constitution of power and allow for what Clegg calls 'organisational outflanking' (1989; 1994a; 1994b) which happens on the rare occasions when "resistance to power may consolidate itself as a new power and thus constitute a new fixity in the representation of power, with a new relational field of force altogether" (1989: 207).

For HRM, then, the management of culture and identity can be best seen as an attempt to manage the inter-subjectively shared meanings of the employees and management. Contrary to the view of the managerialist tradition culture is not simply another variable which an organisation has and which can be manipulated by the head. It is a continually negotiated enterprise in which the management are a strong participant but at the end of the day, only a participant. The strength of the management position, like the relative stability of meanings, derive from a fixity of meanings which are, in themselves, the results of power relations. There are a number of questions raised by this. First, the opening up of some of these meanings for negotiation - the attempt to manage culture or identity - could produce a space in which the right of managers to manage or the mechanisms through which they do so could themselves become the subject of an attempted organisational outflanking. The attempt by management to re-negotiate part

of the organisational culture could, therefore, undermine the very rule base of the organisation. Second, for the rules to work they need to be known about and practised. The rules, both formal and informal, have to be communicated and enforced. This can be done through personal interaction or through other forms of communication. As Sims *et al.* show (1993: 22 - 23) formal and informal rules can be mutually contradictory and can be communicated through different channels. If we look again at the necessity of finding some means of communicating the rules and boundaries of action to the workforce, we can ask, what happens if this does not happen. It seems likely that staff will develop ways of understanding their working world either individually, or more likely, in social networks (Fine and Kleinman, 1983). As I noted above, without adequate means of communication (something which is bound to become more difficult when people are in work for shorter periods of time) the firm may become fragmented into different sub-cultures with different understandings of their social world (i.e., the company and its work). This is, by definition, a weak culture. How is this to be overcome? Can management communicate effectively within the putative moving mosaic organisational form? Can an organisation characterised by "paradox, indeterminacy, heterogeneity and disorganisation" (Thompson, 1993: 185) actually have a strong culture?

This question is, in part, addressed by Foucault. For him, the answer is no. He addresses the different ways in which bureaucracy (the opposite of a moving mosaic) is central to the potential to manage both meaning and identity. He shows that contrary to the thesis of the post-modernist gurus - gurus who often cite him to support their position - the degree and type of bureaucratisation affects the regulation of, capacity of, and surveillance by, management. It effects the way in which the cultural change model is articulated in general and in specific terms, the way in which it is put into action and

the extent to which it is successful. According to Foucault, it is the highly bureaucratised modernist organisational form, not the loosely organised post-modernist moving mosaic form, which is successful in managing culture.

Accounts of bureaucracy tend to start with Weber, whose account is "neither accepted nor rejected, but . . . put to use" in most modern work on the subject (Coser and Rosenberg, 1976: 252), even if it is an account that is neither gendered (Morgan, 1996), nor terribly coherent (Parkin, 1982). According to Weber (1968) the ideal type of a bureaucracy can be understood as having a number of features including a formal hierarchy, different ranks, the application of rules according to the book and promotion according to clear criteria such as merit or seniority.

More recently, some of the key early contributors to the labour process debate borrowed this language to describe a particular model of employee control as either an internal labour market (Burawoy, 1979) or bureaucratic control (Edwards, 1979). It was argued that, in the modern world, managers do not act on their own behalf (exercising personal control) but operate 'the rule book'. When they exercise the rules in a de-humanised way, removing from "official business love, hatred, and all purely personal, irrational, and emotional elements which escape calculation" (Weber, 1968: 975), they do not themselves have to take responsibility for their action. It becomes reified - the responsibility of no-one but the gods.

This model is not unproblematic. As Thompson has noted (1983) rules cut two ways. By working to rule employees can undermine a bureaucratic control system, and, as various accounts note - including the graphic and moving autobiography by Ben Hamper

(1992) as well as the more academic labour process contributions found in Jermier *et al.* (1994) - this model does not explore the way in which this structure is used as a resource by employees and managers in an attempt to manage their lives within the company. Nor does it explore the way in which the structure can affect the process through which the individual constitutes their own subjectivity. Since subjectivity is central to the model of power used here, the ways in which bureaucracy enters into the inter-subjective relationship needs to be articulated. This is the subject of Foucault's work on the way in which techniques of discipline produce docile bodies within bureaucratic organisational forms.

Foucault (1977) claims that there are discrete practices of discipline which come to be used at different historical periods which operate on a person's subjectivity and their body to constrain them and to build their capacity in certain ways, ideally producing docile bodies. This is not all of power, but it is a certain type of it, one which may give rise to the articulation of another type - resistance. In fact, he argues that one of the principles which motivates the change in practices of discipline over time is the counter power of resistance. Resistance makes the articulation of power costly, therefore other techniques which by-pass resistance capabilities need to be articulated. In its modern variant, discipline fixes meanings, it "arrests or regulates movements; it clears up confusion; it dissipates compact groupings of individuals wandering about the country in unpredictable ways; it establishes calculated distributions" (1977: 219). There is nothing opaque in the operation of discipline. Having fixed, discipline uses this to manage, using a variety of techniques, most notably those of total and detailed surveillance. Discipline is exercised, not through "the brilliance of those who exercise it" (the sort of personalised control also noted by Edwards [1979] and other labour process

contributors), but through the formation of a body of knowledge about its subjects. This happens through "hierarchical surveillance, continuous registration, perpetual assessment and classification" - through "anonymous instruments of power" (1977: 220).

Up to this point, this model seems very similar to that proposed by Edwards or Burawoy. Indeed, it is very similar to that proposed by Weber. It also seems a long way from the decapitating of the sovereign head which, as I have already noted, is integral to Foucault's approach. Foucault goes further. He argues that through this mechanism (best visually represented in the panopticon - a model for a prison with a capacity for continuous surveillance - but enmeshed in practice in capitalist organisational techniques) the disciplinary techniques become internalised into their subject, who begins to practice self-surveillance. As Rabinow notes, (1996: 19) in the panopticon "the inmate cannot see whether or not the guardian is in the tower, so he must behave as if the surveillance was perpetual and total. If the prisoner is never sure when he is being observed, he becomes his own guardian".

Foucault argues that disciplinary practices are directed at the subjectivity, the sense of self of the individual, and have already been internalised by people via the operation of disciplining institutions (school, medicine, employment). Disciplinary practices work through the diminishing of the political force of the subject, but increasing the 'capacity' of the subject: their ability to become something which is directed towards the 'normal'.

> In short, it dissociates power from the body; on one hand, it turns into an 'aptitude' a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjugation (1977: 138).

In the firm, the person's capacity to be that which the firm wants them to be is to be developed through the techniques of discipline. The techniques of discipline do not target the person's obedience. They target the person's soul.

But what of the subject, resistant or otherwise? Foucault does not neglect the subject. While people are the subjects of these disciplinary practices, he does not suggest - as Giddens (1981; 1982) has argued he does - that people are cultural dopes. As Knights and Vurdubakis show "they are a presence within, rather than simply bearers of discursive relations. They are active in both positioning themselves within such relations and in committing themselves to particular subject positions" (1994: 184). Disciplinary practices are totalizing in their tendency, but not total in their effects. Knights and Vurdubakis go on to note that:

> The acknowledgement that forms of individuality are constituted - unequally - under particular relations of power and knowledge in no way implies that these discourses and practices are incapable of being employed in a challenge to the subjectivities that are produced. As Foucault has argued, challenges to relationships of power can arise from within the very subject positions such relationships make available.

In fact, their continued development is predicated in part on the resistance of their subjects.

Foucault's model of disciplinary practices differs from Weber's model of bureaucracy in a number of key respects. Foucault sees the effects of disciplinary practices, not in the eradication of love, hatred and other purely personal motives (which Weber sees as the goal of bureaucracy), but in their harnessing in a project of docility which the disciplined subject is to undertake. Nor does he argue that these processes will, like the iron cage of bureaucracy, continue to close in on their subjectivity and eventually remove it. He

argues that the actor remains active in the construction of subjectivities within power relations. However, there are a number of key similarities. The pyramidal-organisational form, the clarity of instruction and of criteria of selection and promotion for example are common to both. Essentially Foucault's disciplinary procedures can be seen articulated clearly in firms in the symbol of modernity, the bureaucratic organisation, even if their ends are not those that Weber imagined they were.

The suggestion then, arising from Foucault, is that the most successful disciplinary practices will be those which are found in particular forms of bureaucratic organisation; organisations which prioritise clarity, fixity of meaning, surveillance, self-surveillance and training. They will be hierarchical organisations which are clear as to what constitutes 'right' or 'normal' action in order to enable them to measure and check behavioural action against it. He is not suggesting that such organisations are necessarily totally successful in the construction of docile bodies. He is arguing that these practices have been developed as more successful than other. These practices are clearly not of the 'moving mosaic' organisational form, where clarity, order, hierarchy is replaced by multiple pathways rather than a chain of command (Kanter *et al.*, 1992: 12 - 13) and which lacks clarity (Toffler, 1990: 53). Crucially, in terms of the question at which this research is addressed, Foucault's work suggests that flexibility in its manifestation in the moving mosaic organisational form will be incompatible with the generation of docile bodies in so far as it moves away from the aspects of bureaucratic techniques outlined here.

This understanding does find some basis in the cultural management literature. Thompson (1993) has suggested that those companies which are often claimed to be

non-bureaucratic are in fact operating along bureaucratic lines which are more Foucaultian than Weberian, and Alvesson quotes Weick as noting:

> whenever you have what appears to be a successful decentralisation, if you look more closely, you will discover that it was always preceded by a period of intense centralisation where a set of core values were hammered out and socialised into people before people were turned loose to go their own 'independent' ways. (Wick, quoted in Alvesson, 1990: 42)

While this view is challenged by Rosenthal *et al.*, (1997) - who claim that in their case study there is far less surveillance and control that Alvesson and Thompson would have us believe - this may in part be because they appear to under-emphasise the role of the actor within techniques of discipline and consequently focus too much attention on a conception of managerial sovereignty. However, in at least one respect they are accurate: in summarising the post-structuralist control literature they re-emphasise a need for empirical evidence that takes into account the sort of methodological concerns dealt with in the previous sections:

> The critics raise important issues and counterbalance some of the more extravagant claims of the advocates of new management initiatives. However, to date there has been more attention to theoretical critique and argument than to substantiation of these positions. More fundamentally, there is a lack of good quality empirical data on *employee's experiences* of these initiatives, a gap that limits understanding regardless of research perspective (italics in original) (1997: 489).

Foucault and Clegg operate within what can be broadly called philosophical idealism. Yet the question with which I started implied, or at least questioned, the relationship between ideas and the material world. To address this, I need to move away from the grand theory of Foucault and Clegg and towards something more in the mid-range. The work of Pierre Bourdieu is useful in this respect. The key question with which I started was whether flexibility and the management of culture were incompatible. Above, I have re-focused this slightly by looking at the question of whether the material world sets

limits to the management of culture. Will loosing pay or hours preclude a unitary culture? Will the fact that your hours are unstable necessarily affect the management's capacity to manage your sense of identity? From the Foucaultian perspective, the answer is no. In theory any signifier can be negotiated to mean any effect. Yet some things are so taken for granted in an organisation that attempting to draw these meaning systems into the realm of negotiation will be far from easy.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Bourdieu and Wacquant, (1992) and Bourdieu (1998) explore this relative fixity of meaning. Bourdieu and his collaborators argue that some things are necessarily excluded from negotiation in certain types of organisation because the organisation itself is predicated on the solidity of these sets of meanings. He refers to this as the 'necessary culture' of an organisation. As Bourdieu and Passeron have it:

> The selection of meanings which objectively defines a group's or a class's culture as a symbolic system is *arbitrary* insofar as the structure and functions of that culture cannot be deduced from any universal principle, whether physical, biological, or spiritual, not being linked by any sort of internal relation to 'the nature of things' or any 'human nature'.
> The selection of meanings which objectively defines a group's or a class's culture as a symbolic system is socio-logically *necessary* insofar as that culture owes its existence to the social conditions of which it is a product and its intelligibility to the coherence and functions of the structure of the signifying relations which constitute it. (italics and hyphenation in original) (1977: 8).

Bourdieu and Passeron's reference to the social conditions of which a culture is a product is broad enough to allow many interpretations. One could read this as a kind of essentialisim (and through that back to crass Marxism). A better reading, that of Nash (1990), is somewhat more subtle. While all cultural choices are arbitrary in an anthropological sense, they do become tied to certain patterns in society which are constituted within the particular context in which they operate. In Bourdieu and Passeron's example, schools make what is anthropologically an arbitrary choice in favour

of literacy and numeracy over other forms of human practice, yet if they did not do so they would produce people who are not prepared for technological society. To choose against this arbitrary culture would be to go against the very conception of the role of the school in western technological societies. (Nash, 1990: 437). Similarly it can be argued that in commercial organisations the privileging of ideas concerning the primacy of profit motive for all concerned is integral to the very definition of the company as a commercial organisation. Yet this concern with the cost and value of the material outcomes of the employee's labour may well be one of the discourses which an attempt to create a unified culture must break out of. The work-value-wage-profit discourse may well provide the symbolic logic which under-writes differences of preference (for a discussion of the use of the term 'preferences' over the term 'interests' see below). In this respect, some meanings are not simply fixed by historical sedimentation or the negotiated victory of one body over another. Some meanings are inherent to the very existence of the organisation they exist within. Their place as the *raison-d'être* of a particular form of social life makes drawing these meanings into a negotiating space almost unthinkable within that form of social organisation.

In this respect, it is possible that the management of culture in commercial organisations may only be possible within certain boundaries. The relationship between the employer the employee - from a materialist point of view, the essential relationship between employer and employee - may be outside the realm of debate, not because the material reality of the employee impinges on their consciousness and gives this relationship a primacy, but because this relationship and the discourse which prioritises it is necessary for the functioning and continued survival of the commercial organisation. It is possible that it is management, not just staff, who prioritise this relationship.

Power, identity and ideology

Central to this discursive view of power is the negotiation of identity. Identity, as with other meanings, is not fixed or universal. As I have already noted, identity formation is "a continuing and often innovative cultural process of boundary maintenance and reconstruction" (Cohen, 1978: 397). Essential to the HRM model of generating cultures of commitment is the management of the employees' identity. By definition, this involves entering into relations of power through which identity will be negotiated.

Lukes (1974) suggests that there are three types of power. They are the power to get people to do something, the power to get them to not do something they would otherwise have done, and the power to get them to do something against their own 'real interests'. This third form of power is the power of ideology, and is the one that primarily interests me here. In developing this third dimension of power, Lukes draws heavily on the work of Antonio Gramsci (1971). The central idea is that a power is exercised in managing the ideas and values of a group or an individual in order to ensure that they do the things the exerciser of the power wants, rather than what is in their own 'real' interests. Ideology is, in this formulation, essentially 'a false consciousness', it means knowing things about the social world which are incorrect. One of the best known forms of this false consciousness is nationalism. According to this view, the working class give their allegiance to the rulers of a country, not recognising that the rulers are actually operating against the real interests of the working class. As we have seen, some of the authors writing on HRM have described it as an ideology - an attempt to hide the material reality of the employees. Clearly this ideological analysis ties identity and power together, in so far as if one can manipulate a person's sense of identity then one is exercising a power over the person which is non-coercive. However, like Lukes,

this form of the ideological analysis makes some assumptions which are, in practice, unsustainable.

Integral to this form of the idea of ideology is the proposition that people's 'real' interests are hidden by ideology. There are things that are really in their interest which they don't know about or understand. On the other hand, these things are seen by the social researcher. According to this understanding of the social world there are times that the social researcher, armed with the benefit of their supposedly objective analysis, is a better judge of what is in the person's interest than the person themselves. This, somewhat paternalistic view has been referred to the paradox of emancipation (Benton, 1981). To want to emancipate the working class one has to first of all presume that they are too stupid to see what is in their own real interests. These real interests are only seen by the middle class academic. The middle class view is privileged and even when we are on the side of the working class they are wrong. As Hindess notes: "'[i]nterests' in this sense clearly depends on the use of particular discursive means of formulating objectives and situating the agents in relation to them" (1982: 507). This biased and class-centred view is clearly unsustainable.

Benton suggests an alternative. For him, identity and ideology must both be understood as internally contradictory processes. Ideology is, he suggests, best understood in "'patterns of actually or potentially cross cutting, interlocking or conflicting identifications, loyalties, and locations of interests" (Benton, 1981: 181). Hindess seems to come from a similar perspective when he notes that "the forms of discourse available to agents generally allow the formulation of a variety of distinct and often incompatible objectives. (1982: 507). There are traces of this even in Gramsci, (1971) so often

quoted as the basis for the 'real' interests argument. He noted that all ideology (false consciousness) has a material base. In other words, people have not just been conned into believing something is in their interests when it is not. Instead, people have accepted something which is in their 'interests' when it is contradictory to something else which is also in their 'interests'. While his analysis does privilege the position of one of these interests (class interests), the roots of the 'contradictory interests' view can be seen in his work. In a practical sense this means that in the workplace increasing the profit of the company may be in the interest of the employees, since it means the company will not close down. In that sense managers and staff are in the same boat, and do have the same interest. On another level, higher profits are bought at the expense of wages, since both are paid out of the same pool - the difference between spending and income. In this respect the two have fundamentally opposed interests. While everyone is in the same boat, some are in the engine room stoking the engine while others are sunning themselves by the on-deck pool. This view is diametrically opposed to the 'Them and Us' analysis which is still popular in industrial relations studies (Kelly and Kelly, 1991; Turner and Morely, 1995; D'Art and Turner, 1999).

The formulation of identity is, as we have already seen, a complex and on-going processes. Identity is not given - it is achieved, or rather we are perpetually in the process of achieving identity. In a society that privileges material preferences or interests one would expect that the distribution of material wealth will play a part in the generation of identity. To put this in other terms, in a context (for example a company) which privileges a materialist discourse one would expect to find those competing for resources to form identities at least partially on this basis. Certainly Taylor and others (Taylor, 1980; Taylor and McKirnan, 1984) have argued that differential access to power

and wealth may cause a group to develop their own self-definition as ethnic group in order to enable them to better compete for resources.

Summary

The starting point of this section was that debates and research into the management of culture do not enter into or fully reflect the sort of ideas which underlies Human Resources Management's post-modern perspective. Nor are they influenced by the critique of functionalism. Instead, the functionalist or managerialist literature tries to understand the application of this post-modern ideal through very modernist models of research and theorisation. Therefore the available literature does not have the theoretical tools to explore sufficiently the capacity of managers to create a committed or unitary culture in highly flexible environments. In this respect, this chapter can be read as a post-structuralist critique of the modernist way in which post-modern ideas have been articulated in managerialist research. This, clearly, is one major gap in the literature.

The functionalist model of culture can be described as follows: *Culture is a set of values, beliefs and norms which is stable, exists before people and is internalised by them. It is a variable within a social system - the firm - which can be understood as a body, with interrelated institutions/organs which are controlled by the management/ leadership/head.* The critique I have presented above focuses on a number of failings of this model.

- It focuses on values, beliefs and norms rather than on the symbolism of identity.
- It decides what values, norms and beliefs are important in advance, rather than seeing which ones are meaningfully tied to identity.
- It sees culture as a stable, coherent, pre-existing variable which is an attribute of a

company, rather than as an emergent and reflexive series of ideas, values, beliefs and actions which are sometimes incoherent. It fails to recognise that the company, the organisation is, in itself, an achieved state constructed out of meaning systems.

- It does not offer a meaningful understanding of power (or resistance) and therefore cannot fully deal with the power relations inherent in an attempt to manage the culture of an institution.

For these reasons, the existing literature on HRM and the management of culture is flawed. The ways in which it addresses questions and the sort of data it chooses to answer these questions is flawed. This points to the need to address this question in a theoretically coherent way. It also raises a number of questions that any coherent attempt to understand flexibility and cultural management will need to address. These are:

- are there material limits (such as those set by flexibility-led material changes to work conditions) to the management of culture imposed by the 'necessity' of a materialist culture in commercial firms?
- are there contradictions between the lack of clarity in a moving mosaic organisational form and the management of culture?

In the next chapter I will identify how I will answer these questions - the methods I used to do the research. In the fourth chapter I will locate the case studies I use in the context of the economy and the workforce as a whole. In chapters five, six, and seven I will address the questions raised here directly. Before I do that I will need to look at some of the empirical gaps in the literature, and identify how the existing empirical literature can help me address these questions. It is to this I now turn.

The Empirical HRM Literature

It would be a mistake to assume that the previous section was theoretical and that this one is empirical. Most, if not all, of the theoretical writing cited above comes with empirical research attached. However, the point I made above is that much of the analysis of this data is of limited use, given the frailty in the theoretical scaffolding supporting and informing this research (Legge, 1995a: 198). However, it is worth noting that on a *purely* empirical level there are also gaps - large areas of empirical reality that have not yet been addressed by the management of culture literature. The two gaps which are identified here, and which this research sets out to address are: (a) a lack of ethnographic or bottom-up research on HRM and the management of culture; and in particular (b) a lack of such research in an Irish context.

A number of comprehensive reviews of different areas of the HRM and cultural management literature exist. These include reviews by Guest, (1992) and Legge, (1995a) on the creation of cultures of commitment and of HRM by Storey, (1992; 1995) and Brewster (1995). Rather than simply replicate these reviews, it makes more sense to briefly explore their findings, before looking at literature outside the scope of these reviews.

Extent and Nature of HRM and Cultural Management

Despite a great deal which has been written about HRM over the last number of years, there is still a great deal we do not know abut the extent and nature of HRM. This is particularly true of Ireland, where, until recently, there has been little available on the shape and nature of HRM and the management of cultures of commitment.

How does one turn the normative models of HRM listed in the early part of this chapter into measurable descriptions of social reality? Storey (1992), Storey and Sisson (1993) and their followers do this by identifying 'key levers' of HRM implementation. They identify a series of what are, broadly speaking, policy choices which are made by managers. Through this, they identify a difference between Traditional Industrial relations (IR) 'levers' (policies) and HRM 'levers' (policies). This will allow for the identification of HRM, even when the firm itself does not use the term HRM. The key levers of IR and HRM are presented here in Figure 2.1.

Table 2.1 Storey's Checklist of HRM Policies

Dimension	*Personnel and IR Levers*	*HRM Levers*
Foci of attention for interventions	Personnel Procedures	Wide ranging cultural, structural and personnel strategies
Selection	Separate, marginal task	Integrated, key task
Pay	Job evaluation; multiple fixed grades	Performance related: few if any grades
Conditions	Separately negotiated	Harmonisation
Labour-Management	Collective bargaining contracts	Towards individual contracts
Thrust of relations with shop stewards	Regularised through facilities and training	Marginalised (with exception of some bargain for change models)
Communication	Restricted flow/indirect	Increased flow/direct
Job design	Division of Labour	Teamwork
Conflict handling	Reach temporary truces	Manage climate and culture
Training and Development	Controlled access to courses	Learning companies

Source: Storey (1992:35)

As I mentioned earlier, while this tries to objectify and operationalise what is new or different in HRM, in doing so it ties HRM to a set of policies which may be specific to a particular period in time, while the basic assumptions of profitability through integration,

commitment, and flexibility may remain. This difficulty is cited by Tyson (1995:34), who notes that trying to tie HRM down to a single operating model is probably misguided. Since Personnel Management never existed as a single entity, a 'one best way' for all situations, there is no reason for assuming that HRM should or could. As I have already suggested, looking at the HRM goals or outcomes rather than the inputs or policies may be more effective.

Another approach is that taken by the Price Waterhouse/Cranfield/University of Limerick studies (Gunnigle, Flood, Morley and Turner, 1994; Brewster, 1995; Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley, 1997). Rather than try to identify a company as following HRM as opposed to IR, they identify the company as following HRM style policies. For them, all policies dealing with areas like selection, deployment and communication are HRM. Since, for example, some companies may be quick to adapt HRM style policies in relation to communication but slow to adopt such policies in relation to pay, this approach allows us to see a growth in HRM style policies even if companies cannot be said, overall, to have adopted HRM. It also allows for the empirical study of different forms of HRM in different places at different times, and to explore if, for example, European HRM might be different to US HRM, or if continental European HRM might be different to British HRM. The clear difficulty is that central to HRM is the notion of coherence or fit of policy. While these surveys identify how many people are engaged in one policy or another, they do not identify how many are coherently engaged in HRM. Roche (1995) has attempted such an analysis in relation to Ireland. The results of each of these approaches are presented below.

In Britain a number of surveys present evidence of the growth of HRM. These are

detailed in Storey's review of empirical evidence in relation to HRM (1995: 3 - 30). Among the interesting findings are that 35 per cent of firms surveyed in a Leicestershire study (published in 1994) had attempted a culture change programme, and 65 per cent of those considered it as having made a considerable contribution to objectives. 75 percent of firms had instituted increased flexibility between jobs, 76 per cent had instituted team-working, and 74 per cent had instituted team meetings used for briefing staff.

In the third Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (WIRS3) covering all of Britain, published in 1992, indicators of HRM in firms were on the increase. Sissons notes, in relation to the WIRS3 survey, that "the British management is taking its Human Resources more seriously" (1993: 205). Storey goes on to note: "These survey findings by the WIRS team provide confirmation of the case study reports by Storey detailing the important phenomenon of increasing line and general manager engagement with human resource management" (1995: 21).

On a European level, there is also evidence of the growth of HRM, and of specific forms of HRM. Evidence from Brewster (1995) and Gunnigle, Brewster and Morley (1994) shows a growth in flexible work practices and high levels of human resource personnel involvement at company board level. Brewster concludes that it makes sense to talk about HRM as a model used in Europe, even if the model is not the same as that prevalent in the US. "The trends show some areas (pay, flexibility, training) where the US approach works and others (such as trade union recognition and communications) where it does not. Rather than debate whether this means that HRM or personnel management or industrial relations is the more explanatory model, a more positive way forward is to redefine a 'European' approach to HRM; one that includes a significant

role for the state and trade unions" (1995: 328). Interestingly, this ties neatly with Sisson's finding, that HRM was more prevalent in Britain in unionised rather than non-unionised firms (1993: 205).

In relation to Ireland, Brewster (1995) presents some evidence of a growth in HRM related activities in firms. From a valid sample of 130 Irish firms, he identified moderately high levels of organisations offering individualised pay incentives (although, this goes hand in hand with a fairly high level of national or industry wide collective bargaining). Irish companies also showed increases in a range of 'flexible' work practices (though the data is only on numerical rather than skill-based flexibility). Ireland (in common with other peripheral European countries such a Spain, Portugal and Turkey) showed higher levels of training than core European countries. (1995: 309-329). While this shows some evidence of a growth in HRM consciousness and practice in Ireland there are difficulties. One difficulty is that the size of the valid sample for Ireland is reasonably small. A second difficulty relates to the method and nature of the measurement. How numerically flexible part-time or short-term contract work is depends on the national legislative context, something which differs quite radically from one European country to another. While such data can indicate something, what exactly it indicates it open to question.

Work on Ireland using the same and similar data has been done by Gunnigle, Flood, Morley and Turner (1994) and Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley. (1997). This work has focused on the extent to which different HRM style policies can be said to be in place in leading Irish companies. Between 1992 and 1995 they have identified growth in such areas as the presence of HRM/PR function, representation of

this function at board level, workforce flexibility and management-staff communication (Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford and Turner, 1997). Since they do not distinguish between companies in terms of those who evidence HRM as opposed to those that evidence Personnel Management of 'Traditional IR', they do not themselves attempt to identify how many of these top firms can be said to be moving towards HRM as opposed to IR. However, it is clear that in terms of the firms practising HRM style policies, there has been a growth over the last ten years. Roche (1995) does try to identify how many top Irish firms can be said to be using HRM overall. He does this by constructing scales for four different facets of HRM style activities and identifying how many companies score highly on a number of these scales. He identifies that only 6.8 per cent of companies surveyed score highly on all of these four scales, and only 26.2 per cent score highly on three out of four scales. Despite the relative modesty of the numbers using HRM (in a survey of high achieving companies) he does note that there is some diversity in the circumstances of companies who attain a high level of coherence between different policy areas. He notes that the data:

> implies that significant numbers of organisations which do not fit the 'textbook profile' still manage to attain high HRM fit. Putting it rather differently, there are clearly different 'trajectories' through which cohesive HRM policies can be attained, and 'textbook' organisational features emerge as a clear but rather modest contributor to their attainment (1995: 23)

Roche does try to address the issue of the coherence of HRM. He identifies three different models of fit, the Threshold model (where a certain minimum level of all types of HRM policies are engaged in by the company), the Leading Policy Areas model (where some areas of policy are deemed to be crucial and are prioritised in terms of HRM) and the Strategy Contingent Model (where the level of coherence is dependent on the company's strategy and therefore on the competitive context) (Roche: 1995: 3 - 9).

He identifies that threshold level coherence is possible, having been attained by the 6.8 per cent of the surveyed firms already mentioned. In looking for factors which might affect the attainment of coherence between different policies he tests a number of factors which might affect the firms capacity to develop cohesive HRM policies. These are: the capacity of management to develop such policies (an internal factor identified in various ways by Sisson, 1989; Storey, 1992; Storey and Sisson, 1993; Beaumont, 1993; Gallie and White, 1994); whether the market in which the firm operates is local, national or international (an external factor); whether or not the market is dynamic or stable (an external factor); whether or not the company is a multinational (an external factor); and the size of the company (an external factor). Interestingly, he does not include whether or not the company is unionised in his analysis because preliminary modelling suggest it is not a significant factor. This is notably different to the findings of Brewster and Sisson, cited above, and Gunnigle, Turner and D'Art (1997). Overall, he concludes that while there is no one set of criteria which will 'cause' the development of coherent HRM policies there are some criteria which will facilitate or hinder the development of such policies. In particular "larger, multinational organisations with high capacity for strategy, competing in international markets, are 76 times more likely to have developed cohesive human resources policies than smaller, indigenous organisations with low capacity for strategy competing in national regional or local markets" (1995: 4). Out of all the characteristics he identifies as mattering, only the capacity of management to develop such policies can be said to have a straightforward relationship with a high degree of HRM coherence in the companies studied. While size and market characteristics do seem to matter, this is not a direct effect. Instead, it is "through intensifying the effects of a high capacity for strategy on the odds of high HRM fit (1995: 25).

Roche's findings are interesting from the point of view of the question of the coherence of flexibility and cultural management. He is suggesting that attempts to combine different HRM policies are not contingent on being a textbook case (i.e., a large multinational with a core business). Any company, irrespective of size, markets etc. *can* be coherent in relation to HRM policies. However, the chances of them doing so are drastically reduced by a lack of capacity, small size and operation in local markets. However, there are a number of problems with Roche's approach, and that of other researchers who rely on survey research, which limit the usefulness of this work.

Studies of HRM based solely on surveys do have some major limitations. Firstly, most of the surveys quoted here have tended to equate HRM with specific policies. As I noted earlier, this imposes an etic model of HRM on the social reality rather than looking at people's experience of managing in relation to what are HRM goals. This is true in relation to Roche's work. He looks at how many companies put in place a certain minimal level of HRM style policies, not how these policies are articulated and negotiated in practice. There are occasions when the measures used are not terribly logical. For example, the measure of 'management capacity' identified by Roche is in itself a collection of outcomes. This means that he identifies the capacity to deliver by measuring if they do deliver on one thing and then correlates this with their delivery of something else. This means that the measure becomes somewhat tautological. In his defence, Roche makes the most of limited data. No such defence can be offered in relation to Turner and Morely (1995) whose measure of employee trust for management is constructed out of a lucky dip of platitudes.

One way around some of these difficulties is to look at the achievement of goals rather

than policies, but this is still subject to the difficulties mentioned earlier in the critique of the functionalist model of organisational culture i.e., it uses an etic models of analysis which will not necessarily tell us very much about identity and identification. To explain this in more detail, I will draw on Guest's review of this area.

Guest suggests that there are five sets of factors which can be said to 'cause' commitment in a firm. They are personal/individual characteristics, role-related experiences, work experiences, structural factors and HRM or personnel policies such as job security (1992:119). The results of Guest's review are presented in Table 2.2 below. The two set of variables that Guest draws particular attention to are personal characteristics and the work role. He concludes that policies around recruitment, selection and socialisation, and around job design can make a difference in terms of commitment.

Table 2.2 Antecedents of high organisational commitment

Categories	*Factors*
Personal characteristics	*Work involvement*
	Lower education
	Age (older)
Work role	*Job scope/Responsibility*
	Opportunity for self-expression
	Low role stress
Experiences in the organisation	*Confirmed expectations*
	Positive leadership/Supervision
	Commitment norm
	Feeling socially involved
Structural characteristics	Scope for ownership
	Decentralisation
	Interdependence within organisation
Personnel Policies	Security/Ability to count on organisation
	Fair treatment/Equitable pay

Source: (Guest, 1992:119)

If we look at these characteristics we can see that there are grounds on which we can wonder about the possibility of attaining high commitment in a flexible environment. The extent to which people are likely to feel involved in work, have an opportunity for self-expression, or feel that they are secure and can count on the organisation is likely to decline in direct proportion to the spread of numerical flexibility. However, it would be a mistake to draw too many conclusions from these studies. One difficulty with these studies is that, as Guest notes, "most are correlational and therefore can do no more than offer hypotheses about cause and effect relationships" (1992:118). In other words, this type of study looks at human relationships as a black box, studying what is on either side of the box without being able to identify what is input, what is output, and what is reflexively linked (i.e., both input and output). More crucially, what happens inside the black box is never uncovered. The process of human interaction is left unexplored. For example, the correlational survey data identifies lower education level as being related to high commitment to the organisation. Is this true of a particular type of organisation, or organisations at a particular time in recent industrial relations history? Has anyone asked the people involved if or why they are committed to the firm and noted the differences between people with different educational levels? We know that one thing is associated with the other, but we do not know why. The lid of the box remains tightly closed. A second difficulty is that these studies tend to assume that these factors (age, educational attainment, scope for ownership etc.) have fixed meanings. It is assumed that they will mean the same thing to different people in different places at different times. As I have already shown, this is exactly the sort of essentialism which the post-modern profits of cultural change are determined to undermine. It is worth noting that, within an Irish context, Turner and Morely's (1995) work is subject to the same sort of constraints.

Another difficulty common to these correlational studies (both those of HRM policies and HRM outcomes) is that they have tended to be quite broad rather than specific. For example in looking at HRM policies, they tell us if there are increases in the rate of flexible work practices rather than the specific rates of different types of flexibility, the different types of employees engaged in different types of work, the different backgrounds of these employees and the types of processes which have led to these different rates of flexibility. In other words, most of the sociologically interesting questions have been excluded from the surveys. The surveys also tend to be carried out at enterprise level. This means that the viewpoint received is only that of management. Clark *et al.* (1998) suggest a number of reasons for this including, the fact that the surveys are to be read by managers or managers-in-training and it appeals to these groups to be identified as the key agents in their organisation, the fact that most of these researchers are working in training managers and their priorities are the priorities of management and the fact that for academic managerial research to get funding it generally needs to demonstrate relevance to user groups - again, managers. It cannot be assumed that the experience of management and staff in a company are the same. In fact, as Clark *et al.* point out, the management based studies can best tell us what HRM practices are out there, not whether or not they are effective, coherent and sustainable. They write:

> The discrimination between practices which sustain HRM can surely only take place with reference to the first-hand accounts of employees themselves. It is they, after all, who are expected to enthusiastically engage with and fully participate in the HR strategies promulgated by senior management in their organisations. And it is largely upon them that such strategies stand or fall, are seen to endure and succeed or wither and fail (1998: 7).

Case study research is one way in which researchers try to open up the black box which correlational research leaves between 'variables'. Legge attempts to do just this, in her

review of case studies of attempts to manage culture (1995a: 191 - 198). Her case studies cover a range of companies, from newly privatised utilities, through public service and many points in between, most notably in the 'old, reliable' areas of car manufacturing and financial services. She notes that many implicitly follow Lewin's (1951) model of 'unfreezing/changing/re-freezing'. They are, by and large, working within the functionalist model discussed above. She notes that in their own terms, the literature does appear to present some evidence of cultural change, though in attempting to answer the question of 'What is achieved?' she responds "I find it difficult to answer this question for, although we have accounts of such 'cultural change' initiatives involving 'high commitment' management practices, there are few, if any systematic evaluations of the same (1995a:196). Such difficulties are further highlighted by other commentators (e.g. Smith and Peterson, 1988; Anthony, 1990,1994; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1990; McGrath and Geaney, 1998). A further difficulty, is that while some of these pieces of research are identified as case studies, they very often are presented as teaching case studies, which does not allow their methodological rigour to be examined. (See for example the many case studies cited in Gowler *et al.* [1993]). However on close examination it appears that, at best, only a few of these case studies are based on, or even involve to any great extent, the interviewing of the targets of cultural change: the staff themselves. Indeed, it seems that few of these case studies would come up to the standards of rigour laid down by authors on case study research such as Yin (1994) or Bryman (1989). Finally, while there are a few notable exceptions (e.g., Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Ogbonna, 1990, Ogbonna, 1992; du Gay, 1996; Rosenthal *et al.*, 1997; Mabey *et al.*, 1998; Van Maanen, 1998), the study of HRM and of the management of cultures of commitment is largely bereft of the sort of organisational ethnography to be found, for example, in labour process studies. This curiously biased focus may be due in

part to the same sort of issues identified as being the causes for the predominance of survey research. Whatever the reason, the people who are the targets of cultural change techniques, the people whose culture is supposed to change are rarely approached in research into the changing of culture.

So what do these rare, rigorous case studies tell us about the relationship between the management of culture and flexibility in commercial organisations? Storey's case studies (1992) have already been described as a classic (Legge, 1998: 15), although from my point of view their usefulness is limited by the fact that they look at HRM policies rather than HRM outcomes. Such flexibility as exists within his case studies tends to be task based rather than numerical, but even this has had to be the subject of continuous formal and informal negotiation (1992: 89 - 97). A similar process is identified by Heyes (1998). Storey does note that while there is evidence of change in culture at management level, there is much less evidence of change in culture at staff level (1992: 215).

Other interesting case studies include those of Paul du Gay (1996) and Rosenthal *et al.*, (1997). Both pieces are similarly intriguing in so far as they adopt a post-structuralist analysis similar to that adopted here (although du Gay relies heavily on the work of Michel de Certeau (1984) rather than that of Foucault). In most important respects Rosental *et al.*'s, work mirrors the more comprehensive work of du Gay. While du Gay's focuses on the management of identity, and Rosenthal *et al.* focus on the management of a quality programme, both have a some of interesting points to make in relation to the interaction between the material issues of flexibility and cultural management.

Like Rosenthal *et al.*, du Gay finds a substantial amount of evidence to support his contention that the management of culture is a core activity of retail managers. In company A, the focus was on engendering a service culture. In companies C and D, the management of cultural change was aimed at creating an enterprise culture within the chain. He notes of company D that this is an enterprise culture which "links together customer satisfactions, individual responsibility and accountability, self-development, economy and efficiency in a chain of equivalencies" (du Gay, 1996: 133). Overall, he claims that attempts to stay 'close to the customer' in retailing are "constitutively linked to obtaining 'productivity through people'. It is 'culture' that provides the link. The quest for 'quality service' in contemporary retailing, for example, is represented foremost as a battle for the imagination, not only of the consumer, but also of the retail employee" (1996: 130).

However, he notes that such changes meet with limited successes, because of the ways in which the specific biographies of the employee, the manager and the company have interacted. He notes that the discourse which is to constitute the centre of the new culture:

> not only acts upon people with specific biographies but upon organisations with specific histories. When enterprise calls for a 'management revolution' - a fresh start, as it were - and projects the vision of a cohesive but inherently flexible organisation, work relations in companies like A and most other modern retailing corporations *already* involve the differentiation and 'fracturing' of collections of employees (management as well as workers).(1996: 154).

He also notes that the lines of fracture are not necessarily upon the lines of difference in material preferences: "such groupings do not develop solely or necessarily around the traditionally privileged site of management/worker relations. Rather, these groupings are

multiple, often seemingly contradictory to outside observers, and liable to constant re-alignment" (1996: 156). From the point of view of the core question of this work, du Gay notes in passing that one of the possible bases for such a fracturing is part-time versus full-time workers. While Rosenthal *et al.* found a higher degree of success in the management of quality project, they also conclude that there are "considerable individual variations in terms of how receptive different people are to new forms of 'dominant' discourse and ideology" (1997: 496).

du Gay concludes that he has no evidence that labelling from above is anything but limited. He also attests to "the impossibility of abolishing antagonism and therefore of creating the happy relation the organisation would like to have within itself" (1996: 174). However, for him, this does not represent the failure of cultural management, rather he is at pains to point out "the inherently relational or dislocated nature of 'tactics of consumption at work'" - including consumption of the enterprise discourse and its attendant identity management - "to highlight both their structural inversion of and ambivalent dependence upon 'official norms' of enterprise. Because 'tactics of consumption' are *always immanent to power and not in a relation of external opposition to power*, I have argued that the effects of such tactics upon the process of 'making up people' at work are never unambiguous" (1996: 174). du Gay is arguing that, although the creation of a unitary culture is impossible (his term), the effects of attempts to manage culture cannot be predicted as being - simply - ineffectual. The end result of such an attempt to manage culture is, at best, unpredictable.

There are three issues to note in relation to this work. While it is interesting as a theoretically coherent attempt to understand the management of culture (and in particular

the generation of an enterprise culture), it does not really address the question with which I started this chapter. Certainly both works provide pointers towards what we might expect from the data, but such pointers allow only informed guesswork. This body of work does not tell us much about the relationship between attempts to construct a unitary, company-focused identity and the mobilisation of different types of flexibility within a company. Secondly, both du Gay and Rosenthal *et al.* conclude that individual biography is the defining feature in the consumption of the workplace identities offered to the staff. This seems to negate the possibility for what would traditionally have been understood as a sociological understanding of the issue. du Gay, in particular, suggests that there is a lack of predictability about the manner in which the management of culture is articulated in practice through interaction, when predictability is the very basis of sociology. The fact that we are disposed to fairly regular patterns of actions, values and beliefs which will, clearly, be indexically linked, but will still be fairly regular does not deny the individuality of the persons biography but does locate it. Bourdieu calls this the *habitus*. He notes:

> sociological analysis . . . carries out a radical rupture with the profoundly complaisant image of human existence defended by those who want us at all cost, to think of themselves as 'the most irreplaceable of beings'. (1998: ix).

Certainly du Gay's analysis, full as it is of beautifully documented accounts of social processes, strays on the side of individualism. His claim that "the effects of such tactics [of identity management] upon the process of 'making up people' at work are never unambiguous" (1996: 174) does not give us enough of a sense of the regularity of the effects of social process. While processes may not be determining, they clearly do have a regularity of outcome. Part-time work, flexibility, gender, and age, if articulated in certain ways are likely to have certain outcomes. Such sociological concerns are a level

of abstraction below du Gay's concerns. (Rosental *et al.* fall into a similar trap when they only note "For whatever reason, some employees are clearly more resistant to managerial attempts to constitute meaning" [1997: 496]. A sociological attempt needs to be concerned with what these reasons might be). du Gay's account best serves as a description of the processes of power and discourse. His conclusions operate at the level of grand theory. He does not offer anything substantial at the level of mid-range theory. He does not theorise any relatively fixed relationships between different meaning patterns in the particular context in which he researches. It is precisely this level of analysis the core question of this research is pitched at.

The third issue which is worth noting is, in some respects, the other side of this sociological balancing act. It is also an issue which is common to all of the case studies noted above. While we should look for some regularity with similar contexts, we should also recognise the difference of different contexts. All of the case studies cited were carried out outside Ireland - the vast majority in the UK. While some (du Gay included) work on the assumption that this can be readily internationalised, such assumptions are questionable. One cannot assume that the Irish case will necessarily be similar to the experience in the UK. Whether it will or not is an empirical question which needs to be addressed. Certainly in relation to other areas of workplace studies both similarities and differences can be noted. The legislative situation in relation to workplace flexibility, for example, is different, as is the extent to which flexible workers are in flexible work through choice or through a lack of alternatives (Wickham, 1997). It is important that in workplace sociology we avoid what Margaret Archer has identified as the type of explanations which "represent general explanations that pinpoint some particular variable or process as universally responsible". She goes on to note that many attempts to offer a

grand theory represent an epiphenomenalism that denies important differences between societies (1989: 243). In other words, any study that engages with a body of international literature while addressing a specific empirical location must recognise its own cross-national nature. The literature with which the researcher engages is drawn from a different place and a different time to the research context.

In fact, in Ireland, there is a real lack of case study or ethnographic research into HRM, flexibility or cultural management. McGrath and Geaney note that "in Ireland one is struck by the low level of significant research focusing directly on organisational change and its management" (1998: 341). In relation to research which might be described as sociological they note only one piece of research, which is, unfortunately published in a very limited form (Moore, 1995). While the case studies of Turner and Morely (1995) do address questions of identity - the 'Them and Us' question - their research with staff is based solely on quantitative methods. There is slightly more ethnographic work available on flexibility in Ireland (Daly, 1985; Daly, 1988; Tormey, forthcoming) however this has not addressed issues relating to the management of culture or identity. More generally, and with some notable exceptions (e.g., Harris, 1983), Ireland does not have the sort of tradition of workplace ethnography that one finds in other countries. This is one of the major gaps in the Irish literature. As Gunnigle, Morley, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley (1997) note there are a "number of process issues related to the actual conduct of HRM within organisations which cannot be adequately addressed through a quantitative survey . . . but, rather, require more detailed case study based investigation" (1997: 48).

Overall then there are a number of important empirical gaps in the literature at present.

To some extent the international literature, and to a large extent the Irish literature, is lacking the sort of ethnographic research which is essential to make sense of HRM in practice. In particular, such studies as exist do not address the question of the relationship between flexibility and cultural management. Even the most comprehensive case study in the international literature, that of du Gay, is limited in so far as it does not address itself at the level of analysis required to make sense of the relationship between flexibility and the management of culture. In the specific context of Ireland, nothing comparable is currently available.

The survey based data is useful insofar as the figures do tell us that the management of culture and flexibility are two of the major issues facing companies in the current climate both in Ireland and further afield. Furthermore it can point out certain factors which are likely to have an impact on the coherence of a firm's HRM policies. In particular, Roche's suggestion that the capacity of a firm to develop HRM, understood as the levels of experience and training of its managers and the time allocated to strategic thought, will be important. Reviews of the Irish and international literature on commitment also suggest that some conflict between flexibility and cultural management is possible, but it can tell us little about the processes of inter-relationship between the two, or about the ways in which what it treats as abstract essentialised categories can, in fact, be drawn into the realm of negotiation, and re-constituted.

Conclusion

There are a number of areas in which the literature on HRM and the management of culture is currently deficient. At the theoretical level, the models which inform and shape a great deal of the literature are based on a functionalism that has been discredited for

thirty years. For what one can only assume are political reasons, the study of the management of culture has confined itself in inappropriate and regressive models of social reality. It has locked itself in the land that time forgot. This is all the more regrettable, given that the normative literature which gives rise to these attempts to understand the management of culture is based on ideas drawn from post-structuralist thought. At an empirical level too there are gaps. The core issue which this research addresses is the relationship between flexibility and the management of culture. This question is not sufficiently addressed at present in the available literature. While there are good reasons for believing that the two are incompatible, this needs to be explored in practice. Chapter three looks at the way in which I did this.

CHAPTER THREE - METHDOLOGY *OR* NECESSARY

NAVEL GAZING

> The Empiricists are like ants; they gather and consume. The Rationalists are spiders spinning webs out of themselves. But the bee combines both functions. It gathers its materials from flowers of garden and field, and digests and transforms them by a faculty of its own. This is the type of true philosophy. (Francis Bacon, quoted in Farrington, 1966: 97).

Personal Introduction

Bacon's thoughts can be applied to some of the perennial tensions in sociology. On one hand there is the sociology of rich description, with plenty of detail and colour and energy - a living description of the social world. Attendant to this sometimes comes a lack of sociological analysis. As with du Gay (1996), there may be a tendency towards individualism. Analysis can also be overwhelmed by the wealth of detail (McGrath and Geaney, 1998). On the other hand there is the sociology of clearly worked out research questions designed to allow falsification of a theory. With this, sometimes, comes a lack of engagement, a failure to see people's lived lives once researching and a failure to contextualise for the society one is studying. This is where most of the managerialist writers end up. To paraphrase Bacon, somewhere in the middle is the true sociology.

I didn't always engage in this kind of philosophical meandering. Once upon a time I was far more relaxed about epistemology. Put simply, I ignored it. In designing this research project (in the early 1990s) I took certain considerations into account. These included such factors as: the nature of the social entity viewed, (i.e. issues relating to the fact that the research was on organisations); the sort of information required to deal with the research questions; the sort of research training I had or could easily access; and issues

of size and scope of research. Drawing from a few well regarded and influential cookbooks of sociological method (primarily Bryman, 1988a, 1988b and 1989; Hakim, 1987; and Yin, 1984), I chose my methods based on such considerations and set about the research. Questions of epistemology and ontology were addressed by 'tradition'. If it was good enough for the many that had thumbed those pages before me, it was good enough for me. Methodological purists were seen as un-pragmatic navel gazers. I had taken good note of Peter Berger who had written that, "some sociologists . . . have become so preoccupied with questions of methodology that they have ceased to be interested in society at all" (1963: 25).

Somewhere along the way the existential angst set in. Somehow, the question of 'Am I?' came to be addressed in terms of the question 'What sort of a sociologist am I?'. My first teaching job - teaching adult education philosophy - did not help. In trying to make Berkley's questioning of his capacity to know a tree interesting to others, I began to get interested myself. How the hell could he know if it existed or not? Before I knew it, epistemology had a hold of me.

For that reason this chapter deals with more than the methods used. For reasons of interest as well as issues of morality (dealt with below) the epistemology underlying any truth claims that I make is presented here. While I recognise that epistemology is among the least appealing aspects of sociology (Bonner, 1994:3) - a sociology which often conspires to make itself esoteric and unappealing - there is an often neglected responsibility to ensure that our truth claims are based on clear principles.

In this chapter I will start by identifying and clarifying my research question. I will then go on to describe the case study approach which I used for the bulk of the research. I will then describe my methods of data collection and analysis before finally noting a few final issues such as the necessity for an intellectual biography and the ethics of this research.

The Research Question

The question which is at the core of this research is this: *What is the interaction between the management of culture and the management of flexibility in commercial organisations*. This question is descriptive in nature. As I have shown, the management of culture and flexibility are tied together in both the post-modernist literature and its managerialist counterpart, the HRM literature. The HRM literature suggests that the reason for managing culture is to generate commitment to the firm, and from that to generate quality and flexibility, however it is not clear that this is possible. As the previous chapter argues, there are two reasons why it might not be possible. First, the nature of commercial organisations may mean that there are aspects of the culture which are 'necessary', such as a focus on wage costs and profit. This may prioritise the material differences in preferences between management and staff. Second, the moving mosaic organisational form may have such ambiguity as to separate the signifier and signified, rather than fix them in a manner which management would like. This lack of clarity may not be conducive to the sort of techniques of discipline necessary to manage the culture of the workplace.

As the previous chapter also noted, there are a number of factors which may affect the management of culture. They include: whether the organisation is a commercial or non-commercial organisation; the national culture of the organisation; the size of the organisation; the age, education and gender of the workforce; and the nature of the work. The way in which some of these factors interrelate with both flexibility and cultural management have already been mapped by quantitative research, as I have noted in the last chapter. Their processes of interaction now needs to be described if we are to explore the space between du Gay's (absolutist) assertion that one cannot predict how these factors will inter-relate with cultural management and the findings of Guest that much of the empirical research (also absolutist in their analysis) shows that older, less educated people are the most likely candidates for successful cultural management.

The case studies I chose were all from the retail trade. There were a number of reasons for this. Some of these reasons will be dealt with in the next chapter but I will deal with two reasons here. The first is that choosing a specific sector of the economy allowed me to control for factors relating to the sector of the economy. Any research can be thought of as an attempt to see what happens in a system. This can be a social system as in sociology or a physical system as in physics. In order to see what happens between two parts of the system, it makes sense to try to hold the other parts of the system constant (Bhaskar, 1978, Collier, 1994). While in a social system there is never complete closure of the system and some factors are always likely to vary, it is still worthwhile making an attempt to achieve some level of regularity. This is noted by Hakim (1987: 62) who writes that "case studies are designed to achieve *experimental isolation* of selected social factors or processes within a real-life context so as to provide a strong test of prevailing explanations and ideas [italics in original]". The same point is made by other writers also

(Marsh, 1988: 226). Clearly this is quite different to randomised isolation where factors are hoped to be controlled through random selection. This difference does not make it less valid. The retail sector was chosen because it possesses greater explanatory power (Mitchell, 1983; Platt, 1989; Rose, 1991).

The second part of the Hakim quote above leads me into my second point. Part of my rationale in looking at one sector of the economy was to provide a strong test for prevailing explanations and ideas. One of the underlying theories being addressed is that the material situation and the possible conflict between management and staff over material issues will remain important for the staff (and the management). If this is untrue then irrespective of the ways in which flexibility impacted on the staff materially, it would not affect the management's ability to manage the culture. In order to address this part of the question I needed to be careful about the research location I chose. Clearly there are different material effects of flexibility. Some types (voluntary work-sharing, for example) can be thought of as 'employee-friendly' flexibility practices. There is no reason why giving someone the hours they want would cause them to affirm a difference in material preference between management and staff. Other types of flexibility (low or variable pay, involuntary part-time work, etc.) are less 'employee friendly'. They are more likely to cause staff to affirm a difference in the material preferences of management and staff. Yet prescriptive literature on HRM, as well as the form of philosophical idealism which underlies it *and* the post-modernity literature from which this derives all seem to feel that culture can be managed in any circumstances. In particular, since the point of managing culture is to enable the generation of flexibility (including less 'employee-friendly' flexibility), cultural management and flexibility need to be compatible.

This affects the choice of research location. In looking for a flexible working environment, I looked for one which practices less 'employee-friendly' flexibility. This is likely to be typical of employment sectors which have tight product markets, but loose labour markets. If the management of culture was possible in this environment it would be reasonable to assume that it would be possible in most other environments. If it was not possible then (a) the claims of post-modernity to describe (and the claims of HRM to prescribe) a new kind of workplace combining flexibility and cultural management are likely to apply only to part of the workforce, and (b) some of the processes at work in this sort of situation may also underlie relations in other sectors of employment and may come to the fore when tight product markets and loose labour markets demand or allow. The retail sector was chosen as fitting the necessary criteria. As I will show in the next chapter, in the early and mid-1990s it had very visibly tight product markets, but a loose labour market. It was at the forefront of the growth in flexibility in employment at that time. At the same time, market success was thought to rely on the management of a service culture within the store. The retail trade has another benefit also. Compared to other sectors of the economy it is very large. Therefore by describing the working lives of people in retail I am likely to be touching on practices which affect many people. The same cannot be said of other economic sectors (and in consequence, other studies).

In summary then, the research question to be addressed was this: *What is the interaction between the management of culture and the management of flexibility in commercial organisations. In specific, are there (a) material limits to the management of culture and (b) contradictions between the moving mosaic organisational form and the management of culture in a tight product market/loose labour market situation.*

Specifically I looked for a number of pieces of information which I believed would address these questions.

- I first of all looked for the existence of a unitary culture. What were the norms, beliefs and knowledge which were held by different groups within the company? Were they similar or could different groups be identified?
- I looked for the meaningful symbolism of group identification. What stories did different groups tell about each other? Were these shared stories or not? How did they identify who was 'in-group' and who was at a distance?
- I looked for data on the structure and organisation of the company. What were the levels and mechanisms of flexibility? Training? Communication? Pay and conditions?

I approached these questions using a case study methodology. In order to make some meaningful statement about the wider world, I also looked at where these case study companies 'fitted' into the overall picture of the Irish economy and Irish retail.

Case Study Methodology

This study is focused on companies and much of the available sociological research on management in companies has been based on case studies (e.g. Roy, 1954; Burawoy, 1982; Edwards,1979; Pollert, 1981 and much of the labour process tradition) and this suggested that the case study was a useful strategy. Essentially, it made sense as a study of organisational life. The workplace and the interrelationships between people and groups within the workplace were what interested me. Therefore it made sense to study the networks *within* a certain number of workplaces rather than, for example, surveying people randomly.

What exactly is a case study? It is defined by Yin as:

> an empirical enquiry that
> - investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when
> - the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. . .
>
> The case study inquiry
> - copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
> - relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
> - benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (1994:13).

It is defined more simply by Hakim as follows:

> Case studies take as their subject one or more *selected* examples of a social entity - such as communities, social groups, organisations, events, life histories, families, work teams, roles or relationships - that are studied using a variety of data collection techniques (Hakim, 1987: 61). [Italics in original]

In relation to the quality and quantity debate, both these definitions identify with what Bryman calls 'the technical solution', in other words, they allow for a variety of data collection techniques in order to get the variety of different types of data required (Bryman, 1988b). Both note that the case is defined as a social phenomena or entity, a loose definition allowing a range of possible subjects. Hakim emphasises the crucial role of the selection of phenomena for study, while Yin appears to take this for granted, while emphasising epistemological naturalism and the role of deductive as well as inductive logic. While there are other definitions of case study research (e.g. Stake, 1994) as well as some refusals to define case study research (e.g., Rose, 1991), essentially these definitions cover most of the points touched on by other authors.

The research question addresses a particular social entity (workplace) but looks at a situation where the interrelationship between different factors (gender, class, age) and the two central factors (flexibility and the management of culture) are thought to be crucially important. There is no attempt to limit the number of variables which may turn out to be important. Since people will define for themselves what is important in terms of their own meaning systems, an attempt to do this would defeat the purpose of the research. This is, essentially, qualitative research (e.g., Silverman, 1985; 1993; Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979; Denzin and Lincon; 1994). However all qualitative work is limited in the extent to which it can be generalised to wider groups and I did want to be able to locate the qualitative work in some sort of context. For example, if I discovered a particular process at work I wanted to be able to locate it in a broader context and identify the number of people and the situations in which it might apply. In other words, I wanted to map social reality as well as identify the processes which are shaping it. This necessitated looking at the strengths of quantitative work as well (Bryman, 1988b: 94 - 102). Given the literature in existence I also had a theoretical proposition which I wanted to explore, even though the site itself - Irish retail - is one on which little descriptive research has been done. These three reasons, the richness of the context, the necessity for mixing methods and the existence of a prior theoretical framework fit precisely with Yin's definition above.

This research is based on three case studies. There are a number of rationales for this. For Hakim, (1987:64) the experimental logic of case studies can often be best served by choosing a number of cases which are thought to cover the range of situations, starting with the extremes. Sudman (1976:26) notes that the confidence in the general significance and robustness of research findings increase with the number of sites. He

also claims that the single largest gain occurs when the number of sites is increased from one to two. Yin, in developing this, borrows and adapts the conceptual usage of another term common to survey research - replication (1994: 45). He notes:

> Every case should serve a specific purpose within the overall scope of the inquiry. Here, *a major insight is to consider multiple cases as one would consider multiple experiments* - that is, to follow a "replication" logic. This is far different from a mistaken analogy in the past, which incorrectly considered multiple cases to be similar to the multiple respondents in a survey (or the multiple subjects *within* an experiment) - that is, to follow a "sampling" logic. . . [A]n individual case or subject is considered akin to a single experiment, and the analysis must follow cross-experiment rather than *within*-experiment design and logic. (Yin, 1994: 46) (Italics in original).

The logic of multiple case studies, then, is not a statistical logic. The multiple case studies are not meant to be a representative sample. They are a number of case studies chosen from slightly different contexts which, in comparison, may tell us more about what processes are specific to a particular site or situation and what processes are found more generally. Their logic is the that of replication and comparison, not of randomness.

Given the fact that selecting a single sector of the economy could only control for a certain number of factors, other decisions were taken to help me control for, or at least understand, the different processes in operation. I focused more specifically on supermarkets, partially because they fitted my criteria of workplaces with an emphasis on both the management of culture and flexibility which were also in a tight product market and a loose labour market situation. I will elaborate in chapter four some of the more personal reasons for choosing this sector. Within this sector I chose a number of case studies.

There were a number of different factors which could have formed the basis for my choice of case studies. Given the variety of factors which could affect the processes of cultural management I felt it would be best to select cases which could be predicted to have different outcomes (i.e., theoretical replication [Yin, 1994: 48]). Factors such as the size of the workplace and the company, the nationality of the company, the extent to which it practised 'hard' or 'soft' HRM could all play a part. I initially set out a 2 X 2 grid based on the size of the workplace and the extent to which the company practised hard or soft HRM. As Yin notes (1994:47) one problem with multiple-case case studies is that choosing cases based on certain criteria will necessitate some degree of familiarity with the case studies in advance. In using hard versus soft HRM as a basis for deciding on case studies a problem quickly became apparent. As I have noted in chapter two, although hard and soft HRM could be distinguished at normative level, it was far from clear what criteria should be used in distinguishing their practices. Although this could be done by distinguishing between companies where the industrial relations climate was good, this put some of the supposed outcomes in as an assumption. This would make the research tautological. Instead, I switched direction slightly and distinguished between companies which were hostile to trade unions and those which were not, since hostility to trade unions would not necessarily lead to a lack of unitary culture and vice-versa. The three case studies chosen fitted into this matrix. By coincidence the one 'union-friendly' store was part of a multinational retail chain, whereas the other two were Irish owned concerns. The final, 2 X 2 grid is represented in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1 Identification of case study stores matrix

Small 'Union Hostile' Store Super Store	**Large 'Union Hostile' Store** Home Store
----------	**Large 'Union Friendly' Store** Quality Store

Yin recommends writing up each case study report individually, attempting to draw conclusions from each, and only then comparing the reports in order to draw out cross-case study conclusions (1994: 49). This advice was followed. Yin also recommends that one avoid changing one's theoretical framework until after all the data is collected (1994: 52). This advice was not. While the theoretical understanding with which I started remained fairly similar throughout, Yin's suggestion that my understanding of the data should not grow and develop in interaction with the data while it was being collected is unrealistic. Whyte expresses this beautifully:

> Often we have the experience of being immersed in a mass of confusing data. We study the data carefully, bringing all our powers of logical analysis to bear on them. We come up with an idea or two. But still the data do not fall into any coherent pattern. Then we go on living with the data - and with the people - until perhaps some chance occurrence casts a totally different light on the data, and we begin to see a pattern that we have not seen before. This pattern is not purely an artistic creation. Once we think we see it, we must re-examine our notes and *perhaps set out to gather new data* in order to determine whether the pattern adequately represents the life we are observing or is simply a product of our imagination. (Whyte, 1955: 279 - 280) [Italics added].

Whyte's suggestion that we live with, and imagine our data during the collection process is a far better representation of the reality. It is impossible to imagine that conversations with people about their lives and their way of understanding their lives would not affect us and our thoughts. It is also profoundly amoral. The notion that the researcher is an impartial scientific observer and that the research subject/participant has nothing to offer

except data, is one that has been heartily challenged (Punch, 1994; Adler and Adler, 1994; Lentin, 1993; Lentin, 1994). The theoretical framework I use did not remain stagnant over the years in which I carried out the field work. I continued to read, to chat with, interview, watch and live with my research participants/subjects. I continued to imagine. This makes the data, and consequently the findings, richer than any forcibly stagnated theoretical framework would have done. Therefore I did not hold off on matching data to theory until after all the data has been collected as Yin suggests.

Overall, the multiple case case study methodology using the logic of theoretical replication was used in the this research project. Each case study is taken as its own population, and inference is made to the theoretical level. The drawback in this is that it is difficult, even with theoretical replication, to make sense of the overall picture. To draw on a geographical analogy, the case study will tell you how glaciers form U shaped valleys, but not how many glaciers there are today, their size and their importance to the processes of topographical change. In other words, we need to put the case studies in some context. This will suggest answers to some of these questions. In order to do this I carried out an extensive review of official government statistics in relation to the current trends in flexibility in the economy as a whole and in the retail trade in particular. Where official statistics were not published I requested specific runs to be done on the data sets. The staff in the Central Statistics Office were very helpful and supplied the necessary data. This constitutes an integral part of the research project and while it does not allow me to generalise from my cases to all companies, or even to all retail companies, it does allow me to make some educated guesswork as to the possible extent of the uncovered processes.

Data Collection and Analysis

Triangulation

Within each case study a number of different data collection instruments were used. These included individual interviews with respondents/participants, group interviews, documentary research, and survey research. There are two reasons for this. One, the purely technical reason, is that it gives access to different types of data that I wanted. The second is to allow for data triangulation (Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 1978; Hakim 1987; Yin, 1994). For example, if I am interested in the issues a strike is conducted on, I can ask a striker or I can read the various submissions to the Labour Relations Commission. Together these will give me a richer picture than one alone would, combining both the issues the union negotiated on and the issues the employee was striking on. If there is a divergence between the two this gives an added richness to the data. I can establish the 'facts' which are inter-subjectively held by different groups and I can establish that which is held to be true by one group and not by another. I can check to see if a respondent/participant's memory is faulty or biased, or to see if the written record is full and accurate. Such data triangulation gives me more confidence that the things which I hold to be empirically true are actually empirically true.

Access

I needed to get access to each of the locations in order to carry out the research. When social researchers die and go to heaven, they will probably have to negotiate access at its gates. One of the problems with researching companies is that often those in a position of power are not all that interested in having the particular aspects of their organisation you want to examine, examined (Clark *et al.*, 1998). Yet "the ultimate quality of a piece of research, indeed the very possibility of caring it out, depends on the possibility of

negotiating and sustaining such access" (Powell and Lovelock, 1991: 128). Fontana and Frey (1994) identity a number of steps in gaining access. They are:

- Accessing the setting;
- Understanding the language of the respondents;
- Deciding on how to present yourself;
- Locating an informant; and
- Establishing Rapport.

I used a number of different techniques to access the settings. In all cases I started with an initial letter to the management of the store. This letter was addressed to influential gatekeepers within the company (Bryman, 1988b: 9 - 10). Two of the companies responded by inviting me in to talk to them about the research. In one case, that of Super Store, I knew an acquaintance of the manager with whom I was discussing access. I took care to casually mention this and we swapped stories about our mutual acquaintance. From there on, this senior manager was happy to grant any access I wished for, subject only to my not interfering too much with the work of the store. He asked for nothing in return. In the second case the company was interested in the study insofar as it could give them feedback on their own cultural change programmes. They were willing to facilitate the study provided I give them a report on the quantitative stage of the work. The third company did not reply, though I did interview a number of individuals within the company (in their private capacity) at that time. I left this alone for some time while I carried out my other case studies. Having carried out the other two case studies a number of opportunities came to hand which would enable me to get data on the third company. While the company would not officially give me access to their staff, once their staff went on strike they couldn't stop me. Accompanied by a friend

(and with shades of Whyte's [1955] 'Doc' in my mind) I went along to the picket and I was introduced to different groups of people. Through this mechanism I was able to get access to the staff. Once the strike was over a number of the managers also agreed to talk to me in an unofficial capacity. This gave me the basic access to each location.

Having got into each setting I needed to ensure that I spoke the right language and understood the things that were said to me. This would help me identify my role in each interaction as well. I had to interview people from a number of different backgrounds and in a number of different jobs, including well-trained senior managers, middle managers, supervisors, managers with little training or formal education, college students, manual staff who left school early, men and women. I would sometimes take on the role of the learner (Wax, 1960), sometimes the academic, (Becker, 1956). Sometimes I could 'dress down' and use expletives (Thompson, 1985), sometimes I could not (Whyte, 1955). In each context my role could be slightly different, as would be my language. For example, with senior managers I was the university professional, (wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase) able to discuss the intricacies of recent approaches to HRM and their application in practice. I was a fellow professional, an intellectual equal. To young people who had left school early I was a working class lad who had worked in a bar for years, had worked in retail work and knew the scene. To most college students I was, essentially, a student working on a project for college. I dressed in 'good student wear' (clean jeans and an ironed shirt) and spoke of common experiences with them. To older working class women, I was working on a project for college which I hoped would eventually become a book because I noticed how none of the books I read in college ever told the stories of the thousands of women working in

retail. None of these personas were false - all were true. Each of these things were part of what I brought to the research. (Some of them I will return to in the next chapter).

I had to learn how to do this and I did make mistakes as I went along. Early on I went for a meeting with a manager who I felt, since she had a senior personnel role in her company, would be familiar with debates in HRM. She sat and nodded pleasantly for some time as I spoke about my research before eventually asking me "Look, what is this HRM that you keep talking about?" She had never heard of HRM. This drew to my attention the practical implications of the fact that not all senior managers have intensive training in their specialist field. I was more cautious in how I started conversations in future. Later, in a different store I found that the role of student which had served me well in another store was no longer serving me well. The participants here tended to be slightly older and to have been out of formal education for longer. They simply did not care to help a student. I shifted my presentation of self slightly to that of the working teacher who was doing a course in his spare time (also a true persona) and access became easier. They could relate to working and overworked people. Through this process of trial and error, I managed to build up some rapport with my respondent/participants.

In two of the case studies I had a great deal of help from individuals within the company. In one case the 'Doc' was a friend in advance of my time there. She introduced me to people, explained different groups to me, mapped out different groups and encouraged and re-assured people when they needed it that they could talk to me. In the second case a person within the company took on responsibility for organising interviewees from a number of different groups for me, organised for them to do the interviews on work time

in order to ensure that they would be willing to help and even organised an office for me within the building so I could carry out the interviews. She got nothing in return - she simply wanted to help. Without the interest and generosity of the two 'Docs' the research would not have happened.

I decided early on that, although the survey was a useful research instrument, it was by no means crucial in helping me address the research question. However, the qualitative research I could not do without. I therefore decided that if it came to a crunch, I could jettison the survey so long as I got semi-structured interviews. This happened in one case - that of Home Store. In this case study I had no official access to the company, therefore surveying the staff would be almost impossible. In the other two I got varying levels of access to the staff for survey purposes. Super Store is a medium sized supermarket, employing between 35 and 50 staff depending on the circumstances and the time of year. I surveyed the majority of staff in this store. Quality Store is a much larger concern. Here the only access I was given was an opportunistic sample of the staff - all those who were at breakfast on a particular series of days. I was also given data which would allow me to locate this opportunistic sample within the broader framework of the staff. Again I was willing to accept this as the survey was not essential to addressing the research question.

While the survey gave me good data, its real purpose was to grant me access to the staff. While the management of a company could be sold on their employees carrying out a survey which would only take ten minutes each to fill out (particularly if it could be filled out during their tea break) they would be far less likely to release staff for thirty to fifty minutes for a semi-structured interview - particularly when I would promise them

nothing in return. Therefore I asked their permission only to survey their staff. At the end of the questionnaire I asked each person if I could speak to them again in order to help me clarify issues raised by the questionnaire. I noted that this would not take long and could be done at a time and place of their choosing. This strategy was very successful in the first of the case study stores where I administered the questionnaire to each person individually. However in the second case study store it was far less successful. This may have been because the interviews were self administered, or because the manager insisted on giving the instructions for filling out the survey, or both. The survey may have been seen as something which was closely allied to management. For that reason the response to the request for a possibility of a later interview was far less than in the first case study. For that reason I fell back on the help of the second of my two Docs, described above. In the third case study no such introduction was necessary or available so the alternative means of accessing interviews described above was used.

The different forms of access to each of the case studies might be thought to impact on the comparability of the data between stores. Certainly there is evidence that participants responded to me differently in different case studies. In this respect the level of access gained comes with a price: the researcher is no longer the cold detached scientific observer, but an actor in the social world being studied. A number of things were necessary to counteract this potential source of bias. First, in interviews, I had to ensure I was getting comparable data. I had assumed that the danger was that in cases where I was introduced by a fellow staff member (Home Store) I would get fuller accounts of workplace life. In fact the difficulty turned out to be the opposite: I got frank accounts in all stores, however in the case of Home Store the interview participants became quite

informal on occasion. On such occasions I needed to ensure that focus was retained and exaggeration was minimised. The second way of dealing with this possible source of bias was in the analysis of the data. As I will describe below, the principle underlying all the data analysis was that of falsification. If there was a doubt, data was not used. I will return to the modalities of this below.

Data Collection

Within each case study I needed to collect two different types of data:

- facts about the company, working conditions, and events within the company; and
- the meanings which people ascribe to their working lives.

This suggested that I should use a number of different data gathering techniques. Facts and figures about the company, and its workforce could be gained through a survey, key informant interviewing, and documentary analysis. Some figures (the age ranges, background, number of children, average hours worked per week) could only be gathered by the survey. Some (numbers of people on different categories of contract, for example) could be accessed through key informant interviewing. Other facts such as the company history and development could be accessed through documentary research. I also needed to get at people's understandings of their own situation - the things which had meaning for them (*Verstehen*) (Winch, 1958; Weber, 1968; Parkin, 1982). For this qualitative research was necessary. I chose to do semi-structured interviewing as this would allow me get rich, meaningful data but would not require me taking part in either participant or non-participant observation. Neither method was ever likely to have been acceptable to the firms in question.

The survey I used had three parts. The first part collected basic demographic data about the participants/respondents such as their age, gender, marital status, number of children, and length of time at work in the company. Any or all of these factors, or the interaction between them could have affected their orientation towards the company. The second section consisted of likert scales for the teamwork orientation and the unitary nature of the firms culture. These were tested for unidimensionality and reliability (de Vaus, 1996: 255 - 256). The final (and most important) section asked respondents/participants if they would be willing to take part in another interview at a later stage. On one occasion the survey was carried out in an office supplied by the company and on the other is was carried out in the store canteen during the breakfast tea break. A copy of the questionnaire in included in Appendix B. The scales are included in Appendix D.

The format for the semi-structured interviews changed from time to time as different issues came up in the different case studies. In the interviews I was looking for facts and for meaningful stories. I was also looking for quotations which were particularly poignant, meaningful or simply entertaining and which would make the final report more readable. The schedule for the interviews with managers was drawn up before each interview as this was the one most likely to change. The schedule for interviewing staff changed far less frequently. A sample Interview Schedule is also in Appendix B. The main areas covered in the interviews were:

- how the person came to work in the store;
- their job and changes in their job over time;
- changes in management-staff relations; specifically
  - use of labour;

- communication between management and staff;
- informal contacts between management and staff;
- sense of teamwork; and

• the manager's job.

The interview is a particular form of conversation - in this case a recorded conversation in which one person generally asks questions and another generally gives answers. Older textbooks tend to recommend that the interviewer adopt a value-free, neutral, business-like role (Scott, 1985; Oakley, 1986). However there is a need to develop a rapport with the respondent/participant (Jones, 1991). There is also an ethical question of our relationship with our research participants/respondents. Sociology has long recognised that the people we research have their own understandings of the social world. Do we simply have the right to treat that as subservient to our analysis, or should we engage them in conversation in relation to our understandings of their world? If we do not engage with them, have we engaged in a fairly unpleasant sort of power relationship? Reinharz goes so far as to describe this relationship as akin to a rape.

> The researchers take, hit and run. They intrude on their subjects' privacy, disrupt their perceptions, utilise false pretences, manipulate the relationship, and give little or nothing in return. When the needs of the researcher are satisfied they break off contact with the researched (1983: 50).

I was anxious not to engage in power plays with my respondents for a number of other reasons also. The first is that one of the reasons for doing the research in the first place was to tell their stories. The second is that I recognised a value in checking my own analysis against theirs. By offering them an opportunity to disagree with my analysis (or telling them when I disagreed with theirs) it could bring to light facts or meanings which had been taken for granted or were unarticulated by them, but which were important to

me. Finally, and pragmatically, I found that when I attempted to take on the role of the silent listening interviewer, I simply unnerved the participants/respondents and thereby drew attention to the fact that this was in fact an interview and not a conversation. My presentation of self as the quiet listening interviewer clearly did not put them at ease, as they shifted in their seats and gave overly considered answers. One eventually said to me "It's like you're analysing me, like in therapy or something". I therefore re-considered my presentation of self.

I was interested in the meanings which people held about their workplace. Since I would not always know what was meaningful for them, I felt it necessary to give them some leeway to talk about events or stories which I had not anticipated coming up. I therefore gave my respondents some leeway to digress from the points which I had on the interview schedule. In order to encourage them to talk - something many people are reluctant to do on tape - I started the interviews by asking an open-ended question. I found that this gave them a chance to relax, get talking and forget that this was a recorded interview. With the staff I generally started by asking them to tell me how they ended up working in retail and in this store in particular. The other topics of interest were listed on the schedule as topics rather than as questions (contrary to the advice of Kane, 1985: 67). I found that this encouraged me to ask open ended questions, questions of the 'Tell me about . . .' variety. On occasion, specific questions in relation to facts, feelings or preferences had to be asked. I tended to keep such questions until the middle of the interview since I did not want to break the flow of the respondent/participant early in the interview. I found that asking such questions once they were relaxed and talking did not break their flow. They tended to answer the

question and then say something like "Where was I?", before picking up the topic they were addressing again.

In order to facilitate the flow of the interview I designed the interview schedule in order to facilitate the interview being something like a conversation. I thought of it as a 'story board' for the conversation. This meant I identified possible sub-topics which could link from one major topic to another. I tried to have two or three such sub-topics under each heading. Once I was satisfied I had got enough material on a topic I could use these linking sub-topics to carry me naturally onto the next topic. At my most obvious, I was sometimes required to use a link like "That's actually another thing I wanted to ask you about . . .", but often such a link was not necessary. The interview carried on 'naturally' and the respondent/participant was not jolted back to the realisation that this is a 'false' situation and the interviewer is taping the whole thing. While this may seem like the manipulation which Reinharz is referring to, I found that it left the respondent/participant at their ease. Any suggestion that this can be seen as being in opposition to what we actually do in 'normal' conversation is naïve (Goffman, 1959).

The choice of interview location was also important in putting people at their ease. Over the course of the field work I used a number of different locations. Some respondents/participants were interviewed in their homes. This option was often chosen by women with child-rearing responsibilities. The interview would often take place in the afternoon or early evening over a cup of tea. Such interviews can present some difficulty as washing machines can obliterate taped sounds, so I was careful to check the tape quality before proceeding. Not everyone is comfortable in such a situation. On one occasion I interviewed a younger shop worker in his home (his parent's house) but he

remained self-conscious throughout and did not relax. Arising from this, I began to interview younger people outside their home. Drawing on Benyon (1975), the local pub was used on a good deal of occasions. Pubs present their own problems since noise levels can be high and the clank of cups on saucers and glasses on tables can obliterate some sounds on the tape, but overall I found a pub in the afternoon to be an excellent location and time. The pub is a neutral location, away from work and its surveillance possibilities and away from home and its distractions. It is a public place where people meet people they do not necessarily know all that well and it is a place where people sit and chat. In the afternoon it is generally quiet, and, since people are less likely to drink alcohol in the afternoon, responses tended to be very coherent. The two other locations which I used were an office in one of the stores and a quiet space near to the picket line outside one of the stores. Neither one was ideal, due to the existence of some of the factors noted above, but both sufficed.

On a number of occasions, particularly in the Home Store case study, I used group interviews. I did not start with any particular rationale for this - it was simply that people only offered themselves in groups and I had the choice of getting no-one or getting two or three people. However, I quickly found this to be a fortuitous accident since it allowed me access data I would otherwise not have had to opportunity to see. Group interviews have been part of sociological research for a long time - Bogardus used group interviews as for back as 1926 - and the term 'focus group' has been in use since the 1950s (Merton *et al.*, 1956). For group interviews the usual considerations which apply to open-ended interviews apply (Oppenheim, 1992), however the role of the interviewer/moderator is a little different. Lunt and Livingstone (1996) note that the role of the moderator in grouped interviews is to "ensure that the discussion remains on the

issue at hand while eliciting a wide range of opinions on the issue" (1996: 80), while Merton *et al.*, (1956) note that there are three specific skills required of the group interviewer: the interviewer must prevent one person dominating the group; he or she must encourage recalcitrant respondents/participants to participate (a contradiction in terms which displays the power relations inherent in research); and he or she must get as full a coverage of the topics as possible. While early understandings of focus groups saw them as being used as some sort of unrepresentative surveying, with participants randomly chosen, Lunt and Livingstone (1996) argue that the focus group must be understood a special case of conversation. They write that:

> conversation, public discussion and gossip are all important processes in the production and reproduction of meanings in everyday life. . . focus groups can be understood, not by analogy to the survey [or] as a convenient aggregate of individual opinion, but as a simulation of these routine but relatively inaccessible communicative contexts that can help us discover the processes by which meaning is socially constructed through everyday talk (1996: 85).

This was certainly my experience. Since I was interested in finding out whether, and if so, how, meanings were constructed within networks in the case study stores I was able to use these conversations between friends as something akin to participant observation. I could see the processes unfold. As Fontanna and Frey note, however, this can lead to difficulties. "The emerging group culture may interfere with individual expression, . . . "group think" is a possible outcome, and the requirements for interviewer skills are greater because of group dynamics (1994: 365). There is no easy way of overcoming this difficulty. While people can be given the opportunity to dissent from views expressed by others, they may not always want to take it. Nor do they necessarily know, at the moment, whether they do dissent from a view that has just been expressed. At the data collection stage, the researcher can, at best, try to ensure that an open dynamic is maintained. In this respect I found the interviewing training I had received as part of

initial social work training to be particularly valuable. Apart from this the context of the interview must, as always, be taken into account at the data analysis stage.

A series of measures can be taken at the data collection stage in qualitative research in order to help attain an empirical validity of the data. As I have already noted, facts and attitudes can be checked with the respondent/participant. During an interview where I felt there was a possibility for misunderstanding on my behalf, I was careful to check on my interpretation or understanding. I did this through one of two ways. One was to 'triangulate' by asking another question aimed at getting similar information. A second was to simply ask 'I just want to make sure I have this right, are you saying that . . .'. Due to the possibility that the interviewee could be influenced by my question, I tended to use the second format sparingly. I was also careful to check facts across a number of different interviews. Like the Watergate reporters (Bernstein and Woodward, 1974) if I did not have independent verification, I did not accept something as fact. However, my research question could also be addressed by finding out things which people held to be true, even if they were not. Therefore non-verified reports were also useful.

Given the size of two of the stores I knew I would not be able to interview enough people to be able to make statements about the store overall, either using the randomisation logic of survey research or the saturation logic of some qualitative theorists (e.g., Glaser and Strauss, 1967). While I felt I had reached saturation point in the Super Store case, I did not have the time or the resources to get close to saturation in the other two cases. Instead, in both these cases I chose to work within existing networks. I interviewed friends, either in groups or individually. This enabled me to see what was actually shared within these groups, what was not, and what was shared

between this group and other groups and between this group and management. Therefore while I did not reach saturation, I did get a number of 'case studies' within each case study which allowed me to make some sense of the group dynamic and its relationship with other groups and the official view of the store. This turned up some powerful findings. As with the three store case studies I endeavoured to locate each of these networks within the wider framework of the store using the demographic data collected. Overall, I carried out interviews with 12 interviewees in 11 interviews in Super Store, with 16 interviewees in 10 interviews in Home Store, and with 15 interviewees in 15 interviews in Quality Store. This gave a total of 43 interviewees in 36 interviews overall. A full list is in Appendix C.

Apart from the interviews I also spent some time in each store around the time of the interviews observing the store layout, environment and working situation. I also collected, where possible, documentary evidence in relation to each store. I was able to gain access to research reports and some correspondence, from each of the two larger stores in particular, from a variety of sources. Some of these included documents which were on public record (published accounts in books, newspapers, journals and magazines) while some were private materials given to me by my respondents or other people connected with the retail industry.

Data Analysis

Once this mass of data was collected it had to be analysed. I used three principles in analysing my data. The first was triangulation, the second was analytic induction and the third was checking. In triangulating, I compared the results from each of the different methods of data collection with each other. This enabled me to verify items of fact

(numbers of people working in different areas, store policies, etc.). I have described this in length above. The analytic induction method is one possible response to concerns, voiced by Bryman, (1988b), Silverman, (1993) and Fielding and Fielding (1986), that data is often used in an anecdotal manner. Bryman puts it this way:

> There is a tendency towards an anecdotal approach to the use of 'data' in relation to conclusions or explanations in qualitative research. Brief conversations, snippets from unstructured interviews, or examples of a particular activity are used to provide evidence for a particular contention. These are grounds for disquiet in that the representativeness or generality of the fragments is rarely addressed (1988b: 77).

Silverman discounts a number of different means of dealing with this as being inappropriate before suggesting the use of what he calls the analytic induction method (1993: 160). This is very similar to what Yin calls 'pattern matching' (1994: 106 - 113). It consists of searching for cases which do not fit where they are expected to fit, and then rechecking using other criteria of fit to see if there are other categories hidden by the current categorisation. In my case, if I was to claim that something was true, I checked this against other statements in order to identify if counter-factual evidence existed. It very often did. This led me to discard, or amend the statement and check again. Through this sort of searching for counterfactual evidence I was able to derive a stronger theorisation of the case studies. I was also able to identify different patterns and groups within the respondents/participants which did not derive from my own pre-conceptions. In my reporting on the case studies below I have, on certain key occasions, indicated the extent to which statements could be attributed to more than one interviewee, in order to demonstrate analytical induction in practice. Where quotations are presented the interview which they came from is noted. For example, the origin of a quotation which is followed by code consisting of two letters and a number (e.g., SS8) can be identified in Appendix C.

The final principle is really an application of this sort of scepticism to questions of empirical validity. It involves checking statements of fact against their context. These include some of the sort of checks to which historians have traditionally subjected historical documents including:

- checking if the respondent actually witnessed what they are describing, or how long after the event that are recounting the story;
- checking if they have a vested interest in the account, or if they may have wished to mislead the interviewer.(Duffy: 1993: 71 - 72).

While many of the cookbooks of sociological method recommend that qualitative research be used to generate theories that can be tested quantitatively (Bryman, 1984,1988a, 1988b), it made sense for me to come at things from another perspective. Since the survey was to be used as a means of getting access, I intended to use this as a means of identifying the sort of different groups which I would focus on in the qualitative section of the work. In fact this only worked in the first case study (Super Store). There, I was able to use the survey to locate people within the store and then chose interviewees which would allow me to cover the different groups in the store. Given the lack of randomisation in the Quality Store survey and the lack of a survey at all in Home Store, I was forced to rely on either the advice and help of a Doc, or self-selection. However, the Quality Store survey data was quite useful in providing some independent confirmation of the existence of groups which I had identified through the interviewing. In this respect it provided confirmation through triangulation on issues which would otherwise have been covered by saturation of social groups.

When approaching the qualitative data I used the principles noted above in my analysis of the typed transcripts of my interviews. I used the methods of textual deconstruction (Feldman, 1995) in making sense of the different groups and their shared understandings. Feldman recommends looking at what is not said, as well as what is said. Are there areas that different respondents do not talk about? If so, this will tell me that they either do not regard it as important, that they do not know about it, or that they do not want to talk about it. Feldman also recommends checking text for disruptions. She notes that:

> a thought not completed, a great deal of hesitation before expressing a thought, sentences that start going in one direction but end up going in another, and so forth can all be interpreted as meaningful. The meaning attributed to these disruptions in the smooth flow of text, talk, or action depends on the contexts, and it is up to the researcher engaging in deconstruction to make a convincing connection between the disruption and the interpretation of it (1995: 52).

Another technique I used was a form of semiotic analysis of the myths and stories which were told within the transcripts. There are at least three ways of looking at myths in society. For many organisational theorists, myths are functional. They provide a web of meanings for the actors in their everyday life, in a manner something like Durkheim's (1915) view of religion (Aron, 1970). Myths provide the actor with values, and give their working life a meaning. Such theorists will often focus on heroic myths, such as the hero entrepreneur: the 'John Wayne in Pinstripe' (Deal and Kennedy, 1982). For Barthes (1993) on the other hand, myths need not serve any function at all. They are simply cultural artefacts, they give us access to a web of meanings, a worldview which is present in a given society. In this approach the myth of *Steak and Chips* in French society gives us access to cultural beliefs in relation to masculinity and 'man the hunter'. The French man, in order to be a 'real man' must take his steak extremely rare ('blue') so that the blood can run through his teeth and he can approximate the masculine ideal.

Barthes agues that by exploring the absurdity of myths we can see the absurd value systems of modern society.

For Gabriel (1991) the myth is a much more active thing. It is an event. The story does not infuse people's working life with meaning so much as people infuse their working life with meaning through the story. What is crucial is that people tell stories, they do not simply re-produce them. For him, the story gives access to underlying psychological needs. This more active conception has a number of benefits.

- A number of stories depicting essentially the same event may have a number of meanings depending on the view point of the storyteller. I was once told by a manager how 'we all call each other by our first name here', and 'If you were to go into the car park you would see that there is no parking space reserved for management. You can park your car wherever you like'. Later, in the canteen with a number of the staff one asked me had I been told 'You can park your car where you like'. He finished with the observation 'I can't afford a fucking car!'. The same person can also tell the same story in a different way at a different time. This difference is also meaningful for the teller.
- It brings the actor back in. It recognises that people are not passive recipients of a culture nor its conduits: they make it in their every action. It recognises the person's ability to change the story.

My interest here is in the way in which the different stories people tell represents an attempt to objectify their characterisation of their group. The story tells us who is in the group and who is not. We can tell this by looking at the meaning of the story and

checking if it differs from person to person and from group to group. The story also represents something that is meaningful to its teller: the story will often tell about an event which defines (for them) their group placement and that of other actors.

Using these methods and practising these principles I analysed the collected data. The crucial word here is 'I'. As Devault points out "Social scientists have become increasingly aware . . . that writing is not a transparent medium with which researchers simply convey 'truths' discovered in the field, but itself constructs and controls meaning and interpretation" (1990: 110). Stanley argues that the research author should provide an intellectual biography - essentially teasing out the research process (and as a consequence their place in it) with a view to recognising the nature of the product (1990: 120). That is what I have tried to do in this chapter. At the end of the day, the 'I' is always present in the research - therefore I have felt free to use the word 'I' when referring to myself. This runs contrary to some of the prescriptions in the research cookbooks (e.g. Calvert, 1991: 98). The 'I' is not unfamiliar to sociology even if it offends those who make claims to their own objectivity which cannot be substantiated. William Foote Whyte was using the 'I' as far back as 1943 (1955). I will continue to use the 'I' as it locates this research within my own biography and my analysis, an analysis which is not necessarily better than that of the research participant/subject, just more sociological.

One element of my sociological biography which I brought with me to the research is my gender. I did not start this project envisaging that gender would be a major issue - this is perhaps, a good example of the gender blindness I brought with me to the research - but I quickly became aware that gender would be an issue and took appropriate action. As

Warren notes "the myth of the ethnographer as any person, without gender, personality and historical location, who would objectively (at the very least intersubjectively) produce the same findings as any other person has been increasingly challenged" (1988:7). Gender enters into this research in at least two distinct ways. The first is in data collection, the second in data analysis.

I have already noted that data collection has been likened to rape by at least one feminist methodologist (Reinharz, 1983). I endeavoured to ensure that, I did not find myself in the same situation as Finch: leaving interviews with the feeling that "my interviewees need to know how to protect themselves from people like me" (1984: 80). The power relations that come with being the instigator and manager of a structured conversation into aspects of other people's lives do need to be taken into account in doing research. Therefore, I did endeavour to engage as an equal in the research conversations by giving information about myself and my project where requested and by my presentation of self. However the reader must recognise, (as must the researcher) the sort of things which people, (women and men) will say to me in a conversation are not what they will necessarily say to someone else. As Fontana and Frey note: "the sex of the interviewer and of the respondent does make a difference, as the interview takes place within the cultural boundaries of a paternalistic social system in which masculine identities are differentiated from feminine ones" (1994: 369).

While gender enters into the interview in subtle, unnoticed and possibly un-measurable ways, it does not dictate that the interview has to be a negative experience for the participant/respondent. While Finch may want people to be able to protect themselves from the prying social researcher, Jones has written that "several researchers have noted

the therapeutic and counselling role of some interviews, and I have also noted that people are likely to say that they had enjoyed the interview" (1991: 211). In writing this she opens up for consideration an area of considerable danger. Researchers sometimes do not have the training or the skills to engage in counselling. Perhaps our participants have more to fear from us as well-meaning amateur counsellors than they do from us as psychic thieves. In my own research, I met only one respondent who spoke enthusiastically about having the opportunity to get 'it all' off his chest. Many others spoke about finding the interview interesting, but unfortunately some remained uncomfortable during the interviews (as I have already indicated, by no means all of these were women).

Given the way in which my research location put gender into the question in such a major way I chose to draw heavily on feminist methods of analysis. Much of the framework for analysis presented in this chapter derives from such a feminist perspective (Reinharz, 1983; Oakley, 1986; Warren, 1988; Devault, 1990; Stanley, 1990; Lentin, 1993; Lentin, 1994). While I have not accepted this work uncritically (most notably in relation to its rejection of empirical validity in qualitative research, [see Silverman, 1993: 149 - 170]), I did endeavour to ensure it informed the research process.

Ethics in Social Research

Some of the questions raised in relation to gender issues in research can be seen as a sub-set of broader ethical issues. The issue of the ethics of interviewing has been addressed in depth already. I did endeavour to engage in ethical interviewing practices, even if, in practice, I was not always happy that I left the respondent/participant comfortable and happy after the interview. I feel this was unavoidable as interviewing is not an exact

science. In the vast majority of cases, however, I was successful in leaving them the feeling that they had engaged in an equal exchange which was, if not valuable for them, at least harmless.

A second ethical issue is the ends to which the research will be put. Having been involved in designing atomic weaponry, Oppenheimer spent the rest of his life campaigning against them - as the medieval monks knew, scientific truth does not necessarily equal moral good. (Eco, 1983). I once engaged in some research for a government department in the US. I reported on my findings, (essentially, that there was significant grounds for believing that family dynamics play a part in sustaining heroin addiction and that comprehensive family support could therefore help maintain a heroin-free life for ex-addicts and in the long run save money for the state) to, amongst others, a group of senior speech writers in the Department concerned. After returning home to Ireland I was sent on copies of a number of speeches which were, I was told, influenced by my findings. The speeches essentially said that if you were a junkie it was your mother's fault so don't come crying to the state for help. Those who pay for the piper's pipe sometimes play their own tune.

Thankfully there are considerably less ethical difficulties with this research. In order to get access to Quality Store I did have to give a report on the findings of my survey to the company. I did not feel that this constituted a major ethical problem as I had already discussed the sort of things I might need to do to get access with union officials who work in relation to Quality Store and they did not have any difficulty with me doing this. However, there is far more in this final research report which may be of interest or use to

management in large retail overall. Could it be used against the staff who are, in a sense, the heroines and heroes of this story? It is possible.

There are two safeguards against this. The first is the confidentiality of the case studies and the individuals within them. I assured both Quality Store and Super Store that they would remain confidential. Since Home Store did not officially participate, I gave them, as a company, no such assurance. I also assured all the research participants/respondents anonymity. I have not used the respondent's names in any part of this report. I have avoided using descriptions of a setting which would allow one to locate any of the stores too precisely. On occasion I have amended reported quotations in order to protect the anonymity of the person being quoted. In doing so I have endeavoured to maintain the sense of the quotation. I have also endeavoured to maintain, in the analysis if not always in the presentation, the relationship of the person to the action being described in so far as this is important to contextualise the quotation. The second safeguard is designed to protect against this research being used by management against the staff. That is, simply, to ensure that it is also available to the staff and their representatives.

Conclusion

If chapter two told the story of what I was researching and some of the story of why I was researching it, this chapter has told the story of how I researched it. It also clarified the question and how it was to be answered. To recap, the research question is:

> *What is the interaction between the management of culture and the management of flexibility in commercial organisations. In specific, are there (a) material limits to the management of culture and (b) contradictions between the moving*

mosaic organisational form and the management of culture in a tight product market/loose labour market situation.

I have elucidated in this chapter the way in which this research question has been operationalised. Part of the operationalising of the question is the research location in medium to large retail. As I have indicated, the retail sector provides a location in which the management of culture is important and in which the tight product market and loose labour market criteria apply. I will elaborate on this in the next chapter. As I have also indicated, an integral part of the research method involves locating the case studies in the broader context of large retail in order that the possible (if not actual) extent of the processes uncovered in the case studies can be estimated. I shall also provide this context in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR - HRM AND THE PECULIAR CASE OF RETAIL

Introduction

Chapter two introduced the debate on Human Resources Management (HRM) and identified a number of gaps in the literature on HRM. On an empirical level there were gaps in the literature on the nature of HRM in Ireland and specifically on the processes which relate flexibility and cultural management. On a theoretical level it was argued that the model underlying the literature on HRM and on the management of culture was insufficient because, on one hand, it draws on an untenable and outdated functionalist concept of culture, and on the other, it draws on a philosophically idealist tradition which, on occasion, fails to question the importance of material things like pay, profits and working conditions to how people make sense of their working life. It was argued that situations where both a strong corporate culture and a low labour cost are required would allow an exploration of this idealist position and the more materialist alternative. This chapter will describe just such a context for this research, the Irish retail market. It will begin by highlighting some of the reasons why the comparative neglect of the Irish retail trade by social researchers is regrettable. It will then highlight the different pressures which make retail an environment in which management pursue the twin strategies of low labour costs and high employee commitment. It will then describe the labour market context in which Irish retail operates. Finally it will describe the three case studies which make up the empirical work of this thesis.

A Personal Note

A few years ago while I was at a sociological conference I got chatting to a lecturer from another Irish university. She asked me what my current work was about and so I told her - a sociology of supermarkets. To say that she became disinterested was an understatement. People who break wind in public do not get the sort of reaction I got. Her eyes glazed, she nodded disinterestedly, she made her excuses and she wandered off to talk to someone who was researching the computer industry instead. After all, computers are one of sociology's interesting subjects. But supermarkets?

My first job was in a pub. In many respects pub work is similar to supermarket work. On my first day in work (in about 1987), I worked for five hours and I got paid IR£7.00. The following week they told me there had been a mistake and I was only supposed to get IR£6.00. They called you when they needed you and browbeat you into coming into work, they sent you home when they didn't need you and deducted your pay. From week to week your hours, and therefore your pay, was not predictable. Most people did not stay more than a few months but I stayed for three years because I had made friends there. Work became my social life and if the pay and conditions were awful, at least you could have a laugh with friends. My next job was in large retail. I worked as a gofer in the gent's tailoring department of a large department store. Since the sales staff worked on commission I was not allowed talk to customers or help them in any way as this would have been interpreted as poaching. My job was to pick up clothes which customers had left on the floor or in the wrong place, straighten them on hangers and put them back in the correct place. It was mind-numbingly dull work, but it paid better than bar work. I lasted three months before I just couldn't take it any more. I went back to bar work for another few years.

I know plenty of people in similar situations. My family have all worked in retail in one form or another. My mother has been a shop assistant for over twenty years, my three sisters and my brother all had their first jobs in either bar or retail work. My grandmother, countless cousins, aunts and uncles also work or worked in retail. Overall, more than ten percent of the Irish working population work in retail. Can all our stories really be that boring?

Maybe it is the fact that we deal with retail so frequently that makes it seem a dull topic. As Berger and Berger (1976) point out, it is only social institutions which are new to us that capture our wonder. The school, the college or the shop which was once such a strange and new place is now everyday and mundane. We loose a sense of wonder as we are socialised into an institution. Having lost this, we may fail to see the importance of the institution. But, seeing its importance is what sociology is about - it is the point in having a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959; Giddens, 1986). The point is to see what the Irish poet Patrick Kavanagh called: "the newness that was in every stale thing/ When we looked at it as children" (Kavanagh, 1962: 70). That partially explains my interest in retail. I started this project, in part, to tell the stories of people like my mother, my family and me.

Irish Retail - Woven into the Social Fabric

Early on the morning of October 16, 1981 Bernard (Ben) Dunne Jr. was driving his car north from Éire/Ireland into Northern Ireland on his way to open a new store in his father's retail empire. He was possibly listening to the radio where the big news of the day was that the Irish national soccer team had beaten France 3 - 2 in a World Cup

qualifying match the night before. He may even have been wondering about the fate of J.R. Ewing, a character in the American soap opera *Dallas* which was to be on television that evening. As Dunne headed toward the border a car heading in the opposite direction cut across the road in front of him. He later recounted "I hit my brakes and swerved to avoid it. I went onto the side of the road, pulled my own car back and stopped. I said to myself, 'That was a close one'." Inside the car Dunne was shaken but unhurt. The car which had forced him off the road reversed toward him. Dunne assumed the person was coming back to apologise. He was wrong. As he later recounted "I was confronted by four masked men with rifles and they ordered me to get out. I got out and I was in a daze". Dunne was bundled into the other car and was ordered to put a hood over his head. He had just been kidnapped by a small group of militant republicans. (Interview quotes from *The Irish Times*, Friday 23 October 1981). In the following week the Gardai and the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) would foil a number of attempts to pay ransom. During one such attempt the kidnap gang were spotted by an RUC patrol. While an intermediary between the family and kidnappers (the intermediary was a priest and well known media personality) was waiting in a barn nearby, the security forces tried to apprehend the group. Shots were exchanged and the kidnappers escaped into the night, dragging the blindfolded Dunne across the fields. He was eventually released unharmed after six days. Many believe that a ransom was paid after his release to prevent further harm being visited upon him.

It is ironic that the Ben Dunne kidnapping episode began on the same day as the first episode in a new series of *Dallas* was to be screened as the Dunne family is, in some respects, Ireland's own living soap opera. Their story in retail is one that spans generations and encompasses all the elements of a *Dallas* story line. It is the story of the

battle of a tough man against retail cartels, the building of a business empire, kidnapping by an armed terrorist splinter group, drug-dealing charges, political intrigue and corruption, workers fighting for improved conditions, economic links to the South African apartheid state, sibling rivalry and a bitter battle for control of the empire. In Ireland, these things have not been far removed from where we buy our bread and oranges. The story of the Dunne family, in fact the story of Irish retail, is intrinsically linked into the story of modern Ireland.

The Dunne kidnapping story, his arrest for cocaine dealing in Florida while in the company of a young woman who worked for an escort agency, the Judicial Tribunals of Inquiry into his payments to the politicians Minister Michael Lowry and former Taoiseach (Prime Minister) Charles Haughey all demonstrate that the retail trade is colourful. What is important about these events, however, is not simply that they are colourful and that they have happened but that everybody knows about them. They form a part of Irish people's lived experience of being Irish. It is not just the Dunne family that is important in this regard, though they are in a sense Ireland's own royal family. Other names associated with large retail (Maurice Pratt of Quinnsworth, Senator Fergal Quinn of Superquinn) have a similarly high profile although they have significantly less colourful public lives than that of Dunne. This is partly because these are some of the few, highly successful Irish entrepreneurs. It is also partly because of the place that retail occupies in modern Irish society.

In modern Irish society (in common with other European and north American countries) retail is everywhere. On one level retail is the essential link between productive capital and consumer capital. It exists between those who make and those who purchase.

Whenever we want something we must engage in the retail system to get it, making the retail system one of the social systems that is omnipresent in modern societies. It has also been noted that in the decade up to the mid-nineties retail has expanded its influence in everyday life. Some commentators argue that it has played a major role in "the progressive penetration of the market into all walks of life" (du Gay, 1996: 99). Others have argued that retail has taken on the leading role in the consumer economy in so far as it has progressively made more and more people dependent on it for their own reproduction (Gardner and Sheppard, 1989). It is argued that shopping has come to be the space through which people define themselves. The retail trade does not sell products so much as a lifestyle. The purchase of certain goods or services define who the purchaser is. People seek to define themselves by what they consume rather than what they produce. The philosophy of the 'nineties becomes "I shop, therefore I am". While the roots of this argument are firmly within 'fashion' retailing, the argument can be extended to cover retail in general. In fact, it is arguable that the regular purchase of consumable goods (where we 'do' our shopping) says more about us than the less regular, less integral sites of purchase of clothes, cosmetics or toiletries (where we 'go' shopping). While the process of reflexive self-construction may be less conscious, where, what and how we purchase everyday goods is probably more integral to our self-construction by virtue of being commonplace. Thus the single professional buys their weekly shopping of staples (plus sun-dried tomatoes, artichoke hearts, blue cheese and pesto) in a franchise market late in the evening, while the middle class mother of three does her shopping (with some of the same extras) on a Saturday in the food court on the edge of town and the working class mother does her shopping (with white bread, crisps and Cola as extras) in town. It is the difference in access to buying choices which constitutes status difference in the consumer society (Bauman, 1987).

Within this social space, retailing has become big business. In Ireland, the retail sector includes some of Ireland's biggest companies. In 1996 two of the five biggest companies in Ireland were retail concerns. Associated British Foods (ABF) and Dunnes Stores were the third and fourth biggest companies on the island with a combined turnover of approximately 2.4 billion pounds and combined profits of approximately 100 million pounds. Individually each company was bigger than Irish Food Processors, Aer Lingus and Telecom Eireann (*Sunday Tribune Business*, 14 January 1996:1). In March 1997 the British supermarket chain TESCO purchased ABF's retail holdings for a sum in excess of six hundred million pounds (*The Irish Times*, 20 March 1997: 16).

Retail is not just big business, it is expanding business. As has happened in other countries, retailers in Ireland have moved to consolidate their position by progressively taking control further and further up the line of production. In other words, the producers loose some control over their own products as they are taken under the control of retailers. One clear example of this is 'own brand products'. As goods are repackaged and the producers name is removed from the label the producer looses some control over the final product. Own brand products go further than simply repackaging, however. The retailer comes to exercise control over the nature and specifications of the final product. As Israel Sieff, ex-chairman of Marks and Spencer has noted:

> We came to regard ourselves as a kind of technical laboratory. We felt it was one of our functions to provide our suppliers with expert technical information about the new materials and processes which the advance of technology was making available. We saw ourselves as, in a limited way, production engineers, industrial chemists, laboratory technicians. We learned to exercise an active influence on production generally, and on the textile industry in particular (Sieff, 1970: 146-7).

Other, less subtle, methods of gaining control were also used. As Fitzgerald notes in relation to Dunnes Stores:

> It became accepted wisdom that Dunnes would gradually draw a supplier into a position of near total dependency on the company. Once the fly was well entangled in the web, the trap would close. The company would signal that it was altering the supply contract. The supplier was left with no alternative but to accept the revised conditions or face a drastic decline in trade as its top customer moved elsewhere (1996: 23).

Retail is also a major employer in Ireland. If it had no influence in other areas, this alone would make it interesting. As we will see, unlike some of the more frequently researched parts of the newer service sector retail is huge in terms of the number of people it employs. Retail is also frequently a first employer. It is a place in which the person's conception of life in the workplace is first formulated. Shop assistant work in large retail is also largely done by women. Despite the size of the retail workforce and its particular character, studies of retail are few and far between (exceptions include Ogbonna, 1990, 1992; Ogbonna and Wilkinson, 1988, 1990; du Gay, 1992; 1996; and Rosenthal *et al.*, 1997). The working lives of this vast group of people are largely unexplored. On a very human level their story are as much a story of heroism, bravado, treachery, victory and defeat as are those of, for example, car workers - a group whose stories have been told *ad infinitum*. Despite this, the stories of women and of young people have been largely ignored in the rush to study the cloth-cap workers of the heavy manufacturing industries and the soft white-collared workers of the banking and information technology sectors.

The Retail Trade and the High Commitment/Flexibility Quandary

This research contributes to the understanding of the Irish retail trade in terms of all these areas, however this study is not focused on those aspects of the retail trade. The

reason for choosing the retail trade lies in the nature of the market in which the retail sector, particularly the large retail sector, operates.

One of the debates around HRM is whether or not it is a phenomenon of particular markets (e.g., Storey, 1989; Purcell, 1989; Storey and Sissons, 1993; Legge, 1995a; Roche, 1995). Such matching of HRM strategy to market is thought of as an issue of coherence or of 'external fit'. Because of the external market into which the HRM policies of the retail trade must fit, it constitutes an excellent case study of internal fit between flexibility and cultural management. On one hand, the service must be of a high quality, on the other it is offered (in western Anglophone countries at least) by poorly paid, flexible workers.

In the retail trade the tension between price and quality is rarely an either/or choice. Both are often required at the same time. In recent years success in the market has been built on variety of goods and quality of service rather than simply on low price. However at the same time, Irish retail is a market in which the term 'competition' is never far from anyone's lips. It is a market in which the competition is visibly fierce. Therefore retail is a market which needs soft management of Human Resources with hard Management of the costs of human resources. This dilemma is explored in more detail in the following section.

Competition and Commitment in Irish Retail

The retail sector appears to be a highly competitive one. Margins on sales are said to be low by international standards - as low as 3.5 percent on food products (*The Irish Times*, 20 March 1997: 16). Irish retailers are often perversely proud of their ability to work

within a fiercely competitive market, parading their low margins like a badge of victim-hood. A representative of one large retailer noted in 1988 that, "home operators have found a way of working and surviving within a net margin of 1.5 percent and UK operators do not have that skill" (RGDATA, 1992: 81). When one Irish retailer was asked in 1985 about the margins on dry groceries he replied, "You must be joking. What you should be asking is: how much are you loosing on them?" (RGDATA: 1992: 75). Irish retailers are estimated to operate on a margin of about 3.5 to 5.5 percent, compared to the UK retailer who operates on margins of 5 to 7 percent (Fitzgerald, 1996: 15).

As in other jurisdictions, Irish retail sometimes adopts the language of a gangland feud (e.g., Corstjens and Corstjens, 1995). The years since the early 1980s have seen Price War '81, the bread war, the milk war and the voucher war. The casualties of the conflict have included such household names as TESCO (which pulled out of the Irish market in 1986, loosing in the region of 20 million pounds, before re-entering the market in 1997), Johnston Mooney and O'Brien bakers (victims of the 1989 bread war), 7-Eleven and H. Williams.

What is crucial about this competition is that the market is highly *visibly* competitive. In this context, the move by British retail chains to enter the Irish market (TESCO, Sainsbury's etc.) is not interpreted as a sign that the market is in some way flabby. Instead it is interpreted as a sign that the already competitive market is becoming increasingly competitive. The growth of chains of small stores able to supply goods from a single wholesaler at reasonable prices but with long opening hours and convenient location is also seen by retailers as heightening this competition. For example, a Labour

Court recommendation on the dispute between Dunnes Stores and a number of unions (LRC14816, 4 July, 1995) notes the following:

> Arising from significant changes in competitive forces in Ireland since the 1980s, the Company claims that it faces increased competition from a number of new sources, in addition to the competition faced from existing large multiples. Examples of such competition include franchise groups such as SPAR, CENTRA, SUPER VALU (who operate 7 days a week, some 24 hours a day) and the motor service-station mini supermarkets. The arrival of a multitude of international retailers, e.g., Marks and Spencer, River Island, Adams, Mothercare etc., has also increased competition and the expansion of Sainsbury's into Northern Ireland and the anticipated arrival of the TESCO's will have considerable impact on the retail market.

One effect of this highly visible competition is to make retailers conscious of their costs, particularly their labour costs (this will be discussed in more detail below). Retailers then are increasingly pursuing cheap, short term flexible labour as a means of keeping labour costs at a minimum. Part-time contracts, zero hour contracts (rendered more problematic since the 1995 labour court recommendations) and fixed-term contracts were increasingly on the rise as a means of keeping costs low. In fact, in the years between 1991 and 1994 the number of full-time employees in retail dropped as the number of part-time employees rose (CSO, 1996c; Tormey, forthcoming).

If competition is an important reality for retailers, so is the need to generate a strong corporate culture. As other commentators have noted of the British and international retail trade, the higher incomes of people in the aftermath of the recessions of the 1980s and early '90s meant those with more disposable income were placing more specialised demands on markets (du Gay, 1996: 110; Lucas *et al.*, 1994: 113). Rosenthal *et al.* have also noted in relation to the retail trade:

> Products, technology and price are vulnerable to emulation by competitors. Thus many companies choose now to differentiate themselves on something which they assume is less easy to copy: quality of customer service. The role of the *deliverers* of the service - those employees with direct customer contact - is thought to be critical in the quality management and applied business literature. (1997: 481).

The same is true of Ireland where retailers have come to believe in recent years that a move to a service-oriented or 'customer-care' approach is the best way of surviving. As Fitzgerald notes, the strategy based on mass ranks of similar goods in a warehouse environment never took off in Ireland anyway (1996: 14). Throughout the 1970s there was already a highly visible 'high quality' major multiple in the form of Superquinn which had been selling on a high quality rather than low cost basis since 1973 (RGDATA, 1992: 54). The shift has, therefore not been terrible dramatic.

What quality means in the context of retail is a much debated concept. Pollert identifies two distinct types of quality goal which managers may seek to attain. The first she identifies as the 'continental model' of service, based on the Austro-Gernam model. It is based on staff knowledge, of products and of ways of dealing with customers. It involves being responsive to the needs of the customer without the provision of routinised forms of behaviour or an exact code of conduct. This also approximates what Rosenthal *et al.* (1997) found in their study. It is a version of the somewhat labour-intensive form of service one might expect in an Irish department store. The second, Pollert calls the Anglo-US unqualified retail service model. This does not require a deal of knowledge from the staff but does set out clear behavioural specifications for their actions. In this model service can be provided through changes in the layout and organisation of the store, including longer opening hours, more checkouts, shorter

queues. Both models are responsive to the consumer and the self-constitution of the consumer, although they do this in different ways.

Whichever model of retail quality used, the task is not to sell the product, but to sell the lifestyle. As du Gay notes, this comes to permeate all aspects of retailing from the design of the store, through the nature of the products to the staff who work there. In the search to capture the customer of the 1990s - the customer whose 'life project' is expressed in part through their shopping basket (Featherstone, 1990) - customer service has become an integral part of the retail project (*Retail Week*, 30 November 1990; Lucas *et al.*, 1994; du Gay, 1996). The change is noticeable in the language companies use. In the 1990s the *Staff Handbook* of Dunnes Stores described retail work as being "in a highly competitive service industry where quality service and customer care are essential and of the highest priority" (Dunnes Stores, n.d.: 7). This statement comes, notably, from a company which was more renowned for a 'cheap and cheerful' approach than a 'high quality/high service' approach. The movement towards customer care is evident, not just in Superquinn and Dunnes but across the market. ABF (now TESCO) holdings were split into three market divisions with Crazy Prices catering for the stack high/sell cheap market, Quinnsworth for the mid to up-market range and Bloomfield's for the dedicated up-market food shopper.

Part of this move towards customer care has become reflected in the training of retail workers in customer care. In the past, retail workers were given training 'on the job'. This training was sometimes formalised and sometimes completely informal. For example, the Dunnes Stores Handbook from the 1970s outlines a notional twelve week training programme which is essentially learning on the job. In many cases it was a

somewhat hit and miss affair, with people simply learning most of the job details on the floor. In almost all cases whatever training existed was company specific - i.e., if a sales assistant moved from one store to another their training and years of experience was generally not recognised in the position and pay in their new place of employment (Goodbody Economic Consultants, 1994).

The new focus on training is not only evident in customer care issues. In recent years, the Irish national employment and training agency - FÁS - has highlighted the need for formal training, due to the development of new information technology increasingly used in stores as part of a 'Just-in-Time' (JIT) delivery system. As Fitzgerald (1996: 17) notes:

> New information technology will undoubtedly transform the Irish retail sector over the next few years, with enhanced stock control, sales tracking and better management information all round become in the norm . . .Those companies which foster good training practices look set to have the edge over more traditionally minded companies.

These factors combined with new legislation conferring more rights on part-time employees mean that, as Fitzgerald continues, "traditional style command and control type companies are going to find themselves increasingly out of step".

The focus on training, on development of skill and on the need to generate a culture of quality and commitment points to the need to develop a soft HRM approach. However the context of highly visible competition within the retail sector also means that managers are likely to be under a great deal of pressure to keep costs low. In this respect, Irish retailers fit clearly into the international pattern (Lucas, *et al.*, 1994: 114). The retail sector, then, is one characterised by a very high awareness of competition, in which

success for the major players is based on a high level of service. This is precisely the market place in which internal and external fit is likely to be most difficult. The sector demands service with flexibility, quality with low pay. If culture can be managed effectively here there are good grounds for arguing that it can be managed successfully in any sector. If it cannot be managed successfully here the problems encountered and the reasons for those problems will throw light on possible difficulties with the idealist approach which underlies the model of culture HRM and other cultural management policies are based upon.

This, then, is the market context which makes the retail sector ideal for this research. As I described in the last chapter, the main body of the research was three case studies. Individually and collectively, these case studies cannot be generalised to the retail sector as a whole. However, it is possible to draw some conclusion as to where they fit into this retail sector as a whole. It is to this I now turn.

Employment in Retail

The purpose of this section is to give some context to those case studies. It provides the national context against which I will elaborate from the case studies in chapter eight. This section presents data on those who work in Irish retail: their number, their age, sex, marital status, etc. The data in this section, by and large, relates to the 1994 - 1995 period, i.e. the same period in which the case study field work was carried out. This will enable the reader to locate the following case study descriptions in a clear context. The Irish retail sector is one of the biggest sectors of employment in the country. It also operates in a very distinctive labour market. With high rates of part-time and occasional workers it was at the cutting edge of the flexibility revolution. It also has a high rate of

Table 4.1 Male and Female Employment by Economic Sector and Employment Status 1991

Economic Sector	Regular Full-time	Regular Part-time	Occasional Full-time	Occasional Part-time	Total
Wholesale Distribution					
Male	30,500	600	100	100	31,300
Female	8,500	1,200	0	0	9,700
Total	39,000	1,800	100	100	41,000
Retail Distribution					
Male	73,600	3,400	100	1,100	78,100
Female	45,000	11,500	200	2,400	59,100
Total	118,600	14,900	300	3,500	137,200
Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing					
Male	138,700	3,900	200	900	143,800
Female	10,200	3,200	200	1,100	14,700
Total	148,900	7,100	400	2000	158,500
Building and Construction					
Male	72,500	1,700	400	300	74,900
Female	3,200	400	0	100	3,700
Total	75,700	2,100	400	300	78,500
Other Production Industries					
Male	175,600	2,200	500	200	178,500
Female	62,500	4,800	300	600	68,200
Total	238,100	7000	700	800	246,700
Insurance, Financial and Business Services					
Male	29,000	500	100	100	29,700
Female	27,100	2,200	200	100	29,700
Total	56,100	2,700	300	300	59,400
Transport Communications and Storage					
Male	51,100	1,300	0	200	52,700
Female	12,300	100	0	100	13,400
Total	63,500	2,300	0	300	66,100

CONTD.

Economic Sector	Regular Full-time	Regular Part-time	Occasional Full-time	Occasional Part-time	Total
Professional Services					
Male	68,200	2,900	200	400	71,700
Female	100,100	19,700	300	200	122,200
Total	168,300	22,700	500	2,500	193,900
Public Administration and Defence					
Male	47,100	1,000	200	0,600	48,800
Female	18,600	2,300	200	1,400	22,500
Total	65,700	3,200	500	1,900	71,300
Other					
Male	39,500	4,000	300	900	44,800
Female	42,700	13,500	400	1,800	58,300
Total	82,200	17,600	700	2,700	103,200
Overall Total	**1056,000**	**81,500**	**4,000**	**14,500**	**1155,900**

(*Source: Unpublished CSO Labour Force Data,* CSO 1996c)

young staff and female staff. It is, therefore, far from the stereotypical workplace of received sociological wisdom. In the retail trade there are no cloth caps, not a single car manufactured and not a rivet gun in sight.

Employment Within the Retail Sector I - General Overview

In 1995, 139,900 people worked in retail in Ireland. That is 11.3 percent of the total number of people at work, more people than worked in the entire *Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing* sector and 57.5 per cent of the size of the combined *Manufacturing Industries* sector. The Distribution sector (combining retail with wholesale distribution) as a whole made up 15.0 per cent of those at work in Ireland (CSO, 1996a: 30).

In 1990 the *Distribution Services* sector made up 43.7 per cent of employment in the Irish service industry sector. In the same year 10.3 per cent of services jobs were in *Banking and Insurance* and only 6.4 per cent were in *Communications.* On the

European front, this compared to 36.2 per cent of services employment in *Distribution Services* in France, 34.7 percent in Belgium, 37.8 percent in Germany and 33.4 in the traditional 'nation of shopkeepers' - the UK (*The Financial Times*, 1 March 1994: 14). While Ireland has often been described as an agricultural nation, it appears that we may be better described as a nation of shopkeepers - and shelf packers.

Using the categories used by the Central Statistics Office *Labour Force Survey* we can see (Table 4.1) that retail has a relatively high density of female employment. In the employed population as a whole the ratio of women to men is 1:1.9 (i.e. 1.9 working men for every working woman). In the retail trade the ratio is 1:1.3. Retail has the second highest proportion of the workforce made up of numerically-flexible[1] (i.e., part-time, occasional part-time and occasional full-time) workers, with 6.3 regular full-time workers for every numerically-flexible worker. The category which has a higher rate of flexible work is the catch-all non-category called *Other,* which has a ratio of 3.9:1.

Amongst women employees in Irish retail the ratio of numerically-flexible workers to regular full-time workers is 3.2:1. Again, it is only in the 'non-sector' titled *Other* is the ratio of numerically-flexible to full-time regular women staff closer to parity at 2.7:1. The high rate of women who work flexibly in the retail sector is at odds with the situation for men. There were 16 regular full-timers to every numerically-flexible worker among men in the retail sector. In other words, women working in the retail sector - one of the major employment sectors for women in Ireland - are more likely to be

[1] The task of defining flexibility for the purposes of measurement is a difficult one. Here I simply use two of the International Labour Office's measures of atypical work: part-time work; and occasional work. Not all flexible workers are in these two categories and, as Gannon and Nolan (1997) point out, not all part-time workers are flexible. For a fuller discussion on the limitations of the measurements of

numerically-flexible workers than women in almost any other sector of employment. They are far more likely to be flexible employees than the men in the same sector.

Table 4.2 Employment in the Retail Sector 1991 and 1994

	Males	*Females*	*Total Persons*
1991			
Total	78,100	59,100	137,200
Part-time	4,500	13,900	18,400
Full-time	73,700	45,200	118,900
1994			
Total	80,300	65,200	145,500
Part-time	6,700	21,400	28,100
Full-time	73,600	43,800	117,400

(Source: Unpublished Labour Force Survey Data CSO, 1996c*)*

Table 4.2 provides these figures for both 1991 and 1994. Even over this short period there were changes in the employment profile of the retail trade taking place. Over these three years there was a growth in employment in the retail sector and that growth was in part-time employment. In fact, in 1994 there were less full-time employees in the retail trade than there were in 1991. This trend is even more pronounced if we look at women's employment in the sector. While the number of women in part-time work grew by seven and a half thousand, full-time employment for women fell by one and a half thousand. It therefore appears that some of the jobs which became women's part-time jobs were previously women's full-time jobs, and that some of the new women's full-time jobs which should have been created as the sector grew became part-time jobs.

By 1994 there were 28,100 people working part-time in the retail trade. That means that 20.57 per cent of part-time workers in Ireland in 1994 were working in the retail trade

flexible work see Tormey (forthcoming). While recognising the limitations of this sort of measure, I will continue to use these figures as a proxy measure for numerical flexibility.

(CSO, 1995a: Table 36). This represents a slight rise from 19.37 per cent in 1991 (CSO, 1992: Table 36). We can also see that the growth in employment in the retail sector during this period has been entirely in part-time work. In fact, it is possible that this has under-estimated the extent of part-time work in the retail trade. Data from the *Annual Services Inquiry* (CSO, 1996b: Table 6) indicates that in 1994 there were 48,168 part-time employees in Irish retail, as opposed to the 28,100 identified in the *Labour Force Survey*. The *Annual Services Inquiry* also shows that between 1991 and 1994, part-time work in all retail establishments grew by 47 per cent. If the *Annual Services Inquiry* is accurate, it means that in 1994 roughly one person out of every twenty five working people, worked as a part-timer in the retail trade. If we take a longer term view, this growth in part-time work is remarkable. In 1966 the *Census of Distribution and Services* (the equivalent of the modern *Annual Services Inquiry)* showed only 4,909 part-time employees in Irish retail or 8.1 per cent of retail workers (CSO,1970)

Employment in the Retail Sector II - The 'Goods Sold' Context

The rates of flexible work can be even higher depending on where you work within these broad sectoral categories, as can be seen from Table 4.3. The data used to break down these categories comes from the *Annual Services Inquiry.* This gives a total number of people as working in retail which is slightly different to the total given by the *Labour Force Survey* and used above. Also, in Table 4.3 we have no data about the gender of employees. The figures presented here relate to part-time (rather than the more general category of numerically-flexible work which was used above). In retail business as a whole the ratio of non-part-time persons engaged (i.e., persons engaged minus part-time employees) to part-timers is 2.3:1. This figure probably still under represents part-time workers because the *Annual Services Inquiry* does not say whether 'non-employed

persons engaged' are part-time or full-time. There people are often family members, and in the figures presented here are treated as full-time workers.

Within the retail sector as a whole we can see that food retailers use more part-timers than non-food retailers. Within the two categories that make up the food retailers (*Grocery, Public House and Off-Licence* and *Other Food, Drink, Tobacco and Newspapers*) there are 57.9 per cent of all the employees in the retail sector as a whole, but 74.7 per cent of all the part-time workers in the sector. The ratio of full-time to part-time employees in food retailing as a whole is 0.9:1 (i.e., there are less full-time workers than part-time workers). The picture is even more dramatic if we take the *Grocery, Public House and Off-Licence* sub-sector by itself. Here the ratio of full-time to part-

Table 4.3 Persons employed in the Retail Sub-Sectors by Employment Status 1994

Description of Business	Persons Engaged	Full-time Employees	Part-time Employees	Total of Employees
Grocery, Public House and Off - Licence	78,566	26,861	31,516	58,377
Other Food, Drink, Tobacco & Newspapers	16,574	6,554	4,448	11,002
Garages and Filling Stations	17,703	11,626	2,379	14,006
Footwear, Drapery and Apparel	16,817	9,274	4,627	13,900
All Other Non - Food	28,341	17,326	5,198	22,523
All Descriptions of Business	158,002	71,641	48,168	119,808

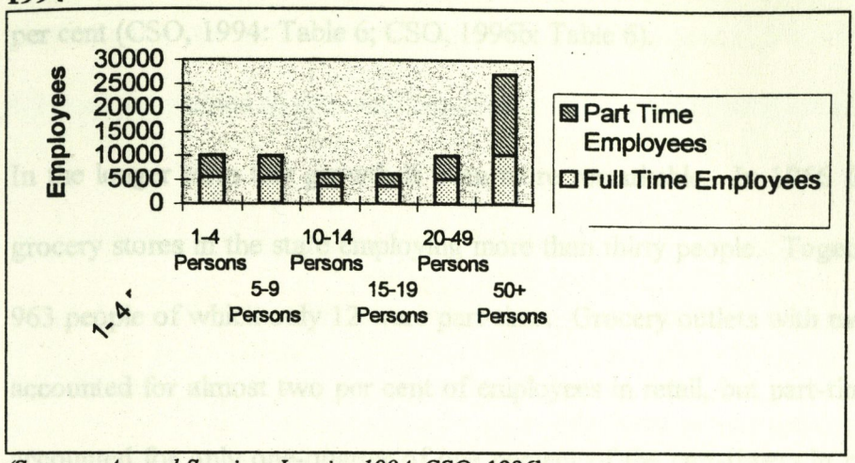
(Source: Annual Services Inquiry 1994, CSO, 1996b)

Table 4.4 Employment Status in Food and Drink Enterprises by Size of Firm in 1994

Size of Firm	Persons Engaged	Full-time Employees	Part-time Employees	Total Employees
1 - 4 Persons Engaged	28,609	5,536	4,543	10,078
5 - 9 Persons Engaged	13,931	5,210	4,644	9,854
10 - 14 Persons Engaged	8,438	3,587	2,517	6,104
15 - 19 Persons Engaged	6,590	3,628	2,567	6,194
20 - 49 Persons Engaged	10,496	5,155	4,942	10,097
50 or more Persons Engaged	27,076	10,299	16,752	27,051

(*Source: Annual Services Inquiry 1994,* CSO, 1996b)

Chart 4.1 Status of Employees in Food and Drink Enterprises and Size of Firm 1994



(Source: Annual Services Inquiry 1994 CSO, 1996b.
Note: Size of Firm is presented in terms of number of persons engaged. Therefore '1-4 Persons' means '1-4 Persons Engaged' rather than 1-4 Persons Employed.)

time employees is 0.85:1. The *Annual Services Inquiry* also shows that between 1991 and 1994 part-time work grew by 126 per cent in food and drink retailing establishments (CSO, 1994: Table 6; CSO, 1996b: Table 6).

Employment Within the Retail Sector III - The 'Size of Store' Context

Table 4.4 and Chart 4.1 contains an analysis of the relationship between the size of the workforce in a food or drink shop and the employment structure of that shop. It shows the number of people employed nationally within stores of a given size and their contracted hours. As they show, it is only in the largest food retailers that part-time employees out number full-time employees. In all sizes of food retailer with 49 persons or less working, there were slightly more full-time staff than part-timers. It is only the largest of food retailers (those with fifty or more persons engaged) that part-time workers out number full-time workers. The *Annual Services Inquiry* also shows that in retail establishments with more than 50 employees part-time work grew by 68 percent, in food and drink establishments with more than 50 employees it grew by 67 per cent and in

food and drink establishments with less than 50 employees, part-time work grew by 228 per cent (CSO, 1994: Table 6; CSO, 1996b: Table 6).

In the longer term this growth is even more remarkable. In 1966 there were only 24 grocery stores in the state employing more than thirty people. Together they employed 963 people of which only 12 were part-time. Grocery outlets with more than 30 people accounted for almost two per cent of employees in retail, but part-timers in such stores accounted for only one-quarter of one percent of the part-timers in retail (CSO, 1970). This has been comprehensively turned around by the huge growth in part-time work in larger retail.

Employment Within the Retail Sector IV - The 'Job' Context

Of course, the rates of part-time or flexible work are not spread evenly within firms. Nor are men and women likely to be employed in similar jobs. Managers, for example, are far more likely to be full-time than sales assistants. They are also more likely to be male. The *Annual Services Inquiry* does not give details of the position of employees within a firm, nor does the *Labour Force Survey*. The *Census,* however, does. However, it does not analyse these in terms of hours worked. It does, however, give us additional information about the age and marital status of people within various jobs.

Chart 4.2 gives details for the retail trade (not including garages, filling stations or off-licences). As with the *Annual Services Inquiry* the figures here do not tally directly with the *Labour Force Survey* data. This is due to a different method of collection (a population survey rather than a sample of a population or an enterprise survey), different questions asked and different time of surveying. The census shows a total of 118,343

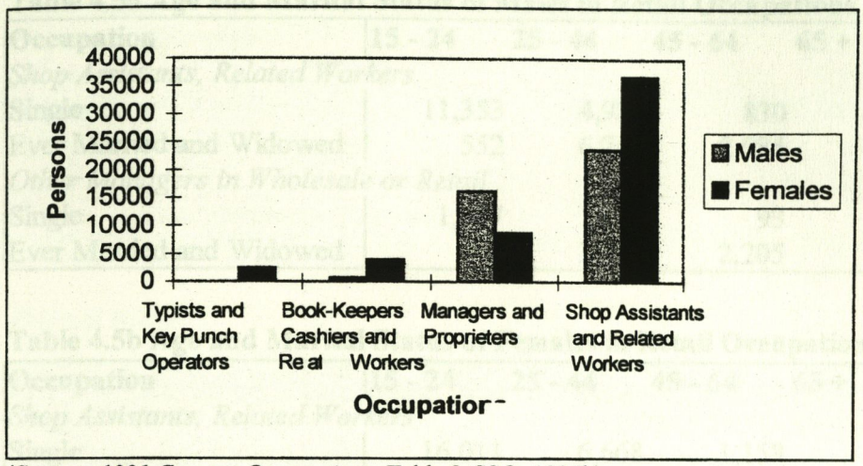
people working retail based jobs[2] as compared with 131,000 people working in the retail distribution sector in the *Labour Force Survey* of that year (CSO, 1992: 35). As Chart 4.2 does not include all the retail sector the total number of people represented is 92,382.

Chart 4.2 does clearly indicate the different types of jobs that men and women have within the retail trade. There are almost twice as many male managers and proprietors than females (16,136 men as opposed to 8,700 women), and in the shop assistant and related workers category there are 55.1 per cent more women than men (36,846 women as opposed to 23,753 men). There were also 2,323 female typists or key punch operators (this includes Checkout Workers who were not classified as Shop Assistants), with only 46 men in this category.

Chart 4.3 contain data from The 'Food, Beverage and Tobacco' sub-sector. This sub-sector is in some respects un-typical of the sector as a whole. The ratio of male to female shop assistants is not quite as high (possibly due to the way in which the census classifies different types of workers as the note to Chart 4.3 explains), with 33.5 per cent more females than males in this sub-sector (16,800 women and 12,568 men), but the ratio of male to female proprietors and managers is even more unequal with more than twice the number of male managers and proprietors than females (8,902 men as opposed to 4,041 women).

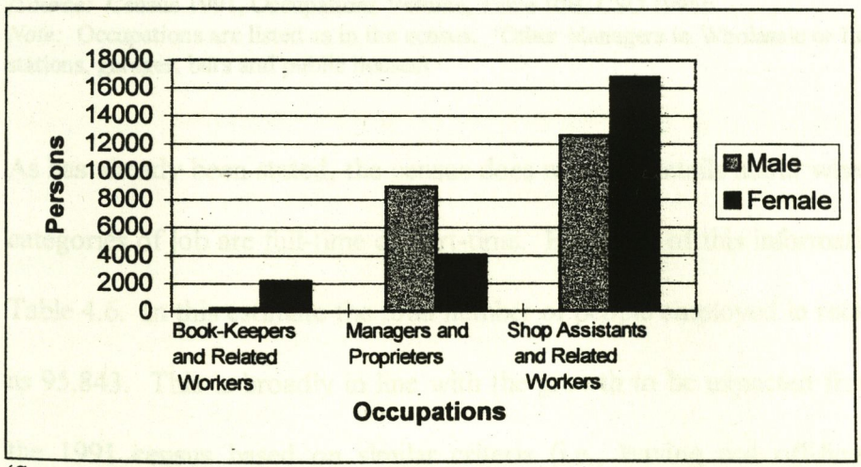
[2] This figure is the sum of: typists and key punch operators in retail distribution; book-keepers; cashiers and related workers; managers of filling stations and garages; bar or public house mangers; other managers in retail distribution; proprietors of filling stations or garages; publicans, wine merchants, off-licence proprietors etc.; other proprietors in retail distribution. It does not include hawkers, street vendors, or commercial travellers. It is Taken from Table 2. Volume X, Census '91 (CSO, 1995b: 27 - 28).

Chart 4.2 The Occupations of Retail Workers, 1991



(*Source: 1991 Census Occupations*, Table 2 CSO, 1995b)

Chart 4.3 The Occupations of Food Beverage and Tobacco Retail Workers, 1991



(*Source: 1991 Census Occupations,* Table 2 CSO, 1995b

Note: 'Typist and Key Punch Operators' are not included here, as the Census does not provide information on their number in the Food, Beverage and Tobacco sector. This will cause women to be under-represented in this chart.)

Table 4.5(a) and 4.5(b) gives details of the age, marital status and job of some of those working in retail. The tables show that a sizeable minority of shop assistants are young single people. 40.5 per cent of shop assistants are single people under 25 and this remains constant when men and women are taken separately. For both men and women, single people make up about two thirds of shop assistants and related workers.

Table 4.5a Age and Marital Status of Males in Retail Occupations 1991

Occupation	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65 +	Total
Shop Assistants, Related Workers					
Single	11,353	4,923	830	68	17,174
Ever Married and Widowed	552	6,743	2,985	178	10,428
Other Managers in Wholesale or Retail					
Single	1,047	1,129	93	6	2,275
Ever Married and Widowed	78	3,510	2,205	107	5,900

Table 4.5b Age and Marital Status of Females in Retail Occupations 1991

Occupation	15 - 24	25 - 44	45 - 64	65 +	Total
Shop Assistants, Related Workers					
Single	16,011	6,668	1,158	112	23,976
Ever Married and Widowed	1514	10,584	3,725	231	16,054
Other Managers in Wholesale or Retail					
Single	589	808	141	10	1,548
Ever Married and Widowed	58	1,029	404	24	1,515

(Source: Census 1991, Occupations Volume, Table 10B, CSO 1995b
Note: Occupations are listed as in the census. 'Other Managers in Wholesale or Retail' excludes filling stations, garages, bars and public houses)

As has already been stated, the census does not give details about whether these various categories of job are full-time or part-time. Estimates of this information is presented in Table 4.6. In this estimate the total number of people employed in retail in 1994 is given as 95,843. This is broadly in line with the growth to be expected from the figure from the 1991 census based on similar criteria (i.e., leaving out off-licences, bars, filling stations and garages). This table clearly shows that part-time work is not a uniform phenomenon within retail work. It is largely limited to sales staff. There were 98.8 full-time managers for every part-time manager in the retail sector overall, compared to 0.3 full-time selling staff member for every part-timer. In other words, part-time work is concentrated in the grades most likely to be occupied by women.

Table 4.6 Job Hours in Retail Occupations

Occupation	Full-time	Part-time	Total
Manager/Supervisor	31,122	315	31,437
Administration	10,167	759	10,926
Selling Staff	10,922	33,741	44,663
Others	6,965	1,852	8,817
Total	59,176	36,667	95,843

(Source: Goodbody Economic Consultants, 1994)

Overall Picture

Overall, the retail trade can be said to be operating within a very specific labour market with very high rates of numerically flexible (including part-time) work, with a high proportion of the labour force being made up of women and young single men. Compared to other sectors of the economy the retail sector as a whole has relatively high rates of female and part-time employment (Table 4.1). If we break down this broad sector into its component parts we see that part-time work is particularly prevalent in food retailing (Table 4.3). In fact there are more part-time workers than full-time workers in food retailing. Table 4.4 shows that while there are almost as many part-time workers as full-time workers in food retailers of any size, in large food retailers (those with 50 people engaged or more) there are substantially more part-time workers than full-time workers. Within the retail trade the likely hood of a person being a Manager or a Shop Assistant is different depending on their gender. There are almost twice as many male managers and proprietors as female managers and proprietors, and more than one and a half female shop assistants for each male shop assistant. Table 4.6 shows that selling staff (i.e. Shop Assistants and Related Workers, Cashiers etc.) are far more likely to be part-time than managers or supervisors.

The overall picture is that the closer we get to shop assistant work in a large retail establishment the more likely the employee is to be a part-time female employee. The

further we get from large food retail, or the closer we get to management the more likely the employee is to be a full-time male employee. As this section shows, retail is one of the most numerically flexible sectors of employment in Ireland with about one in every seven people working there being part-time. In large food retailers (supermarkets) part-time workers out number full-time workers. This represents a continuing trend towards part-time workers. It is possible that, by the mid 1990s, as many as one person out of every twenty five in work in Ireland worked as a part-timer in the retail sector. This is, as I mentioned in the last section, tied to the pressure for ever better service (i.e., longer opening hours) while maintaining low labour costs (i.e., removing over-time payments and bringing non-standard working hours into standard contracts).

The Three Case Studies

The third chapter noted that the central method chosen to explore the research question was three case studies chosen from the Irish medium to large retail sector. The case studies are of social networks made up of shop floor workers and others in medium or large retail outlets. By 'shop floor workers' I mean mainly checkout workers, shop assistants and shelf packers. Backstage workers were not interviewed as part of the normal work of the case study but were interviewed if there was an opportunity and a clear reason for doing so: that is, if they were seen to be part of the social network. A number of managers were also interviewed in each case study. This section will describe the three stores in some detail and place them in the context of the employment situation in Irish retail as elucidated above. Although assurances of confidentiality were only given to two of the case study sites, the three case studies are identified by fictitious names. They are described according to their situation at the time the field work was carried out (1993 - 1995). The information on the three separate sites presented below

is drawn from that survey, from the accounts of key informants and from the companies' own literature and more generally available literature.

Super Store

The first case study was of a relatively small store. There are about 35 people employed in the store, (this figure is rough as it changes regularly). The field work for this case study comprised of a survey of 28 of the employees and interviews with 12 people. The store is part of a franchise chain. Franchise chains are stores which bear the same name and buy from the same supplier but are individually owned. Consequently they manage to gain some of the benefits which come with multiple store chains (cheaper prices due to large bulk buying and 'own brand' goods, similar shop design and layout procedures, and the advertising and attraction that goes with a corporate image) while still being individually owned. The owner of this store is a former executive in a large retail chain who left in order to buy his own franchise store. He now owns a number of stores within this and other franchise chains. The store is situated in the centre of a village in the suburbs of the city. Two major bus routes pass nearby and there is a small car park. Within three or four miles there are a number of much larger competitors and this means that much of its trade comes from within walking distance or from casual "drop-in" trade. This "drop-in" trade is further attracted by long opening hours (including Sunday and Bank Holiday opening) and the presence of a late opening off-licence which is part of the store. The store sees its competitive edge coming from the fact that it is a local store - a part of the community. Management repeated a number of times that people would go elsewhere if all they wanted was cheaper prices, but customers continued to shop in Super Store because it was a friendly environment - unlike the major multiples. Many, though by no means all, of the staff are drawn from the local community. As one

would expect (based on the store's niche in the market) customer care is seen as crucial. The franchise also pushes service as part of its corporate image. All the staff wear name badges which also contain a slogan proclaiming how caring the corporation is. Training is also part of this process and training workshops had been organised with the staff on customer care.

There are a number of levels in the store's chain of command. At the bottom of the staff ladder are the checkout operators and the shelf packers. The next level is the charge-hands (something like a staff supervisor). This is an ambiguous term as some staff that were identified by managers as being in this category did not see themselves in this way. It may or may not carry with it responsibility for a section (e.g. fresh foods, deli, butcher shop etc.). Apart from these employees, the workplace also has one general manager, an assistant manager, a trainee manager and a checkout supervisor (at a grade similar to the assistant manager). The staff are not unionised although there was a recent unsuccessful attempt to unionise.

The following data is based on the staff survey mentioned above. 43 per cent of the employees surveyed were under 20 years of age, and almost 90 per cent of them were under 25 years. Only two employees were involved with a long-term partner. A similar pattern held true for the management layer. For those who were in their teens the average length of time that they had been working there was about 12 months. For those in their early 20s the average was about 3 years. Turnover is very high. A number of those surveyed had left the store by the time the interviews were completed, two months after the survey. The store is generally a young store, with half of the charge-hands under 25 years of age as well as the checkout supervisor and two of the managers.

Over half of those working in Super Store are part-timers (53.6 per cent). Within this group there is a further sub-division into those who have regular hours and those whose hours vary from week to week. 5 of the 15 part-timers had regular hours, ranging from 20 to 25 hours. The range for the remaining ten people whose hours varied weekly was much wider, with average weekly hours ranging from 11 hours per week to 35 hours per week. In fact this is only part of the story, as the one group which was systematically under-represented in the survey, was part-timers on hours which varied from week to week. Full-timers hours varied from 39 hours per week (the modal average for full-timers), to 50 hours per week. 80 per cent of the people who described themselves as part-time with variable hours, were under 20 years of age.

Most of the people who are working part-time with non-fixed hours in Super Store are currently studying, some for the Leaving Certificate and some in University. Understandably, those who are currently involved in further study tend to be the younger employees and also those in the most transient of jobs, i.e. cashier for the women, and shop or store assistant (shelf packer etc.) for the men. There is a strictly gendered division of labour in the store, with all of the cashiers being women, and all of the shop and store assistants being men. While the chargehands tend to be women, all of the three managers are men. The checkout supervisor is a woman.

This store is untypical of the retail trade as a whole in many respects. A "normal" store (i.e. a store which conformed more closely to the averages for the sector) would have less young staff and more married staff (as Tables 4.5 a and b [above] noted only 40.5 per cent of shop assistants are single people under 25). Compared to other stores of

similar size selling similar goods, it has more part-time workers than you would expect. The gender imbalance between managers and staff is fairly typical of the sector. It seems that this store is an extreme case of a student labour market (Lucas, 1997) predominantly young and unmarried, in highly contingent and unstable work. This is built around a small core of less flexible, older employees. It may well be typical of franchise stores and of the garage shops.

The store does not have what could be described as a strong or unitary culture. There are some networks of staff in which there is a sense of opposition to the management. The staff can also isolate their sense of team work and service from their sense of common identity with the management. This is well seen through the way in which they articulate their sense of service. While the management is trying to generate a sense of service and is succeeding reasonably well, the staff actually articulate their sense of service in opposition to management. Something the management is trying to generate becomes a stick which is used to beat management. Many of the staff feel exploited and bitter. The points they come back to when defining the basis of their relationship with management include: rudeness on behalf of the owner to the staff; the unprofessional actions of the management; the decline in staff numbers and the consequent overworking of core staff; and the lack of consideration of the staffs personal needs by the managers. In the recent past some of the staff have tried to bring in a union, much to the anger and dismay of the owner of the store. This led to very personalised and heated argument between the owner and some of the employees.

For the contingent staff, the job is not a major part of their life. They are largely students gaining some experience and pocket money. They tend to be more accepting and happy

with their situation in work. However, their relative contentment is less important to the company than the lack of contentment of those close to the core.

The term which best describes the culture of the workplace is uncertainty. Employees do not know basic information even about their own contracts, such as their scales of pay and the length of their probation period. Nor do they know the rules of conduct - what is allowed and what is not allowed. In fact, it seems that rules are negotiated in interaction rather than clearly articulated. While this gives the management power to be arbitrary, it also, occasionally leaves them open to being outflanked by staff who use the space to successfully re-define the relationships of power in the company.

Overall then the uncertainty and continual negotiation in the company is suggestive of a moving mosaic organisational pattern. Staff can be shifted from area to area, from designation to designation and they do not have an overall picture of the company and their place in it. However, this lack of formality has been accompanied by what the staff experience as a personalised dictatorial management style which is not conducive to building a unitary culture.

Home Store

The second case study is a large store which was part of a sizeable retail chain. The store, which sells both drapery and food products, employs somewhere in the region of 500 employees. The chain as a whole employs about 9,000 employees. The chain is a large multi-national chain which was founded, and still does the bulk of its business, in Ireland. In recent years the chain has been headed by a succession of high profile personalities and while there is no personal input by these into the day to day running of

the individual stores, there is a sense in which the employees have a strong, almost personal relationship with the chair of the company board. The store is located between a number of villages in the suburbs of a city. Much of the store's trade would be carried by car.

In the past Home Store would have been regarded as being at the lower end of the prestige scale in the large retail market. Its major competitive advantage was its lower prices and its nation-wide distribution. However in the early 'nineties the company was loosing market share for a number of reasons, one of which must certainly have been the change in the nature of shopping (as outlined above). The decline in the company's fortunes eventually led to the replacing of the Board of Director's chairman in the mid 1990s. In an attempt to meet the challenge of the new marketplace the company embarked upon a major redesign programme which meant rebuilding and re-designing a number of stores, the introduction of more modern uniforms and the introduction of new retail technologies. The changes were not simply intended as changes in the physical space of the company - a change in language was also evident. Terms like 'team', 'teamwork' and 'communication' became part of the company's language.

However, such changes were not the central plank of the company's strategy for reclaiming its competitive edge. The company argued that, within the context of the changes in lifestyles and shopping styles, convenience is the ultimate factor (along with price, quality and value) in determining competitive worth. As such, it is a clear example of the Anglo-US unqualified retail service model. The company has tried to place itself at the cutting edge of the flexibility revolution in Irish retail. This has led to a high level

of numerical flexibility in employment practices, including zero hour contracts, assigning staff to starting times but not to a set finishing time as well as standard part-time work.

There is no survey from Home Store. All statistical data is based on key informant interviews. The Store employs a very high proportion of its employees as part-time workers - some reports indicate as many as 90 per cent of employees are part-time. Sixty per cent of employees regularly have less than 30 hours per week. While pay is high compared to the company's main competitors there is a very high turnover of staff in the company. The ages of staff is quite mixed, with a substantial proportion made up of young single staff but with some longer term staff. The rate of contingent work is higher than that evident in the sector as a whole.

This has lead to some considerable tension between the company and MANDATE, the union which represents the majority of the company's workers. In recent years the company has become embroiled in a number of very public industrial disputes. These have centred around conditions employment issues such as zero hour contracts, Sunday working and the lack of pensions as well as union recognition.

The case study is based on interviews carried out with 16 staff members in the store. In order to facilitate the accessing of social networks a number of these interviews took the form of group discussions. Almost all the interviews were carried out during a period of strike. It is likely that people interviewed while on strike would be less objective about their relationship with their employer than on other occasions. However, I decided to go ahead with the data collection during the strike for a number of reasons. First, the strike was a real event in the relationship between the employees and the company, just

as a non-strike day at work would be. In so far as the strike would prejudice people's views, this prejudicing of views arose from the case study environment rather than from the research process itself. Second, the purpose of the interviews was not primarily to collect objective information about the workplace. It was to collect data on the subjective (and inter-subjective) construction of reality within social networks. The strike did not hinder this. As an addendum to this rationale, it is perhaps interesting to note that despite being on strike, interview respondents generally did not take the opportunity to disparage the company.

This store was also characterised by a high level of uncertainty. As with Super Store, there was lack of clarity about the organisational structure of the company, about employee's basic rights and terms and conditions. Instead, stories and myths develop through the telling and re-telling in small group networks. Compared to Quality Store the nature of management training and surveillance is quite limited. This leads to a greater degree of ad-hoc management of human resources. Compared to Super Store, the relative lack of immediacy of the 'real' source of power (the Board of Directors) takes some of the venom out of interpersonal relations between management and staff, though the familiar theme that managers are unprofessional re-asserts itself. Overall the store is similar to Super Store in many respects, although those the scale of the operation is quite different.

Quality Store

The third case study is called Quality Store. The company is a multi-national retail company with a number of stores in Ireland and is one of the small number of Irish retail companies that is frequently cited as a exemplar of HRM and quality management. The

case study here is based on two of their stores in a city area. The larger store has a staff of about 300, the second store has a staff of about 120. The stores are located on busy streets in the centre of the city. They stock both food and drapery goods. Within the stores there is the division between the backstage and the 'front of house' staff. This is partly a gendered division, with most of the warehouse and loading staff in the backstage area being men, and all but a very small number of front of house staff being women.

The case study is based on a survey and a number of interviews. The survey covers 55 out of about 420 staff. As was noted in chapter three, the survey respondents were chosen in an opportunistic fashion (on a number of mornings anyone in the staff room for the morning break was asked to fill in the questionnaire). A more thorough method of sampling would not have been possible without endangering my welcome within the store. Therefore the findings of the survey are seen as instructive if not definitive. The one group that were systematically excluded from the survey were younger, student, part-time employees who tended to work evening shifts and week ends. A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were also carried out in this case study. The interviews tap into a number of networks of relationships within the store.

Overall, the majority of surveyed employees (69.1per cent) were aged 25 - 44 years of age. In the two stores there was no one surveyed under the age of 20. Only 15 per cent of those surveyed were still engaged in education. The staff in the smaller store tended to be younger than staff in the larger store. This is in part due to the fact that the larger store is older than the smaller one and many of the permanent staff have been working in their stores since they opened. The surveyed staff were evenly divided between those who were single and those who were married/once married/living with someone. 60 per

cent of the employees surveyed had full-time positions, though for sales assistants this figure dropped to 45.9 per cent. 5.3 per cent of the surveyed part-time sales assistants did not work any hours other than those they were contracted for, but 63.2 per cent of the surveyed part-time sales assistants worked on average at least 10 hours per week more than they were contracted for. These extra hours are not 'required' of staff.

The staff in Quality Store are unionised. The sales floor staff are members of MANDATE (the shop and bar workers union) and the backstage (i.e. warehouse and cleaning staff) and some of the administration staff are SIPTU members (SIPTU is the country's largest general workers' union). The overall employment structure of the work place is as follows:

(a) Temporary staff (full-time and part-time). All staff are contracted for a certain number of hours. Some have contracts of a given length, sometimes for the Christmas period, or for the Summer. After that time, they may be made permanent, (unlikely), called back for more temporary work (more likely), or let go all together. These are fully-contingent workers.

(b) Part-time permanent employees. They are contracted for standard hours although many worked other hours if these hours were available. Most did not have their own section (i.e., Frozen Foods, Lingerie, Fashions etc.), and tended to be increasingly used for checkout work. These are partially-contingent workers.

(c) Full-time staff, who worked thirty seven and one half hours per week. They tend to have their own section and more responsibility than part-time workers.

(d) Deputy Supervisor. They have more responsibility than full-time staff.

(e) Supervisor. The supervisors are seen by some staff as management. Senior management have been making efforts to try to develop a management culture among

supervisors, although the supervisors, feeling threatened by some of the overtures by management promptly joined a union.

(f) Management of various grades and types.

The job categorisations are also slightly different to those in Super Store. Here shop assistants also pack the shelves and serve customers. Hence the designation of shop assistant here is different to that found in Super Store.

The staff in these stores are closer to the "normal" store than of the two other stores. Although there appears to be more full-time staff than normal for a store of its size, this is probably because of the under-representation of younger part-time weekend staff. Compared to Super Store, the staff are older and more are married. The fairly clear distinctions between the roles taken by men and women within the workplace also approximates the normal situation. This store is fairly typical in its employment patters of other stores of a similar size.

The store bases its competitive edge on the quality of its goods and service. It prides itself in always having been a 'cut above the rest' of the Irish retail market. While other retailers have tried to encroach on this 'quality' market, the store still feels that it has maintained an edge in prestige. For example, employees and management make reference to its superiority to the quasi-slummish nature of other Irish retailers. The company provides staff with conditions which would be regarded as quite good in comparison to other retailers. This includes a high level of stability for those who make their way into the core work force, comparatively high pay, a visiting medical service and a well catered and subsidised canteen. This necessarily leads to higher labour costs than

those of some competitors. In recent years these higher costs have become an issue of concern for the company head office which is in England. In terms of profitability, the Irish stores are said to compare unfavourably to stores in other jurisdictions and the Irish company has come under pressure to increase the profits. Increasing flexibility in labour as well as addressing the level of theft and loss are just two parts of this drive for increased profitability. The pressure has led to a growth in what one manager describes as an 'accountancy penchant' within the firm.

The company has a history of training, of communication initiatives that is not common within the sector. It has been cited on a number of occasions as a market leader in HRM. Yet despite the high level of work which the management of the company have put into cultural management, their paternalism and the high level of financial investment in their staff, the results have not been as glowing as one might expect. Some of the staff who have been in the company for a long time feel that service levels are being cut and that the company is moving away from a continental/department store service model towards an Anglo-US/supermarket service model. For them, like the employees in Super Store, their commitment to service is used to articulate an opposition to the policies pursued by management. The comparatively low levels of team orientation of the supervisors can also be explained in terms of the history of the company. Recent attempts at 'flattening' the company have been interpreted as an assault on their position and has left them wary of management. Part-time workers on variable hours also articulate a sense of difference with management, since they would like more steady jobs. Unlike Super Store, part-time workers with fixed hours are actually long serving staff who have given up full-time work. They are comparatively happy with their situation.

Overall, I will show that the company is characterised by a high level or organisation or bureaucratisation. This means that the company does not approximate a moving mosaic organisational form. It also means that staff's voice has an institutional channel through which to be heard. While this limits the company's capacity to act unilaterally, it does make communication a more straightforward and successful task. While staff may not agree with management on everything, the management position at least can be understood and articulated by them. While this does not make a unitary culture, it is the most successful of the stores studied at sharing a vision between management and staff.

Conclusion

This chapter introduced the context of the three case studies, the Irish retail trade in general, and the three case studies in specific. The argument presented here is that the lack of research on retail is lamentable because of the central importance of retail in modern societies and because of the number of people who find employment in the retail sector.

The retail sector is one that has been under-researched. The fact that it is a central part of our lives seems to have made researchers overlook its crucial nature. Retail is like air in so far as it is so much a part of our lived experience of the world that we forget it is there. Retail is also a major employer, employing more than one out of every ten workers. These workers tend to be young and female. Retail also has higher rates of part-time work than other sectors of the economy. All the case studies used have substantial proportions of part-time work and all are heavily female workplaces. While the stores are not statistically representative of the retail trade, they do fit into a pattern similar to that of the trade as a whole, that is they include a franchise store, a large

retailer which uses very high levels of contingent workers and a large retailer which uses a more normal working pattern for the sector. There is, therefore, a strong argument for hypothesising about the nature of social processes to be found in the sector, based on an exploration of the processes in operation in these case studies.

This chapter presented an overview designed to contextualise the case studies. It is to these case studies that the next three chapters turn. Chapter six will identify the ways in which flexibility affects each of the three case studies. Chapter seven will look at how some of the other aspects of HRM (communication, selection, and reward systems) are used to deal with the effects of flexibility. However, before either the fragmentation or the unification of the culture can be properly understood the role of managers as change agents has to be understood. What can management do, what do they try to do and what resources are at their disposal? These questions will be addressed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE - THE VIEW FROM ABOVE

Introduction

This chapter and the next two describe the success and the failure of the attempts to manage the culture of the workplace in the three case study stores. Specifically, chapters six and seven address the way in which the management of culture enterprise is experienced by the staff in the case study stores and the ways in which that experience is mediated by their structural position - particularly by their age, their social class and their gender position. This chapters is about the managers. The data used here comes largely from interviews with nine managers in the case study stores, four in Super Store, two in Quality Store and three in Home Store.

In order to address the questions I laid out in chapter two I need to answer three empirical questions about managers. First, any evaluation of the success or failure of the cultural management enterprise needs to be explored in the context of what the intention was. Put simply it would be a mistake to judge the company a failure if the only things they did not achieve where things they did not set out to achieve. It is also notable that, although there is survey evidence as to the growth in HRM policies in Ireland and other countries, it is difficult to interpret this data in practice without some case study data. In order to address these two issues this chapter will look at what the operational managers intended to do when they set out to manage culture. Second, the theoretical model which I set out in chapter two suggests that the 'necessary' limits of the cultural management project (limits made necessary by the fact that the person is operating within a commercial company within capitalism) will be limits these managers themselves will

recognise and adhere to. This needs to be explored in practice. Finally, even if the management of culture does come within limits, it makes sense to assume it can be managed better or worse. While the next two chapters will deal with the success or failure of the cultural management enterprise, the reasons for that success or failure may lie in management actions and culture. How the managers see themselves managing culture therefore needs to be explored.

In this chapter I will address each of these empirical questions in turn. First I identify that the operational management in each of the companies did place an emphasis on the management of culture, though this appeared in much more coherent form in some rather than in others. The coherence with which it appears will be shown to be meaningful in the next two chapters. Second, I look at whether the management see material limits on their understanding of the management of culture. I will show that the managers did understand the management of culture as a materially bounded activity. Finally, I look at the development of the managers' capacity and willingness to deliver on the management of culture and the roots of this in each of their experience/*habitus* in the retail trade.

The Goals of Cultural Management

As chapter two has already noted, the literature on the management of culture is far from clear in the way in which it conceptualises culture. Culture is a short hand for 'identification with the company' on one hand and for a 'commitment to quality' on the other. Of course both these things are far from being clearly defined. It is this failure to distinguish between the two which means that when Smircich (1983) writes that culture is not something an organisation has but something an organisation is, he is at once hitting and missing the point. Certainly, from a post-structuralist perspective, the

organisation is its culture, however, the specific attributes which the managerialist tradition would like the organisation to have are not addressed by noting this. While Smircich's position is certainly defensible, it simply ignores the subject of managerialist attention.

In this section I will describe the sort of culture which the management in these case studies sought to manage in their staff. In doing so I rely on data on what actually happened in the companies, and data from the interviews with managers as to how they understood what they were trying to do. Like all interviews, there is likely to be an extent to which the managers are going to present an idealised form of their actions and their rationale for these actions (Hammersly, 1983). However, there is no reason to assume that they are any more likely to idealise their input in response to an interview than they are in response to a questionnaire, the standard form of data gathering on this subject. Management idealisations are also more transparent in this research since management statements can be triangulated against staff interviews and written sources. Finally, as I have argued in chapter three, the management idealisations of their own actions are in themselves valuable data, since they show management's views as to what constituted good practice.

As I have shown in chapter four, there are good grounds for expecting that the management will want to engender quality in the form of a service orientation on behalf of their staff. In Ogbonna's (1990; 1992) research on supermarkets this service orientation took the form of simply managing the appearance of service - managing behavioural indicators (a smile, speed, helping customers according to a set plan). However, in the retail stores studied by du Gay (1996) (most of which were not

supermarkets) there was a notable difference. Here the managers were interested in managing the self-identification of the employee. The worker in the stores was to become an enterprising individual, someone who would be a self interested actor engaged with the firm in a process of development. As I noted in chapter two, du Gay claims that attempts to stay 'close to the customer' in retailing are:

> constitutively linked to obtaining 'productivity through people'. It is 'culture' that provides the link. The quest for 'quality service' in contemporary retailing, for example, is represented foremost as a battle for the imagination, not only of the consumer, but also of the retail employee (1996: 130).

Therefore, while one would expect an attempt to manage specific service actions in the store, du Gay's findings leads us to expect to that this will be integrally tied to attempts to manage identity also.

Despite the fact that my case studies were supermarkets, and therefore more like the context of Ogbonna's work, they exhibit a number of similarities with du Gay's findings. In my three case studies there is a focus on the management of service and of identity. Managers in each of the case study stores make reference to the need to manage the ideas, emotions and sense of self as well as the actions of the employees. However, the way in which this is articulated in each of the case studies differs. In Super Store it tends to be articulated through the paternalistic idea of 'family', in Home Store it is articulated through the staff being 'responsible', and in Quality Store it is articulated through the focus on the company as a natural place for enterprising individuals. In the first case the company is fairly straightforwardly attempting to mobilise existing cultural resources. However in the second and third, the project of docility is more clearly developed as an idea.

Ogbonna's work does raise interesting questions also. How does the management of identity translate into the practices of the employees? Does having a service orientation pre-dispose you to certain types of action? What might these actions be? How do they differ from case to case? Ultimately, these questions are about the possibility and actuality of surveillance and self-surveillance. In this there are clear differences between the companies. Only Quality Store is clear in the mobilisation of techniques of surveillance and self-surveillance across Human Resource Management policy areas. The lack of clarity and surveillance is problematic in the other case studies. If there are clearly defined actions required of people then they can feel comfortable that they know what is expected of them. If what is required is a 'service' orientation then this is open to negotiation. This uncertainty may result in employees pushing the boundaries of what this might mean or in employees operating self-censorship to avoid coming up against invisible boundaries. However, even in Quality Store the articulation of these techniques of discipline come up against the limit posed by the actions of the managed. They too can mobilise company sponsored meaning systems in order to resist, most notably in the area of service.

It is not only the staff who are open to exercising freedom of will in the mobilisation of cultural resources. The management are also actors in their own right. They are situated between the owners and their superiors on one hand and the staff on the other. They are themselves employees of the firm and, given managerial downsizing and de-layering, likely to be very much aware of that status. The way in which they have been and are subject to techniques of discipline and the way in which they make these techniques operational will also affect both the goals, the methods and ultimately, the outcomes of

such cultural and identity management. These issues and their relevance to the case study stores are systematised in Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1 The Goals of Cultural Management in the Case Studies

	Service/ Quality Ethic	***Identity Project***	***Clarity***
Super Store	- Exists in ideal terms - Loosely articulated in behavioural terms - These are not applied	-Membership of Family - Not tied to service - Not articulated well through management	Low
Home Store	- Exists in ideal terms - Loosely articulated in behavioural terms - These sometimes applied	- Team membership and responsible actor - Tied to service - Sometimes articulated through management	In relation to financial issues
Quality Store	- Exists in ideal terms - Clearly articulated and applied	- Enterprising individuals - Tied to service - Articulated through management	High

Super Store

In Super Store the management of culture project is articulated as part of the service ethos of the store. Service, for the management team, means long opening hours, provision of choice of goods, and plenty of cash points to minimise queuing as well as a particular form of interaction with the staff. Things like cash points can be provided through a building programme rather than by working with the staff's culture or imagination. Whatever work is needed with the staff's culture and imagination is understood by management within this context.

The cultural management project has originated outside the store rather than with the store's management. It appears this initiative arose partially from the store's owner and partially from the chain of which the store is a franchise. Part of the common advertising of the franchise is that customer care was a strength of the franchises and, in the franchise chain, all of the staff wore a badge as part of their uniform which carried the exclamation: "We care!". Other programmes, such as the training being offered to staff, arose from the owner's own initiative.

The are two elements to the management of culture initiative. The first, as in the other stores, is service. Apart from being one of the elements which derives from being a franchise, service is said by the owner and his managers to be a key element in the success of the store. Management concede that if a person is simply looking for cheap goods they will get them cheaper nearby. What this store has to offer is the environment in which people get to shop. They feel that their competitive advantage will come from being a place that people enjoy shopping in. The senior managers in the store speak of this as a distinct philosophy - a way of thinking. Staff were not simply asked to act out customer care, they were required to adopt the *customer care way of thinking*. One manager argued that the staff cannot think of working in Super Store as being "just another job".

> We have to indoctrinate them into thinking of customer care, what they are doing. They can't see this as just another job, we have to get them motivated, and we have to get them into that mode of thinking. (SS8).

Essentially, she is arguing that this low-paid work with poor security needs to be conceptualised as something special, something which is more than just a place where you come in, do your work, and leave. The person is to approach their work with a

customer care mode of thought, to translate this into action as required in return for low pay, poor conditions and an insecure environment. It is a place where you give, or more precisely, articulate part of yourself. It is not just another job.

This idea of quality service is not well embedded in behavioural indicators in the store. While the franchise has very clear guidelines for maintaining cleanliness, other aspects of customer care, particularly service, are less clearly articulated. This is seen in interviews with both the senior manager and the checkout supervisor. In relation to a question on the specifics of what is expected of staff, the manager replied "we expect them to be friendly and nice to customers and treat them in a way they would like to be treated" (SS6). While the checkout supervisor is a little more specific, she is still some distance from articulating clear behavioural indicators. She notes different things are expected of different groups of staff:

> For the girls on the checkout it's that they are serving the customers, being polite to the customers, getting through them as quickly as possible. They're chatting to them, packing bags, helping them with any queries that they have. On the deli, it's that everybody is getting what they want and if they want any thing out of the ordinary that they will get it for them. . . It's hard to say. (SS 8).

The training programme which the staff were engaged in at the time of the case study did include clear behavioural patterns which staff were expected to observe, role play and then act out in practice. However, this did not translate into clear management expectations and therefore was not the subject of surveillance. Although the trainee manager sits in on the training sessions, the managers themselves had not been subject to the training programme in question at the time of the case study. There was a vague suggestion that they would do a more advanced version of the course in the future though no-one was clear about what or when. Overall then, an attempt to create a

service orientated or customer care culture in the company is in place though this has not been translated into clear behavioural objectives against which the management can assess the staff. Although the aspiration of a project of docile self-development is articulated, it is not resourced in any bureaucratic way.

Apart from the management of service the management and the owner are also interested in managing the identity of the staff in order to create something of a unitary culture within the store. While the word 'team' was used on a few occasions, the image which was most used was that of 'family'. This image was used by three of the four management-level people interviewed. In the respect in which it is articulated below it was used primarily by the owner and his daughter. Although the general manager used the term on a number of occasions, he used it in the more restrictive descriptive sense of the company being a family firm.

In using the term 'family' the company is simply using a terms which is a part of their immediate cultural resources. The concept 'family' is not tied in any direct way to improved service or productivity. Its tie is only to obedience, rather than, as Foucault argued, a development of some capacity through the same process as the dissipation of political power. It is an idealist support for a personalised control system. Although the store is in competition with the major multiples it is, in essence, a family run store. The owner is generally around the store for two or three hours per day, his wife has an independent company which operates within the store's space and his daughter is in a management level job in the store. The meaning of family has been broadened somewhat from this descriptive sense in its use by the owner. He refers to the store itself as a "big family" (SS1). By implication the staff are in some respect an extension of the owner's

family, a family in which he is the paternal figure. One staff member tells of an argument with him in which he tried to get the other staff on his side by telling them: "The shop is like a big family. It is nothing to do with money" (SS3).

The image of the family could have been used to suggest that that the family is a unit which may be said to look out for each other and which is united. However, in Super Store the family metaphor is not well developed in the management conception of their ideal culture. In so far as it is developed it does have paternalist overtones which might be thought to make management of the staff easier ('Father knows best'). Conspicuously, there is no suggestion that what is god for the family (company) is good for all members of the company. The family metaphor is used most frequently as an image of legitimate power (with the sovereign father) and as a guilt mechanism. Those who break ranks are admonished with the suggestion that they are breaking with the family - and attacking the owner in the area he cares most about, the welfare of his blood family. The family metaphor here is not a reference to interdependence or to job security. It avoids any material reference at all. It is a mobilisation of a cultural resource which is to hand in order to maintain control through feelings of fear, guilt or respect. The intended effect of this mobilisation is that the staff will identify themselves with the company in a manner similar to the way in which they are expected to identify themselves with their families.

The use of this term is in some sense problematic for the management team, showing some of the same problems which have been identified in open-door management communication systems (Tripoli, 1998: 31). If the owner is really the father figure then the managers are simply people who operates on behalf of the father. With father so

close at hand this 'elder brother' role can be questioned as the children run to daddy to second guess his son. This may explain why, although the general manager uses the term family in relation to the company it is not in the same way as members of the owner's biological family do. His use of the term is more descriptive - he sees the family firm as a small, relatively non-formal and comfortable place to work. The term family is not a resource for him in the same way as it is for the family of the owner. In this respect the lack of capacity development implicit in the idea of a family for its subjects - the staff - is just as evident for the manager. It places him in a position between the owner and the staff, not as a mediator but as a baby-sitter who can be 'outflanked' (Clegg, 1989; 1994b) by staff.

Overall then, the owner in Super Store is concerned with the generation of a service ethic and a family identification within the company. In relation to the firm this is not clearly articulated in any measurable form and therefore does not lend itself to surveillance or self-surveillance. This concern is shared by the management in an ill-defined kind of way. For them it is the attitude that matters - what it might mean in practice is said to be hard to say. The owner and his daughter also share a concern for the development of a familial identification with the firm on behalf of the employees. This is articulated in entirely non-material terms, in fact it has involved the denial of material interests on occasion. Once more, what this is to mean in practice, other than obeying father, is not articulated. The articulation of the concept of the family provides a meaning system which could make management difficult for the manager. Both concepts are left in fairly ill-defined form.

Home Store

The focus on service and customer care in Home Store is a reasonably recent phenomenon. As with Super Store, the focus on service is often articulated in terms of the structural provisions for the customer. Things like checkout packers, extra till points and extended opening hours are among the first things the commercial managers will think of when they talk about service. However, part of this push on service is seen to depend on the management of the identity and culture of the staff.

This idea has only really grown in the store in the early 1990s. At that time the power base on the Board of Directors changed and ideas of customer care came to the fore. The change became articulated in a number of different ways. The staff got new uniforms which were thought of as more fashionable, a number of stores were renovated, merchandise (particularly in the textiles departments) moved up-market and new training and communications programmes were initiated. The word 'team' was also increasingly used to describe the workforce, both in job advertisements and in other PR exercises. Irish sports teams were congratulated 'from one great team to another' and potential job candidates were invited to join the team. This new language also included terms like 'customer care'. The managers interviewed noted that they had not heard such terms used within the company prior to the early 1990s.

This translated itself into some action in relation to service and the management of identity. This is articulated both in philosophically ideal terms and in terms of some specific actions (in the language of the company 'skills') which constitute customer care. The specific skills in question relate to the presentation of self (dressing in a certain clearly defined way, smiling, acting pleasant, saying please and thank you and following

specific procedures in dealing with the customer). These skills are articulated in measurable and behavioural terms. These skills, in turn, are to be backed up by knowledge as to the working of the store (in order that the employee has the capacity to help the customer in need), a pleasant disposition or attitude and a sense of achievement in being of service. In this sense it is not simply a behavioural regime, what is requested is more. The staff are asked to self-actualise themselves through being good at what they do: through being 'of service'. The staff were also to think of themselves as valuable parts of the company. Issues which were of interest to the staff were to be listened to and acted upon because the employee was valuable to the store. They were not labour costs any more. They were human resources. In short, they are asked to develop their capacity for serving as part of a trade-off which lessens their political capacity to have a say.

At the time this was being introduced, there were changes in practice within the company. Out of the blue (and sometimes with very short notice) some managers were invited to conferences to discuss the company and its way forward. Customer care was spoken of. Training was organised, managers were brought on courses, they brought this orientation back to the stores, there was a great flurry of activity, of excitement, and then, gradually, action by the company in relation to customer care faded away. While the language remained, action in relation to it was left up to the individual stores.

To the individual managers this it seen as a failure on behalf of the company. It is a source of some disappointment and frustration to them:

> We started a lot of training courses for managers. Team building courses, coaching courses - training us in how to coach our employees. We had directors come round to meet the staff members in the store, meet managers in hotels later

> to find out the problems we were having, what we needed to fulfil our role that we would be happy in and that it would be passed on to the company, and it all started up really well and the courses started and a lot of store managers and staff managers went to them and then it just started to die. That would be another weak area in our organisation. Good ideas started up and not followed through. . . .A lot of it would come down to costs. That the organisation would look at it as something that was costing a lot of money and what benefits are we seeing in turnover? (HS9).

All the managers interviewed spoke of the company as having a weakness in the area of training, in clarity of organisation and in following through. While the customer care model is articulated in a very general sense, and even in behaviourally specific terms, there is no clear method through which this is followed through in each of the stores. Whether or not it actually happens is left to the initiative of the individual manager:

> It would be left down to the individual manager. Some packages were set up but there was no kind of follow through, like, nobody would come into me and say "Are you doing a proper induction session with that new staff? What are you doing? Are you doing proper training at the registers?" The odd package would be sent out but there would be no follow up as to what we were doing. So again it was left down to the individual. I can do as little training as I want to, or I can do as much as I want to (HS9).

In this case, as in the case of Super Store, the managers are acutely aware of their own intermediate status. This is articulated in a different way here than it is in Super Store. Their job is not simply to do the will of the boss. It is to interpret the directions which come from head office, read the signs, read between the lines, read the entrails and then decide on a course of action. As in Storey and Sisson (1993) and Legge (1995a), it was the management's job to decide what head office 'really' wanted, almost irrespective of what it said it wanted. In this respect, the managers themselves were not facilitated in their own self-surveillance. I will return to this later in this chapter.

As I noted above, this service orientation is to embed itself in a particular identity. Staff are to identify themselves with the company, to self actualise themselves within the company, to develop an achievement orientation which is to become operational through service. They were required to become 'responsible'. (This language is identical to that which du Gay finds in a number of his case studies [1996: 131]). The benefit of this to the company is not simply that employees will become part of a unitary culture focused on the common goal of the company, though this would obviously be nice. Nor is it simply that people would articulate their self-expression and self-realisation in ways which was positive for the company's profits. The language of 'responsiblising' (that is, making staff responsible) allows the company to articulate both these things in a manner which also makes de-layering (the removal of the middle management role and the pushing of extra responsibility on lower grade employees without giving commensurate remuneration) seem downright attractive to those affected. The company cuts down on costs, de-layers, and has people at lower pay rates doing work previously done by middle management, while the staff get personal development, fulfilment and a sense of being an integral part of the company.

In this respect the management of culture is different to that found in Super Store. For a start, there is a correspondence between the identification of employees with the company and the particular model of service which is identified. The employees will be committed to and at one with the company through the opportunity they are afforded to articulate a sense of themselves. Secondly, this is functional for the company in allowing it to de-layer. There are similarities between this and Quality Store.

Quality Store

Service is not new to Quality Store. Historically it occupied the quality and service market into which more and more retailers are now moving. This store has always been seen as having a strong service ethos, though what that means is now changing. As with Pollert's study of Czech retailers (1995) what constitutes service is being changed from the presence of staff who are have transferable knowledge (about things like tailoring, textiles, fashions or foodstuffs) and who can advise and assist customers, to a self-service based model based on short queues, staff who are knowledgeable about the company's stock and who can order or procure appropriate goods for customers. As with the other stores, the new model of service also involves longer opening hours and more opening days. Despite the change in service focus towards that being increasingly offered by the other case study retailers (what Pollert calls an Anglo-US unqualified service model), both staff and management still speak of Quality Store as having a touch of class, of being a step above what they see as the slightly grubby retail market that most large multiples were engaged in. On one occasion I was asked to change the title of the questionnaire that was to be used in the store from 'Supermarket Work Questionnaire' to 'Retail Work Questionnaire', as the management felt that neither they nor the staff would like to identify themselves as supermarket workers and on another I was told that the customer in Ireland does not treat the shop's stock with the same care that customers do in other countries. After all, I was informed, the Irish customer is used to shopping in places like Home Store rather than in the more dignified surrounding of Quality Store. It is, therefore, natural for them to drop goods on the floor and run a child's buggy over it. But that is not the way Quality Store customers are really expected to behave. One Supervisor wondered if the British Queen's mother didn't buy her underwear in Quality Store.

As with the other two case studies, the culture of the company is to be managed. The company is determined that its interaction-based service ethic will be maintained. Unlike Super Store and like Home Store, there is a very clearly fixed idea as to what service means in practice. It is embedded in behaviourally specified performance indicators. Unlike Home Store however, these behavioural indicators are expected to be applied by the management. This is expected of management by their management, and will be checked in regular audits. When either of the managers interviewed spoke about managing quality or managing service, therefore, they spoke in terms of the ways their staff acted rather than simply in terms of the ways they thought. For example, as part of the service drive the management and selected staff have observed the staff at work.

> We've used the sales assistants on the focus team, the supervisors and the management team to get together and analyse certain performance indicators which, what we did was we went down on the floor and the staff actually watched other staff doing things, certain things in service, and got results from them and decided where we were weak and where we were strong in service (QS9).

This clarity and focus on performance indicators is not peculiar to service: many aspects of the work of the sales assistants are clearly laid out and codified and one of the supervisors in the store is dedicated to carrying out ongoing audits of practice and to designing training as appropriate. Such clarity is a feature of the company as a whole, a fact seen in published studies of the company outside Ireland. Clarity is part of the way of life - part of the more general culture - in this store. The company operates the kind of clarity which is necessary as a precursor for techniques of discipline and the surveillance and training models which constitute these techniques.

As in Home Store, behavioural indicators are not enough Quality Store. The management are also concerned that there should be a conceptual backdrop for the clear behavioural targets. People should want to achieve them because of a commitment to service. This can cause problems. The focus on the concept of service means that practices need to be articulated through the lens of service. Work on doing this is carried out by the management and the training operatives, and the employees are invited to see the behavioural patterns requested as being service - and thereby to see themselves as being 'developed' through training and surveillance.

Part of the engendering of a culture of service in the company is the management of identity. The task of management is not just to get people to work more flexibly, to smile at the customer and to process their goods quicker, though that is certainly part of it. The management were also interested in changing the way in which the staff think about their sense of self. This was deemed to be part of the task of making the staff more flexible, responsive and service oriented. Flexibility, responsibility (as in Home Store), constant change, becoming a commercial person, and recognition of the mutual benefit to the company and the staff are all part of the cultural mix. This has much in common with du Gay's description of the cultural management project in case study D. Here self-actualisation is not simply achieved by being in a place that gave people a space to be responsible, though this is part of it, it is achieved through being an enterprising individual - a self-interested economic actor among other self-interested economic actors. Here staff are not asked to become part of a family or even simply part of a

team. They are asked to 'buy' into the company, to become "commercial people" (QS3), self-actualising through being a part of the commercial organisation focused on the goal of that organisation: profit. The management are not saying that they are trying to get away from monetary based contract with their staff towards a notion of emotive attachment, though that is part of it. The manager is actively pursuing the engendering of a far more contractual understanding of their relationship with their workforce. Rather than saying to the workforce 'This is not just a job, it is a meaningful part of your life' (something that HRM is often presumed to have as the goal of its cultural-change model) the management are actually saying: 'This is a job. Our relationship is contractual. However, if you engage with us, see things our way, be one of us, then this can, in itself, be meaningful. You can be the best you that you can be by making our goals your goals'. Essentially the staff are asked to think about their work the way the managers say they think about it themselves. The staff are asked to develop their own capacity and to self-develop in a manner which is thought to generate organisational docility.

Two issues illustrate this project of the development of *homo economicus* (du Gay, 1996: 181) (or *femina economica*) clearly in Quality Store: flexibility in the definition of a job; and flexibility in rewards. The first of these is seen in the nature of the discussions with the warehouse staff over the issue of flexible work practices. According to the managers, the men in the warehouse felt that a job meant working regular hours for a five day week. Working any other structure was not really a job in the way in which they understood that term. It may be 'work' but it was not really 'a job'. (This definition of a job is clearly a gendered one). In order to generate numerical flexibility the company

wished to change the way in which the men understood 'a job'. To do so meant breaking the emotional and conceptual attachment to a particular lifestyle that revolved around particular working hours and changing their way of thinking:

> . . . [What] we're trying to do is turn their thinking around and say, basically, its not the fact that you are part-time or full-time, its the fact that you are actually earning a wage. And if that wage is a reasonable weekly wage surely that's the important factor. . . It's a philosophy we are very much trying to turn around at the moment because we want to look at working patterns as opposed to full-time and part-time levels of staff. . . So, what we are trying to do now is turn that all on its head and say, 'Look, surely it must be the monthly salary you get that's important to you because that is ultimately what is allowing you to live', and it is quite an interesting one to turn around because its a philosophy that people simply are completely alien to (QS3).

This is an attempt to re-define 'job': to de-fix the meaning from the emotional and conceptual meaning of it and re-fix it to a purely contractual relationship. This is clearly a negotiated process. The management are attempting to mobilise other material cultural resources (the salary which "ultimately allows you to live") with a view to de-fixing and re-fixing the meaning of job for these employees. It is also notable that this process does not happen in the abstract, but in a particular interaction in a particular situation. The process of cultural management is not discursively directed so much as a discursive resource which is drawn into negotiation in relation to a broader issue - that of flexibility and ultimately profitability.

The second example also shares these characteristics: management wish to tackle deeply held meaning-systems in order to bring about 'flexibility', this time in payment systems; the process of de-fixing and re-fixing is desired because it moves towards the employee as a self-interested economic actor within the context of a company which values and

requires such actors; and the staff are asked to see things and value the world from a manager's perspective. In this context, the manager would like to change the employees' views at to what is fair.

> The employees see fairness [in a community sense]. They see ways of doing things as fair. Like, for example, if someone is here longer they get the increase in the basic and they see that as the fairest way, and they know what to expect and nothing is surprising them. . . [In other countries] anybody who performs to an acceptable standard and who doesn't have an absence percentage that it too high will get an increase in the basic. It is just done differently here. It's [length of] service related and in my opinion service related changes are archaic because why should somebody who was here first get more than somebody who wasn't here first. I don't see the fairness in that (QS9).

This concern with underlying principles of what is fair and what is not, what should be understood as a full-time job and what should be understood as a 'working pattern', underlies the management attempt to manage the world of ideas in the workforce. This can be understood very simply as an attempt by management to get the workforce to see it their way. In a very straightforward way, therefore, their aim is to create a unitary culture. However, the nature of that culture is that is it to be a hierarchical enterprise culture, with many enterprising individuals doing what is best for them within the framework of the company.

In Super Store it was clear that family concept was a resource which could be easily drawn into the discursive relationship between the owner and the staff. It is also clear that there is a functional relevance in the model of self-actualisation chosen in Home Store. It is far less clear, in an Irish context, where the enterprising individual model comes from in Quality Store. It is possible that this particular model which has been drawn into the discursive relationship between management and staff does not come

from an Irish context at all. It does appear that the concept of the enterprising individual was far more readily used in Britain that in Ireland where unions enjoy considerable public and political legitimacy (Roche and Turner, 1998: 97) and where a series of corporatist national agreements (Roche, 1997; Tansey 1998) and the relative dominance of populist rather than economically ideological parties have meant that such language sits less comfortably within our political culture. In this respect du Gay's account of the rise and rise of *homo ecomomicus* may be a more geographically bounded phenomenon than that which he presents. However, in many other respects the company is very untypical of a British company. This is an issue I will return to in chapter eight.

Overall

The pattern which presents itself from these three firms is that of increasing levels of organisation and clarity as one moves from the first to the third. Super Store is a store without clarity in the specification of a model of docile identity for its staff - the model it has chosen is specifically unlikely to achieve this docility for all the managers - in the specification of behavioural objectives, or in the structured surveillance of such objectives. Home Store has clarity of specification and some behavioural objectives but no surveillance. Only Quality Store has all three.

Yet all three stores can be clearly said to have made the management of a culture of service and the management of identity a goal. This is most surprising in the case of Super Store which is a small store which, as I will show, does not betray many signs of what is referred to as HRM capacity. Yet, even this store has internalised elements of the debate around the management of culture enough to be able to articulate it as a goal. This is perhaps one of the most interesting findings overall, the extent to which the

language and ideas of cultural and identity management are embedded in even this most unlikely of sites. This has some resonance with Roche's (1995) findings that there is no one type of market or company that is a precursor to the development of HRM programmes.

Material Limits to the Management of Culture

Having identified the sort of models of identity which the companies seek to engender in their work forces we are now in a position to address the second of the two empirical questions I posed above: whether or not the management identify material limits to the management of culture. As I noted above, this helps us to address whether such limits are 'necessary' limits imposed by the nature of the companies as profit making concerns in a capitalist economy.

All of the managers interviewed did note material limits to the management of culture. This can be seen in two ways. The first is in relation to the way in which they are managed themselves. Their hours of work and their conditions of employment were important to them in defining their relationship with the company. Their own articulation of self within the company was contingent upon certain material conditions being fulfilled. Second, they identified material limits on the extent to which they could manage the identity of the staff. They saw in their interaction with the staff the same sort of limits which they saw, from the opposite perspective in their relationship with their employer.

The significance here is that the material limit was perceived by the management. Their perception of the material limit does not necessarily mean that it actually exists in a super-cultural sense (an orthodox -Marxist sense or in the sense that a number of industrial relations writers use, for example). Whether or not that is true is not really at issue here. What is being suggested is that there is a dominance of a particular cultural meaning, a series of meanings, within the organisations which are necessarily fixed by the purpose of the company - profit.

The material limit was not an absolute limit and it did not always function in the same way. It depended on the store, the category of staff one was dealing with and with the nature of the work practices in question. In Quality Store it was very much to the front - as the company strove to articulate a libertarian economic ideal within the company issues of material reward came to the fore. For them, the management of culture was not about the denial of the material, rather it was about the articulation of the material world in a way which supported this ideal. In Home Store too, the pay nexus came to the fore as the company attempted to use the material world to demonstrate the mutuality of the relationship between the company and the employee in tangible ways. However, here the idea that people needed to be able to articulate a non-material reward through their capacity to realise themselves within the store's context also came through much more strongly than in Quality Store. This theme is also found in Super Store which places the least emphasis of all the stores on the material world and the most on this capacity for self-realisation.

Super Store

As with all the other stores, the management in Super Store note that their own material situation is important to them in the decisions they make in relation to work. It is not the defining characteristic, but it is taken into account. The trainee manager, for example, expressed his desire to eventually get out of the company. The reason was simple. The hours of work were simply not worth it:

> . . .[T]here is no real life in this job. I was in at nine this morning and I'll be in to nine tonight, and get home at ten and be back in at eight. You kind of spend your whole day in the shop. You get sick of it sometimes. (SS9)

The manager also spoke about the hours of work and how difficult they made his life. For him however they were balanced by two other considerations. One was also material: he was well paid. The second was non-material: he loved his job since it gave him an opportunity to actualise himself through working with people and dealing with customers. However, in the long run, even he doesn't see his future as being with the company. He wants to continue the project of self-realisation but not in that environment necessarily:

> I suppose while I'm happy working here, I'll stay here until the time is right to go. . . . I'm now looking at another two years here, maybe three and then I'd open my own [store]. I suppose that'll be the more personal touch because you'd be the owner yourself. (SS7)

For the managers their conditions are important. The general manager gets well paid, he has a certain amount for flexibility in his time, but, at the end of the day, self-actualisation is important to him. This is a developed capacity. He notes that by becoming a supermarket manager he specifically did not become something else. Within these narrow options he, and the trainee manager look for self-actualisation. Both will

look elsewhere. That self-realisation which keeps them committed to the company leaves space for their departure from it.

The managers also recognise that material issues are at stake for the staff. Their relationship with the staff is framed by this context. They note that pay is part of the considerations people take into account in their decisions regarding the company. Like the managers, the staff are not expected to see pay as the defining issue. They do not pay as well as other multiples and everybody knows it. Other factors work to keep staff there. On the other hand, they recognise that staff make decisions partially within the context of the rate of pay:

> Our pay is not the best. It wouldn't be as good as some of our competitors but a few of our young lads at a training meeting said "Right, we're only getting 20 pence per hour less than Home Store, but they're more relaxed here". We won't be standing at their shoulders all the time. We let them work - I won't say at their ease - but we let them work casually, rather than under pressure. One or two of our lads said they'd rather work here than in Home Store. One or two of them come from Home Store or some of the others, and they say they'd prefer to work here, even though the money is not as good. (SS7)

The management recognise the role of pay in the decision making processes of the staff. What they offer instead of pay or other forms of material rewards is more relaxed working conditions (also a material factor). For them, the question of staff's role in the company is bounded by these material factors.

Super Store does have a substantially idealist tendency. The owner has been known to tell the staff that his commitment to the company has nothing to do with money, the focus on a casual work environment partially relates to creating a space where the employees can enjoy themselves in a social sense rather than a simply utilitarian

calculation. Yet, at the end of the day the management see material issues as forming a boundary beyond which they cannot go.

Home Store

While the managers in Super Store recognise the importance of material issues as setting boundaries for their interaction with the staff, they do not try to mobilise material rewards and situations to create a unitary culture. At the time of the case study Home Store were starting to give some thought to the mobilisation of such rewards. Such rewards were being considered for both management level and staff level.

The managers in Home Store are, as I have noted above, acutely aware of their status as intermediaries between senior management and the staff. Their own status as employees of the company is clear in their conversation. It is also clear that material issues play a part in their decision to stay in Home Store and in the decision of so many other managers to leave. Like the situation in Super Store, material issues are not the determining characteristic of the relationship but they do set boundaries. For example, in recent years the company has had difficulty in attracting and in keeping graduate managers. In order to do so it has become conscious of the working conditions of managers. This has meant working to keep the hours close to the 'normal' working day, structuring opportunities for pay advancement and limiting the amount of mobility which is required of managers.

In relation to staff also, they have taken note of the material situation and how it affects the relationship between staff and company. This represents itself in two ways. The first is that full-time staff are thought to have a different relationship with the company than

part-time staff. Some part-timers are "only here for the money" (HS10). The second way in which this is represented is in the perceived need for various material rewards including incentive schemes, a discount for staff purchases, and improvements in working conditions. Managers note that material rewards for work done is a priority since it is raised so often by staff at communication meetings. The company is looking at ways of attempting to mobilise this instrumentalist orientation of the staff towards their work.

As with Super Store, the orientation is not entirely materialist. The employee of the month scheme is not based on a material reward, for example, and at the end of the day, the managers argue, the staff need to like retail type work - they need to be able to find some means of self-expression via their work. They have to be cut out for the job. This is particularly true of the full-time workers and the longer-term workers who are not just there for the money. However, like Super Store, this is expected to happen within the context of the material situation. The mobilisation of an instrumental commitment to the store is not articulated in a manner which could reasonably be thought to link to the stated project of generating responsible staff. It is not so much a part of the project, as a precursor to the project. It is necessary to attract the 'right sort' of people who can be an appropriate raw material for the project.

Quality Store

As I noted above, the type of identity which Quality Store was attempting to manage was that of an instrumentalist economic actor who could self-actualise within the company's context. Implicit in this is the belief that material issues matter. Without a sound materialist base, the relationship founders. As with the managers in the other

stores, the managers here note how important their own terms and conditions are to them. Their hours of work, their rate of pay and their conditions of employment were noted by the managers there as being important in terms of their relationship with their employer. It was important to them that, unlike other retailers, their employer does not "abuse" its managers (QS9).

In relation to the staff, the task of the management team is to create a culture which is more, rather than less, materially oriented. However, that materialism is to be recognised and directed by enterprising individuals within the framework of a healthy company in which different interests can be accommodated with the general, shared project. The management do not try to manage the relationship through the denial of material issues, but instead, through the negotiation of the meaning of one set of material interests against another. Therefore, in the example quoted above, the definition of 'job' is debated with the staff, with both definitions being material (hours vs. take home pay).

The managers can see how the employees different conditions can help to shape their experiences, even if they are trying to change how these conditions are experienced. This can be seen in relation to a number of issues, be it job flexibility, working hours, or performance-related pay. It is clearly seen in relation to the management's view of the Union:

> Interviewer: You said that the union wasn't the most effective means of communication. Why?
> Maybe it's because the house committee would see themselves as addressing any problems the staff have, so they address a problem and that's basically it. Their main job, they are basically there for the good of the staff as they see it, to ensure that if anyone has a grievance they will discus it with them [the union]. If [the union] feels they don't have a case they won't pass it on and if they feel they do have a case, they will sort it out. (QS9)

According to this manager, the union is there to work for the "good of the staff *as they see it*". Clearly the management recognise that the experience of the staff is sometimes at odds with how the management would prefer for them to experience their working life and that this different experience arises out of their working conditions, or in this case, out of their employee - employer relationship with the company.

The company is not entirely materialist in its orientation towards the staff. Certainly the managers see mechanisms like a reward scheme for service above and beyond the call of duty, a scheme which does not give monetary rewards, as being part of the process of cultural management. However, compared to the other two stores, the managers see the management of culture happening more through the mobilisation of material rewards.

Overall

The material limits of the management of culture project are recognised by all three stores but articulated in different ways. In Super Store it is part of a trade off between pay and the enjoyment of social life at work. The level of pay must be such that it is not worth someone's while going somewhere else to work. Home Store are experimenting with the use of material rewards as a means of generating an instrumental commitment to the company. This is seen as a precondition to movement on the responsibilisation project. In Quality Store, the instrumental rewards form an integral part of the project of the creation of economic actors. Through the mobilisation of and negotiation of the meaning of instrumental rewards the 'rational' economic concerns of both employers and employees can be accommodated within the common project of responsibility, service and profit.

In all cases the management articulate the view that the management of culture is constrained, bounded or infused with material limits. In this respect they are far more materialist than the ideologues of post-modern management which I dealt with in chapter two. This can be understood as representing what the management see as the necessary limits of a relationship founded on the wage nexus. As one moves from Super Store to Home Store to Quality Store this necessary limit becomes increasingly incorporated into the management of culture apparatus. In Super Store and Home Store the limit exists as a precursor to cultural management. There is a certain norm one must approach before anything else is possible (in Super Store it is 'only' 20 pence per hour less than the opposition, in Home Store it is reasonable pay and conditions). In Super Store it also exists as external to the management of culture apparatus, while in Home Store it is part of the apparatus. While it makes sense to see it as a precursor in Quality Store also, in some sense the discussions here are happening at a different level. Such criteria are taken for granted here and the debate has moved on to look at the mobilisation and articulation of different types of material resources in the management of culture project. As I have already noted, it is Quality Store which will be shown to be most successful in the management of culture, partially because this material limit is not tested in practice to the same extent as in the other companies. I will return to this in chapter six.

Techniques of Discipline and Key Levers of HRM

Even if management recognise and operate material limits to the management of culture project, chapter seven will show that the culture is not *determined* by this material reality. There are things the managers can do to more effectively manage the culture of the workplace. As I noted above a number of authors (Storey and Sisson, 1993; Legge,

1995a; Roche, 1995) have suggested that the management capacity to manage Human Resources will make a difference in HRM outcomes. Storey and Sisson, and Legge, have also argued that the management's understanding of that which the organisation expects of them will affect their attitude towards certain key HRM levers, such as training.

Both these factors relate specifically to the operation of techniques of discipline upon the managers. The development of their capacity (and its converse - their docility), and the presence or absence of clarity as to the organisation's expectations are key features of such techniques. However, as I noted above, such techniques should not be thought of as being total in their effectiveness in the modern workplace. Here the two variables at work are (a) the extent to which the techniques are applied and (b) the *habitus* or sociological biography of the subject (in this case, the managers).

It is clear that the sociological biography or background of the manager is likely to affect their management style. Their social class (Redding, 1979), their gender (O Connor, 1995a; 1998) their ethnicity or cultural background (MacMahon, 1995: 189) and their education (Lane, 1989) are all likely to play a part, processed through their training in the formation of their managerial ideology and values which will in turn have a relationship with their practice (Gunnigle, Heraty and Morley, 1997). In the three case studies there was considerable diversity in how these different factors inter-related with the individual's professional development to develop their conception of the company's priorities and their capacities. These factors were not simply inputs shaped by their experience in the company, but were shaped by and shapers of their experience within

the company. Their personal sociological biography weaves through their company biography.

The managers in the case study stores reflect management as a whole (Mintzberg, 1973, Stewart, 1976) in so far as they do widely different tasks within the job title 'manager'. Some of those identified as managers in Super Store (a small store) would not be regarded as managers if they worked in larger stores. The managers also come from widely differing educational backgrounds and work backgrounds. Some have not completed post-primary schooling, some have degrees. In this section I am primarily concerned with those that are identified by their company as managers and who had responsibility for managing staff. Therefore I exclude some of those that the staff might see as managers (e.g., supervisors in Quality Store). Where personnel managers exist I focus on their careers. Where they do not I focus on the personnel function within the management team's work. In this section I will present each of the three case study stores, identifying the way in which the company has structured the management career and the way in which the managers in turn attempt to manage the identity and culture of their staff through the mobilisation of key levers of HRM (Storey, 1992), namely training and communication, and things like hiring and firing, promotion, and reward management which can be broadly understood as career development.

Super Store

The careers of the managers in Super Store have been characterised by a lack of clarity in relation to personnel issues, a lack of training and a high degree of personalised sponsorship. The managers tended to be from working-class backgrounds and to be poorly educated: none had a degree and only one of the four had successfully completed

post-primary education. They tended to be selected for jobs in a clearly gendered fashion.

There are three male managers in Super Store, the general manager, the assistant manager and the 'trainee' manager ('trainee' is a designation, not a description - he was no more 'in training' than the assistant manager). All managers, including the female checkout supervisor spoke about prospective managers as "he' or "a lad". All three had worked their way up from the shop floor to managerial positions. Those interviewed speak about starting out pushing shopping trolleys and stacking shelves (not doing checkout work since that is women's work) before being chosen for management careers. In what might be thought of as a classically British way (Lane, 1989: 95; Storey and Sisson, 1993: 173), the criteria by which they see themselves as having been chosen were a vague sense of their suitability for the job.

The general manager received a sixteen week training course which focused on giving him experience in each of the different product areas (delicatessen, fruit and vegetables, meat counter etc.) and in the accountancy-oriented areas of the company (wages, ordering etc.). Although the company he trained with is thought of as being a leader in the area of personnel management, he received no specific training in this area. The managers under him receive even less training. Some formal training is offered to the trainee and assistant managers in Super Store. This comes in the form of a short course offered by an external training agency. After that they simply engage in on the job teaching and learning.

> Interviewer: Do you do any training?
> There is a course that you do. You don't really need it. It's good if you have it going to another job, [but] as I say, it's who you know. That's how I got this.

> And any other jobs I'd go for I'd know people there and they know how much experience you have. . . You have to have a bit of training . . . [but] other than that I've nothing myself. I just learned everything as we go along. (SS9).

There are no clearly defined work plans for managers in training and no performance indicators. Promotion to management and promotion within management is, as this quotation shows, through who you know not what qualifications you have. Managers anointed by other managers who choose to sponsor them, rather than by clearly identifiable or measurable criteria. This is clearly stated by a part-time employee - himself a former supermarket manager who is currently continuing his studies and working part-time. His account is supported by the experience of all three managers interviewed.

> Half of it is the personality game. You see turnover is so fast, even for managers, so for three months you'd have one manager and he'd really look after you and he'd think you were a great lad. Then you'd get another with a different personality. You're doing the exact same job and this fella doesn't get on with you as he might have his own fellas he'd think was great. He might think of you as a complete waster. . . As well, if you're a trainee manager, if you don't get on with your manager, you won't get anywhere. It really is a big personality game. It's a lottery. (SS5).

If management is by selection and those selected to line management roles are expected to be men, the closest thing to an outright personnel role is fulfilled by the one female in a management position. Like the others, she has received little training, and has received promotion because of who she is rather than what she has done. In her case, promotion came because she was the daughter of the owner (this is part of what it means to work in a family firm). Her role is not a personnel position as such and she is only directly responsible for the (entirely female) checkout staff. The personnel function is not

anybody's job in particular. It is overseen by the checkout supervisor, the general manager, and ultimately, by the owner.

Overall then there is little formal training within the company and little education expected outside the company which could be seen as developing the management's capacity to manage culture. Their own experience is one in which informality and a lack of clarity or measurable standards apply. At least one of them, the checkout supervisor, recognises that she would be unlikely to hold a similar post under any other circumstances. Others also recognise the role informality played in their appointment.

This follows over into their attitude towards key levers of HRM policy such as training communication, and career development. What training they plan for the staff is cursory, since the job tasks are learned on the job, communication systems are informal, though some formal structures do exist and career development is largely characterised by informality.

Staff training is a fairly new phenomenon in Super Store. The training program is being carried out by an external consultant and is carried out on a sporadic basis. While having an external consultant adds to the status of the training it has its own difficulties since the staff turnover is so high those who attend one training session are not always going to be there for the next. Nor is training seen as being part of the manager's job. Storey and Sisson note that, in Britain, managers may object to releasing staff for training and regard it as a luxury (1993: 171). It is possible that the managers in Super Store would think of training in this way if they had to release staff for training. However staff are required to

come in for training during their own time. They are only intermittently paid for such training sessions.

As I have noted above, there are a number of behavioural indicators which are outlined in the training, but these are not noted by or monitored by management. It is not clear that the management understands the purposes of such training or even what might constitute good training practice. The trainee manager, who attends the training sessions, could not identify any specific service related skills which he had learned in the sessions.

> They just show you a video. How to - the customer always come first - how to relate to them and that. . . Showing [the staff] at the desk and that. That's what she was really at. . . She'll be back in a while doing videos and that. . . It's a good idea, like. . . You learn a few things. (SS9)

"You learn a few things" is not quite damning with faint praise but it is not a ringing endorsement either. In fact the things he eventually identified as the things he learned were all related to hygiene and other non-interactive activities. He could not identify any 'service oriented' things that he had learned. While the training is being offered to all the staff it is felt that it is particularly needed by the part-time staff who are only intermittently in the store. Full-timers 'learn while they go along', while part-timers are only there for a few days every week and are not in a position to get the necessary experience. As a result of this they need to be taught, or more properly "indoctrinated" (SS8).

If training in Super Store is not well organised and does not constitute part of the job of management, communication is only slightly less tangential to the organisation of the

company. Given the difficulty of relationships between management and staff in the past, culminating in the attempt by some staff to unionise the store, the owner decided on using the training programme as a neutral means of communication with staff. During sessions the staff can raise issues in the absence of management. These are then communicated to the management who say that they endeavour to address them. This - externally facilitated - means of communication is not the only attempt at communication though it is the most recent.

On an earlier occasion the owner met with the staff directly in order to deal with the fact that some staff had joined a trade union. This meeting gave rise to a staff liaison body on which the different groups of staff were to be represented. This body was to serve as a mechanism for communication between the staff and management. This body did not have regular meetings once the unionisation issue blew over.

Apart from these two formal modes for communication, all the management emphasise that, for them, communication is carried out on an informal basis. (In this they are typical of the management of small firms [MacMahon, 1995: 200]). The formalised bodies are viewed by them as temporary responses to situations where informal communication breaks down. In line with the 'family' concept in use on the company, the formalised procedures of communication involve by-passing the management by going directly to either the owner or an outside facilitator. They note that staff should be able to come and talk to them about issues and they claim that this happens. Communication is something that is thought to infuse the workplace in interpersonal contact, and the creation of structures for communication is viewed almost as an admission of failure.

The management do note that it can be tough trying to maintain this informal communication with the staff when there are so many other things to be done. Here questions of company expectations come up. The management have to ask themselves what is a priority and according to them, time for communication is hard to find somewhere in the midst of their very long working days. Between managing the store, planning for the future, making sure the butter is stocked up and on the shelves, smiling and chatting with the customers they also have to find time out of their long day to chat to the staff in a meaningful way. Though not all the managers were as dramatic in their description as the checkout supervisor, they did share the same sentiment.

> It's tough. . . You are looking after the girls, see if they're OK, their holidays, this problem, that problem. Looking after customers, looking after managers . . . You're the one. There might be fifty million people asking you to do something at the one time, so it is tough. You have to chip in, jump on a checkout. You have to do everything. (SS8)

The picture which has emerged so far is that the company operates primarily on informal systems of communication and staff learning/training. While there are formalised structures for communication and for staff learning/training they are not operated by the management and tend to simply be added onto the main work of the company. In both cases managers emphasise the informal systems of personal communication and experience over formal communication and training. This same pattern is further elaborated in looking at career development systems.

I will look at three issues within the overall title of career development. These are, appointment, promotion and firing. Within the company, there is no particular programmatic intent in appointment. Management do not seem to be looking for any

type of person in particular and psychometric models are not used. Indeed, it seems as if formal interviews account for only a small percentage of those appointed in Super Store. It seems that if there is a vacancy then the next person to apply are likely to be taken on. Staff are taken on for (I was told) a three month probation period initially, though there does seem to be some confusion about the length of the probation period however, an issue I will come back to in chapter six. Staff may, after some time make the move to the core full-time workforce, and males may make the transition to posts of responsibility such as the off-licence and from there to a managerial post.

There is no clear rationale for making the decisions as to who moves in to the core and who stays on the periphery. Like so much of staff management, it appears to be based on who the manager 'gets on with'. (This has been dealt with at some length above in relation to management promotion). As with selection, there are no models of appraisal or review, no clear identification of expectancies which could allow the management to base their decision on something other than a whim or a hunch.

Inevitably some people have to be let go. This is a very thorny issue for the company because in recent months a number of trusted staff members, including two who were being groomed for managerial posts, have had to be let go for stealing. In one of these cases there was legal proceedings pending. Possibly because of the legal implications of their words in this respect the managers seemed to emphasise the formalised procedures in relation to this issue. They emphasised that before someone is let go there is a long process involving an oral warning, re-training, a written warning, an offer of further re-training, a second written warning, and finally dismissal. As I noted above, sometimes

professionals fall back on coherent and 'correct' answers which do not fully represent the lived reality.

Yet even in the climate of litigation which was prevalent in the store at the time of the case study some cracks in the management armour were evident. We can see this by looking at the example of firing because of theft. There was a difference between the managers as to what sort of stealing would constitute a sacking offence. For the checkout supervisor taking a bag of crisps for a snack would lead to instant dismissal, while the general manager described pilfering on that scale as petty. It was "understandable", he said. "Every young fella, if he's given the opportunity will do something like that" (SS7). The checkout supervisor's reaction was quite different to the manager's. Someone taking a bag of crisps would be "fired immediately, because you can't run a business like that" (SS8). Whatever the cause of the difference of opinion, it does make clear that even in the area that the management have to be clearest about, there is no clear standard which applies across the board. Each manager draws on their own experience, their own *habitus* both inside the firm and outside and acts accordingly.

Overall then, Super Store is characterised by a lack of bureaucracy, clarity, codification and consequently, capacity for surveillance, and self surveillance. The managers have not received a training which would generate a capacity to operate the key levers of HRM at issue here. Nor do they see these things as being a part of what the company expects of them. Amidst the hustle and the bustle of the busy day, they concede, these are the things that they will be likely to forget or leave to tomorrow.

Home Store

The management in Home Store operate at a different level to those in Super Store. The senior managers have hundreds of staff under their control and are rarely called upon to get involved in the physical work of stacking shelves or packing butter refrigerators. The organisational structure of management is quite complex in this store. There are two areas of the store: clothing and hardware; and grocery. Each area has its own manager who will have trained specifically in that area. Within each area there are a number of departments each of which will have their own middle manager (often a trainee). Both areas are serviced by a backstage management team (personnel, staff management, wages, warehouse etc.) and 'service managers' who are responsible for the delivery of various technical supports. This last category do not have any staff under their control.

As with the other stores, management is quite a gendered activity in Home Store with most of the personnel division being staffed by women and other areas of management having higher proportions of men. Of the three managers interviewed, the two personnel managers were women and the general manager was a man. The managers ranged in age from the early thirties to the late fifties. The older of the three managers interviewed had left school early in order to join Home Store while the two younger managers had both finished school. In the past educational qualifications were low on the list of priorities for management with the same vague qualification of suitability being more important, though in the past few years recruitment policy has shifted and now most of the incoming managers would be graduates of third level colleges, however, there is still a substantial percentage of management level entrants who are coming from the shop floor.

The management training in Home Store is, like the training in Super Store, mostly experience based. After an initial few days induction course and a six week long familiarisation programme, the managers will be put to work in a particular area depending on whether they specialise in foods, general grocery, general drapery or personnel. Unlike Super Store, there is a dedicated personnel function. During the first six months in the store the trainee manager will be reviewed monthly. After that they will be reviewed every six months. Depending on their progress, the trainee manager could spend between one and two years in their first store before being transferred to an assistant management position in a small store. Over a period of years they can move to a larger store and eventually on to the position of manager. While this seems to be highly structured, in fact it is not. Although the managers are reviewed regularly (and receive substantial pay increases based on their reviews) there are not clear criteria on which someone is reviewed. Nor are there very clear training guidelines as to what someone should learn or develop over the period of their training. Ultimately even the length of their training may depend more on the company's short-term need for a body to fill a position than on the long-term need for their development in a clear and structured way.

> As far as a structured training plan where you come in and this is what you have to do, we just don't have it. We had a girl who just came from another store to work with us recently. She was in England for seven years. When she went to the English supermarket she was taken on to do an eighteen month training plan. So, for that eighteen months it was all laid down and structured for her and it was not until eighteen months were up that she got assigned to her department. Where in Home Store you might go in to do your training somewhere and [if] someone leaves you get pushed quicker than you expected. There is a training diary that the managers are given and guidelines and questions for them to work through but when they go into a store they are also part of the management team straight away. They are not extra within the business. So, as a result, there is a job for them once they have got their initial two months completed where they have an overview. (HS9).

As this shows, the quality and nature of the training one receives depends a lot on who one is being trained by. This is stated in even clearer terms by one senior manager who said "The training is all left up to the store, so if I don't train the people that I have, they will not get trained" (HS10). For managers once their period of training is complete their training is largely finished. While managerial workshops have appeared and disappeared in fits and starts over the past few years the stated experience of management by and large is that once they move from being designated as a trainee their training is over.

Promotion for a manager depends on their performance in the job. In real terms, there is only one criterion of performance: profit on turnover.

> Interviewer: It is the commercial aspects which are focused on rather than communication or people skills?
> Yeah, its the results. You could be the hardest man causing problems with the staff, handling the staff with bad manners but if you are still getting results you will be tolerated. It was notorious in the early days - Home Store had a very bad name, and we did have some pigs of managers. That is the only way I could describe them. Ignorant. Treated staff very badly . . .The old chairman, God rest him, he had that name as being tough: that's where it stemmed from as well. It stemmed from the top. He was tough and it worked down the line (HS10).

The training that the management receive in Home Store is more comprehensive than that of the management team in Super Store. Here someone has got trained in the role of personnel manager. Some capacity for putting into operation key levers of HRM policy has been developed in some managers. However, it is far from the Foucaultian ideal of training into techniques which are open to surveillance and self surveillance. Nor is the surveillance actually there. Managers can be reasonably sure that irrespective of what they do in almost all respects, so long as the money rolls in they are in the clear.

While this has always been the case, management feel that financial control is becoming tighter and more regulated, while other areas, notably soft HRM practices, are not being developed at the same pace. One manager, speaking of Head Office said:

> It's all accountants in there now. I don't know how many accountants, but everything is budgets. Buyers have budgets, we have budgets at store level. Whereas in the old days it was based on the same day of the previous year - today would be compared with this day last year, we had an increase or a decrease on it, then everything would be added up at the end o the week . . . - now it's all budgets. Have you reached your budgets? Have you reached your targets? . . .So that's a total swing around (HS10).

Clarity, surveillance and self-surveillance (through projections, targets and budgets) are clearly evident and growing in the store in relation to financial concerns. However, this is one of the few areas in which this clarity exists. This is likely to in turn influence the way in which the managers understand the role of training, communication and reward systems. Since such things are not regarded as the sort of thing that the company is all that bothered about, they are not necessarily going to be the sort of thing that managers will be all that worried about. While the managers were told they were expected to build a team spirit and to manage the culture of the company, the company left them to do that in their own way. Within the store the managers claim that there are a number of different models of management practised. Some - generally, but not exclusively, older managers - will practice more dictatorial methods. Others, often younger managers will be less dictatorial in their approach. The company itself does not demand any particular standard in most areas. This space means that managers are able to develop their own style as they choose. Some feel that the continued push for the development of the personnel side of the business has not only come from Head Office but from younger managers who moved into the space opened up by head office when it began to talk about cultural management and have continued to carry and drive forward the

development of personnel policies in the company. In the words of one personnel manager head office only "turned the light on" (HS9). While managers were not clear about what is expected of them, they also were able to develop themselves in this role if they chose to do so. This is seen in relation to training, communication and staff development.

By and large training for cultural or identity management was not a priority of the company. It was left to the individual personnel manager to attempt to train the staff or not. Only two aspects of training were crucial and happened irrespective of the manager. These were training needed to protect the company against personal injury claims (all employees were shown how to lift things properly and were required to sign a form indicating that they had received this training) and training needed to cover legislation under food hygiene. Apart from these aspects, demanded by straightforward commercial and legal considerations, training was up to the manager. As I noted above, some training packages were set up for managers and the ever-present videos were produced, but there was no follow through to ensure that they found their way into practice.

During the course of the case study the attitude toward training changes as a new personnel manager took over in the company. Training became a priority for her. However, she was starting from a low base since the company did not have proper facilities for training. Such training as exists does combine the measurable aspects of change in action with the change in supporting ideology. However, while such training is now being offered to many staff coming in it does not receive a follow up from management. While on the floor the staff are watched by their departmental manager,

there is no facility to tie this back into continual or on-going training. Internal audits are carried out only on hygiene training in the store.

All that is said of training could be said of communication within the company. While the company expects that it will happen, it does not closely regulate how it is to happen, and sends mixed messages about how important it is. As I noted earlier, the board of directors of the company began a push for cultural change by setting up communication sessions with the staff. A board member visited the store and spoke to a selection of staff. Management were brought to nearby hotels for chats with the board. Despite promises that this would continue, it did not. After that communication was largely left to the management. Managers were expected to have monthly communication meetings with staff. Area managers will check that the meetings have been documented, though it seems that while an area manager might ask to see the communications handbook, it is not clear to the managers that this is one of the criteria on which they are assessed. One manager notes that it is "handy to have it up to date" (HS9) in case an area manager checks on it, but it appears that it is by no means essential. Nor is there any checking on the manner or nature of the communications meetings. Once the meetings happen once a month and are documented, their tone is up to the managers. One manager noted that they can simply deal with what they can and pass the rest on to head office.

Other forms of communication are used, including posters and plaques placed in both the front-stage and the backstage area of the store, noting that 'one plus two is a queue' (i.e., one server and two customers is too many - the server needs to speed up or get another till point opened), and enunciating 'The Ten Commandments of Customer Service'. In relation to issues on which the union has been involved the board has also

written an number of letters directly to its staff, by-passing store management as well as normal industrial relations procedures, in order to try to put its message across to the staff.

As with Super Store there is little by way of interviewing of staff for positions in Home Store. The management note that given the high turnover they often have little choice but to take those who present themselves for interview. Even by the time of the induction and training course a number of those offered jobs will have disappeared. Management say that there is little they can afford to do by way of selection. They will try to pick out those who are pleasant, who can communicate and who have a smile on their face however, at the end of the day, a job can be found in the organisation for almost anyone. This is clearly "a compromise" (HS9) but "at least we're getting people", even if some of them are "weird". Still the store has as a matter of course outstanding positions which need to be filled.

Once people are in the company, it feels there is a role for incentive schemes, such as a staff shop or employee of the month in keeping them with the company. For those who want to stay with the company there is the possibility of moving to full-time work, though managers admit that this means "giving something up" (HS9) (those who take new contracts, be they full-time or part-time, do not get paid overtime for certain unsociable hours for which they would have previously received overtime pay). For full-time staff there is the possibility of becoming a service manager. For younger staff there is the possibility of becoming a trainee manager. The management recognise that different groups of employees will be interested in different rewards.

The process of staff reward is not transparent. Although there is supposed to be a regular review process, it does not always happen since it is not regarded as a priority. (Since head office is continually late in reviewing senior managers - a delay which can delay the manager receiving a bonus of tens of thousands of pounds - it only seems fair to managers that the managers do not put a huge emphasis of carrying out the reviews of those under their guidance - reviews which are worth little or nothing in monetary gain). As with Super Store the emphasis is often on "seeing" the potential in someone - a process which is notoriously open to favouritism and a lack of clarity.

Overall then, Home Store is significantly more organised and bureaucratic than Super Store in so far as it has clearly worked out procedures, targets and norms against which people can be surveyed, can survey themselves and can be measured. However, this is only in relation to financial matters such as turnover, returns and the fear of litigation. In other areas of the company's operation things are left up to the individual store. While they are told that communication and training are a priority, this is not followed up on by the company, thereby encouraging the managers to read between the lines as to the company's real priority. While the management of this store have worked to put training, communication and progression incentives in place there is little clear follow up with the staff to ensure these things are carried out in a regulated way.

Quality Store

The management structure of Quality Store is more like that of Home Store than Super Store. The managers have far more people working under them, and they are not involved in physical work in the way that managers in Super Store are. There are more managers and they are divided into occupational categories (personnel managers,

financial managers and commercial managers). The profile of management recruits in Quality Store historically is very different to that of both Home Store and Super Store. Sixty five to seventy percent of Quality Store managers are graduates while the rest have finished post-primary school. Unlike Super Store, no-one is going to become a manager without a leaving certificate or some equivalent. As with the other stores, management is a gendered category. All of the personnel managers were women, while general managers and financial managers were more likely to be men. As I noted in chapter four, Quality Store is a subsidiary of a multi-national company. As a result of this all of the training of managers for Quality Store at the time of the case study happened in Britain. That meant that most of the mangers were either British or were Irish people who had trained in Britain. In Quality Store as a whole the managers tend to be older and better educated than in the other two stores. Very often they are from a different country to that in which they work.

The career path of the manager is quite clearly laid out. The prospective manager spends between one and three years in training depending on their age and the speed at which they reach certain attainment targets. This period involves a mixture of experience and formal training. The different aspects of the learning process are all given equal weight, i.e., courses are as important as experience. Each manager will learn about all aspects of the firms operations, and will retain a focus on the commercial aspects of the store at all stages in their training but will also specialise in personnel management, commercial management, or financial management after a period. There are also a variety of courses which are offered in a range of specialist areas ranging from presentation skills, time management and influencing skills to an outdoor pursuits course. Unlike the other stores where experience is seen as unregulated self learning external to training in Quality Store

experience too is clearly structured, with the mangers having learning goals set for their experience which they then work towards achieving.

I have shown that in Super Store the pathway to management is marked by a process of selection and sponsorship by an existing manager. Once a trainee manager joins Quality Store the potential for sponsorship is there. Here sponsorship is not only part of the process of becoming a manager, it has been brought into the realm of the company's control and is a sanctioned and organised part of the process of progression.

> [During on-the-job training] each category has a sponsor and a mentor and a trainer. Your sponsor might be different from your trainer because your sponsor is there to support you and to guide you. To give you off the record help. . . Also, well, as you can imagine, its a big company. As in all big companies there's politics, so you begin to learn how to deal with the politics. And then also to raise your profile (interviewee laughs). That is the phrase! That is the phrase that makes or breaks your career. You have to learn to present yourself and your information professionally and clearly and everything. (QS9)

In this quotation we can see, both in relation to the sponsorship process and in relation to learning how to play politics, and how to present oneself the extent to which processes which were informal in Super Store and were partially formalised but unimportant in Home Store are highly formalised in Quality Store. The art of playing politics is so formalised that it has been given a company specific name (comparable phrases to 'raising your profile' did not occur in either of the other two case studies). Clearly this takes some of the random element out of the process - someone is assigned to help each manager raise their profile, rather than simply letting the lucky ones find someone. It also serves to disarm the process to some extent. Playing politics is still important, but now it has an official name. It is no longer 'the-office-bullshit-that-has-nothing-to-do-with-the-job-but-you-have-to-do anyway'. It is now 'raising your profile'.

Managers will continue to have a sponsor even when they move into out of the 'trainee' designation and become an assistant manager. There are also development programs for middle and senior manager which run throughout a person's career. Therefore, the manager has not finished training when they cease to be a trainee. They enter into a process of continual training and continual 'progression'. In the manager's career almost nothing is left to chance. At every step of the way, the company has a clearly articulated plan for training and development. They have had their capacity developed in clear ways which fits with that which the company wanted to develop for them. Their training has consisted of constant review, feedback and capacity development. This is a very highly bureaucratised environment in which managers are developed. This will, in turn, affect their own management.

In Quality Store the personnel function is undertaken by a Personnel Manager. This job is quite clearly articulated for the manager by the company. The areas of responsibility are quite well specified, but they are not narrowly focused. The list of areas of responsibility cover a wide variety of tasks from 'soft' tasks such as the care and counselling of the individual to 'hard' tasks such as personnel cost control. The list also ranges from reactive tasks to quite strategic tasks such as development of personnel policies. The job is described as being heavily influenced by 'commercial' factors. This means in practice that issues of profitability are a central part of the personnel manager's role. As with Home Store, this focus on the commercial/profitability issues of personnel management (resonant of the hard wing of the HRM literature) represents a change in the nature of the personnel role in the store. As one personnel manager said:

> The role of personnel management in Quality Store has changed dramatically. It's changed from Pills and Welfare to very much Human Resource Management. That's the difference - but without loosing sight of the individual, the fact that

> each individual has a contribution to make and you have to value that contribution. But we probably are a bit more, em [pause], ruthless is maybe too strong a word, but we are probably more exacting and demanding than we were fifteen years ago. (QS3)

On a day to day level, the personnel manager will have some limited contact with the floor staff. She will have regular contact with other store managers, head office management, the occupational nurse, the training personnel, the personnel administration staff, the 'focus team' (a small group of staff used who are consulted in relation to certain issues). Notably absent from this list is the staff of the store. The management will have some contact with the staff, but the vast majority of direct dealing with the floor staff is carried out by the supervisory staff.

As I have already noted most aspects of work in Quality Store are more highly codified and formalised than they are in Super Store. This is true of the training, the communications and the career development systems. Unlike the other stores there is a training co-ordinator position at the supervisor level in the Quality Stores. Depending on the size of the store this can be either a full or half position. This person is responsible for designing and delivering on the training requirements of the store. This person works closely with the supervisor responsible for analysing theft and loss and with the personnel manager.

Training is an ongoing activity which a staff member engages in over their working life. After the initial training of the staff they can expect to get on-going training on new procedures which are being introduced or old procedures that are not being closely adhered to. This has already been seen above in relation to the planning for training on service. At the same time as this was happening other training was also being either

planned or delivered. This included training on cash handling procedures (which had become lax), training for stock taking and training for a new Just In Time (JIT) delivery system being implemented in the textiles departments.

For management, training is an integral part of their responsibilities and there is no question about its usefulness. It is seen as effective in teaching people skills and attitudes, in promoting job satisfaction by making the required tasks transparent, in making people feel that they are skilled in the company ways and thereby adding to their motivation. The training which is offered comes in a variety of different forms. There is, of course, the ever present videos. This is not the only type of training however. Specific skills and procedures are trained through demonstration and drilling.

Communication is also a major issue at Quality Store. It is seen as the key to addressing the different definitions of reality that management and staff have. While there is a union in the company the fact that management and staff do have different preferences means that this is not seen as a good means of communication with the staff. For the management, communication is something different to hearing things that are of concern to the staff. It is in part about passing on what the management want to the staff to hear. It is also about trying to read beyond what the staff representatives say (what Goffman would call the impressions given) to what the staff really think and feel (the expressions given off) (Goffman, 1959: 16). The union is seen as something which takes stances, which tries to manage the impression of staff given to management. Communication involves getting beyond the impression to how they really feel. The focus team is good for this. It is described as giving a 'truer opinion' than the union, one that is 'less defensive and less protective', one that has no 'hidden agenda'.

The focus team comprises of a selected body of staff from various parts of the store who are brought together as a staff consultative body. They have been given various tasks, such as (a) deciding who should get the prize for outstanding achievement above and beyond the call of duty in the cause of profit, (b) working out how to get a refrigerator for the staff shop, (c) helping to plan the company's new service drive, and (d) organising staff social events and sports. They also act as a sounding board for management, discussing various initiatives and helping to plan them. It is described by one manager as a "lovely supportive environment" (QS9).

The managers also use other means of communication. Staff are sometimes brought together for briefing sessions before the store opens to inform them about new developments. Notes attached to pay slips are used to inform people about new initiatives, as are notice boards and posters in the backstage area. Other stores in the chain have a newsletter and some have a 'radio station' that broadcasts on the in-store speaker-system in the morning before the shop opens for business. Many of these initiatives are new and are still in the developmental stage. They are regarded with a qualified welcome by the management.

> I think the more we do the better. I mean, at the end of the day, the staff still know we're the management team and we mean business at the end of the day, and as such, you can only establish a relationship to a certain extent. Just as long as communication is good that is the main thing. (QS9)

While the different initiatives around communication are regarded as a good thing, the mainstay of communication, as far as the manager is concerned, is the organisation of a framework through which people can communicate. There is to remain a division between management and staff where both sides recognise that they are different.

Indeed, one manager argued that while interpersonal communication is important, real communication is possible when you have a structure and when you speak to staff representatives who can truly represent the staff.

Career progression is clearly structured. In the past it was common for people to be taken on if they were friends or family of existing employees. Now there is a focus on carefully selecting people who fit the company's profile. While the company is not using psychometric testing in the selection of shop floor staff, selection is now more oriented towards finding someone who will fit the culture the company want to create. Once in, there is great clarity in one's position within the company. Contracts are clearly articulated. People come in for a period of time. After this they may or may not become permanent staff. No-one is continually kept indefinitely on temporary contracts. Within a year a person is either offered a permanent contract or let go. Employees are assessed on a yearly basis by their supervisor. This will cover both their work and how they are fitting into the company. I encountered examples of people being offered further training, asked to develop an aspect of their work, and asked to 'come out of themselves a bit' (i.e., not to be quite so shy). These assessments were part and parcel of the manager's life. According to Storey *et al.*, (1991) in Britain there is usually only token reference to staff development in the evaluative systems used to evaluate management work. This is certainly true of the other two case study stores. However, Quality Store seems to be atypical as a British company in this regard. For example, one manager noted that in her own review by the company they had made a point of the fact that her reviews of staff were behind schedule in the store. Quality Store seems closer in this respect to the Japanese companies studied by Storey *et al.* (1991) and Storey *et al.* (1997).

The management of the store have been unable to individualise reward systems though they did note that they would like to do so but were constrained in doing so by the union and the protection it gives to the staff's preferences. They do provide a number of fringe benefits which are available universally to the staff. This includes a comparatively high rate of pay, as well as extras like a company doctor, hairdresser and chiropodist. Promotion to the level of supervisor is possible though the recent de-layering exercise has limited the number of promotional slots in the company.

It is rare for people to be fired in Quality Store. Managers noted that people who had made it through the initial selection and the temporary contract period were with the company for as long as they wanted to be. There was no threat of people loosing hours or of people loosing their jobs if they did not toe the line. Employees were, management felt, in a secure position. However, should they need them, disciplinary procedures in Quality Store were as clear as every other aspect of the store's functioning.

Overall, the management in Quality Store run a very highly regimented, clearly structured, highly transparent store. Order, hierarchy, clarity surveillance and self surveillance play a part in the manager's lives. They in turn manage a store in which they see these things as being part and parcel of their plan for the management of identity. The job of the manager, the training, communication, and the career development regimes are all highly structured and codified. There are few grey areas in the store. Unlike the other two stores, Quality Store approximates the sort of bureaucratic organisation identified classically by Weber and more recently by Foucault.

Overall

The managers in the three different stores have had different career paths. As one moves from Super Store through Home Store to Quality Store the level of education received by staff increases from no post-primary qualification to of graduate level education. This in part also represents a social class difference in the origins of the managers. The sort of store a manager was likely to end up in depended to some degree on their social class origin (the exception to the rule being the owner's daughter in Super Store). The person's gender too also affected where they were likely to end up, with women far more likely to be in personnel and men more likely to be in commercial or financial management.

While these factors are brought with the person to the company, what the company does with it is also open to question. The amount of training received in the firms, if conceptualised crudely in terms of length of formal training, increases from very little to about eighteen months. The degree of organisation, clarity, surveillance and self-surveillance and the extent to which it deals with the area of personnel policy also increases from not at all to almost completely. In Foucault's terms this represents a move from hardly any techniques of discipline to a considerable operation of such techniques.

This in turn means a great deal of clarity about the company's expectations for managers in Quality Store and a great deal more capacity to deliver on personnel issues. For the managers in Home Store some of the capacity to deliver has been developed, though there is no clear means of ensuring it is developed in all management trainees. There is also clarity about one issue: money. The bottom line is in fact very close to the top of

the ledger. In all other areas the individual manager has on one hand a great deal of freedom, however, they are also required to read the signals from head office, to decide which way the prevailing wind is blowing and to act accordingly. This leads to a considerable number of grey areas in the manager's working life - grey areas which are both a potential crisis and a source of opportunity. In Super Store there is little capacity development in relation to personnel issues. The store is run by a commercial manager who has to deal with personnel issues in which he is aided by checkout supervisor who has no personnel training. What structures exist for the provision of a personnel policy have been structured in such a way as to by-pass the existing management team. Clearly then, such structures are not embedded in the day to day working life of the company in measurable indicators which can be assessed. Here too then greyness and 'informality' is the order to the day.

Conclusion

This chapter set out to address three different empirical questions about the managers in the case study stores. First I have shown that the managers were interested in the management of a service culture and the sense of identity in the three case study stores. This was most highly organised in Quality Store where the management of ideas was internally coherent and articulated in measurable behavioural indicators. While the management of ideas was coherent and articulated in behavioural indicators in Home Store this was not followed through with surveillance. In Super Store the management of ideas was less coherent and once more was not followed through with management surveillance. While there were differences, the similarities are notable. All three were moving towards a particular model of service which was based partially on the individuals actions in relation to a customer but also in relation to the particular

organisation of the shop - a model identified by Pollert as "the Anglo-US unqualified service model" (1995: 653). Indeed one of the factors affecting the coherence of the management ideas what the extent to which the legitimisation of this model was part of the ideology of the company.

In many respects, Super Store is the most remarkable of the three stores studied. It is a small company with a quite personalised management structure and far removed from national or international markets yet it has not only considered the management of culture, it has, like the other two companies, also done some work on some key elements of HRM policies such as training and communications at the operational management level. Since increases in training and communications policies have often been taken as indicators of the spread of HRM (e.g., Gunnigle, Flood, Morely and Turner, 1994; Brewster, 1995; Roche, 1995; Gunnigle, Morely, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley, 1997) Super Store is the kind of firm which has been part of this growth. It can be taken as an indication of how pervasive the notions of cultural management have become in retail (and perhaps more widely) that Super Store appears in this way.

I have also shown enormous differences in the degree of clarity in the organisation of the three companies, in relation to the training of their managers and in relation to their organisation of key areas of HRM policy. Again, Quality Store comes closest to Foucault's ideal type of the techniques of discipline, built into and dependent on a bureaucratic organisation structure. The next two chapters will show that this makes a difference in the success or failure of the management of culture in the companies.

I have also shown that whatever success or failure has been attained in the management of culture in the workplace, the managers see this enterprise as being materially bounded. In all three case studies, material considerations played a role in the management of culture and the material world had to be mobilised in certain ways by management if they were to attain their interests. From a management perspective this is mostly because of a need to provide material rewards of a sufficient level to attract the right kind of staff. The importance of the material world is least clearly articulated in Super Store where staff selection at entry level is least important, more so in Home Store where they would like to avoid getting in "weird" staff (but cannot always do so) and most clearly articulated in Quality Store where staff selection and appraisal is most clearly organised.

In chapters two and three I noted that one of the failings with much of the research in this area is that it focused exclusively on the perceptions of managers. This is problematic in so far as managers may not be always the best judges of what happens on their shop floor. It is also possible that they will offer idealised accounts of their actions to a researcher. For these reasons it makes sense to also look at the staff's perceptions of the workplace and their culture. It is to this I now turn.

CHAPTER SIX - COMING APART AT THE SEAMS?

Introduction

The central question of this research project is the possibility of the management of culture in a flexible environment. As I have shown in chapter two, this is crucial to both the general literature of post-modernist futurology and specifically the literature on Human Resources Management. As Legge notes (1995b), the need for a managed unitary (strong) culture is often specifically because it will facilitate the deployment of flexible forms of working. Yet there are a number of different ways in which flexibility may work against the generation of a strong culture. This chapter looks at these fragmentation effects of flexibility. Clearly the role of cultural management is to attempt to overcome these fragmentation effects. The extent to which that is possible is explored in chapter seven.

One problem is the limits placed on the context for the symbolic interaction of staff by flexibility. Studies of work have often indicated that the Taylorist separation of work tasks into different work areas can develop workplace sub-cultures. (see for example, Benyon, 1984). As symbolic interactionists have long shown, common characteristics, proximity and subsequent interaction is a crucial factor in the development of a common set of values, understandings and knowledge base (Fine and Kleinman, 1983; du Gay, 1996). Therefore, increases in flexibility may have increased the rate of fragmentation of culture. If people are at work for a short period of time each day, if they regularly interact with only a few of their colleagues, if they share age, gender, race or social class

characteristics which they do not share with other members of the work force (or the management), then the possibility of developing fragmented cultures may well be increased. This runs directly counter to the need to develop 'strong' unitary cultures within the work place. This issue will be explored in the third section of this chapter.

A second factor which can help to prevent the development of a unitary culture is the fact that the company and the staff may have differences in material preferences which are so fundamental as to make them unassailable to cultural management. In that case there will be a basis for staff to identify themselves in opposition to the management and the company. If that happens then, by definition, the culture of the workplace is not unitary. These material differences may relate directly to flexibility. As I showed in chapter five, the managers in all three stores are conscious of material issues and see them as setting a context in which the management of culture happens. We still need to know the extent to which these differences relate to flexibility, the way in which these material issues are understood by the staff and the extent to which they are mobilised by staff as a symbolic resource to identify themselves in opposition to management. I deal with that in the next section of this chapter.

Material Preferences

As I noted in chapter two it may possible to identify different preferences held by different groups within the workplace. Orthodox Marxism tends to prioritise one set of different preferences - those relating to pay and conditions of work. These preferences have traditionally been ascribed the status of interests. If one were to focus on these preferences it would mean privileging the management/worker relationship. However, as

du Gay has noted, class is only one of the bases on which different preferences can be articulated (1996: 156). As Chapters two and three have noted, it is precisely this imputing of interests which is problematic in a good deal of the available literature. It is a mistake to impute interests or group membership to people. It makes more sense to allow them to articulate their own interests and their own group membership.

I have already identified the major force behind the preferences of managers. Fairly predictably it turns out to be some variation of the 'profit on turnover' theme. The data below shows that it is less easy to predict the preferences of the staff. This is because they are not only located structurally by their class but also by their age and gender. Such structural locations inform and give meaning to their preferences and choices in relation to their work. Nor can their preferences be read mechanically from such a structural location. The effect of this structural location is mediated by a number of factors, most notably by the state. What it 'means' - in relation to work - to be a student will differ depending on the amount of financial support for students. No-one's choices and preferences should be seen simply as a representation of a socialised or biological 'orientation to work' (as it is by Hakim[1] [1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1998] in relation to women's labour market decisions) but as a choice made within a context which is legislative and economic as well as social (Dex, 1992; O'Connor and Shorthall, 1999; Tormey, forthcoming). The lack of state support for students, the lack of affordable child care (O'Connor and Shorthall, 1999), the very high marginal tax rates on married women's wages when married to a working man and the even higher marginal tax on

[1] The use of the term 'preference' throughout this entire section derives from Hidness (1982) and Clegg (1989) rather than from Hakim's 'preference theory'. (The use of the term preference is dealt with at length in chapter two).

women's wages when they are married to a man who is in receipt of a means-tested benefit (Callan and Farrell, 1991) all constitute the context within which various groups develop a preference for a specific work form. While this legislative context was constant during the time of the case studies (and therefore is not a factor which explains differences between case studies) it would need to be taken into account before one could attempt to apply the empirical finding of the case studies to a different legislative and social context.

In this section I will describe the patterns of numerical flexibility in each of the stores. I will identify the different groups which were evident from the survey data for both Super Store and Quality Store. I will then use the interview based data in order to make sense of some of the groupings evident from the survey data. All of the case study stores were highly numerically flexible, in so far as part-time workers made up a very high percentage of their employees. One store, Quality Store, also utilised short term contracts. In the other stores, voluntary turnover was very high.

As I showed in the last chapter, in terms of the management's own goals, successful cultural management initiatives would lead to the staff not identifying differences between themselves and the company about material issues. In all three cases the staff did identify material differences between the management and themselves. In all cases, some of these material differences related directly to the operation of numerical and financial flexibility within the company. Interestingly, in the three case studies differences in the material preferences between management and staff were not simply identified as relating to pay, hours, conditions of work etc. They were articulated through reference to a variety of symbols which were said to identify the difference

between management and staff. A key symbol used in all the stores was that of 'quality': the staff justified their preference for substantially different policies in relation to staff use through the language of quality. In this sense, the model of quality to be practised within the store has become a contested terrain and competing models are identified by management and staff to justify substantially different sets of policies. The way in which they see the management implementing the Anglo-US quality model is regarded by many of them as asset stripping. The major exception to this is Quality Store where very few of the staff interviewed identified a difference in relation to the meaning of quality. For them, material differences tended to articulated through more personalised terms.

Super Store

The employment situation of the employees in Super Store is unclear even to the employees themselves. None of the part-timers have a guaranteed number of hours (i.e., all part-time contracts are 'zero hour' contracts), though in practice some have more control over their own hours of work than others. Over half of the employees working in Super Store are part-timers. Although all are nominally permanent employees (there is a probation period of indeterminate length) there is an informal division into two groups of part-timers. Less than a third of the part-timers have relatively fixed regular hours. These hours range from 20 to 25 hours a week. The other group of part-timers do not have fixed regular hours. Their hours can vary from week to week. Overall, they have much more varied average hours - ranging from 11 hours a week, up to 35 hours a week. This second group (i.e., those on variable hours) is also subject to having their hours changed during the working week and they may be called in or sent home as demand dictates. There is no clear rule dictating that the person has to come in when called, however sanctions may be applied.

The part-timers with variable hours tended to be young. About 80 percent of them are under twenty years of age. Most of them are currently studying, either for the Leaving Certificate or in third-level colleges. The part-timers with fixed hours are, by and large, not students. Most of them come from working class backgrounds. They are people who have left school and for whom this job is their major daily activity outside the home. For this reason their job is more important to them than it is to the part-timers on flexible hours.

There is no such thing as being appointed from part-time flexible to part-time regular. It is a gradual transition which some people make and others never do. People who get on with a manager may be able to dictate their own hours to some extent. Even people who do not get on with a manager may be able to, over time, make certain hours 'their own'. They may also be able to avoid getting called in on short notice. However, their relatively fixed hours are not underwritten by any contractual obligation. A change in management personnel, a change in who makes out the working schedule, or a change in their relationship with management could lead to their hours becoming variable once more.

The full-time workers are, by and large, not functionally flexible. One or two may be skilled in a limited number of areas (checkout work to telephone ordering or dry goods to fruit and vegetables) however it is only the senior management who are truly flexible across all areas of store work. As I have noted above, this often means that they end up accepting an amount of physical work that could be done by an employee if one had been deployed in that area.

The survey data does identify a number of different groups within the population. Here I will present data from two scales (details of scale construction are in Appendix D): one measuring the sense of team work; and a second measuring job satisfaction. These scales can be best thought of as indicating relationships within the store, rather than for comparison between the stores. Since the occupational structures and the occupational profiles of the stores are not the same, comparison of the scale based data between the stores inevitably does not compare like with like. In particular the higher proportion of the staff who are in positions of responsibility in Super Store skews the results for comparative purposes. Since the occupational categories are not directly comparable, weighting the occupational groups for comparative purposes would be of limited use.

In Super Store, it appears, on the surface that the store is fairly unified, with managers and staff claiming to regard each other as being on the same team. On the survey, almost all the staff either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "Everyone who works here is basically part of the same team". Yet more generally the scores on the 'team-orientation' scale (with a high team orientation of 10, a neutral score of 5 and a low team orientation of 0) were towards the mid-range. The charge-hands had an average score of 7.7, cashiers scored 5.8, while the shelf-packers scored 5.7. These averages hide a diversity within the cashiers, as the distribution is bi-modal. Approximately one third of the cashiers clump together with scores less than 5. This group includes most of the part-time cashiers with standard hours. Therefore, as you would expect, the part-time non-standard workers scored higher than the part-time standard workers on the team orientation scale. The scores were 6.5 and 5.3 respectively. The score was highest for full-time workers, at 6.9.

The employees are less than fully satisfied with their work. While there is a high score of 9.5, there is also a number of very low scores - as low as 0.5. On average, of the occupational groups, cashiers are least satisfied with their work (5.3) while charge-hands are most satisfied (7.3). Those with full-time jobs are most satisfied at 5.9, those with part-time jobs with standard or fixed hours score lowest on average (4.4) while the part-time workers with variable hours are in between, with a score of 5.

A number of patterns are visible from this. There are fairly high scores for the extent to which all the people who work in the store are on the same team, but this hides some variety, since some of the part-time cashiers feel less a part of a team than the rest of the staff do. This same group tend to have lower scores on satisfaction also. The other group which tends to stand out at the other end are the full-time charge-hands. They score highly on the sense that they are part of a team, on service and on satisfaction with their job. While the situation of the charge-hands makes sense, the comparatively unhappy and disaffected situation of the (mostly women) on part-time work with regular fixed hours, since much of the literature on flexibility in work (e.g., Drew, 1990; Hakim, 1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1998) assumes that this is exactly the kind of work women are looking for. These findings therefore have to be fleshed out and explained by the qualitative data. It is to this I now turn.

Many of the part-time employees are in this job by choice. For the students, this job suits their needs for pocket money, for some work experience and for a social outlet. For this group, many do not view it as a 'proper job'. It is a pocket money job, and not

the sort of job they expect to stay in long. One female part-time employee with variable hours described her job in this way:

> It's not like going for a proper job. . . I just wanted a few references. . . at least I'll have some experience. I will not be going into supermarkets anyway, no way! (SS4).

For most of the students working there, they stayed because of the social aspects of the job. A number had started relationships with girlfriends or boyfriends within the store. Most also socialised with their peer-colleagues outside the store to some extent. The following comment by a male shelf packer/warehouse worker is typical of this group:

> Interviewer: You said that your job was boring but the people you work with were interesting?
> Yeah. The people that work there - everyone there gets on well. It's a good laugh. That brightens it up. That really is the only good thing there. I've got a lot of friends there. Lately we've been going out over to the pub. (SS2)

In fact, some even felt that the social aspects of the job could compensate for the poor pay. For these workers, the hours of the job suit their needs. Therefore, being on part-time hours is not experienced as a lack of investment in them personally. It does not, in itself, give rise to opposition towards the management.

It does, however, cause some difficulty for part-time workers with fixed hours. Most of this group are young single women who have finished full-time education and who are actively looking for full-time work within the store. They are not of the 'uncommitted' female employee type suggested by Hakim, nor are they married women with children as Drew would suggest. They are probably closest to Hakim's 'adaptive group', though they do not enthusiastically adopt part-time work as she claims (1998:140). Part-time hours do not fulfil the wishes of most of this group. The very existence of part-time

work means that they do not get to have the sort of job they want. This explains their low level of satisfaction and sense of being part of a team.

Flexibility also causes some problems for the full-time cashier and shop/store assistants. To them, the growth in part-time work is part of the process of cutting back on wage costs, and decreasing investment in their shop. It is not simply growing numbers of part-time workers, it is actually a decline in the amount of staff hours. They experience this as a lack of investment in their jobs and in a future which will be shared by both employer and employee. The rise in part-time work (as opposed to full-time work) has been experienced as a burden on them, making their work more difficult. Together these things have contributed to a growth in disillusionment and a consequent rise in oppositional attitudes and values. A number of the full-time staff, when talking about the rise in numbers of part-time workers and the subsequent decline in full-time jobs, described it as follows:

> Number One: They [the managers] go mental if you're out sick because they have no staff, but they won't take on any staff.
> Number Two: They just barely have enough people there to cover it. They haven't even got enough there to cover it.
> Number Three: We're running around like blue-arsed flies.
> Number One: If one is sick, then that's it. The whole shop is just up ended. And he just cuts down staff more and more every year. At first we used to think that he actually cared about the shop but now it only seems to be about money - what he is getting out of it. (SS3).

These staff feel that the owner is cutting costs to a bare minimum. Some staff tell a story of how, during an argument with a staff member about whether or not she could leave work early he shouted "I don't care if you are sick. I don't care if you have a doctor's note. Money is my main object" (SS3).

For these staff in particular there is a clear difference between their version of quality and the management's attempt to implement the dominant (low cost) model discussed in the last chapter. For them quality means being able to take time to help customers with inquiries, to chat to customers and put them at their ease, and to keep the store well stocked. As I have shown, to the management it includes some of these things but within the context of a low cost, low knowledge base framework of extra till points and short queues. For the management the form of organisation provides the quality context in which staff provide a quality service. For the staff, the context mitigates against their providing a service. For them, their interaction is more important than the context. For the management the opposite is true.

Overall then, in Super Store flexibility does contribute to the damaging of management and staff relations for full-time staff. This is particularly so for the part-time workers with regular hours and the full-time workers. For them, it is experienced as being part of a broader process of human asset stripping in which the owner squeezes the employees for all he can get out of them without investing anything back into them. This is seen as being led by greed and the desire for a short term profit. Part-time work is experienced as un-fulfilling by part-time workers who have fixed regular hours. Oddly enough then, the groups that have least opposition to the particular deployment of flexibility are charge-hands and the group who one would expect to have the least in common with the management - the post-primary pupils and students who make up the flexible part-time workforce. As I will show later, other factors help to ensure that they too will be oppositional to management.

Home Store

There is no survey data for Home Store. The data presented here on the organisational structure of the store is based on interviews with management. Only 14 per cent of the employees are full-time staff. These have fixed regular hours. Half of the employees in the store (i.e. about 300) work only evenings and weekends. This group would also have fairly fixed hours. They may be called up occasionally to come in, but largely they are left to the hours that they are contracted for. Most have two evenings and a full week-end day (Saturday or Sunday), though some may get more evening work if they want it. Of that group about 95 per cent are students, either in secondary school or at college. This group has the highest turnover rate in the store. The remaining staff comprises of two groups. Slightly less than ten percent of the staff are part-time workers with regular hours. These tend to be older women - a number are women who have been there for over ten years and were given these hours at a time when most part-time work in the store had fixed hours. The remaining 26 percent of staff (between 150 and 160 people) are part-time flexible workers (called 'flexis' in the vernacular of the store). These are a mixture of students (particularly around holiday times when the store takes on extra staff), younger women who have no other commitments, and those that can manage their other commitments and the flexible job. This sort of job is seen as being desirable by some because it means the chance of more hours (and therefore more money) than a part-time job with fixed hours. The boundaries between flexi and fixed hours part-time workers is a clear one in so far as the nature of the work is specified in the contracts of the staff. Flexible workers are open to being called in on short notice to work. In total, the turnover rate of the store is 100 percent. In other words, six hundred new people will need to be recruited each year in order to maintain the staffing level at

six hundred. Some people will staff for long periods, but other jobs will need to be filled three or four time in the course of a year.

An attempt has been made to widen the experience base of the full-time staff, and thereby make them functionally flexible, by periodically assigning them to different sections of the store. Full-time staff have also become responsible for a variety of activities (such as ordering) that they were not previously responsibly for. Some have been given special posts of responsibility (though no extra money).

Among those interviewed in Home Store there are, essentially, three different interest groups among the part-time workers. There are the student workers (either on evening/weekend work or on flexible part-time work), there are older women (who largely have fixed part-time hours) and there are younger women who have left full-time education (either in flexible or fixed part-time hours but looking for a full-time job).

The situation of the student workers here is similar to that in Super Store. Those who stay for a period of time (and turnover in this sector is very high) have accepted the flexibility of the hours they are asked to work. Like the similar employees in other stores, being given part-time hours suits their needs for a social life, some income and some experience. A fairly typical response came from two students (the first speaker is a women, the second a man) when I asked her why they had returned to work in Home Store for a third and second time respectively:

> Speaker One: I decided I needed a bit of cash and that was the way to go about it. It is convenient for where I live, I know a lot of people working there. It is a pretty sociable crowd anyway, so it was work and enjoyment at the same time.
> Speaker Two: It was the same for me as well. . . I knew I could just start immediately in Home Store and secondly because I knew the crowd in Home

> Store and we had a really good time at Christmas and I knew it would be good fun and it wouldn't be too much of a hardship and getting paid to do it (HS6).

The primary orientation of the student worker towards their work is an instrumental one, though the social aspect of it is also appealing. Their job gives them the money they need to work. The fact that it is for shortened hours suits their needs. For those who intend staying for longer periods there is more dissatisfaction with the management of flexible work. There is a belief that their conditions are deteriorating due to financial pressures and the consequent cutting back on the numbers working. The following is an exchange between three staff, who have worked in the store continuously over periods between one and three years:

> Speaker one: [Recently] someone [i.e., top brass] has been in and told them not to give too many hours and the hours were drastically cut and the atmosphere in the store really went down because the hours were really bad. There was no staff to do anything and we have to tidy up the shop before we can go every evening. Sometimes it can happen [if the] store closes at half past six, it could happen that you are there to eight o'clock because there are no staff whatsoever and you have to tidy up. Stock can't go out.
> Speaker two: It seems quite spiteful really. . .They tend to push you in to see how much you can do. And once you can do it they are going to leave you at that. . .Then you are going to be burnt out when you are doing what is supposed to be a relatively alright job. . .
> Speaker three: I've been there two years and I think the atmosphere has deteriorated so much. It used to be the relationship between management and staff used to be a lot better, whereas now it is just too much pressure, too much stress. And it doesn't help that the management themselves get pressure from higher management and they have to load it all on your back, and you get all the shit from the customers in return. (HS5).

These staff feel the Board of Directors see them as expendable cost units rather than as a resource. This is seen in the way in which hours are curtailed for short term monetary gain. However, it is notable that the alternative one they offer is one of 'a relatively alright job'. In other words a job that does not require any investment other than the time one spends with the store - these are almost the archetype of Hakim's 'adaptive

workers'. However, for these three women the basis for the lack of commitment is commitment to college rather than to a marriage career.

For the full-time staff, the work intensification that has come with part-time work has also given rise to feelings that they are being treated as units of cost, rather than as a resource. This is despite the greater responsibility they have been given. This is because, while they have been given extra responsibility, they have not received commensurate pay increases. As with the full-time staff in Super Store and Quality Store, the full-time staff here have a commitment to service. To them, it gives their work meaning. However, this is not seen as being a culture which they share with management. It is constructed in opposition to them.

As the following full-time staff member explained, there had been staff cut backs which came with the growth in part-time work in the store. The management have employed increasing numbers of student part-timers for short term financial gain without any real commitment to developing the service aspect. This is regarded by her as poor management of part-time work. It is not part-time work *per se* which causes the difficulty. It is the particular manner in which it has been deployed. She describes how the professionalism and commitment to service of the full-time staff has been used against them by this coalition of managers and student part-timers:

> We [in this store] make so much money that they know we'll do the job one way or another. Whether you have two part-timers or one part-timer, so long as you have one full-timer. I mean, this store was always like that. For the last couple of years [they] have always given responsibility to their full-timers with less full-time staff because they won't employ them anymore.
> Interviewer: Why is that?
> It's probably our fault at the end of the day because we allow them to do that. We are so dominant in our own departments. We take on so much, and I have to say, I've never seen it in other stores that you take so much pride in what you do.

> . . I don't mind it at the best of times but when you bring stock in you need other staff with you and you don't always have that. And they are not always great. I have to say a lot of students are there for the money and merchandising doesn't matter a damn. Lash it out anywhere, leave it on the floor. (HS7).

Overall, in Home Store we see that, as with the other stores, part-time work is experienced differently by different groups of staff. For full-time staff, the particular way that short term flexible part-time work is deployed is a sign that the company cares less about service than they do. Therefore service does not become the basis for a strong culture, rather it becomes a point of opposition between the culture of management and staff For part-time flexible staff, part-time work is the type of work they need. Its existence does not cause problems for them in itself. However, the way in which it is mobilised undermines their reason for taking the job in the first place: it takes the ease out of the work, and makes it central to their lives rather than something they can live their lives around. For longer term part-time flexible workers this eventually seems to lead to even greater degree of opposition between management (or more particularly, top management) and staff.

Quality Store

As I have already indicated, the survey data for Quality Store is based on an opportunistic sample and is therefore not fully representative. I will present the survey data here with such qualifications as arise from my field work in the store. 60 percent of employees surveyed had full-time positions within the store. This is an over estimation of the number of full-timers, since the one group who were systematically excluded from the survey is part-time workers with evening or weekend hours. An estimate of 40 to 45 per cent of the workforce having full-time jobs is probably more accurate.

All part-timers have contracts with at least ten hours as a guaranteed minimum. In other words, there are none of the 'zero hour' contracts found in the other stores. Their function is fulfilled in Quality Store by ten hour contracts. These are contracts which give the employee two hours per day over a five day period. Within the part-time labour force there are two major groups. These are known as the 'week day' workers - usually women who are finished full-time education, and 'late night/weekend' workers - usually students or younger workers. Late night/weekend workers typically have set work tasks and set hours. They come in, do their job and go home. With the week day workers there is a further division into two groups. The first group are older women who have typically been with the store since before the numbers on part-time hours were expanded (about five years before the study). Typically they have had in the past relatively fixed part-time hours on a mid morning or mid-day shift, though some have been moved from these shifts in recent times. Most have opted to go part-time from full-time employment. For the woman with young children, the job facilitates her in balancing her home career with her work career. For the older woman (often with another full-time bread winner in the family) the job facilitates her spending an increased amount of time on other activities now that her extra income is not longer as crucial to the family as it once was. The second group of week day part-time workers are typically younger women (aged 20 to 30) who are single or recently married who would prefer to have full-time hours, but who are only offered part-time hours on joining the company. This group also contains a small number of women who are the main bread winners in the family and who would also like full-time work. Many of this group will work extra hours, over and above those they were contracted for. This is the reason why employees are brought in for two hours, five days a week. If they are not working every day they can claim the dole for the days they are not working. This means they have no incentive to come into work if

requested. However, if they are working every day and are getting a comparatively poor take home wage from their trips to work they are more likely to stay on to work extra hours if requested. Of the part-time staff surveyed (mostly week day workers) almost 90 per cent regularly worked hours other than those they were contracted for and 50 per cent worked on average at least 10 hours per week more than they were contracted for.

Quality Store also utilises short term contracts as a means of filling gaps and of vetting employees. All employees, when they first join are given a short term contract, either full-time or part-time. However these contracts are seen as being temporary in nature. Employees are not kept on short term contracts for more than a year. If after that time, they are still on a temporary contract, they will either be offered a permanent contract (either part-time or full-time) or else they will be let go. Because of the range of job types that come in on short term contracts, the population profile of this group is largely similar to that of the store as a whole - though on average they are slightly younger.

The survey data for Quality Store shows some variation in the attitudes and beliefs of the different groups within the staff towards their work. The qualifications I noted in relation to Super Store also apply here. The overall scores for the belief that the workplace is characterised by team work shows a mean of 6.3. The team score for sales assistants is slightly over the average at 6.4 while the score for supervisors is higher again at 7.2. The score for part-time workers and full-time workers is almost identical, showing no real difference between the two groups.

The mean average satisfaction score was 6.7, though this ranged from a low of 1 to a high of 10. When looking at different occupational groups we can see that supervisors

have a higher score than that of the charge hands in Super Store (8.1), as do sales assistants. Part-time workers have a higher satisfaction level with their employment than full-timers and once more this is explained by the huge diversity in satisfaction levels of full-time sales assistants, though it is notable that the pattern here is different to that in Super Store. Here part-time employees with variable hours have the same rate as full-time workers, while part-time employees with fixed hours have the highest. It is interesting to note that the sales assistants who are unsatisfied with their work have all been working in the company for more than 5 years. In fact, none of the staff who had been with the company for less than five years scored lower than a five, while none of those who had been with the company for less than three months scored less than a 6.5. These long serving dissatisfied staff are largely full-time. They comprise about one in five of the long term, full-time sales assistants. Once more, this finding will need to be explained.

A number of patterns are visible from this. Part-time workers with fixed hours are on average happier with their work than either full-time staff or part-time staff with variable hours. The greatest level of dissatisfaction is found almost exclusively among long term full-time sales assistants. This same group also contains those with the lowest level of service-goal orientation in the survey, while also containing the highest scores on the same scale. This diversity will have to be explained with reference to the qualitative data.

There were no student employees among those who participated in the extended interview in Quality Store, however interviews with managers and with other employees give little reason to assume that their orientations to work are terribly different to the

orientations of those in the other two stores. Their situation here is slightly different from the other stores in so far as the pay in Quality Store is better than in the other locations and students are less integral to the overall running of this store than is the case in Home Store (where the long opening hours makes them more crucially involved in the core work of the store). Interviews with management suggest that the student workforce, as in the other locations, are largely happy with part-time work (though this does need to be interpreted with caution). By and large it appears that they do not experience part-time work as a lack of investment in themselves. Their jobs are self contained and provide them with what they require from work. One manager put it this way:

> They do Thursday late night and Saturday and they're kids and they get pocket money and that's great. And they have a specific job they do Thursday night when they come in and a specific job they do all day Saturday, and they feel there is a beginning and an end (QS3).

Because the opening hours of these stores are more limited than in either of the other two companies, there is not the same degree of flexibility required of the student part-time workers. This means that the cause for so much unhappiness among student part-time workers in the other stores is not present here.

Among the most flexible group of part-time workers, the existence and deployment of part-time work, does cause some concern. Many of this group are young women who are looking for full-time work and have had to take ten hour contracts as the best they could find. One woman who had come in as a part-timer and who was trying to work her way up to full-time described the system thus:

> You'd kill in here for two days. I come in here for 5 days, but that's because it suits me. If I could do that time in three days I would. Who wouldn't? Save money on bus fares and everything. But I don't think it's going to happen. . . The people who are looking for full-time work, coming out of school and that, are in

> mostly the morning hours, 7 to 11, but they want full-time work, they want at least 30 hours. The people on two days are the people who are married with kids. The people in the morning are looking for full-time. If you're seen to be in every day, you have a better chance, of even employment elsewhere, 'cause you're seen to be in everyday. Some of them are in every day for two hours. It wouldn't even pay your bus fare, but they have to do it, they have no choice. (QS5)

This high level of flexibility has led to some feelings of animosity towards the management from the staff interviewed, but surprisingly little, compared to the other locations. Some of the part-timers do question the need or the benefit of so many part-time workers but this only turns to either hostility to, (as in Super Store) or ridicule of, (as in both other Stores) managers very occasionally. Here, the better remuneration and other comparative perks seems to have led people towards accepting this as their lot, even if they are not overjoyed about it. There is no evidence that investment in the future of the company on behalf of the company, is lacking. There is also a feeling that they are comparatively well off, and when they compare themselves to people working in other retail establishments, they generally count their blessings.

Part-time workers with regular hours are typically women who have worked in the store for an extended period of time, had full-time jobs and chose to go part-time when the opportunity arose. In fact, the expansion of part-time work was offered to the staff as a choice, was voted on, and was voted for by the majority of the, mostly female, floor staff. This gave them the opportunity of having the fixed mid-afternoon hours that they want. For many, this is part of a process of withdrawing from the working world and concentrating on other aspects of their life. This is unlikely to increase their commitment to the store, but it does at least mean that they are contented.

The role of full-time workers in Quality Store is similar to the situation in Home Store. They are, essentially, the core workers in each section, with responsibility for organising

the section and managing its moment to moment running. A number of the part-time staff referred to full-time staff as their manager, though the management do not see them in this way. There is less hostility to part-time work from full-timers than there were in the other case stores. Its existence is not questioned. It is possible that its existence was not questioned because it was seen to fit in with the long term career plans of some of the full-time staff. One long time female staff member said:

> I'll be full-time for a while. At least we can go part-time if we want, if there is part-time hours. A lot of the girls are after going part-time, girls with babies and that.
> Interviewer: That's a real attraction.
> I suppose so. If they can get what they are looking for (QS4).

This proviso is crucial - if they can get what they are looking for. Increasingly hours which are offered are not the ones which suit people. Having voted to bring in part-time work with a specific model in mind the work which eventually is offered to them is not what they intended in the first place. But for those who can get good hours, part-time hours also fit around their current work-tasks. They get to have a large amount of control and responsibility, and a relatively varied job, while someone else (a flexible part-timer) fills in and does all the monotonous work. Unlike, Super Store, part-time work is not experienced as asset stripping. Instead it facilitates their further involvement in interesting aspects of work while the slack is taken up by others. In general, the deployment of part-time work does not cause much difficulty for them though a number of them did report that there has been some intensification of their work over recent years. They are also afraid of loosing some of the perks which go with the job. Sunday working on the run up to Christmas has usually been rewarded with triple time pay. Now there is a move on from the management to bring Sunday working within the remit of the contracted hours for some of the flexible staff. This will lead to it being paid only as double time, and may eventually leave it paid at the flat rate. The staff are resisting

this move, though most feel they will ultimately be unsuccessful. They are therefore looking at a scenario where management are using flexible labour to further cut wage bills at a real cost to themselves.

There is some minor animosity towards part-time workers and temporary workers on behalf of full-timers, and some animosity towards temporary workers on behalf of part-timers. Full-time workers have recently had their times of work changed as it was felt that flexible workers would be more actively involved in the morning set-up of the store if given those hours (by implication, the full-timers were seen as slacking off). Part-timers see each new batch of temporary workers taking the extra hours which they want.

> When you come in as temporary, there is resentment . . . from the part-time staff that are there. Because in effect what they are seeing is you taking extra hours that they could be working. And in effect you are. And that's just the way Quality Store works. And most people think it is ridiculous and I think it's absolutely ludicrous the way that they do it. But that's the way they do it. (QS14)

While this utilisation of part-time work does serve to remind people that their interests are different from those of the management, it does not produce major friction. There are exceptions to this rule. Some people who voted against the expansion of part-time work, feel there has been a real loss in the decline in number of full-time jobs. One full-time employee said:

> The thing that gets me is this. I have two young kids. There isn't going to be a full-time job there for them. . . If you are part-time, and you're 18 coming out of school, the chance you have of being trained and getting that experience [pause]. It's going to take you a lot longer to do training. Even looking further into it, how are these people going to get a house, a mortgage? . . . I don't think they've looked at it in terms of their children growing up.(QS8)

This employee is bemoaning the loss of the possibility of a traditional retailing career within the store - the loss of the idea of 'the job'. This 'job' is constructed in terms of a

full-time (masculine?) ideal. The same person also argued that it showed a lack of concern for service on behalf of the management - a refrain that is familiar from Super Store and Home Store. In the interviews carried out this view was not articulated very often, though some of the interviewees reported that they knew of staff who felt this way. It may account for the lower levels of satisfaction among the surveyed full-time staff who had been with the company for more than five years. Among the interviews carried out, however it was more generally felt that the commitment to service is something that is compatible with the new working arrangements. It is only a minority who use their commitment to service as a means to express values oppositional to management.

Unlike the other stores, Quality Store has employees on short term contracts. This offers them another dimension of flexibility. Staff of all ages and backgrounds can be found on short term contracts. By and large, contract staff do not have any more oppositional attitudes towards the company than other staff. In fact as the survey showed, they seemed to have high levels of job satisfaction. Since they are held on contracts for no more than a year, they perhaps do not have time to develop a sense that they are being exploited by being kept in a tenuous situation as staff do in the other case studies. On occasion, longer term staff make reference to what they regard as being a lack of fairness, in relation to temporary contract holders. Staff sometimes show surprise at the decision to let some people go at the end of their contract, and to keep others on. However, this is not probed too deeply by staff, in so far as it is not something they see as important enough to discuss.

If flexibility is not understood as a lack of investment in the person (as it is in the other stores), for the staff there is still a question mark over the management's role in dealing with flexibility-related material issues. It is accepted that the management are on a different side to the staff when it comes to issues of the distribution of material resources. In this the union is noted as being important by a number of the staff:

> I do think that you would need the union backing for things like overtime and hours and extra [pause]. Like, for example, the Sunday trading was always a little bit of a sore subject . . .Now that could be a problem and you probably would need the union to help you there because, it could be that when new people come in, or say, I wanted to go part-time, then you could be told that your hours are Friday, Saturday and Sunday and no extra pay (QS6).

Overall in Quality Store, neither the existence of part-time work, nor its deployment cause much opposition towards the management. Flexible workers and many female full-time employees find little to complain about in the growth of part-time work (as I noted already, some of them voted for it). Because it does cut into their Christmas pay and denies them extra hours or full-time jobs, some do question the deployment of part-time hours. The increasingly flexible hours of work are questioned by staff, and are recognised as a material difference in preference between management and staff. While this leads some of them to question the management decisions by and large this does not spill over in to confrontation (though a minor industrial dispute - a short strike - was held in the store some time later on this issue). What is interesting here is that at least some of the management actions which cause massively oppositional values and attitudes in other stores also happen here. People are on very flexible contracts, can be called upon on short notice, and can get more or less hours, depending on the need. However, in this store the attempt to cut costs does not impact on the staff to the same extent as it does in other places. They are still relatively well paid compared to other retail workers, and

they do enjoy other benefits also. Staff are conscious, however, that on a purely material basis, their interests do not correspond with those of management.

Overall

The extent to which the preferences of management and staff differ depends on the *habitus* of the staff. The staff's preferences are formed in context: a context shaped by legislative, economic and cultural factors. Overall, a number of distinct preference groups can be identified depending on their age, gender, marital status and whether or not they have children. Stereotypically these groups include: young male and female unmarried students without children, who want some money and a social outlet; people (largely women) aged 20 to 30, without children or as the family's main breadwinner who are finished studies and looking for a full-time job; people (again, largely women) over thirty with children who want part-time work with fixed and regular hours, or hours which are compatible with their child-care arrangements. The preferences did not fully match the jobs in any of the stores and some of the differences between the stores can be explained by virtue of the fact that different groups occupied different positions. In Super Store, for example, part-time work with fixed hours was done by those who wanted full-time hours. This caused some level of dissatisfaction. In Quality Store part-time work with fixed hours is currently being done by those who want such hours. This causes them to have high levels of job satisfaction.

Underlying the relationship between management and staff in all of the stores is the differences in material preferences related to flexibility. Even in Quality Store this comes to the fore in relation to the possibility of Sunday opening. Flexibility raises the spectre of differing preferences. In Super Store and Home Store in particular (though to some

extent in Quality Store) this is expressed through an affirmation of the strength of the staff's commitment to quality and a questioning of the management's commitment to quality. A battle for the meaning of the term quality is played out between the two with aspects of flexibility being the ammunition of both sides. To the management, flexibility, long opening hours etc. are integral to the quality project. To the staff, staff shortages which are seen to derive from flexibility (even if not synonymous with it) are the antithesis to it. Quality, one of the key terms in the proposed unitary culture, becomes one of the key fissures in the culture in practice.

The Effects of the Structural Context of Flexibility on Interaction

The second factor which was noted as likely to lead to the fracturing of the culture of the workplace was the existence of groups who share the same limited space and time for the sort of interaction which was likely to give rise to shared meanings and understandings. Where other characteristics are also shared within groups (such as age, gender and social class background) this is also likely to facilitate interaction within groups rather than between groups. This section looks at these interactional effects of flexibility on the creation of a unitary culture. It is useful here to distinguish between these structural contexts of interactional effects and the presentation of self in interaction, though in practice the two are difficult to de-couple. The presentation of self of the management will be dealt with in the next chapter as a factor with the potential to develop a unitary culture.

In a strong culture, one would expect there to be little or no ambiguity about basic facts about the organisation of the work place. They should tell important stories in the same

way to embody the same meaning. Such clarity is both a precursor to, and an effect of, the sort of Foucaultian measurement and identification project noted in chapter two and in the last chapter. Such a situation could be described as 'black and white'. Where things are unclear, where there is ambiguity around certain basic facts, we can say there are 'grey areas'. Clarity - things being black and white - is not *sufficient* to ensure a strong or unitary culture. However, it is a *necessary* starting point. In this section I will describe the extent to which the limited interaction opportunities and associated factors can be said to produce grey areas in the three case study companies.

Super Store

As I have noted in chapter five, there is a some ambiguity around different aspects of work in Super Store. While the management note that there are strict rules and procedures for dealing with situations like disciplining and firing staff, they also note that different managers would treat these situations differently. One might turn a blind eye to minor things, another would not. This translates itself into a practice which propagates greyness within the workplace. People who are separate because they work at different times of the day or they work in different areas of the store may find out little about each other and the general operation of the store. As I noted above, friendship was a crucial factor in the decision by the staff to stay in the store. People's understandings of the store tend to circulate within these friendship networks rather than on a whole store basis. While this includes many areas of staff interest, it also includes information about their own contractual situation.

Full-time staff and part-time workers with fixed hours who share common workspaces tend to share similar understandings of their workplace. This means that the full-time

women on the checkouts share their understandings with other women on the checkouts, and with some of the full-time men in the backstage area. On the shop floor and in the backstage area (in other words, everywhere outside the office) part-time workers and short term staff have the a less accurate picture as to what is happening in the store. Some of these employees are from middle class backgrounds and are studying and this seems to lead them into a different social milieu which also helps to isolate them within the workplace.

Despite the small size of the workplace there are a number of clear and distinct networks. One male flexible part-timer described it like this:

> Interviewer: Are there different groups within the place?
> Yeah there is. Lads on the floor who are there a long time, girls on the checkouts who are there a long time [form one group]. It's [i.e., the store is] broken into two by experience. Also, there is a big difference in age between some of them. Basically, you've got the lads and the girls who have been together a long time, they know each other very well. Socially, I've seen them out. If there was a Christmas do and they all went out, they'd be the people siting together, [then] the fellas who aren't there so long, and the likes of me. . . Usually people from college keep to themselves, people from school stick to themselves, full-timers stick to themselves. (SS5)

There are also clear differences between the office staff and the floor staff. Where friendships are formed across these groups they tend to be based on similar backgrounds, gender and age. It is not that there is any animosity between the staff - most state clearly that there is not. One staff member said "You get all types. You get some really posh accents and somebody that just doesn't give a shite, but we all seem to get on" (SS3). The lack of animosity was noted by a number of others (SS2; SS4; SS10; SS11). However, people do simply stick to people of a similar age and with similar backgrounds and experiences. Crucially, they stick with people who are in for similar hours and who do similar types of work. In this sense, the growth of part-time work, along with the

lack of a centralising tendency in the store facilitates the growth of grey areas. Different groups within the workplace experience their work differently, as they develop their experience of the workplace in conversation with those that they share friendship networks with.

There was a great deal of greyness around basic facts about the workplace. Some part-time employees in the store did not have basic information about their own contracts. According to the management in the store, the probation period for new staff was three months. After that period the person became a permanent staff member. Yet staff who have been in the for periods up to six months referred to themselves as still being on probation. One women, (already quoted above), chose not to ask why her hours had been cut after a bout of illness, because, as far as she understood the situation, she was still on probation and didn't want to make a fuss. The practice seems to be that the probation period is not specified and those who make the gradual transition into the core group of employees who are full-time or who are friendly with a manager are deemed to have ended their probation, whereas for others the situation remains tenuous, probation or not. In other words, irrespective of the existence of objective rules governing employment, the actual reality is not managed 'by the book'.

Even full-time staff are unaware of certain aspects of their own work situation. Often statements are prefaced with the words 'They say . . .' or 'People say that . . .'. This includes discussions about important issues such as rates of pay. One long term full-time staff member said:

> Some of the girls who have been there haven't got a rise in two years. They say it stops at a certain amount over there, so you only get cost of living or something. But if you were anywhere else it would be more. (SS3)

None of the other full-time staff were able to be clearer about the situation with regard to pay in the store. There was similar confusion about other important facts about basic work conditions. One staff member was even unaware that, as far as the manager was concerned, she had been recently promoted!

If the staff are unaware of their formal situation, they are also unaware of their situation in relation to each other. A good example of this can be seen in their knowledge of and attitude to the issue of unionisation. This story is interesting more generally as a case study in the fragmentation of understandings in the workplace. The fact that this story - crucial to the management and some of the staff - is understood in such a variety of different ways indicates the extent to which the same basic reference points are not shared by different people within the store. The meaning of the story will be explored in the next chapter in relation to communication systems within the workplace, however for the time being I will simply note the different stories which existed.

A few months before the case study was carried out, unionisation became an issue. The attempt was successfully opposed, in a very personalised way, by the owner of the store. According to him, there was a meeting called in which he asked the staff if there were any problems which would give rise to the need for a union. Most stated that they had no interest in joining a union and that they did not want to work with those involved in bringing in a union. Eventually one of those involved left and others remained but the union idea was dead - killed by the staff (SS1).

None of the interviewed staff tell the story in the same way. Some of the longer term staff tell it like this:

> You see, one girl tried to bring in a union last year and she nearly got fired over it because [pause]. Well, where she is, she's grand because she'll stick up for herself but a lot of the girls won't or can't. They don't know what they are entitled to or whatever, and they came to us and loads of them were saying will you start one [i.e., a union]. So we did, and the first thing they [i.e., the management] knew about it was when they got a letter from your man [from the union] saying he was coming out. So the owner had a meeting in the shop and they all came to it. And there was only one person that stuck up for her out of, what was it, sixteen, seventeen? One person stuck up for her. Because she was getting all sorts of things thrown at her, and he was saying "Oh, the shop is like a big family. It's nothing to do with money. Everything is great", and they believed him. And she was just sitting there, and she couldn't believe it. She killed them afterwards because it was them that actually came to us, and now she was just getting it all thrown at her. (SS3)

The story of the resistance to the union is a key story for these full-time female staff and their account differs radically from that of owner and is known by friends of this group, even friends who work in a different area of the store and have relatively little workday contact with this group (SS10). However, a number of the part-time staff with whom they have more contact do not know about this story. One male part -timer said that, although he had inquired, no-one he asked seemed to know too much about it (SS5). Another male part- timer said:

> They do [have a union], but that is basically for the full-timers. Well, they had. I think it is still going ahead. They just pay so much every week. Full-timers really. No part-timers. (SS2).

Overall then, we have a picture of a workplace in which friendship is a crucially important means of organising the workplace. As we have already seen, it is one of the factors which motivates people to stay in the workplace. It also helps to determine, to a large extent, people's understanding and experiences of their work. Part-timers are not part of the same social milieu as full-timers, they do not share many of the important

stories that help to organise their understanding of their workplace. Managers also foster the lack of clarity about the workplace, as it aids their control over the workforce and also over issues such as pay and conditions of work. The management and the staff are not part of the same culture. They do not tell the same stories, the stories they tell have different meanings.

Home Store

Home store is substantially bigger than Super Store. It also has a higher proportion of part-time employees. Like Super Store there are distinct age groups and work groups within the store. As with Super Store, the staff tend to socialise in groups of their own age, with people of common background, and similar work position. (These things are, as we have seen, contingent to each other - flexible staff are more likely to be young, female students, long term part-timers tend to be older women, finished education and often involved in a long term relationship). In Home Store there is similar confusion among the employees about the basic nature of the workplace. Employees are unable to give coherent accounts of their workplace. They still give accounts, but they prove to be partial, or contradicted by management or by different people in different areas of the store.

The staff do not know the structure of the basic hierarchy in the store. Different groups of people described the structure in three different ways. Two different people were identified as the overall store manager, one manager was listed as appearing in three different positions ranging from a floor manager of a particular section, to overall store manager. Staff were unclear as to the position of various different people in the store that they had daily dealings with. The following exchange, which took place between

three part-time staff, was typical (the name used here is fictitious). It shows a lack of clarity about the basic organisation of the store as well as the process of negotiation the definition of the situation in which they work: in other words, the creation of a working consensus (Goffman, 1959).

> Interviewer: Who does the training?
> Staff One: It was Maureen Murphy did it with a manager.
> Staff Two: They were managers, weren't they?
> Staff One: They were supervisors, not managers. . .
> Staff Two: What's Maureen's job?
> Staff One: Maureen seems to be some sort of supervisor.
> Staff Two: I don't know what she is, but she did mine [i.e., my training]. (HS5)

Staff take their information where ever they can get it. Staff cited the newspapers, a radio chat show, and even employees of other retail companies as sources on information about the organisation of work in Home Store. Information and stories are passed between friends, and competing interpretations of the situation are worked out and a working consensus is agreed upon for the time being, though these can be revised if more facts come to light later on. A number of staff suggested that I would like to hear a story that another staff member told. Still more staff, outside that particular network of friends would never have heard the story or would tell it very differently.

One such story is the account of the day that a member of the board came to meet and talk with the staff. The meaning of this story in relation communication will be teased out in the next chapter, however for the time being I will simply note the different accounts which existed. In this case, the basic account of the meeting is shared by all. One of the members of the board of directors came to meet with the staff. She met with, listened to and spoke to a selected group from the staff. To the manager there at the time, this showed to the staff that the senior management in the company were

demonstrating their new found commitment to communication. This was the first step in developing this communication (HS1). The long term full-time staff are also aware of this story. And though the details of the story are quite similar, up to a point, overall the meaning is quite different. To them it shows that the middle management (the store management) have been hiding the truth from the Board, but at the same time the Board do not care all that much.

> Once, the new head of the board came out. We're going back about five years now. She came out and one of the girls was at the meeting. A few of them actually. They had their list with what they wanted to communicate. This was supposed to be a monthly thing. Next thing, she heard all the questions that they had and what they were all about and she stood up at the end of the meeting and she said they were the most disgruntled staff they had ever come across and she certainly wouldn't be coming back here any more, and she didn't. That's the exact words she used. "Disgruntled staff", and she "certainly wasn't coming back here anymore". (HS8).

The same story is told, almost identically by other middle-aged long-term checkout workers interviewed (HS2; HS3; HS7). However, the younger staff who move in a different social millieu were unaware of the story. Of the six staff in their twenties I told the story to, none had ever heard it before (though none were surprised by it). Once more, it is not the truth of the story which is important, it is that only a particular group of people who identify with each other know it. While it is clearly important to them (since four of them brought it up without prompting), it is not one they have shared with their younger colleagues.

Nor do a lot of the staff have a clear understanding of issues relating to the union, or the strike. A number of staff were unable to tell me (while sitting on the picket line) what the strike was about. One woman confessed that she simply told people "Ah, it's the same as last time", if she was asked the reason for the strike. Other staff were unable to

say how many people were on strike overall, with estimates ranging from 2,000 to 7,000. Some staff did not know who was involved in the union organisation within the store. They had simply joined the union the week before the strike happened.

The overall picture from Home Store is that there is a substantial amount of greyness. Flexible staff do not know basic information about their workplace. Their interviews are characterised by a lack of clarity and discussions about what they think might be true but cannot be sure. They are trying to construct a view of the workplace as they go along. This is facilitated by the fact that as flexible employees, they come from a different labour market and have different interests and orientations than both the management and their middle-aged colleagues. It is also facilitated by the short time which many of them spend in the workplace (both in terms of hours per week and total duration of stay). Flexibility is not necessarily the cause, but it does facilitate the process of greying the workplace.

Quality Store

In Quality Store, the staff are less grey than in the other stores. For example, the longer term part-time employees (those who were once full-time and now have fixed regular hours) interviewed in Quality Store generally knew a great deal about their store's operation. On one hand this is to be expected since they are a similar age and background to the core women employees in the store. They also worked with them full-time for part of their career. But still, this situation contrasts with the situation in the other stores. Other part-time workers find it harder to find out about aspects of their workplace, though it is significant that all groups seem to know more about their workplace than was true of the other case studies. The part-time flexible workers feel this exclusion arises from the slight animosity between full-timers and part-timers over

the hours which people work. Temporary workers are even further excluded from the culture of the workplace.

Longer term staff report that there are not discernible groups within the workplace. Yet, shorter term, flexible staff claim that such groups do exist. As one female flexible worker told me:

> There are always little cliques as there always is when you have a lot of people working together, and especially when it is very young girls that work together. They do tend to be clique-ish. Little groups, little bands of them [the interviewee whispers] whispering in corners. (QS14)

The temporary staff also experience some difficulty in finding out about aspects of their job. The same part-timer reported that she had difficulty in finding out about her conditions of employment from her colleagues, and other part-time flexible employees supported her version of events.

> Interviewer: [Are there] certain areas of conversation . . .
> Yeah. And you don't get told much about the company as a rule. You have to keep asking questions which is a pain in the arse. I eventually went and asked for my conditions of employment so I could read it for myself because I was fed up asking people. (QS14).

This is put down to some amount of bad feeling over hours of work and the nature of work which I made reference to in the previous section. Despite this, the part-time flexible workers seem to have a much better grasp of their workplace than they did in the other case studies.

Unlike the other two stores, some of the management's accounts of work do seem to permeate into the conversations of the staff. Again, this can be seen in the stories told.

One such story is the accounts of what happened in the store during the 1994 World Cup. The Irish national soccer team were playing in the World Cup on that occasion, having been brought there by their manager, Jack Charlton. During Ireland's quarter final match against Italy four years previously many shops in the city centre had closed down to allow staff to watch the match. Ireland's first match on this occasion was again against Italy. Many of the staff expected the store to be closed, but the manager decided against it. During the 1990 World Cup a festival atmosphere pervaded the country and street traders made a small fortune selling tee shirts with cartoons printed on them which commemorated various events on and off the football pitch, now blown up to epic proportions. These tee shirts were almost a nation's uniform for the period of the competition. While the staff had been allowed wear tee-shirts and hats in work during the previous World Cup, this manager decided against letting that happen again. Staff were only allowed wear a badge on their uniform and a tasteful hat.

For the management, this was a rational decision, inspired by a need to maintain a certain degree of service. Since some customers are not interested in football, they would be aghast to discover that the store was closed. Letters might even be written to the newspapers about it. The staff account is not identical, but it does have some similarities. A typical staff account went like this:

> You see, for people interested in football - I couldn't have cared less - if someone had said to me, "Would you mind holding the fort here, they all want to go and watch the match", I would have said "Yeah. No problem". I think if you run a store you have to run a service and you can't just close, even though everyone else appeared to be closed. I think if you have a standard you can't really say "I want to watch the match, we're closing". I think one day we did. Other than that we did [open the store]. And in opening the store, it probably cost more in lighting and heating to keep the place open, but if you run a department store with a good name you must give the service regardless of what is going on. I wouldn't care. I know some of the girls were put out. . . The previous manager four years ago didn't mind if we wore tee-shirts with all kinds of things written

> on them. But this manager wouldn't allow it. You could wear hats and badges. And one girl had a lot of badges. Now she had Jack Charlton hanging out of various places and she was told, "No, sorry, that's not on". And she was a little bit annoyed about it. Em. That's just a personal thing. I thought it was petty of the management side not to let her just for the one day, but other than that, I must say, I agree with not allowing staff off to watch a match if the staff are working to a certain time (QS6).

This very balanced account was typical of a number of the staff who spoke about the incident. Even staff directly affected recount the story in a similar way. They recognised that there had been some difficulty, but the management account of events is firmly embedded into their account. Management are clearly not absolved from all blame in relation to the incident - their decision is described as petty - however it is also clear that their justification for their decision has been successfully sold to the staff. There is no difference in how the part-time staff and the full-time staff tell the story. While individual workers may put more emphasis on how unreasonable management were, others place the emphasis on the extent to which different staff caused trouble over the incident. In general there is a balance between the purely oppositional and the purely unitary in each account.

Overall, in Quality Store we find a much greater sense of coherence in the culture, even if aspects which are there which will allow people to redefine their allegiance at different times. Management accounts find their way into the discourse of the shop floor. While different groups (particularly peripheral groups) find some difficulty in obtaining information, in general, they seem to do much better than their counterparts in other locations.

Overall

The different stores do present in quite different ways. As a general conclusion it makes sense to suggest that structural factors, both in terms of the organisation of work (whether employees are part-time or full-time, have flexible or fixed hours, are there for the short term or the long term) and in terms of the structural location of the employee (their gender, age, social class) do make a difference in setting a context for interaction. This is seen in all the stores. Yet its effects are not uniform in all the stores. In Super Store there are clearly different groups through which facts and stories circulate and a working consensus is constructed. The same is true of Home Store. In fact, in Home Store the process of negotiation and working consensus construction is even happening during the interview. Quality Store is, as usual, the exception to the rule. While the conditions are the same as in the other two stores, the outcome is dissimilar. Clearly there is some other factors at work here.

Conclusion

The questions posed at the beginning of this chapter were: does flexibility give rise to differences in material preferences between the management and the staff; and does the context created by flexibility give rise to interactional fracturing of the workplace? The answer to both questions is a qualified yes.

In relation to the first question flexibility does give rise to material differences but not in any straightforward or mechanical way. As one could predict based on the work of du Gay (1996), factors other than the traditionally privileged factor of social class entered into the relationship. Yet, while these other factors (such as gender, age and marital

status) also entered into the mix and helped to shape the preferences of staff there remained a readiness to identify a potential for a difference in material preferences between management and each group of staff. This was true even in the workplace which was most content with their current material situation - Quality Store.

If Quality Store is surprisingly in line with the other stores in relation to the first question, it is, more familiarly, the odd case in relation to the second. While the flexible context is the same as in the other stores, the extent to which that contributes to 'greying' of the stores culture is different. While there are substantial grey areas in each of the other stores, and while these can be related directly to the context provided by flexibility, there is little greying in Quality Store in comparison. The reason for this difference cannot be found in the deployment or structuring of flexibility.

As chapter five noted, Quality Store was unique in the extent to which, at management level, it promoted and adhered to clarity, identification, measurement, surveillance and self-surveillance. The interviews with the managers suggested that that would be followed through in relation to the staff. The extent to which differences in the application of such a model could be responsible for the sort of clarity identified in this chapter is the subject of chapter seven.

CHAPTER SEVEN - KEEPING IT ALL TOGETHER?

Introduction

If is clear from the last chapter that although there are common factors which could and often do lead to fragmentation of the workplace in the case study stores, there must also be differences which can account for the fact that not all the stores are as culturally cohesive or disjointed as each other. Some of these factors relate to material issues and have been noted in the last chapter. However they are not the only factors. In chapter five I suggested that these differences could also be understood as being due to the mobilisation of key levers (Storey, 1992) of HRM practice such as communication, training and career development. These key levers in turn could be understood as the operation of techniques of discipline (Foucault, 1977).

Clarity of meaning is a key element of disciplining the subject. Before the subject can be constituted as normal we require clear indicators of what constitutes normal. From a cultural management perspective, if management and staff are going to share values and beliefs then the meaning of certain key factors and relationships has to be established clearly to be shared. As the last chapter showed, such clarity does not lead necessarily to a common set of meanings but it does at least make it possible. Clarity and fixity of meaning also removes at least one basis for inter-group tension. If meanings are fixed and clear they do not perpetually become the subject of negotiation (see Goffman, 1959: 21). The constitution of self is something which can be done within clear boundaries. One does not need to perpetually push the boundaries to explore one's self. Of course,

there can still be tension over issues which are clear. However the tension in that case relates to the substance of the meaning rather than the process of creating meaning.

Training is also crucial. If communication is about establishing clear meanings and clear boundaries, training is one of the places in which these can be utilised in a process of constituting the self (du Gay, 1996; 128 - 129). Rosenthal *et al.* noted that training was the most important factor in explaining the success of the cultural management project they studied. It is one of the few formal spaces within which the twin inter-related processes of capacity building and the diffusion of political power can happen. If it is successful then the staff can constitute themselves in a fashion which is useful to the company.

Career development is important in two respects. On one hand it is in itself a technique of discipline which draws the employee into the company and creates a space in which the staff can constitute themselves in a manner useful to the company. It is also one of the main carriers of meaning about the relationship between the management and the staff. It is tied closely to the material issues looked at in the last chapter and carries a number of the themes which run through both communication and training.

In this chapter I will look again at the three key levers identified, this time from the point of view of the staff. I will show how they experience (a) communication systems, (b) training systems, and (c) career development (including hiring, promotion and firing). I will show that, in line with the analysis in chapters two and five, where these techniques of discipline are put in place in an organised and bureaucratic way, creating clarity and

relative fixity of meaning, they will be more successful than where there is greyness or uncertainty about meanings.

Communication

In all the companies studied, communication happens in both a formal and an informal way. In this section I will look at both informal and formal communication in each of the three stores. Despite the differences in communication systems used in each of the stores there are remarkable similarities in underlying trends. In all three stores the two key underlying issues for staff are the *consistency* of communication and the extent to which there is *reciprocity* in communication. Consistency refers to the extent to which any member of management will give the same message as any other and the extent to which any manager will give the same response at two different times. In stores in which there is a good deal of informal communication and in which a clearly articulated hierarchical bureaucratic structure is not mobilised (Super Store and Home Store) there is a good deal of inconsistent communication. Inconsistency is therefore linked to the Foucaulian question of clarity. It is also derived from a lack of bureaucratic structure. Reciprocity on the other hand relates to the extent to which the staff can find a space in which they can be active participants in a process of communication as opposed to passive listeners (sometimes it would be more accurate to say 'hearers'). As usual, Quality Store makes the running in this respect, though not necessarily of their own volition. It is the fact that they have developed a good working relationship with their union which makes such a difference here. The irony is, of course, that chapter five has shown that some of the management would prefer not to be working with the union at all.

Super Store

In terms of communication, Super Store is typical of the small companies described by MacMahon (1995). There is a reliance on informal means of communication which in turn can give rise to issues becoming personalised. As I described in chapter five, the managers in Super Store see informal means as being the most important form of communication. So long as they get on and people feel able to talk to each other everything is OK. However, the staff feel that this openness is simply not there. As chapter six showed in relation to staff being called in on short notice, the staff feel that they are subject to arbitrary control by the management. In fact a number of staff describe the decisions of the management team as being subject to whims and changes in mood (SS3; SS4; SS5; SS10). In some sense, this has already been identified as an issue by the general manager who noted that everyone has good days and bad days. The difference between this and other workplaces is that in Super Store, if the manager is having a bad day it makes a real difference to interaction in the workplace. Added to this is the difficulty of a lack of consistency between managers. As one staff member describes it:

> With so many people to tell them what to do, they didn't know who to take the main order from. One person would tell them one thing, someone else would tell them to do another (SS10).

One would expect on the basis of this that the staff's experience of formal mechanisms of communication would not be a positive one. This generally proves to be the case. As with so much else in Super Store, formal communication systems are shrouded in greyness. They may or may not operate formally in a number of different ways at a number of different times, depending on who you ask.

Communications has a history in Super Store. As I described in chapter five, the staff had recently tried to bring a union into the store. This was resisted by the store owner who got personally involved. After the successful attempt to head the union off at the pass, the owner then attempted to institute various mechanisms for employee voice (Lewin and Mitchel, 1992) - all of which were to have some consultative role but no direct decision making power. The first was a monthly meeting with staff members from each department in order to ensure that he remained in touch with the staff and their concerns. However, the initiative was short lived and cynicism among the staff increased.

> Interviewee one: [We were] meant to have this monthly meeting. This great committee collapsed after one meeting. [laughs]. They never keep their word on anything.
> Interviewee two: [Laughing] He said he wanted to be more in touch with the shop and know what is going on. So, he came up with this brilliant idea. One person out of every department, and if there were things which came up, we could tell him. There was one meeting. (SS3)

While this was going on, the only people who were able to communicate their concern were those who were not afraid to raise their voice. The staff feel that even this was rarely effective, unless accompanied by some other catalyst, and, at the end of the day, if it cost something it was always going to be out of the question. One of the full-time staff takes up the story of one of the numerous attempted robberies in the store, after the staff had been lobbying for some time for a security guard.

> One of the girls was collecting cash from the tills. There was no manager around, which you are supposed to have for insurance reasons, but there was nobody around. And [the thief] started pulling her down and two girls started pulling her the other way. And they started shouting at him, and they started shouting at her to give him the bag. But they were there for about five minutes! They got a security guard then, for two weeks. At Christmas, we have always

> asked for a security man. Any other year we got a security man we had to ask and keep at them and keep at them. You do be afraid on the tills, especially with a lot of money in it. We didn't ask this year. I mean, it's their money. . .If I went over there now and said, "I think . . .", they'd laugh at me. The only way is if I say "Look, we're holding a meeting in our own time, we want you to be there, we want a security man". Then they'd say "I'll think about it and see what we can do". (SS3)

The lack of formal mechanism for communication devalues their input to the company, even when they want to discuss how to make the company more profitable (such as looking at ways of protecting the owner's money). As I have shown in the previous chapter, this type of interaction between management and staff is typical. The next communication initiative of the owner developed in conjunction with the new training regime for the company. Training sessions are used as a means through which the outside facilitator can gather the views of the staff in a non-threatening manner. A male part-time staff member takes up the story:

> This woman came in . . .we didn't know what to expect but it was OK in the end. We got some points across. One thing was that we should have jumpers, because we had to wear white shirts and a tie, and the white shirts would get dirty, so now we have jumpers. They actually listened to us. They didn't just ignore what we said. She went back to the owner and told him. (SS2)

So, for some members of staff, this new mechanism for communication seems to have alleviated some of their worries. Some staff got raises, the uniform was changed, and as one member of staff put it "anyone that had a mouth was kinda noticed" (SS3). For others it has done nothing of the sort. For those who keep quiet about their discontent, those that do not stand up and get counted, there was little improvement. A part-timer described the meeting like this:

> It was very frank. Everything was going to come out, but not like "He said this and she said that". That was a major point. One of the lads says nothing has changed. A couple of little things have changed, but [with the owner] himself, nothing has changed. That was a major thing (SS5).

While the staff did get new uniforms the key issue for many was the manner of the owner himself. That has simply remained the same. The fact that the management do not listen to the staff has, therefore, further contributed to the view that the staff and their expertise is not valued. The fact that the management has not created some sort of shared common ground with the staff is further emphasised by their unwillingness to allow the staff to set even part of the agenda. This is an issue of reciprocity. The perception that there is no value on the staff's input is critically damaging to communication. The lack of consistency, evidenced in both the lack of a clear command structure and in the importance given to moodiness is also notable.

Home Store

As we have seen, in recent years the management in Home Store have changed their approach drastically. The old days of referring to a manager as Mr. or Miss are gone. Managers are on first name terms with the staff now. Interpersonal communication is more relaxed than it was before. The older managers who have been with the store for a long time tend to remain shaped by the old mould, but the younger managers recruited in recent years have tended to be more informal. Some of the managers from the old schools are deemed to be unapproachable. One manager was described as 'a dog' (HS8) (meaning he was very rude). Another described a manager like this:

> He's always rude and objectionable, constantly just muttering under his breath as people do things. He's a bitter little man. (HS6)

Like the management in Super Store, many of the managers here are often characterised as unprofessional. In part, the belief that the management lack professionalism relates to a lack of consistency between managers. Staff are also aware that their relationship with

the company is mediated by their own manager and this can lead to radically different outcomes depending on who is the manager in question. In other words there is a clear perception of inconsistency between managers. For example, staff who summon a manager are sometimes met by querulous managers who complain at being called for what they regard as inconsequential things, irrespective of whether or not the staff are following a stated rule. Part of the question of professionalism also relates to the managers' presentation of self. Along with the move towards informal contact between staff and management has come a degree of informality that some staff do not regard as being appropriate. Managers act informally and use swear words in front of customers and generally present the company in a poor light. From the staff's perspective, this is tied to a belief that there is a lack of reciprocity. Managers act informally when asking or pleading with staff to come in on times for which they are not scheduled but will accept no such informality when the staff request time off without going through the proper channels fully. Managers are able to exercise control but claim to have no authority to speak on behalf of the company. (As Milward *et al.*, [1992] has shown in a British context, the removal of decision making powers from local level is a trend in British industry despite the rhetoric of decentralisation). This means that they can take, but never give. For the staff, this was evident in the run up to the strike:

> They got wind [i.e., news] that we were balloting for industrial action. Then we [the staff] were told [by the management], "Oh, you'd better talk to your union and get this thing sorted out". Easing off a bit then. Then we had our ballot and it was 'all-out'. Then we had these nicey nice meetings up to the date of going out, where [they were saying] "We don't want any animosity between people at local level. Everybody is grand here. The union is stirring it up. We don't want to do anything". And at the end of the day, they were really saying that they couldn't do anything because they'd have to refer back to head office. They couldn't promise you nothing. They couldn't negotiate at local level, which is a joke. You are sitting in an office and you are saying "What are we all sitting here for? You can't give me what I want so what am I talking to you for?" That's the unprofessional situation we have. (HS3)

The major means of formal communication with the staff is through the communication meetings which are held periodically. The description above relates to one such meeting. These meetings were fairly irregular at the time. The first such meeting - held with a member of the board - was described in the last chapter. The way that story is told clearly indicates that the staff believe that the company's commitment to listening as well as talking is half-hearted. The staff also emphasised the belief that store management did not want to be bearers of bad news to head office and therefore head office was kept in the dark as much as possible. (As chapter five has shown, the management believe that head office only wants to know about profit and therefore news is not transmitted). The irregular but on-going attempts to communicate with the staff through communication meetings tend to be seen with some scepticism. Stories similar to this one were also told by a number of other staff (HS7; HS3).

> Well, they always tried to [threaten people]. They always brought them up in little groups. But it wasn't a regular thing. They would corner girls on their own, or bring people in for something different [and then start asking questions]. You'd come up about your uniform and then it would come up about your hours and then your time-keeping. Then sort of threaten you behind closed doors. (HS2).

The newer, or shorter term staff have less of a problem with the communication meetings. Since they haven't been there as long as the other staff they carry less baggage. They do not view the present through the eyes of the past. For them the 'little meetings' are a bit silly, a cause for a laugh rather than evidence that the management are trying to pick on the weak links in the staff chain. That is the case for those of them that

ever get to a meeting. Since many of the part-time staff never get near a meeting it doesn't make one whit of a difference.

> Interviewee one: They have communication meetings with the staff, but I've never been to one so I don't know what they are about really . . .
> Interviewee two: I know I'm real suspicious . . . but I wonder how much is achieved. . .You never meet people who have been to these meetings. Now I know they do [have them]. Its not like [George Orwell's] *1984* or something, here. I know they do exist [pause]. It doesn't really have an effect. I'm sure they want it to have some effect but the fact is you are talking to us now and we know about [it], but we haven't felt any difference. (HS4).

The lack of regularity of the communication meetings, the supposed one-sided nature of them, and the fact that so few people ever get to experience them means that, for the staff, the meetings are seen as ineffectual. Other attempts to communicate with the staff are meeting similar ends. Letters sent to the staff indicating the management's position are felt not to be engaging with the staff's issues. The signs and notices around the staff area use well worked clichés ('The customer is doing you no favour', 'A smile costs nothing', 'One plus two is a queue') which are laughed off. A series of detailed photographs of how the staff's uniform is supposed to look before they go on the floor are passed off as neurotic. A sign over the mirror in the staff toilets is regarded as an intrusion and a piece of cultural Americana. The notice board provides a good example of these attempts to communicate. It is situated in the backstage area, and is supposed to be consulted every day before the staff go onto the floor.

> Interviewee one: We're supposed to read it every day (laughs) . . .
> Interviewee two: There's notices all around the canteen, on the doors leaving the canteen "Have you read the notice board?"
> Interviewer: And I take it no-one does?
> Interviewee three: The odd time.
> Interviewee one: When there is a big sign, you can't help reading it (laughs). Or if one day you notice absolutely everything on the notice board has been changed you think, "Well, I'd better read it now". (HS5).

The notice board, like other attempts to communicate are the subject of some humour for the staff. This is not to say it is ineffective at every level. It is one of the ways used to communicate day-to-day information about the operational running of the store. If there is a new handbag and purse combination, staff will need to know this to perform their duties. It can serve this function. It also lets them know if the cash in their tills was accurate. However, when it comes to the bigger picture, issues of how management want to see staff act, how the management conceptualises the staff and their relationship with each other, this is laughed off or worse, treated as a trick. At their most charitable, staff view this sort of communication as an unimportant luxury - not to be confused with the real work. This is reminiscent of accounts of training cited by Storey and Sisson (1993: 170 - 171) and Legge (1995a: 241 - 242) and re-appears in the case study stores when looking at training.

In fact, communication within the store as a whole is thought of as laughable, including communication between the management. They are seen to be disorganised and not to be communicating with each other. A number of staff told stories about how they had given a message to one manager, been assured that the message would be passed on, only to realise that it had not been.

> Interviewee one: I rang in sick one day last week and I spoke to somebody in personnel, and I was put from Customer Services up to personnel, and I said "Will you pass a message down that I won't be able to come in because I'm sick" and she said "Yeah, no problem", and I got a phone call from one of the managers the next day to say where the hell was I on Thursday night. And I said "Well, I rang and asked them to pass the message down", and there was no message passed down. That's, like, within management. There was no message passed down.
> Interviewee two: They've a habit of doing that because I rang in sick on Sunday and I was really sick . . and they tell you to ring in as soon as possible and the shop opened at ten so I rang in bang on ten to say I wasn't coming in. And they

> got the message and I think it was about two o'clock in the afternoon we got a phone call asking where was I. My mother wasn't impressed with it at all. I wouldn't mind but I was literally sick. I was dying that day! Communication is pretty bad I'd say. (HS5)

Given that the management are seen as being unable to communicate among themselves, it is hardly surprising that their attempts at communicating to the staff are not taken seriously. Management are seen as being trapped by senior management, incompetent or inconsistent (and often all three). Given the inconsistencies, the communication is seen as being in laughable (since, whatever they say 'in theory' will be immediately forgotten 'in practice').

For the long term staff the lack of an alternative means of communication rankles. The fact that the union, a medium of communication that would not be controlled by management, has been given such short shrift in the company heightens their distrust of the management.

> To me, this company was always anti-union. The union has always been there, from day one when I started there. But Home Store has steadfastly refused to work with them. And they'll tell you "Oh, we always like to sort things out among ourselves". Irrespective of whether the staff wanted them to talk to the union. Which they have always been claiming (laughs). So it is like badgering people "Don't worry about the union. We'll look after you". But still they got nowhere. It just came down to a situation where, if you didn't like it you'd lump it. (HS3)

While the management say they do not want to talk to the union because they want to be free to manage their own company, the longer term employees feel that their stake in the company is not recognised. They feel that this is part of an historic, paternalistic mindset in which the management viewed the staff as children to be taken care of by the management. This is starting to change, they say.

> They ruled with an iron fist. That's the thing I was saying to you, going back over years. Fear more or less pushed them up to where they are today. But I mean, I'd have to say, the people who were working here years ago were [pause] - I'm not saying they weren't as intelligent as people are today, [but] young people don't take that shit any more. They are standing up to them. (HS3)

Some of this older style 'iron fist' approach does carry over to the younger staff, though it seems to depend on who the manager that they have contact with is. Likewise, the younger staff's attitude towards the union can differ, depending on the area they work in and how long they plan to stay. Summer workers are on their way back to college and would not have gone on strike if it was just up to themselves. However a strike is a strike, and once their colleagues are out they would not have gone in even though they had no quarrel with management worth striking over. Longer term flexi and part-time workers (some of them also students) are fully in support of the strike. Some of the most personalised and vilifying attacks I heard on the chair of the board came from just such people. During one such attack the chairperson of the board takes on the persona of the Wicked Witch of the West, cackling at every indignation she can heap on her staff.

> Interviewee one: The union reps and the Home Stores reps that were in the talks agreed to some sort of solution and then Home Store management refused. And they all thought that they had a solution and she refused it at the last minute. . .
> Interviewee two: She just seems like a horrible vindictive person. Like she gives you nylon uniforms! That's another thing! (All three respondents laugh and agree). It is unbelievable! It is just a nightmare trying to work in one of those things. We should have cotton uniforms. She's probably in bed at night thinking "Oh, all those little staff are in their uniforms" (she laughs) It's just, obviously the cheapest one they could get. (HS4).

The same group of staff argued that the Home Store policy is still to treat staff as if they were children.

> I don't know whether it is because of the number of students working here, but sometimes I feel that they think they are running a school. And the fact of the matter is that most people there are over eighteen. There are very few under

> eighteen but still you get that feeling. That is the way I felt when I came back in. I was in college the last four years then I went there. And the last time I felt like that was when I was in school and I've worked in other places since then. It's not like I haven't been working. You feel like you are caught or something. It's incredible. (HS4)

Overall then, the unwillingness of the company to engage with the staff's union, the low priority which they have given to building comprehensive communication systems with the staff, and the history of animosity between the company and its staff mean that the communication systems in place have not succeeded in conveying the sense that the staff and management are part of the same team, or that they share more than separates them. There is a lack of reciprocity in so far as the union is not taken seriously by the management as a means for setting an agenda and in so far as the management are seen to be only able to speak on behalf of the company but have no decision making powers to grant changes to staff. There is also seen to be a lack of consistency since the staff's situation differs depending on the manager to which they report.

Quality Store

Communication in Quality Store is far more highly structured than it is in either of the other two stores. And yet, many of the same techniques are recognisable. The difference seems to lie in the coherent manner in which these techniques are applied. Most importantly, the formal mechanisms of communication, and the formal message of the communication is consistently built upon in non-formal communicative settings. To appropriate the language of Goffman and only slightly alter his meaning, the impression given off is the same as the impression given (1959: 14). Secondly, the staff have a mechanism for communicating with the management which is not controlled by the

management. The management treat this mechanism with respect. Therefore the staff feel that they have some means of interacting with the management.

The management use various methods to communicate with staff. Staff meetings are held in the morning to brief the staff on new developments within the store. For example, because a refurbishment of a store is underway the staff are briefed with the details of the new design and layout. This happens even though it does not directly affect the staff being briefed. Notice boards, and memos are also used systematically rather than occasionally. New initiatives are clearly sign-posted to the staff so they are not in doubt as to the management's intentions. This means there is no grey space for staff to construct their own theories about dark intent. While not everyone was as glowing in their praises as this fairly recent recruit, there was no doubt that in general people were kept informed and that this had a value.

> You are told about how much we take in and, OK, how much Theft and Loss, and that, but you are involved. In everything. Even, the refurbishment is going on. We were shown the plans. Everything. We were shown how it was going to look, from the inside, from the outside. Why it was being done that way. In other places they wouldn't bother their arses telling you that. They'd say "Sure why would they want to know that". Instead of working for them, we work with them, and that's the difference. They're the little things that matter. (QS7).

These messages are then consistently reinforced in non-formal communicative situations. This happens because everyday communication in the store happens through a fairly rigid structure. Management rarely give instructions directly to individual members of staff. The chain of command, through supervisors, assistant supervisors, the head of a department, and finally to the ordinary staff members is followed. This does not rule out

conversation between management and staff, but when instructions are to be passed on they follow this route. It is described by the following staff member.

> The manager will look at the stock situation, the way the shelves are laid out and he'll say, "No, I want this moved there, na, na, na, na, na". Then it comes down the whole chain of command. Like, he stood behind me looking at a move I was doing a move on. The previous manager was more personable, but he would have done the same thing. He was talking to the supervisor, and I knew what he was saying. I knew he was saying he didn't want the ports put in the front section he wanted white wines put out because I could hear him say it. But would he say it to me, the person who was working on it? No, no, no. He said it to the supervisor who passed it on to another supervisor who came and said to me. I said "Don't tell me. I heard the man". Why - he was only three feet away from me - why couldn't he come around to me and say "Before you go any further with that would you just put all the fine wines at the front here, the white wines, and leave the ports where they are". All he had to say! . . .But that's the way it works. (QS14)

Longer term staff are a bit more sanguine about the process. It is only really noticeable for this member of staff because she is relatively new. What was once strange has not yet become familiar. Another staff member describes the process as ridiculous but she goes on to say "It is acceptable because you are used to it. . . .Only a small thing. One of those quirks. It's not a problem" (QS6). Many people had stories to tell which are similar to that recounted in the last quote, but for most it was just part of the Quality Store way. There is a hierarchy and it is followed, there are rules and they are followed. The fact that management speak through the chain of command does mean that people are not being asked to do two different jobs by different managers. It aids the clarity of the voice with which they speak:

> I worked for Home Store, and two other supermarkets. I worked everywhere and you just see a total change in the attitude here. Everything is so well done and so well organised. I'm two years here and I still feel that great feeling of it's so well organised. (QS7)

Another who had been there much longer put it this way:

> I think Quality Stores operates very much to the book. Rules and regulations. Black and white. Very little grey areas. Decisions made and stood over. That sort of thing. You almost work to a special [pause] a special way of thinking is how I'd put it. They have codes and they just stick by that the whole time. Very little grey areas. (QS6).

This is not to say that there is no problems with communication. The episode of the football match indicates that management sometimes get it wrong and do not take the staff's feelings or position into account. The story of the football match clearly shows one space for inconsistency in Quality Store. A change in management meant a change in policy in relation to this irregular event. Nor is this an isolated incident. As with Home Store the new uniform is causing some disquiet.

> They don't tend to ask you, yourself, how do you feel about working. You're told to do certain things and that's it. Whether you like it or not. Like now (starts to laugh) we've got these new uniforms. They're horrible. . . We were never even questioned as to whether we would like to wear the uniform or what we thought of them. We were just given them, and most of them are disgraceful. . . There was a big hype over that, the uniform. Some of the older women, like we have little jackets and there's longer jackets as well. And they were real embarrassed because they didn't come down over their (pats backside). There were bits sticking out here and there and I did feel like - I'm not in great shape myself - but I did feel for some of the bigger women. They had to wear them. . . Like, a lot of the staff, there was a big commotion over it. Like they never even asked us what did we think. (QS15)

In some senses this is a theme which has already been seen in Home Store as well as in other locations (Milward *et al.*, 1992). It is difficult for the managers to have reciprocal communication when issues to be decided (such as the new uniform) is taken at head office (in this case in another country) rather than in the store or even in the chain. It is notable that in Home Store the managers use the fact that decisions are taken at a

different level to avoid entering into a reciprocal relationship with staff, but in Quality Store no such scapegoating takes place. This means that the difference is far less emphasised here. However, where such a lack of reciprocity is evident it does lead to a reemphasis on the nature of the relationship between management and staff.

The management have also instituted a 'focus team' for the purposes of communicating with the staff. This is intended as a means of by-passing the union, however, most of the staff do not think of the focus team as their means of communication. Those who talked about it at all (very few did) speak about it as a creation of management. It belongs to them. For the staff, their means of communication is the union. Everyone joins the union. Some say that it is mandatory to join the union when you join the company (although such a situation would be illegal). Some of the staff note that they have had little contact with the union. They note that some of the staff use the union for 'little things', like getting an open door closed, getting the right to wear jumpers or having a high shelf moved down. One said that there would never be a strike. (In fact the company did have a short strike over rates of pay for unsociable hours about a year after the case study). Others felt more strongly that the union was a necessity, precisely because of things like flexibility. They felt the company could be suspect on things like opening hours and payment of overtime. Therefore the union offered the necessary clout to fight it. And, as I have noted before, the management is willing to work with the union. Together they can usually sort issues out and prevent them coming to a head. But, the staff recognise the union as a vital bulwark. Comparisons with the company's free hand in countries where is it not unionised helps to ensure that people make the comparison and see the benefit of the union. This is starkly seen in the case of the supervisors. For years the supervisors had not been unionised. Then a few years before

the company had started their efforts to develop a strong culture by working on supervisors first. A supervisor takes up the story:

> About three or four years ago the company itself overseas came up with the great idea of making supervisors, changing the name into departmental managers. And as they changed the name to re-draft the job description and say "Right. You are now a departmental manager. Bang goes your job description". They went with that idea in the UK and we would have been the last place to get it, but of course a lot of stories came back from the UK through the grapevine, through people we contact every single day for work purposes. I don't need to tell you. "How's this working out?", or whatever. And in some places it went well and some places it went terrible. The company then went slightly backwards in what it wanted to do and it said "Maybe we'll still have supervision, but maybe they won't be called supervision, maybe they'll be called deputy supervision, but we want to get rid of the supervision category". And of course once that was said - BANG! Fury! "What's going to happen my job? If I don't make it up to this I'm going to come down to this. I've got a mortgage on my house on top of everything else". . . I think people felt ladled to the whims of a constantly changing management team. . . They were trying to manoeuvre on certain issues and we had very little back up, as most of the staff in the UK have very little back up. They say "Right. Here's your new job description and that's it". So we said "Right. We best join some sort of an association - a union". (QS12)

The union is seen as being a bulwark against whims of management. It might be added that this is in a context in which management do operate structures which largely, certainly within the store, prevents they them from operating on whims. The role of the union in this case is to extend that protection to include possible inconsistency on behalf of Head Office. This in itself is functional for management, even if it is not wanted by them. That unions are functional in this respect for managers has long been recognised by researchers, (Reader, 1973; Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Kochan and Osterman, 1994) even if it is not always appreciated by managers.

Overall then we see that the communication systems which exist seem to work reasonably well in terms of creating an awareness among staff about the management's logic. However, there still exists the awareness that management and staff are on

different sides in relation to some issues. The staff do not accept the management's logic wholesale. It is something they are aware of. We also see that communication is carried out through a highly ordered, highly organised set of structures. There are 'no grey areas'. The result is that there is, by and large, consistency within the store. While reciprocity is not always possible, there is a higher degree of reciprocity in the communication in Quality Store due to the existence of a union which can represent the staff. Having a union means that the staff can work to set the agenda for communication in a meaningful way. In this respect it is interesting to note that the proportion of Irish companies using a union as a means of employee-management communication is remaining fairly stable while attempts to use other means of communication (such as staff communicating through managers, supervisors, workplace meetings or team briefings) are on the increase. (Gunnigle, Morely, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley, 1997: 212). This focus on employee 'voice' as opposed to employee 'influence' is precisely why the employees in Quality Store do not recognise the focus group as a means of communication. Although there is evidence which suggests a value in such initiatives (Tripoli, 1998), on the evidence presented here, it may well represent something of a dead-end strategy for Irish managers. While the management in Quality Store are paying the price of having a union in terms of higher costs, they benefit in terms of a more coherent communications package. It is, perhaps, an indication of the penchant for short-term accounting that they prioritise the former as a problem over the benefits of the latter.

Overall

The extent to which the communications system is mobilised as part of a disciplining project differs from store to store. Both Home Store and Super Store lack clarity due to

a lack of consistency in the management's presentation of self. Both ally this lack of clarity to an occasionally authoritarian - pre-disciplinary - management strategy. Quality Store is different. Here there is clarity brought about by having consistency in the message passed on to staff. This is achieved through a bureaucratic chain of command within the store, through having managers who act consistently and through having communications systems that are operated consistently by management. This clarity is a necessary condition for staff to be able to make sense of management's position.

While consistency is important, so too is reciprocity. As I emphasised in chapter two, techniques of discipline are totalising in their tendency but not total in their effects. The case study stores provide excellent examples of this. The need for reciprocity highlights the extent to which techniques of discipline cannot act to completely determine the individual. The structurally located individual (that is, the individual, influenced by their gender, race and social class among other factors) must be met and engaged in the technique of discipline. This creates a means through which discipline is itself acted upon by the subject. For the communication system to work, the staff must themselves be allowed to set part of the agenda. This partly subverts the value of communication from a management perspective though in real terms it turns an information distribution system into a communication system.

Training

Training is an essential component of techniques of discipline. Some would argue that it is the vital component of HRM (Keep, 1989). This view is certainly supported by Rosenthal *et al.* who found in relation to their research that:

> Employees in the stores were exposed to the ideas, aims, and discourse of Service Excellence in a variety of ways as we have noted. By far the most important was through participation in training. . . Participation in the training was a better predictor of how strongly employees internalised and endorsed service excellence than was their prior orientation to customer service (1997: 494 - 495).

In Foucaulian terms is the process through which people on one hand develop their capacity (a capacity to be something 'normal') while their political force is diminished (1977: 138). In this respect a well worked training system is crucial to developing the employee as a company person (du Gay, 1996: 128 - 129). As chapter five has shown the training aim in the stores differs. However it can be largely summarised as developing the idea that quality service can be understood as the Anglo-US service model (Pollert, 1995), and developing the behavioural tenets of this model in the staff. In this way, particularly in Home Store and Quality Store staff are to develop the capacity to realise themselves through being service-oriented in their work (du Gay, 1996).

In practice, training works differently in each of the three stores. Generally, Home Store has paid little attention to training. Super Store is starting to take training seriously and has brought in an outside company to facilitate training. Within the minds of the management in the store, however, experience is still worth more than training. Quality Store takes training very seriously at all levels. Their managers have described it as a means of ensuring profitability, ensuring the sanctity of procedures are maintained and ensuring the staff know that nothing will be asked of them that they have not been prepared for. Only Quality Store operates what has been called 'the training and development cycle' (Storey and Sisson, 1993: 157) and as such is the only case studied which really approximates the potential of training as a technique of discipline.

Super Store

The management in Super Store view experience as being more important than training. Historically people did not get training upon joining the company, with the exception of a small amount of checkout training for the women who operate the tills. Despite the recent introduction of training workshops, there is still no initial training for the staff in the workplace. The first few weeks of a warehouse employee was described as follows:

> You see it all the time in there, it does go on so much. Someone comes in on their first day and Jesus! He doesn't know what's hit him! He's up the top of the conveyor belt and three hundred fucking cases of sugar coming at him and he's in bits by the end of the day. He's saying "I can't handle this. I'm going home". Most fellas stick it out for a couple of weeks [before leaving]. (SS5)

Nor do the training workshops currently going on make much difference to the staff. They see their primary value in the capacity to use them as a means of reciprocal communication rather than in actually being trained in any aspect of merchandising. I have shown in chapter five that at least some of the management see these training workshops as being primarily aimed at part-time staff. The checkout supervisor felt that they would not be of much benefit to the full-time staff who already knew their job. For the full-time staff however, the story is quite different. They see the training as being aimed at them, and they see it as further underlining a difference of opinion they hold with the management and the owner. For them, the training tells them nothing they do not know, but signals that the owner believes the current problems are due to them rather than due to his cut backs on spending. Rather than adding to the sense that they were being invested in (Storey and Sisson, 1993:154) the training was seen as evidence that the owner was trying to blame them for the problems of the store.

This misunderstanding is facilitated by the lack of clarity about the training which exists. Staff (like management) do not know when the training is to happen. They are not clear about its aims. Its methodology does not engage with them, and its planning does not involve them. The greyness surrounding training enables its construction as something vaguely ominous, rather than an opportunity or an investment.

Home Store

Training has never really been taken seriously in the store. Management note that it was never something the company was involved in to any major extent, but that it is something that they want to work on in the future. At the moment, it simply further increases the staff's sense of management as disorganised and slipshod. Nor does it focus in any way on bringing the person into the company and making them a 'Home Store' person. It is a purely functional thing aimed at giving them the basic checkout work skills. In other words, in HRM terms it is an opportunity lost.

The training starts with the induction course. When staff first arrive they are given a two hour course. Many were unable to remember the content of the course, except that they were shown how to lift things and given a declaration to sign indicating that they now knew how to do so. Essentially, what they remember was the company protecting itself against insurance claims. Two members of staff below have a slightly more detailed memory:

> Interviewee one: We got a really nice 1970s video on how to treat the customer, and on how to lift things. How not to damage your back. And, em, we were given a diagram of how to lift things and you had to sign the back of it to prove that you'd seen it. That you'd have to lift things so it would be your own fault [if you got hurt] (she laughs). What did they tell you?

Interviewee two: To tie your hair up and to look nice all the time (she laughs).
Interviewee one: What was and wasn't tolerated.
Interviewee two: No chipped nail varnish. (still laughing). (HS5)

In the induction course, it is the practical and behavioural details which the staff remember. Customer care is laughed off because it is packaged through a medium that lends itself to ridicule. The behavioural requirements of self-presentation are also scoffed at. In fact the video in question is relatively new. It certainly doesn't date from the 1970s. However it is the sort of educational video frequently lampooned on *The Simpsons* television show as being tacky and unrealistic. Also because, as we have seen, those who do not already know will quickly learn that customer care is not high on the list of management priorities. Departmental training (the next step in the training programme) is viewed in a similar way. The practical details (what sort of goods are to be checked through under which department heading, whether or not a belt goes with a particular type of trouser) are remembered. Customer care and the sort of attitudes a Home Store employee is expected to bring to work are ignored. In this respect the staff are similar in attitude to the management. As I showed in chapter five, the management view it as their job to de-code the messages from head office and decide what is important (essentially, the answer was always profit). Here the staff are doing the same thing. They de-code the training on offer and identify what is worth remembering. As Storey and Sisson have noted "reading signs about 'what counts', ordinary members of staff routinely declare themselves too busy to be trained. . . Here one witnesses the real, measured, priorities asserting themselves at all levels throughout the organisation" (1993: 171). Having de-coded the training in light of the real measured priorities, anything that is not a priority is dismissed or becomes an object of ridicule, not because it is intrinsically funny (no-one laughs at the same ideas in Quality Store, for example), but

because it is so at odds with the stated priorities. As Gabriel has pointed out, humorous accounts of work can operate as a warning as to what is appropriate action and what is not (1991).

As with other aspects of life in Home Store, in training disorganisation seems to reign supreme. Some staff never get training as they just slip through the net. The management seem to have simply forgotten about them. Training happens when there is a critical mass of staff and whenever there is someone free to do the training. If there are too many people in any cohort, or if they have been there a while before a cohort are trained, some end up simply being forgotten. The training, when it is received, has only limited effectiveness.

Some attempt at multi-skilling long-term staff is being under taken, but, as usual, the long-term staff interpret it as being motivated by dark intent.

> They are after having their yearly review, and normally the yearly review means that people are moving, the move is on. And you could have a good girl, a girl who was brilliant, doing a brilliant job on fashions, or on knitwear, and just to upset the apple cart the girl was taken off knitwear and put on footwear. She knew nothing about footwear. The girl who was on footwear and knew everything about footwear was moved up to underwear. Another girl was taken off underwear and put on the fashions and the girl on fashions was taken off and put on to children's. So, they all have to spend time learning doing the books, the dockets, the re-order form instead of leaving them. . . They leave them there for maybe a year or two years but when they're comfortable and know everything then they move you over to a completely different department. . . The girl they moved off children's [wear] had been on children's nineteen years and they moved her off it and the girls were devastated.
> Interviewer: Who makes those decisions?
> The two senior managers and the two managers down on the floor as well. But that's a thing they do on a regular basis. When they see that they are getting on. . .
> Interviewer: It seems what you are saying [is] that they make petty decisions. Big on petty things, but they don't have the strategic vision. Is that what you are saying?

> Yeah. They're loosing out, yeah they have no strategy. No, they are not doing it for any particular good reason. They are just being petty. Just for the sake of letting you know that they can move you from one place to another. There's no other reason for it. (HS8).

So, the sedimented nature of the culture of the store - the fact that each layer of culture is built on a previous layer - plus the lack of communication about what is the management's logic and intent means that even attempts to generate a multi-skilled core workforce are not interpreted by the staff as an investment in the staff. It is interpreted as the latest skirmish in a long battle for the worker's submission.

Overall then we see that the disorganisation of training means that staff do not feel that they have been invested in. They do not experience training as bringing them into the Home Store community. The fact that training is not built into a cycle of evaluation and training, and the fact that it is not reinforced by a consistency of message coming from managers means that it is ineffective. Instead, it heightens the sense among staff that the management are disorganised, and that the staff are expendable cogs. They end up experiencing their training regime as one through which they are required to sign away some legal protection. Little else is remembered.

Quality Store

As with communication, the staff experience training as being a highly organised. At the time of the case study, training was largely focused on the new technologies which were being used in the store and on reinforcing the correct procedures for handling money. The new technology in question was part of a (Just in Time) JIT system and was primarily being used by the full-time staff. The training was not simply on the mechanics of the technology. In line with what we would expect based on the communications

model used, the logic of its implementation was also explained to the staff. Training is on-going during the person's tenure in the company. There is initial training on checkouts and on the section they will work on. Training courses are run when there is a perceived need and a specialist training officer (at supervisor level) works evaluating the staffs actions, planning and designing training. Training is then carried out by staff.

Some staff do interpret their involvement in training as an investment in themselves. If they are asked to help on training other staff, this helps to give them self confidence and motivates them. Others note that the clarity about their roles in the company comes from the training they receive. However, most people did not mention training as giving them any particular confidence. While staff mentioned issues of flexibility, communication and career development, few mentioned training other than in passing. Training existed. That was all. This may be because training was such an integral part of their life in the company that it was not questioned. There was a clear guideline, you were trained in the way to proceed and everyone knew how to do it. If so, this is a success, since this is precisely the strategy which the management wanted to implement. In this respect, it makes sense to see training as having very successfully constituted the staff to such an extent that it becomes invisible.

The staff are given, through training, the capacity to be good at being a member of the Quality Store staff. Since it is clear what is required, it is relatively straightforward to deliver on it. Having delivered, the staff member becomes part of the company. There is a Quality Store way of doing things which they come to see and accept. When looking at communication I showed a peculiarly rigid hierarchical communication structure. When I suggested to staff that this sort of structure is not the same as in other stores one

told me: 'Probably not, no, but it is the way you are trained. When you come into Quality Store you expect this. It is not unusual' (QS6).

Overall

Once more we can see that there is a greater clarity of purpose and action in Quality Store than in the other two. Through their training the staff are given the capacity to constitute themselves as members of the Quality Store: they learn to think in the Quality Store way. In the other two stores there is not the same clarity around training and people do not have the opportunity to develop their capacity to be what the company wants them to be. In fact, their training becomes one of the many vehicles through which opposition to and derision for the management is articulated. It is a vehicle for the greyness which fogs the relationship between management and staff and crates a context for frequent collisions.

Career Development

Career development is one of the best researched techniques of discipline within Labour Process research. In the early days of labour process research, a number of classic studies noted the role played by career development in obtaining the staff's consent to be managed. Burawoy (1979) noted the use of the internal labour market, where the fight for promotion kept people from challenging the authority of the company, and Edwards (1979) identified bureaucratic control as an ideal type where the company was divided into a dizzying array of layers to facilitate an interminable process of minor promotion through the ranks. Similarly, career development has been noted by HRM theorists as comprising an important key lever (Storey, 1992). It provides a mechanism through which the staff can benefit in material and status terms from constituting themselves in a

fashion positive to the company. Selection of appropriate staff has also been a focus for a great deal of attention within the HRM tradition (Heraty and Morely, 1998), partially for its reliance on psycho-metric testing and psychological and social profiling of staff (Guest, 1987; Townley, 1989; Storey and Sisson, 1993: 121), a most Foucaultian 'normalising' development.

At the same time HRM theorists have focused on the need to slim the company - that is, to remove as many of the layers as is possible. This sets up a dilemma for the company: how to use career development without having an interminable series of stages on the route from the bottom to the top. I have shown in the last chapter that while traditional hierarchical promotion strategies are not possible in this sector, alternative means of conceptualising 'advancement', subject to the structural location of the staff member, have been developed, particularly by Quality Store but also by Super Store. It is still true to note that in actuality these promotion systems operate for very few staff. Because this has been dealt with above, and because in real terms promotion is not an issue for most people, this section deals mainly with staff selection and with letting staff go, though where appropriate, issues of promotion and re-deployment are addressed.

Quality Store is quite careful in relation to staff selection and is quite clear about the grounds and procedures for dismissal. Both factors contribute to the comparatively good relationship between management and staff. In the other stores, hiring, promotion and firing is accompanied by much of the same ambiguity and greyness as exists in the rest of the stores. In Home Store, the rationale for promotion is unclear to the staff and the long-term staff believe that there is an element of social class-based snobbery in the distinction drawn between management and staff. In Super Store, the arbitrary nature of

promotion, and its operation, is also seen as confirming the management's deficit views of their staff. Firing in Super Store is seen to be arbitrary, not always 'by the book' and a further example of the moodiness of management. It also provides one of the stories that shows that the staff can fight for their corner and can, sometimes, win.

Super Store

The staff see no basis for believing that there is any logical basis for deciding who to hire and who not to hire. In fact, they claim that just about anyone who comes along will get a job if they come at the right time. As we have seen, promotion from part-time flexible to part-time regular to full-time is a hazy process. One is never sure when they have crossed the line, and how far they have got across it. The staff also tend to speak of being given different types of work as promotion. These jobs are handed out on as hazy and as seemingly arbitrary a basis as anything else in Super Store. The process of selecting and anointing favourites works just as much at this level as it does in putting people into management positions. The same is true when it comes to firing. It is, perhaps, here that the full extent of the arbitrariness of management can be seen. However, the staff can also see that the arbitrary nature of the decisions leaves some basis for them to win a battle or two of their own.

> This one lad got sacked and he was put back two days later. He was there about two years ago and one of the managers told him to do something or told him he was meant to be in [on another day] and the young lad said "I wasn't". And the manager said "You'll get out there and fucking do it", and this lad says "No I fucking won't", and because he'd cursed back the manager said "You used bad language at me. You're fired". Like, he'd cursed first! There was about six lads that heard it, and his Da was on the phone the next day threatening [them with] solicitors and everything. He had his job back within an hour with an apology and everything. But if they can get away with it they will. (SS3).

There are two points here. This description of a firing is very different from that which was described by the manager in question in chapter five. In other words, the practice as experienced by the staff, differs sharply from the stated rules articulated by the manager. There is a lack of clarity here. The reality does not match the rules. This brings me to the second point. The reason for the greyness around sacking people and the lack of clarity is the fact that for the owner and for some of the managers, the rule book can be thrown out the window (a fact noted in chapter five). In fact, there has been something of a change in practice now in relation to getting rid of staff. With the exception of clear-cut cases (such as robbery), the staff say that no-one is fired anymore. They are eased out by making their conditions unbearable.

> There was a fella working upstairs in the office, he was really untidy and all that. And the boss didn't like him. Everyone knew she didn't like him because he was real lazy and that. Every time she went on her break, he'd sit on the phone, leave the other girl running around trying to answer all the phones. But they gave him a job as a trainee manger to get him out of the office. Then they told him there was no work as a trainee manger, know what I mean? So they do it in a way which was very clever. (SS10)

So, the management continue to exploit the grey areas, even if they generally avoid outright breaches of identifiable rules. But what is good for the goose is good for the gander in Super Store. The staff also have the right to explore grey areas. The staff's experience of how robbery is dealt with shows the full extent of this greyness. Robbing is particularly an issue for the lads in the backstage area since they have most opportunity. Stealing money would be regarded by the staff and the management as being dishonest. The stealing of cigarettes or alcohol would also constitute dishonesty. However, one packet of cigarettes, worth less than two pounds, is more dishonest than a few Mars bars a week coming to a much greater total.

> If you are suspected of being dishonest, you'd get away with it. I have no proof of that, but I suspect that. They'd just keep their eye on you. If you took money out of the till, they'd try to push you out. But if they thought you were robbing chocolate or doughnuts I wouldn't say it would be a big issue.
> Interviewer: Would you have an idea if much of that goes on?
> I know for a fact to be honest with you. In the jacks [toilet] there's a high window with a metal bar at an angle back so you can't break in. But you get your hand in to clean it out. A week later it's just full of empty fucking chocolate bar packets. The lads just walking through the warehouse to go to the jacks [put their] hands in the case, into the jacks, sit down, have a Mars bar, off again.
> Interviewer: How do the staff see it? Do they just figure it is part of their wages or something?
> Yeah. Exactly. That's right across industry. It's just "Well, you're not paying me enough. If you were paying me a wage, I wouldn't do it". It's self justification. " He can afford it. I'm hungry. He doesn't give me a break when he should. I'm going into the jacks, I'm going to have a cigarette". I've seen the lads do it. But they wouldn't steal cigarettes. They would never do that. But little things. "I want it. He's not going to miss it" I wouldn't say they are dishonest people. Not dishonest by any means. Definitely not dishonest people. It is, it's just part of their wages. (SS5)

This same mindset is noted by a number of other staff (SS2; SS3; SS11). The greyness that operates in all areas of the store's working life, in training, in communication, in day to day interaction and in sanctioning and ultimately firing employees is utilised by both the management and the staff. Since the boundaries are unwritten - or rather the boundaries are written but are ignored first by management and subsequently by staff - there is no script to follow except that which unravels in everyday interaction. The unwritten rules have too many clauses to know by heart (who has a father involved in a union, whose parents are friends of the owner, who has enough self-confidence to stand up for themselves, what sort of mood is the manager in today). This is the greyness in which the working consensus (Goffman, 1959: 21) is kept flexible and is constantly written and re-written in interaction. It is a greyness that is the antithesis of a strong culture.

Home Store

I have shown that communications and training in Home Store are characterised by three things: a management who are caught between top management and staff; a high level of disorganisation; and finally a history of distrust between the management and staff through which all things are viewed. These factors are also evident in the career development pattern in the company.

Recruitment seems to the staff to be on the basis of accepting whoever is handy at the time. This concurs with the management's view that anyone can get a job there if they apply at the right time. Most employees are interviewed but some are not (they slip through the cracks and get jobs anyway). Some of these are known to management having worked there before. These may be automatically taken back, or they may be made do an interview - there is no consistent policy.

The interview process does not serve to make people feel like they are the selected as the cream of the crop. A focus on physical appearance and the fact that the management sometimes do not actually carry out anything like a formal interview means that staff sometimes feel devalued by the process. It is seen as simply a formality. You were accepted because you were good looking and you were available, not unlike the process of choosing vegetables. I have noted that when the staff come in for induction they have to sign a declaration that they know how to lift things. This declaration is on the same form as the management use to interview staff. This leads to some embarrassing discoveries.

> When I was in the office last week there was someone on the phone wanting to know how, when her friend and her left their application in the same day and her friend got the interview and she didn't. When I was up there, there was a women going through them and as far as I could see all she was doing was looking at the pictures and sorting them into two different bundles. . . She was just having a flick through them and every now and again she was pulling one out. . . [and] at our induction, it was over Christmas so there was loads of people and it took them so long to hand them [i.e., the application forms] out that you'd loads of time to read everything they'd wrote about you.
> Interviewer: And what sort of things was it?
> Well it was sort of, "Doesn't look too bright". (she laughs). Well, I got the job anyway. Somebody else was showing me something and it had loads of smart [i.e., sarcastic] comments on it. (HS4)

Of course, this does not do serve to convince the employees that they can constitute themselves positively within the company or for their sense that management take them seriously, treat them as professionals and expect them to play an important role in selling the company. Other employees' forms noted such things as bad skin, acne and looking fat. Other people experienced a lack of professionalism in other ways during their interview process. One employee (who had been fired the last time he worked there) went looking for his old job back:

> I walked in and I said to one of the managers "Can I have a job please?" and she said "No", and I said "Ahhhh. Go on!" and she went, "No". I went "I'm really nice and I'm quite a good worker" and she went "Hang on, I'll ring personnel". And then she said "OK, you can have a job. Just go over and fill in an application form". (HS6)

For most of the staff there is no career development in Home Store. They may eventually get more stable hours if they have a sympathetic manager who can look out for them, others may go from a flexi to a full-time contract (a mixed blessing as their new contract will mean they get nothing extra for Sunday and will not be eligible for the hours bonanza which comes about at Christmas and during sales). Most will leave before experiencing anything like stability or promotion. For the small number of full-time staff, recent years have seen more responsibility, but no more money. A very small

group have got posts of special responsibility which do carry more money. Most have not been so lucky. Longer term staff, looking through the eyes of the past, see little possibility for promotion from the floor. They feel that the people who have been there for years have never got the chance to go for management because they were not respected. Even now, some of the staff do make the transition to management but they are primarily college educated. They are not the sort of people (working class people) who have stuck it out there for years.

Nor does the recruitment policy (taking almost anyone who is breathing when they walk through the door) add to the long-term staff's sense that they are doing a job that is valued. Their professionalism is felt to be undermined by the recruitment policy. Rather than becoming a focus for self-expression and development in a manner useful to the company it becomes a symbol of their resistance. Like the women in Super Store they feel that they know how to do the job if only the management were not preventing them in a number of ways including the recruitment of unsuitable staff. One respondent described the current intake of staff as " lot of undesirables"(HS10). She also noted that staff who want to merchandise properly are caught between management who do not care and staff who do not care:

> If a customer comes up to me and even if I have a queue I'd say "I'll get you someone from that Department" and I would put on the light, press the button. And a manager got pissed off at me, but that's what you are supposed to do. Look after the customer. "That lady is looking for help in hosiery" or "That lady is looking for that in another size". [The manager would say] "Is there no-one to get it? Could someone else not get it?" You know, they don't want to be hassled. I keep bringing it to them that the young ones don't care. They are passing through, they couldn't care less. . . They will get their money at the end of the day anyway. They just stand around talking. They are not interested. So all that kind of thing falls back on the full-timers. (HS10)

Unlike Super Store, not many staff made reference to getting fired. Those that did simply said that they would squeeze you out if they wanted to. It seems that on one hand greyness does operate here (people are squeezed out rather than sacked after following a dismissal procedure). On the other hand, the demands of actually finding and keeping staff seems to be more important than getting rid of people.

Overall then the career development system in Home Store is not designed to make the employee feel rewarded or feel that they are part of the company. Rather than providing the employee with a reason to constitute themselves in a manner that is positive to the company, it encourages full-time staff to constitute themselves as professionals in opposition to the company. The lack of material reward (promotion) and the devaluing of the work of the staff which the recruitment process implies, together with the interactional elements of recruitment mean that the view of the management as unprofessional and rude is further buttressed and the possibility of staff developing their capacity within the company is diminished.

Quality Store

Recruitment in Quality Store follows two distinct patters. Traditionally a portion of recruitment happened on the basis of family membership or friendship groups. A Staff member could have another member of the family or a friend taken on. Staff note that the managerial logic was that if one member of a family has a job, the second member of the family is unlikely to do anything inappropriate since this could have a knock-on effect on the original member of the family that was working there. This method of selection has been quite important in the company in the past.

More recently Quality Store has moved more towards using behavioural indicators in job interviews as the major means of selection. The company is quite discerning in terms of the staff it takes on. Possibly because of its reputation as a good employer, it has no difficulty in filling interview places when the need arises. Unlike the other stores, no-one will be taken on simply for being in the right place. This combination of circumstances does have consequences. People who get into the company either have a stake (whether directly through themselves or indirectly through another family member), or have been chosen as the person most suitable for the job and therefore feel valued. How long this feeling of being valued lasts depends on whether or not they get a permanent contact.

Few people do get a permanent contract. A number of people told me that they were surprised to walk in one day and find forty seven of the fifty people they had been hired with all gone. This has lead to ambiguous feelings among those staff. On one hand they have been chosen to remain which is affirming for them. On the other hand, they have seen that management have laid off the vast bulk of the people they started with. There is some feeling that despite the fact that the company has valued them, it can be brutal when necessary.

> They have temporaries finishing up this Saturday, and they're recruiting now for Christmas. So you are saying to yourself "Why are they training in more staff? Why not keep the staff they already have trained in?" Obviously they didn't find them, maybe, good enough. But this particular girl, any hours they asked her to do - and she had children and it was inconvenient at times - but she did them. She left a part-time job she had - 12 to 4 Monday to Friday, the hours suited her and everything - to come and work in Quality Store. And now they are letting her go on Saturday. (QS15)

A number of staff who spoke about the transition from temporary to permanent positions spoke about this inconsistency. They generally rationalised it away - arguing that the

person might not have been good enough, or that the management might have seen a different side that the staff did - but the hint (or at least the question) of injustice remains in the stories. While few people make it into permanent jobs, and fewer still join any sort of career development, the possibility is still held out to staff. For at least some, this is a motivating factor (Tormey, forthcoming). There is also a regular appraisal system through which staff are advised on their work and their most appropriate means of advancement.

Firing stories are quite different in Quality Store than in Super Store. There is no hint of injustice in people being fired, other than those who are let go at the end of their contracts. As with other aspects of the Quality Store organisation, order reigns supreme. Most people do not know of any staff members who have been let go. Such things happen so infrequently because there is no doubt as to what would get you fired. Some staff remembered one person who had stolen money and had been fired. A number of others (QS6; QS11; QS 13; QS 14) noted a degree of self-surveillance based on a clear understanding of rules.

> Interviewer: They have a certain set of rules and you stick to them?
> They don't even say, "You have to do this. You have to do that". But just for your own peace of mind you say "Look . . .". Or even for yourself. You're getting change for yourself. I could be coming from the locker and I'd say to one of the girls "I'm taking twenty pounds from my purse and I'm going to get change". The same thing like that. You do let someone know what you are doing, just in case. Because you do have on your mind that they're watching. . . Small things like that, but everyone kind of does it. (QS13)

The success of the training in the store is evident here (even though the interviewee claims that it is not things that they are told). She noted that at the moment there was a training programme relating to the handling of money in place at that time. She also says

something that is commonly stated among the staff in this store - if someone robs from the shop they are a thief, therefore they could rob from anyone. As I have shown, in Super Store, this is not seen to be the case (the same can also be shown to be true of Home Store). Yet, through training and reinforcement (this point is covered during initial training) this idea has entered the mythology of the company, and is noted by a number of the staff.

Overall then we see that recruitment differs from the other stores in so far as it is far more selective of the staff taken on. This certainly plays a role in building a specific sort of culture in the store. It enables the company to select 'desirable' staff. The further whittling out process which is engaged in at the end of contract periods also enables this. It also emphasises that the company is working in a professional manner, a manner that the staff can then be invited to share. This is quite different to the experience in the other two stores.

Stories about firing of staff fall into two categories. There is some disquiet about some of the staff who are let go at the end of their contracts, but firing for other reasons is recognised as being far from arbitrary. On the contrary, the clarity of the rules, and the self-surveillance which is part of the culture means that staff recognise no difficulty with other firings which have taken place. The fact that there are few firings is not due to a more lax management policy but to a more restrictive management policy which has promoted self-surveillance among the staff.

Overall

There is a real diversity in the way in which the three companies deal with the question of career development. None follow the classical HRM strategy of using profiling or socio-metric testing however, Quality Store does find some success. In Super Store and Home Store the lack of career development opportunities denies staff one of the means of constituting themselves positively towards the company. In fact, the lack of clarity about issues such as promotion and sanctioning can create a context within which the type of employee the company requires becomes so vague that it becomes impossible to orient oneself towards it. Since the rules can change on a whim, the employee does not have the opportunity to build a clear idea of what is required. The looseness of the selection procedure also denies the staff any space in which they can believe the company sees them as professionals. As a consequence their professionalism becomes constituted in opposition to the company. In Quality Store we do find a selectivity in hiring. We also find a great deal of clarity in the staff's understanding of what is expected of them. We also find that staff are so clear about the meanings in the workplace that they are in a position to carry out self-surveillance. In other words we find staff who have to at least some extent successfully internalised the company.

Conclusion

The three case studies show a great deal of diversity in the extent to which the different stores operate techniques of discipline. If we look first at whether or not they create the conditions for the sort of embodied techniques of discipline noted in chapter five we can see that it is only in Quality Store that there is real clarity as to what is required of staff. This clarity identifies the boundaries of acceptable action. It precludes a situation in which the negotiation of roles and rules gives rise to conflict between the management

and staff. We see in Super Store a number of examples (such as the firing story) of the boundaries of acceptable action being explored by both management and staff. Clarity also provides staff with the technical knowledge they need to constitute themselves as company people. It is a precursor to the task of capacity building. We see in Super Store a number of situations in which staff are moved from one job to another without adequate explanation. They are, they feel, subject to the whims of management. The reasons for a particular action by management are not explained to them and may not be well thought out in the first place. The rules change depending on the manager and their mood. In this context it is impossible for someone to know what the management's definition of doing their job well is. This creates a space in which they end up articulating their own sense of professionalism in opposition to management and in opposition to the Anglo-US service model. Without clarity there is no way in which the staff can constitute themselves in a manner the company would deem appropriate.

Where clarity exists, the process of developing the capacity to be something the company want you to be can take place. Training is clearly an important part of this (Rosenthal *et al.*, 1997), but the way training is mobilised differs from location to location. In Quality Store there is a training and development cycle (Storey and Sisson, 1993: 157). Everyone in the store knows the Quality Store way of doing things since they have been trained in it. They are given the tools with which to create themselves in the Quality Store mould. Training is far more sporadic in the other two stores. It does not approximate the standards of rigour applied to it in Quality Store.

As important as training is the consistency with which standards are required of staff. In Home Store in particular we see a situation in which the interaction of staff and

management provides the staff with signals which suggest that many of the ideas they are trained with are unimportant. Managers who show disrespect to customers, swear or act in what is perceived to be an inappropriately informal manner provide signals as to what is important and what is not. For the staff these messages are easy to de-code. Some take their lead from this and act in a similar manner. Others use this to identify themselves as being pro-service and therefore in opposition to management and their model of service. In Quality Store we find no such ambiguity. The messages given off by the management's interaction with staff match the messages given through training.

This embedding of the training message into the day to day work of the company, the overall clarity of message and reinforcement stems from the particularly bureaucratic style of organisation used in the company. The clarity in communication is premised on a clearly laid out and hierarchical chain of command and communication. It is maintained by a constant cycle of evaluation and training. Through this the staff are given the tools to construct themselves in a manner the company would be happy with.

All the above factors can influence the culture of the company, however they do not determine the culture of the company. This is because the staff themselves are active within the processes of discipline. In Super Store we see a classic case of resistance to management authority in the case of the storeroom worker who was fired and re-hired. What we can see here is a pre-disciplinary articulation of arbitrary and personalised power that, by definition, gives rise to resistance (Foucault, 1977: 218 - 219). It is, according to Foucault, precisely this resistance which gives rise to the need for newer means of articulating power. In Home Store we see the way in which the staff struggle to create for themselves an idea as to how the store operates and what is appropriate.

The continual development of a working consensus further emphasises the extent to which the staff are active subjects within discipline. Since discipline is best developed in Quality Store it makes sense that the best examples of the employee being active subjects within the processes of discipline would be evident here. The requirement of reciprocity in the process of communication provides just such an example. The fact that the staff must be involved in setting part of the agenda before communication can be taken seriously means that as a process of discipline it is opened up to staff involvement. The management must be willing to let go of part of the agenda before the process can be engaged in. As a technique it cannot discipline resistant subjects. It can only discipline subjects who have chosen the capacity development it brings. It must, therefore bring capacity development for them. If they do not conceptualise what it has to offer as capacity development it is unlikely to work.

The management have to engage with the staff they have but they do at least get to decide who these staff will be. This means that they can provide themselves with appropriate raw material. This selection process can also be used to provide a sense of being valued to successful candidates. This does not happen in Super Store and Home Store. It does in Quality Store. Given that all three stores are limited in the amount of promotion they are in a position to offer (something which was addressed in the last chapter) this selection process provides an important vetting mechanism. Yet in real terms, only Quality Store has the opportunity to be selective in recruitment. Given the high turnover of staff Home Store and Super Store are compelled to adopt a rather more liberal recruitment policy. This in turn relates back to the material issues discussed in the last chapter. A substantial part of the draw in Quality Store is the terms and conditions of employment.

Overall then, we see that the key indicators of HRM identified in chapter five can have some implications for the management of identity. The capacity of the staff to approximate any service ideal is tied directly through the operation of the key levers to a clear and bureaucratic structure. This further emphasises the discordance between the management of identity on one hand and a moving mosaic organisational form on the other.

CHAPTER EIGHT - CONCLUSION

> [I]f control in work organisations is through 'technical rules' it is hardly a problem should the worker posses a distinct cultural identity. Once control is through the worker's 'normative orientations', the necessary control in work will depend on the removal of any basic cultural differences between him and his superiors (Wickham: 1976: 9 -10)

Introduction

This research takes up where Wickham (amongst others) left off. An opposition is posited between technical rules on one hand and normative orientations on the other - an opposition which must be questioned. This is particularly true of the literature on the post-modern workplace. Heydebrand, (1989), Clegg, (1990), Crooks *et al.* (1992) and Hargreaves (1994) all identify the destruction of rule based, hierarchical systems of control with the development of identity management within the post-modern workplace. To this potent mixture one can also add numerical and functional flexibility - factors which could add to the opaqueness of a 'moving mosaic' organisational form. These factors can also be found clustered together in the academic literature on Human Resource Management (HRM) - a body of literature which draws much of its inspiration from the post-modernist literature yet tries to articulate this through a classically modernist research agenda. In the work of Guest (1987), for example, a committed body of staff (that is, a body of staff that identifies with the company, its goals and its means of attaining them) is a prerequisite for the development of flexibility in the company. The question as to whether and how these things are compatible is not addressed.

The voluminous literature on the management of corporate culture does not address this problem sufficiently for a number of reasons. The assumptions as to the relationship between commitment, culture and identity are largely untenable. Most of the literature relies on a functionalist basis which does not give rise to sufficiently probing research questions or research methodologies. The traditional methods of research on this area (attitudinal surveys and teaching case studies based on management interviews), simply do not provide adequate data. One notable exception to this rule is the work of du Gay (1996) who has done a great deal to move forward research on questions of identity at work and its management.

Between Determination and the Free-floating Subject

However du Gay's work does not go far enough. Despite the fact that he follows Burawoy (1979: 34) in accusing symbolic interactionists of denying the macro-level structural reality within which people operate (1996: 33) his own conclusions come close to doing the same thing. While he identifies that there are a number of different factors (sex, race, class, part-time vs. full-time work) which can influence the processes of 'making up' people at work he does not ascertain or attempt to describe regularities in the effects of these factors. Ultimately the explanatory account rests in the ambiguous biography of the individual rather than in a structurally located biography. In this respect his account verges towards an individualism which could be argued to be anti-sociological (Bourdieu, 1998: ix). As Bourdieu argues, although the individual does have freedom of will their biography is structurally located. There is therefore a relatively predictable system of dispositions of individuals, derived from their biography which he calls a *habitus*. He notes that a *habitus* is:

> a product of biographical experience (so that just as no two individual histories are identical, so no two *habitus* are identical, although there are classes of experience and therefore classes of *habitus* - the *habitus* of classes). (1993: 46).

The *habitus* is itself structured by the actions of social institutions (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977: 54). Certainly, while du Gay has broken new ground, he has left space for the development of an understanding of the *habitus* of structurally located subjects of identity management. In the case of employees in commercial organisations in a capitalist economy, it makes sense to suggest that the material basis of the relationship between employer and employee could come to constitute a 'necessary' limit on the culturally arbitrary relationship. This is one of the structurally located relationships that needed to be explored.

In this respect Bourdieu's concept of 'necessary culture' is very useful. It allows us to identify that employees in capitalist industry, such as the case study stores, work within a material context in which profit is the primary goal of the company. Within such a context, material interest has already been established as a valid goal for the employees. Material interest becomes a 'necessary' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977:8) part of the culture since, if it was not present, the primary motivation of the company - its very life force - would be diminished.

It is notable that in Quality Store in particular, the model of staff identity into which the company wishes to socialise their employees is heavily focused on the economic. Their idea is that staff should become *homo economicus (*or even - in less sexist terms - *femina economica)* and that the company can benefit from entering into an economic contract (rather than a more purely emotive identification) with their staff. Ultimately

the company wishes for the staff to identify with the company in so far as it is a natural home for *homo* and *femina economic(us/a)*. It places - one might say 'necessarily' places - material issues at the core of the relationship.

The necessity of material issues to the culture of the workplace also explains why the management in the stores treat the management of staff culture and identity as being bounded by material issues (in the case of Super Store and to a lesser extent Home Store) or as being inter-linked with material issues (in Quality Store). Certainly the staff also view their relationship with their employer as being bounded by material issues. It is interesting to note that the company which has been most successful in constructing a positive relationship with their staff - Quality Store - not only treats material issues as a boundary but mobilises them (through various material incentives such as competitive rates of pay, good benefits and conditions of employment) in their attempt to manage staff identity. The contention that identity constitution is resident in an ideal plane and therefore can be separated from issues on the material plane can be seen to be problematic in light of the case studies. Certainly within these stores two things are abundantly clear. First, the employer/employee, work/pay relationship between the protagonists in all the stores is an integral, fundamental and necessary part of their experience of their work and lives in the store. Secondly, it is the store which does most to mobilise the material relationship between employee and staff for the purposes of managing identity that is most successful in providing a space for the staff to constitute themselves in a manner that the company has stated as its objective.

At the same time one must be careful of over-determining one's analysis. The work of Clegg in particular highlights the paradox of emancipation. He notes that a "sociological

framework is required in which neither the indetermination of the free floating signifier nor the determination of the privileged economic subject holds sway" (1989: 179). In the Irish literature economics and gender are the two factors most often held to be determinant. In their competing interpretations of the relationship between flexibility and gender both Hakim (through her quasi-biological understanding of gender)(1995; 1996a; 1996b; 1998) and O'Connor (through her focus on legislative-economic factors) (1998) show signs of over-determination (Tormey, forthcoming). In structurally locating the subject we must ensure that we do not impose upon them a logic which is not their own. It is too easy, and too dangerous, for the researcher to assert for themselves the status of the omniscient narrator, and to override on the basis of some pre-formed perception the logic which informs the decisions of the research subjects and simply ascribe that logic the status of false consciousness.

This provides a space in which our understanding of the relationships and processes under question can become more complex. In the case study stores material interests could never be simply read-off of the structural location of the respondents. This is seen most clearly in relation to part-time work. The way in which part-time work was understood by the employees depended on a number of factors including their social class, age, gender and marital status. The same job on the same pay with the same hours could be experienced as ideal by a young, unmarried female student, as far from ideal by woman who was finished full-time education and was recently married and as an outrageous attack on his professionalism by a middle-aged, married, man. The fact that the two women did not have the same view of their situation, or that the two married people did not have the same view of their situation does not imply false consciousness on anyone's behalf. It is a reflection of the fact that the social world is structured on the

basis of a number of overlapping factors which result in a complex and often contradictory social reality. However, this complex and contradictory social reality still produces a number of distinct groups according to fairly regular patterns.

As well as allowing us to recognise the variety of contradictory factors which influence the decisions of our respondents this approach allows us to see that a sense of identity is not a fixed entity. It recognises that the sense of identity is in a perpetual process of formation. As Cohen puts it, in relation to ethnicity, "Ethnic group formation is a continuing and often innovative cultural process of boundary maintenance and reconstruction" (1978: 397). The same can be said about any group identity - including the identity of the employees. Employees who will, in one circumstance, identify strongly with the company will, in another context, seek to protect themselves against the company. The sense of identity can ebb and flow depending on the context. This can be seen in the supervisors in Quality Store who identify strongly with the company, show high degree of satisfaction with the company and who constitute themselves through their work in the company. In some respects they seem to be the perfect 'finished product' of the techniques of discipline and selection utilised in the company. But in identity formation, the 'product' is never finished. When faced with a change in their designation - a change that could materially affect them - they joined the union. One supervisor already quoted in chapter seven said:

> [The company] said "Maybe we'll still have supervision, but maybe they won't be called supervision, maybe they'll be called deputy supervision, but we want to get rid of the supervision category". And of course once that was said - BANG! Fury! "What's going to happen my job? If I don't make it up to this I'm going to come down to this. I've got a mortgage on my house on top of everything else". . . [W]e had very little back up, as most of the staff in the UK have very

> little back up. They say "Right. Here's your new job description and that's it". So we said "Right. We best join some sort of an association - a union". (QS12).

This change is seen as reflecting a tension in the identity of the supervisors. This was an attempt to "start protecting our rights as employees". On the other hand it as an action by a group "who are within a sort of, almost within a management structure, as such" (QS12). This is the sort of tension in which identities of all the employees are, to some extent, cast. We find a similar tension in those who identify with service and doing a job well but identify against the company, and in management who recognise the importance of material issues in shaping their own relationship with the company. We can expect that it would be very rare for employees to either identify completely with or against the company. Their identity is always caught in a tension between the two - a tension which is not a false consciousness, simply a logical response to a contradictory situation.

Most crucially, we should not assume that the individual employee is simply a subject of the practices of discipline brought to bear. They are always active within the processes. The case study data shows this quite clearly. In Super Store training does happen, but what it means to the staff - how the language of training is articulated by them - is not necessarily what the management intended. In Home Store we see that many of the same communication systems exist as in Quality Store, but the way they are interpreted by the staff - looking at them through the eyes of their past experience - is certainly not the same. The staff are active within the construction of the discourse. Possibly the most interesting example is that of the communication system in Quality Store. Where systems do not allow a sufficiently active role for the staff in setting the agenda - where there is no reciprocity - they are not taken all that seriously by many of the staff. It is the capacity of the staff to set part of the agenda in interaction which distinguishes Quality

Store. It is precisely when the active nature of the staff's involvement in the practices of discipline is recognised and facilitated (albeit as an unintended consequence of a historic context) that the practices of discipline become most effective. It is with the *de facto* recognition that they are not in complete control that the management project is most successful.

HRM, Greyness and the Moving Mosaic - the Tension in Post-modernity

There are other limitations to the usefulness of du Gay's work in addressing the topic in question. Like others who have looked at supposedly post-modern organisations he does not address directly the core question of the relationship between flexibility, bureaucratic and non-bureaucratic organisational forms and identity management. According to Foucault (1977) the shift from the authoritarian economy of power to the disciplinarian economy of power means a focus on clarity of meaning, a hierarchical or pyramidal organisational structure, continuous surveillance and measurement against a norm, training and ultimately, self-surveillance. Discipline operates where the subject develops their capacity to be something - a processes which simultaneously diminishes their political power. The effects of discipline can be seen in people who have developed their capacity to be what the company would like them to be, who understand this as a process of self-development and who operate self-surveillance.

Despite the difference in material preferences between the company and its employees, there is evidence that some employees in one of the case study stores - once more, Quality Store - have been subject to discipline in this respect. The effect is certainly not total, but it is identifiable. So what are the conditions in which even such a partial

management of identity are possible? I have already noted that the mobilisation of material rewards is an important factor. There is also a clear relationship between the likelihood of staff engaging in disciplinary practices and the extent to which there is clarity about the management's understanding of roles, rules, responsibilities, goals and means. This clarity does not lead inexorably to the precise management of cultural identity (clarity over the management's proposals for extending Sunday work did not prevent a short strike happening in Quality Store) but it does create a context in which discipline can take place. Where staff know what is expected of them, where they know the basis on which their performance is evaluated, they are in a position to act appropriately. Where there is no clarity as to what the criteria are, where the criteria and the technique of measurement change according to the mood of the employer (Super Store) or where rules are broken by or are not consistently enforced by managers (Home Store), the staff are not in a position to know what is expected of them. In that situation their experience of rules and roles is through sanctions (they get sanctioned when they overstep an invisible mark), rather than experiencing rules and roles as a resource in getting the job done.

This lack of clarity also sets up the possibility for inter-personal conflict. As Goffman has noted a working consensus - an unwritten agreement through which each participant in an interaction is allowed establish a tentative official rule over something, or an official definition of something - can best be established when the issue in question is vital to one person and of little consequence to others (1959: 21). This is not the case in a situation in which a manager and a member of staff are negotiating the meaning of a piece of work. Therefore, in workplace situations in which meanings have to be continually negotiated and re-negotiated due to a lack of clarity, any working consensus arrived at

will be very tentative and subject to break-down. As the episode in Super Store in which an employee was fired and promptly re-hired, and the way in which employees are treated when they try to avoid official channels in requesting time off in Home Store, such interactions can easily slip into a more authoritarian mode of power articulation (what Foucault would have called a more authoritarian 'economy of power'). Such interactions are experienced by the employee as acts of symbolic violence rather than as an opportunity for capacity development.

If clarity is a necessary precursor to discipline, it is not sufficient in itself. Quality Store measures, compares, trains, re-trains and re-evaluates. Training has become a constant and on-going part of the job. It has been ascribed a high status within the company and has been resourced, with a staff member given over to its planning and implementation and further staff given relatively freely from the floor to carry it out. When the management performance is evaluated it is one of the criteria that is scrutinised. The situation is quite different in the other stores. In Super Store, in particular, training is not highly valued. Perhaps because of the lack of training of the managers they tend to prioritise experience over training. Training is not embedded in the routine of workplace. It is something that is a distraction provided by outsiders. It is not the result of a reflective/reflexive process.

The result is quite different patterns of capacity development. This can be clearly seen in the case of the long-term staff in all three stores. In Super Store and Home Store the long terms staff have developed a sense of their own professionalism based on a vision of what constitutes service. In both stores they see themselves as being good at service and as taking pride in service. In both cases this is constituted in opposition to management

rather than shared with them. Capacity development goes hand in hand with the increase in their political power. In Super Store it is said that the staff could run the company without the management, or as one employee put it - "we are the lifeblood. Not me specifically, but the lads are the lifeblood . . . they are his [i.e., the owner's] most valuable asset" (SS5). Such valuable staff can afford to "have a mouth on them" (SS3) and still be kept despite the fact that turnover is so high. In Home Store it is said that the management are a hindrance to the staff in their attempt to provide a good service. In both stores the Anglo-US service model of the management is criticised by staff who see it opposed to their continental, personal service model. While the staff have developed their capacity they have done so in a manner opposed to the management's ideal. While there is evidence that the same thing has happened to some extent in Quality Store (the survey data does indicate some of the long term staff are dissatisfied with the current situation in the store and one long-term employee interviewed spoke about the decline in standards of service in the store - a reference to the Anglo-US service model, which is in the ascendant) the more general picture is one that is quite different. If we look at the majority of long-term female staff we see less evidence of them constituting themselves and their professionalism in opposition to the company. In fact, we see substantial evidence that their process of capacity development has tied them to the company. They can develop themselves within the company and in a manner which is desirable to the company.

In the case study stores these criteria of clarity and consistency are fulfilled because of the fact that Quality Store operates a clear, hierarchical bureaucracy. Consistency of directions from management is achieved because there is a chain of command which is followed by the management. Weber's (1968) ideal type of bureaucracy as a formal

hierarchy with different ranks, the application of rules according to the book and promotion according to clear criteria not only applies to the store that is most successful at managing culture, it accounts to a substantial extent for the success. Both other stores operate a degree of opaqueness or greyness in their culture. This in turn leads directly to difficulties in the construction of a space in which the employee can constitute themselves in line with the company's ideal. Put simply, a high degree of opaqueness (an integral component of the moving mosaic organisational form) seems to be incompatible with identity management.

Flexibility can also cause problems in this respect, over and above the divisions it highlights as a material issue. The limited capacity for interaction between staff in situations where they are on flexible hours, combined with the social class and age differences between categories of staff which were evident in the store creates an ideal environment for the construction of a diversity of sub-cultural groups. This is, in turn, linked to the question of clarity. Where clarity does not exist, the divisions are exacerbated by interactional factors.

Overall then we can conclude that there are tensions between flexibility and the management of identity on a number of bases. Numerical flexibility is tied to the material basis of work and therefore is likely to be one of the 'necessary' cultural bases for divisions between the company and its employees in commercial concerns in a capitalist economy. The deployment of flexibility also creates an interactional basis for sub-group development in the companies. The first of these factors sets limits to the extent that management and staff will share common goals. The second can exacerbate the cultural divisions between management and staff and between staff and staff. Where clarity exists

it can work against this second tendency but within the limits set by the first. Such clarity is derived from bureaucracy. It is directly opposed to the opaqueness or greyness of a moving mosaic. In this respect, there are contradictions between these two supposed pillars of post-modern workplaces. It may be that while workplaces may show signs of one tendency or another, and while some workplaces many show signs of both, the tension between the two is likely to mean that they will not be tenable in the medium or long term.

Whether or not these sort of findings can be applied more widely remains unclear. Although Quality Store has been held up as an exemplar of HRM in the international literature, some may argue that it is untypical of such textbook cases precisely because of its highly bureaucratised form. In this context, they may point to other supposed exemplars of HRM. There are a number of reasons for re-asserting the importance of the Quality Store case. The focus here was on a particular type of market - one in which product markets were tight but labour markets were loose. Within that context Quality Store was one of the only exemplars to be found. It may be that other practices, more in keeping with the 'moving mosaic' literature, can be found in other economic sectors. Ethnographic research on such markets is the best way to ascertain the answer to this question. However it is not clear that they would be all that different from Quality Store. Certainly there is already some evidence that team work, functional flexibility and responsible autonomy can go hand in hand with a tightening of rules and task or job specification (Thompson, 1993: 193). Secondly, even if exemplars of a moving mosaic are found in other economic sectors, it is valid to ask how important they are. Given the size and importance of the retail trade (over 11 per cent of the working population) the empirical significance of such highly researched but small sectors needs to be questioned.

Next to farming, more people do retail work than any other type of work. Therefore retail, and the Quality Store case, cannot be easily ignored.

Overall then we can conclude that there is a difficulty at the heart of post-modern organisational analysis. The tensions between flexibility and identity management means that while both may exist side by side, this is unlikely to be sustainable. Therefore the posited general process of de-differentiation is unlikely to progress very far in the creation of some new form of organisation built on these two processes. Rather than searching hopefully for some sort of epoch-shift, it may make more sense to analyse and describe different bureaucratic forms.

The Case Studies and the Wider World

In chapter two I identified that there was a clear gap in the literature on the management of culture and identity in relation to Ireland. As the chroniclers of Irish HRM practice (Gunnigle, Morely, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley, 1997) have noted, there are occasions when there is no substitute for rigorous case study analysis of HRM practice. Ideally this should be something like the tradition of workplace ethnography which exists in labour process research in the UK. Such a body of analysis does not currently exist in Ireland. This research, therefore fills a crucial gap in the literature on management and staff in Ireland. Much of the international work in this area is infused with a spurious universality. While it cannot be expected to speak directly about Ireland, for example, the tendency not to sufficiently address the context of the research is a weakness.

The value of the case study methodology which I adopted here is that it enables the different case studies to be treated as multiple experiments. As Yin notes:

> [A]n individual case or subject is considered akin to a single experiment, and the analysis must follow cross-experiment rather than *within*-experiment design and logic. (1994: 46) (Italics in original).

As chapter three noted I chose the case studies in order to enable me to identify the relevance of such factors as the size of the company, the national origin of the company and the type of employee relations they favoured. Perhaps the clearest indication of all is that size is not a determinant of the management of culture. Despite the fact that Home Store and Super Store were vastly different in scale (both in terms of the size of the store and in terms of the size of the company), there are remarkable similarities between them. Both operate highly personalised control systems and both neglect to manage issues other than sales and turnover. Clearly then, size is not a determinant. While there is evidence to link size with HRM sophistication (Roche, 1995) it seems that size is not a sufficient factor for the development of sophisticated identity management machinery.

Nor is national culture. It is true that Quality Store is the only store of the three to originate outside Ireland, and it is true that it is the only one to have any real success in the management of culture. There is then a contingency between the two factors. However, the relationship is not causal. Firstly, Quality Store is clearly not typical of the UK, the country in which the company originated. This is noted by a number of authors writing about the company. It is also clear when one compares the account of Quality Store contained here with the accounts of training and management decision making in Britain found in Storey and Sisson (1993), and Lane (1989). Clearly the management culture of the company is responsible for some of the company's success, but this is not

in turn traceable to the management culture of Britain. While national origin does not explain the differences encountered in the case studies, national systems of organisation are likely to be important in a more general way. Given the differences between training systems in different countries, and given the importance of training of managers, there is likely to be some relationship between the national origin of the company and their capacity to deliver on HRM and identity management.

If the national origin of the companies did not make much of a difference to the success of the case studies in managing culture, the country in which they operated did, for a number of reasons. First, different countries will have different economic contexts. The case study data collected here refers to an Ireland in which the Celtic Tigress had been conceived but was not yet born. A stronger economy is likely to have a number of effects on key factors in this research (Tormey, forthcoming). There is some evidence in Ireland that since the case studies were carried out the change in economic fortunes has made it even more difficult for companies like Home Store to recruit. This may lead them to re-double their efforts to hold onto staff, for example by adjusting their packages of remuneration, or it may lead them even further into marginal labour markets. This second option may lead in turn to a growth in the employment of ethnic minorities, something which may eventually add a race dimension to identity construction. In this respect it is noticeable that race, which plays such a big part in du Gay's stores, played little or no part in this research. The changes in our economy may change this.

The legislative framework is also likely to make a difference. For example, the effective marginal tax rates on a second earner in a marriage (usually the wife) was calculated in 1991 as being as high as 62 per cent (Callan and Farrell, 1991: 85). This is a clear

disincentive to work. For women on low income whose husbands are on social welfare the effective tax rate can be even higher - up to 100 per cent for women earning up to IR£112 per week in 1991 (Callan and Farrell, 1991: 92). Again, this constitutes a disincentive. Work to remove such disincentives increases the potential labour supply from this particular constituency. As Dex has shown (1992), a substantial proportion of the international variations in women's work can be understood with reference to the legislative context. Such a change may make a difference to the selection and deployment policy of some companies. Companies may find they have greater freedom to utilise flexibility under such circumstances. This in turn is likely to have an effect on the possibility of cultural management.

One could make similar arguments in relation to student involvement in the workforce. The fact that increasing numbers of people now complete post-primary education and transfer to third level education in Ireland (Drudy and Lynch, 1993: 4) and in Britain (Roberts, 1995: 7) changes the nature of the youth labour market. Young people are no longer looking for full-time work at 16, since they are mostly in full-time education until their early twenties. However, the low rate of student support for third-level students and the high percentage of third level students who receive no support means that some form of flexible work is increasingly important for this constituency. Changes in government policy, through increasing the number of places in further education, changing the rate at which student support is paid, or through legislation which restricts the amount of work which can be done by post-primary pupils are all likely to have an effect on the make up of this labour force. For example, the 1999 Education (Welfare) Bill, seeks to make it an offence for an employer to employ a child if that employment is likely to interfere with that child's education. If such a provision were introduced and

enforced to the widest of its capacity then it could bring about a radical change in the labour market from which companies like Super Store draw.

We cannot generalise empirically from the findings of these case studies to retail in general. However, it is possible to identify the extent of the groups which these processes are likely to affect. Of the 137,200 (Table 4.1) people working in retail trades, 69,378 are employees in Food and Drink enterprises (Table 4.4) (i.e., the category which is closest to the case study stores). 39 per cent of these work in establishments with 50 or more persons engaged, that is 22.58 per cent of those working in all retail establishments (Table 4.3 and 4.4). If we take as a group those in Food and Drink establishments with 20 or more people engaged we find they make up 31.01 per cent of these working in all retail establishments. If retail as a whole constitutes 11.3 per cent of those working in Ireland, medium and large Food and Drink retailing then constitutes roughly 3.5 per cent of those working in Ireland.

It makes sense to hypothesise that at least some of the characteristics which were found to be common to all the stores here are likely to be widespread across this industry as the case studies were chosen to represent a number of extremes. Some attempt to manage the identity of employees was found in all three stores. While this might not seem unusual in the case of the large stores, it certainly does seem strange in the case of the medium-sized store in which the management have not followed third-level management courses and are generally unfamiliar with the language of the management-training industry. It seems that this sort of understanding of management-staff relations has entered the public consciousness even outside its primary constituency.

The case studies do not allow us to deduce the way in which this is translated into practice across the industry. However, they do give some pointers as to how this could be researched. They make clear that simply asking employers or managers if they have instituted policies that are thought to be consistent with HRM (the primary approach for researching the extent of HRM) is likely to tell us little about what this focus on identity management means in practice across this industry (or any industry). All the case studies had some mechanism for training and communication, yet what this meant in practice differed dramatically. This highlights the need for more detailed research instruments. The data also indicates a means of identifying management capacity to deliver HRM. Perhaps the best survey-based indicators of management capacity might be based on looking at the length and nature of management training and at the nature of management assessment in the company. An indication of whether or not managers are assessed on their capacity to develop and deliver on a number of the key HRM levers would give some indication that the company had integrated such thinking into their work, as opposed to simply utilising the language in a minor, additive sense. It might also be suggested that researchers need to look at the population from which they draw their samples. Research on companies which are identified as market leaders or in the top one thousand companies nationally is unlikely to provide a full picture in relation to the effects of the spread of the HRM managerial discourse. Recent research in Britain on small firms has used the *Yellow Pages* (the British equivalent of the *Golden Pages*) as a sample population (Matlay, 1999). Given that all companies with a telephone get an automatic free listing, this seems to be a far more representative population.

It would also be interesting to know if this managerial logic is found in even smaller stores. The general manager and the owner in Super Store (the one case study from

what might be termed the independent sector) had both worked in large multiples before coming to Super Store. It is possible that this is the root of their use of the HRM managerial logic. The fact that they are a franchise store and consequently have to adhere to certain standards of the franchise may also be a factor. Again, further research into the relationship between large multiples and the independent sector is necessary. There is evidence that small companies with one or a small number of major clients are likely to be affected by this (MacMahon, 1995). It is possible that small retail outlets with one major supplier will be similarly affected. The McDonald's experience suggests that this is so (Ritzer, 1996). If franchising is the determinant here then the increasing penetration of franchise operations into all areas of Ireland, rural and urban, may lead to a spread of the logic of cultural management far from its 'natural' home in large international companies. Evidence from the Super Store case study does suggest that the franchise is important in spreading the logic of cultural management. The focus on customer service is franchise-wide. However, it is also noticeable from this case study that customer service is not one of the areas of the store that the franchise monitors closely, unlike cleaning rituals for example. It is possible that, like Home Store, the franchise may be important in spreading the language of customer service without actually embedding it, through surveillance, measurement and training, in the practices of their members. The evidence here is suggestive of such a process, however further research is necessary.

According to the 1994 Annual Services Inquiry there were 17,451 Food and Drink retailing enterprises in the state (CSO, 1996x: Table 5). The major symbol/franchise retail chains (ADM/Londis, Musgraves, BWG which operate the Londis, Super Valu, Centra, and Spar franchises) account for roughly 880 of these. There is no precise way

of knowing how many employees are in these stores - many of the franchise distributors do not have even rough ideas as to how many people are employed in the stores they have franchised. Some industry sources use a rough multiplier of 8 to 10 employees per store, giving a total figure of 7,040 to 8,800 in these chains alone. Together these franchise operations alone may account for almost as many employees as the largest of the major multiples. Clearly, the effects of the growth in franchising in the retail sector is something which requires further exploration.

Overall, 19,932 people are employed in stores with less than 10 people engaged. 42,540 people are engaged (i.e., employees plus unpaid workers) in such stores. These figures represent 16.64 per cent of employees and 18.11 per cent of persons engaged in the retail trade overall (Tables 3.4 and 4.4). The difference between the two is made up of relatives assisting without pay in the store. It seems very likely that the family-based paternalism which was found in evidence in Super Store would also be a factor in a substantial proportion of these stores. In Super Store, the idea of identification with the family (and the recognition by the staff that they were not members of the family and that this fact was to their cost) worked to set up oppositional relations within the store. Quality Store on the other hand provides an example of a situation in which the use of family as a means of recruitment was done to positive effect. However this was in a situation in which there were not actually members of the owner's family present to benefit inordinately from the work they were seen to do. It makes sense to suggest that the interaction between paternalism and the management of culture is likely to be a major factor in the large number of small enterprises which make up a substantial proportion of the retail sector.

A positive relationship with a union which represented the staff's interest was hugely important in the case studies. In Quality Store it provided a basis on which the management had a level of reciprocity with the staff. In the other two stores the lack of such a relationship provided a constant basis for opposition between the management and staff. In Home Store a union did represent the staff while in Super Store it was the lack of such representation which provided the basis for opposition. As the case studies show, such a relationship can provide a mechanism through which the staff can become integrated into the process of identity management. What was most important was that the company engaged with the staff in the processes of discipline. This means giving up some control. It was only what the staff were able to act upon the techniques of discipline by setting part of the agenda that it became effective. Clearly, this suggests that Kochan and Osterman's model of a Mutual Gains Enterprise (1994), one which recognises difference in preferences between management and staff and works together within that context, has some value. As Roche and Turner note:

> The common view of commentators internationally is that for HRM innovations to prove effective in enhancing company performance, they must first involve coherent sets of policy changes, and secondly, dovetail with attempts to build new and more co-operative relations with unions (1998: 83 - 84).

In an Irish context this is likely to be more viable than in some UK and US studies since Irish unions have actively signalled their interest in the development of quality programmes in Irish workplaces (ICTU, 1993; Monks *et al.*, 1998: 196).

Within the grocery trade in Ireland most of the major multiples are unionised. Stores like Tesco, Superquinn, Roches Stores and Marks and Spencer have agreements with Mandate, the main retail workers union. The symbol sector and the independent sector have a lower rate of unionisation, simply because they largely need to be organised

individually rather than collectively. For the medium to large stores in this sector unionisation stands at over 50 per cent. Of course, being union-organised is no guarantee that the company will use this relationship wisely. As Gunnigle, Morely, Clifford, Turner, Heraty and Crowley (1997) have shown, the growth in employee voice models has been in non-union models. The Quality Store experience suggests that this will not be as fruitful for the companies concerned as a good relationship with their union.

I will now turn my attention to the staff. We know from the Labour Force Survey and the Annual Services inquiry that contingent work is widespread in this industry. Of those working in medium and large Food and Drink enterprises almost six out of ten (58.40 per cent) are part-time workers. Drawing on the case studies it makes sense to suggest that short-hour contracts and cases of employees with very low take-home pay are likely to be fairly widespread (stories of employees working to cover the cost of their bus fare appeared in all the case study stores). It is also notable that Home Store has one of the highest hourly rates of pay in the industry. This means that other retail employers are likely to have even lower rates of take-home pay. Since the material situation of the employees is so important in framing the interaction between the management and staff and in the process of the identity formation for the staff it makes sense to assume that the same sort of constraints which operate in the case study stores will operate in other stores within this sector.

The student labour market was an important source of employees as well as an important factor in influencing the orientations to work of the employees. These were generally people who were willing to accept relatively poor pay and conditions since they did not

intend to stay with the company as a career and because it met their needs for some money and for a social outlet. Overall, as Table 4.6 identifies, we can expect at least 75.43 per cent of those in the Shop Assistants and Related Workers category to be part-time. There are not precise figures for the number of student employees in the stores. However if we look at the figures for young single employees in the store we get some guideline. According to the 1991 census there were 27,364 young (15 - 24 years) single Shop Assistants and Related Workers in retail (Table 4.5a and b). They constitute 40.46 per cent of the total number of Shop Assistants and Related Workers listed by the census. Many of these will be student workers, primarily in part-time jobs. Although in the case studies their jobs were often gendered their orientations to work did not show any sign of being gendered. From an employers point of view they provide a flexible and cheap alternative to other sources of labour. However, in the case studies they were the employees most susceptible to being missed in the process of identity management. Also included in this 40 per cent group would be a number of young women who had finished full-time education.

These women make up another distinct labour force. The orientations to work of this group are quite different and subject to change over time. During their early career they want full-time work. As (and if) they enter the early child-rearing phase many shift towards looking for stable part-time work with relatively fixed hours. (Whether or not they do this - indeed, whether or not they have children in the first place - can depend on their rate of pay [Beechy and Perkins, 1987]). Table 4.5a and b shows that the 1991 census identifies that women make up 40,030 of the 67,632 in the category called Shop Assistants and Related Workers. As chapter four identifies, this figure under-represents the number of women shop assistants, probably by a couple of thousand. Of those

identified by the census, 60 per cent are women aged over 24 or non-single women aged 15-24. If the patterns found in the case studies are an accurate reflection across the industry, then many will be forced to accept part-time work against their will as previously existing women's jobs in retail have become part-time (Beechy and Perkins, 1987; Tormey, forthcoming). This is not conducive to the management of their identity.

The Last Word

In 1991 when this research began, retail was not a sexy subject for research. Due to the work of people like Zygmunt Bauman and Paul du Gay, this has changed. Evidence of this can be seen in the fact that at the 1999 Labour Process Conference a whole spate of retail related studies suddenly appeared. On an empirical level in Ireland, a rash of reports on training in retail and on the sector as a whole by state agencies (Forfás and Fás) are expected to be published within the next year.

However, a focus on retail, while welcome is only part of the story. Retail is important because of its importance to the economy, because of the way in which it interfaces production and consumption and because of the way in which identity formation and consumption have become inter-linked. It is also important because of the people - the women - that work there. It is worth listening to these women. They are some of the great unheard voices of Irish labour.

APPENDIX A - BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX B(a) - SAMPLE SEMI-STRUCTURED

INTERVIEW STORY BOARD

Interview Notes

This study is about what it is like to work in Large Retail/Supermarket, and about changes in the way in which managers manage. It isn't really controversial, but it is interesting. No-one hears the tapes except me and no-ones quotations can be used in a way which would identify the person who said it. Everything said is confidential.

- Reports
- Stories
- Quotes

1. Can you describe for me how you came to work in retail in general and here in particular?

   → Is this typical?

2. Your job/typical day?

   → Has this changed since you've been here?

3. Other changes?

→ Training? [describe]

→ Structure? → more people/less people?

→ more p-t/less p-t?

→ use p-t differently?

→ Managers and Staff → More/less formal?

→ more part of a team?

→ socialise together in work/out of work?

4. Describe the Manager's Job?

5. Why do you stay here?

→ Strike

→ Unions attitude

6. Anything Else?

APPENDIX B (b) - SAMPLE RETAIL QUESTIONNAIRE

RETAIL WORK QUESTIONNAIRE

My name is Roland Tormey and I am a Sociology post-graduate student in Trinity College Dublin. As part of the research for my thesis I am carrying out this survey. It is a survey about working in a retail environment. It is the first part of my research into the relationship between management and staff and the work that they all do.

The survey has two functions. The first is to gather information about the people who work in retailing. Are they largely male or female? How old do they tend to be etc. etc. The second is to find out the attitudes of those people towards their work. Section B of the survey contains a list of statements about your work that you can agree or disagree with.

The purpose of this questionnaire is not to discover what individuals think, as such, but what general attitudes are. Because of this, it will be impossible for anyone to tell what any one person has said. Furthermore, the whole process is covered by a strict rule of confidentiality, which means that your name will be available to no-one but myself. This survey is purely for my thesis. I have not been sponsored or asked by anyone to do it.

At a later date I hope to conduct interviews with individuals to ask them about some other aspects of their working lives. Just like this questionnaire, such an interview would be completely confidential. The collection of such information is extremely important for my research, so your co-operation is very much appreciated.

Section A.

This Section is designed to give a basic picture about the work histories of people who work in retailing and their attitudes to Trade Unions.

1. Gender **GEN**

Male	❑ 1
Female	❑ 2

2. Which of the following age categories do you fall into? **AGE**

less than 20 years old	❑ 1
20-24 years old	❑ 2
25-29 years old	❑ 3
30-44 years old	❑ 4
45-65 years old	❑ 5

3. Are you currently married, singe or living with someone? **MARSTAT**

Single	❑ 1
Living with someone	❑ 2
Married	❑ 3
Other (Specify) _____	❑ 4

4. Do you have any children? **KIDS**

Yes	❑ 1
No	❑ 2

4.(b) How many children do you have?
(If none then '0') _____

5.(a) Which of the following is the form of formal education you were engaged in full-time, most recently? **EDUC**

No formal education	❑	1
Primary education	❑	2
Inter/Junior/Group Cert. Or comparable	❑	3
Leaving Cert. Or comparable	❑	4
Non-University higher ed.	❑	5
University	❑	6

5. (b) Are you still engaged in formal education? **EDCUR**

(Including night classes/ adult education)

Yes	❑	1
No	❑	2

6. How long have you been employed with this company? **LONG**

_____(Years and months)

7.(a) Do you work full-time, part-time or late-nights and Saturdays? **STATUS**

Full-time	❑	1
Part-time	❑	2
Late-nights/Saturday	❑	3

(If Full-time then go to Q 8)

7.(b) On average, how many additional hours per week do you work? **HOURS**

_____ (Hours)

8. What is the title of your job? **JOB**

_____

9. Could you briefly describe for me what your job entails?

_____

_____

10.(a) Are you a member of a Trade Union? **UNION**

Yes ❑ 1
No ❑ 2

(If 'yes' please specify which Union) _____

10.(b) What benefit do you gain from being a member of a Union? **JUNIO**

_____

_____

_____

10.(c) Have you in the past, or do you currently, hold a position in your union? **UPOSIT**

Yes ❑ 1
No ❑ 2

(If 'yes' please specify the position) _____

11.(a) Prior to your current position have you held any other job with this company? **OTJOB**

Yes ❑ 1
No ❑ 2

If the answer is 'yes' please go to 11.(b) If 'no' go to 12.(a)

11.(b) What was the title of that job? **TITLE**

_____

12.(a) Prior to working for this company, in what other job, if any, was your single longest term of employment? (Please detail job title, company and type of work) **PREJOB**

_____

_____

_____

If the answer to 12.(a) is 'none' then go to Q. 14. If any other answer go to 12.(b)

12. (b) How long were you employed there? **PRELONG**

_____(years and months)

12.(c) Were you employed full-time, part-time with fixed hours or part-time with hours that vary from week to week? **PSTATUS**

Full-time	❑	1
Part-time with fixed hours	❑	2
Part-time with hours that vary from week to week	❑	3

12.(d) How many months ago did you leave? **SINCE**

_____ (months)

13.(a) Were you ever a member of a trade union previously? **PUNION**

Yes	❑	1
No	❑	2

(Please specify the Union) _____

If 'yes' the go to 13.(b). IF 'no' then go to Q. 14

13.(b) Would you describe yourself as having been active in the Union? **ACTV**

Yes	❑	1
No	❑	2

14. Thinking of close family members, would you describe them as being active in a Union? **FAMACTV**

Yes	❑	1
No	❑	2

Section B. The following section is a list of statements which one may agree or disagree with. All the statements relate to your work. Responses are graded on a scale of one to five depending on whether you (1) disagree strongly, (2) disagree, (3) are neutral or don't know, (4) agree or (5) strongly agree.

Circle where appropriate

- D.S. - D. - D.K. - A. - S.A. -

15. Everyone who works here is basically part of the same team. **TMc**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

16. While we may sometimes differ, management and staff have basically the same goals. **GLc**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

17. What is good for the staff is good for the company. **TMb**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

18. What is good for the company is good for the staff. **TMe**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

19. Management and staff have more in common than they do differences. **TMd**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

20. This job can be satisfying. **SSa**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

21. I wouldn't leave this job even if I could get a job paying a little more elsewhere. **SSc**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

22. My job is boring. **SSb**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

23. I often enjoy coming to work. **SSe**
- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

24. My job is an important part of my life. **TMa**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

25. For me, an important part of my work is to serve the customer well. **GLa**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

26. In work our friendliness is as important as our merchandise. **GLb**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

27. One of the main reasons customers come to the store is because of the service they get. **GLf**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

28. Being of service to people is what my job is about. **GLd**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

29. People don't just want material goods, they want friendliness. **GLe**

- 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 - 5 -

Section C.

That is all the questions which I wanted to ask you. Are there any questions which you would like to ask me or any points you would like to make. If so, please state:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

In the future I want to interview some people in more depth relating to points which stem from this questionnaire. As mentioned earlier, such an interview would be completely confidential. It should not take more than 20 minutes and can be arranged at a time/place which is convenient for you. Would you agree to the possibility of such an interview?

If yes, please supply your NAME and ADDRESS.

Name: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

_____

Home Phone Number: _____

APPENDIX C - SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Super Store
11 Interviews, 12 Interviewees

SS 1 - Owner interview October 1992 Non-taped interview

SS 2 - Store Assistant 1 November 1992 taped interview

SS 3 - Checkout Workers 1, 2, 3 December 1992 taped interview

SS 4 - Checkout Worker 4 January 1993 taped interview

SS 5 - Store Assistant 2 January 1993 taped interview

SS 6 - General Manager January 1993 taped interview

SS 7 - General Manager January 1993 non-taped conversation

SS 8 - Checkout Supervisor January 1993 taped interview

SS 9 - Trainee Manager January 1993 taped interview

SS 10 - Office Worker 1 February 1993 taped interview

SS 11 - Checkout Worker 5 February 1993 non taped interview, on going discussions over previous three months.

Quality Store
15 Interviews, 15 Interviewees

QS 1 - Senior Union Officer 1 February 1994, non-taped interview

QS 2 - Senior Union Officer 2 February 1994, non-taped interview

QS 3 - Senior Personnel Manager Store One March 1994 taped interview

QS 4 - Supervisor 1 Store One March 1994 interview, mostly taped

QS 5 - Floor Staff 1 Store One April 1994 taped interview

QS 6 - Floor Staff 2 Store One April 1994 taped interview

QS 7 - Floor Staff 3 Store one April 1994 taped interview

QS 8 - Floor Staff 4 Store one April 1994 taped interview

QS 9 - Assistant Personnel Manager Store Two March 1994 taped interview

QS 10 - Supervisor 2 Store two March 1994 non-taped interview, conversations over two month period

QS 11 - Supervisor 3 Store Two April 1994 taped interview

QS 12 - Supervisor 4 Store two April 1994 taped interview

QS 13 - Floor Staff 5 Store two April 1994 taped interview

QS 14 - Floor Staff 6 Store two April 1994 taped interview

QS 15 - Floor Staff 7 Store two April 1994 taped interview

Home Store
10 Interviews, 16 Interviewees

HS 1 - Personnel Manager1 March 1992, non taped interview

HS 2 - Checkout Workers 1, 2 June 1995 non taped interview

HS 3 - Store Assistant 1, 2 June 1995 taped interview

HS 4 - Checkout Workers 3, 4, 5 August 1996 taped interview

HS 5 - Checkout Workers 6, 7, 8 August 1996 taped interview

HS 6 - Checkout Worker 9, Store Assistant 3 August 1996 taped interview

HS 7 - Checkout Worker 10 September 1996 taped interview

HS 8 - Checkout Worker 1 April 1998 taped interview

HS 9 - Personnel Manager 2 April 1998 taped interview

HS 10 - General Manager April 1998 taped interview

APPENDIX D - SCALE CONSTRUCTION

The following measures were used in the construction of the scales based on the Retail Work Questionnaire. All measures were constructed based on their conceptual coherence and were tested for unidimensionality and reliability. (de Vaus, 1996: 254 - 256).

Satisfaction with work ($\alpha = 0.7064$)

This job can be satisfying.

(inverted) My job is boring.

I wouldn't leave this job even if I could get a job paying a little more money elsewhere.

I often enjoy coming to work.

My job is an important part of my life.

Goal Coherence ($\alpha = 0.7636$)

For me, an important part of my work is to serve people well.

In work, our friendliness is as important as our goods.

Helping people with enquiries is part of my job.

Team work ($\alpha = 0.7396$)

Everyone who works here is basically part of the same team.

While we may sometimes differ, management and staff have basically the same goal.

What is good for the company is good for the staff.