Culture at the Edge:
An Exploration of Cultural Adaptation and Sense-making Across Workgroup Boundaries in Complex Organizations

By

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Abstract

The nature and conduct of relationships between functionally specialised workgroups in complex organization is explored in this dissertation. Interviews with twenty eight individuals and two entire workgroups from four large organizations are used as the basis for an experiential phenomenological study that seeks to understand the essences of the lived experience of being a member of such a workgroup.

The situated outcomes of the phenomenological study are scrutinised in the light of the literatures of organizational theory, organizational communication theory, and social identity theory. These literatures are used as lenses to explore the possibility that problematic dimensions of intergroup relations might be diminished by the deployment of technology mediated communication channels between the groups concerned.

The research finds that, with few exceptions, workgroup membership is a strong part of the individual's sense of social identity. This is consistent with the key elements of social identification theory and self-categorization theory. It also finds that the construction of stereotypes creating mutually oppositional beliefs of positive distinctiveness is unavoidable.

Further, the research tends to confirm that individuals in workgroups believe that they are performing their allotted tasks as well as possible. Such beliefs are not necessarily consistent with the expectations of management, but they address issues related own self image and perceived role-performance.

Although perceived issues of media richness associated with presently available technologies tend to undermine perceptions of technological solutions in the participant organizations, the research points to useful future opportunities for more effective selection and deployment of appropriate technologies as a basis for the conduct and management of intergroup relationships.
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Part I Introduction

This thesis is in two parts, each of four chapters. The chapters in part I introduce the topic, and explain the methodological choices. They go on to describe the research act, and provide a description of the sites at which the research interviews were conducted.
Chapter 1  Background

Introduction

This research seeks to examine and explain a phenomenon observed throughout the years when I was employed as a practitioner in the field of information systems management in various large organizations. During that time, I observed apparently irrational antipathy between groups of people performing different tasks in the organization. Although the roles were different between groups, there was rarely any history or evidence of overtly harmful behaviour on the part of other groups to justify the degree of hostility observed. In particular, it was my experience that relationships between the information systems group and the groups to which they were offering service were always characterised by an attitude bordering on dislike or mild contempt for the former.

Some might argue that there have been valid grounds for suspicion and dislike towards information systems practitioners. Since the advent of third generation mainframe computers in the mid 1960s, and the realisation that technology could be applied to business systems, those with expertise in the design and implementation and management of software have been able to influence business processes and outcomes in domains that other specialists believed to be rightfully theirs. As a young computer specialist, with scant business awareness, and even less accounting knowledge, I often found myself in the uncomfortable position of dictating to senior accounting and management professionals, what could and could not be done within their domains of expertise. In those early days when computing professionals were cloaked in the mystique which surrounded all things to do with computing, information systems specialists commanded salaries and prestige disproportionate to their real business acumen. Then, in the early seventies, the idea of a fully integrated “management information system” became fashionable, and more than ever, such specialists found themselves sitting around conference tables with senior managers, contributing to strategic decision making processes with far-reaching consequences (Haigh, 2001). In the eyes of many, the influence exerted by
computing specialists was underserved, and probably even unwise, and the seeds of enduring distrust were planted. Such distrust has been compounded over the years by the lamentable failure of many high profile information systems projects.

Intergroup antipathy of this kind has not been directed solely at information systems people. It has been my unvarying experience during my thirty years of work in multinational organizations, that accountants tend to view sales people as undisciplined and irresponsible people. Conversely, the sales people of my experience have tended to view accountants as parsimonious pedants. Groups within one of my former employees were forced to compete with each other for a finite supply of the raw material on which the industry is based. For no better reason than being in competition with each other, members of the groups concerned displayed markedly hostile attitudes towards the members of rival groups.

People in the positions of least power and influence in the organizational hierarchy refer to senior managers as "the bosses", in a tone that makes it clear that this is not regarded as a compliment. Likewise I have heard very senior managers, including one of the participants in the current research, apply equally disparaging stereotypes\(^1\) to entire groups within the organization. "They are more loyal to their technology than they are to the organization" was just one such comment. Having worked in engineering and manufacturing organizations, I have also been conscious of the powerful sense of self-confidence commonly exhibited by professional engineers, and their negative attitude towards sales and marketing people.

These experiences accumulated throughout my career in industry, left me with many lingering questions about the underlying causes of intergroup tensions, about the sweeping generalisations that members of one group are willing to make about another, and the potential for improvement in

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\(^1\) See (Comer, 1998) and Glossary entry.
organizational efficiency if the components of the relationship which gave rise to such negative feelings could be modified.

Workgroups in complex organizations strive to discover how best to carry out their assigned functions in their particular environment. As with any other culture forming group, when they encounter and solve problems, the experience of how a particular problem is solved is learned, and becomes part of the institutional memory and way of doing things for that group (Martin, 1992; Schein, 1990; Tylor, 1974). As experience is accumulated, judgements are made by group members as to which methods are consistently the most effective, and thus become the preferred solutions for their particular circumstances. The collective set of responses to problems include such things as values, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and processes. In dealing with its problems, the workgroup deploys special languages and symbols, and its members recollect stories. All of these responses to situated problems can be seen to be the constituents or manifestations of a culture. For the purposes of the present research, these attributes of a specific workgroup are presumed to be a unique situated culture.

When members of a workgroup communicate or interact with individuals from outside their group, they find that such people have a different body of values, attitudes, behaviours, beliefs, and processes that are collectively perceived to be a culture in their own right, different from the culture of any workgroup to which the observer might belong. Such differences require some kind of response from the members of the workgroup under consideration, in order to resolve the dissonances\(^2\) so raised.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this research is to explore the nature, cause, and consequences of reactions to perceived differences, especially those that might be seen to be of a cultural nature, between those who are members of a particular

\(^2\) Items are in dissonant relation when the obverse of one is expected from the presence of the other (Festinger, 1957)
group, and those who are not. The underlying presumption is that, because of the presence of cultural artefacts in the communication process, members of workgroups must engage in a process of interpretation and adaptation in respect of the differences they find, and that this process detracts from the efficiency and effectiveness of any communication across cultural boundaries. As a career technologist, with considerable exposure to the shortcomings of presently available conferencing technology, I have speculated on whether there is a balance to be struck between the need for media richness on the one hand, and the need to deliver the message content free from the disturbance of discordant cultural artefacts on the other. Special attention will therefore be paid to the possibility that communications mediated by technological channels might be used to enhance the clarity of the intention of original communication through the diminution of the effects of cultural difference.

Justification

Despite the lack of any quantification of the real costs to organizations arising from negative intergroup attitudes, there is the intuitive sense that groups that value the same things, and believe in doing things the same way, would in all probability work more effectively together than groups that are perpetually conscious of the differences between them. Exploration of the nature and effect of such perceptions in complex organizations has the potential to assist scholars and practitioners to understand the processes involved, and perhaps to alleviate any friction in the communication processes of the organization. This research will be valuable if, through scrutiny of real life perceptions of the experience of interacting with other groups, it provides better understanding of the nature and origins of any attitudes formed as a result. Such understanding should at least point to avenues for further research aimed at implementing techniques and tools to improve the relationship between different groups required to collaborate for the achievement of business objectives. Amelioration of intergroup friction has the potential to allow for more whole-hearted collaboration between groups and more effective inter-group partnerships, to the probable benefit of the organization as a whole.
Research Questions

Following the discussion of purpose and objectives above, the primary research question is formulated thus:

In the context of a complex organization, how does a member of a workgroup, make sense of, and adapt to, perceived cultural differences encountered when communicating with non-members?

The prior discussion draws on my past experience as an information technologist. It is appropriate therefore that this research should also seek to discover whether the difficulties encountered in the processes identified in the exploration of the primary question might be ameliorated, if the interaction between collaborating workgroups could be mediated by information technologies:

How could information technology facilitate the sense-making and adaptation processes?

Having explored what happens in the process of intergroup communication, and the extent to which such communication could be technologically mediated, the remaining question is to explore the actions that might be taken by the organization, to improve the quality of intergroup interaction:

By what means can a complex organization reduce the negative impact or capitalize on the positive potential of cultural difference when members of a functional group communicate with non-members?

This last question refers specifically to the interests of the organization, and how those interests might be advanced by applying the lessons learned from the exploration of the first two questions.
Structure

This thesis adopts a non-traditional structure. In particular, in accordance with the methodological assumptions discussed in Chapter 2, the placement and nature of the literature review is different to that used in more traditional and positivist research. As proposed by Creswell (1994), "in qualitative research, the literature should be used in a manner consistent with the methodological assumptions; namely it should be used inductively so that it does not direct the questions asked." (p. 21). He goes on to suggest that in this kind of research, "the literature is presented in the study at the end; it becomes a basis for comparing and contrasting the findings of the qualitative study" (p. 23). In a recent doctoral dissertation, Kvasny (2002) justified the late placement of her "Review of Relevant Discourses" (p. 59) on the grounds that the traditional placement would imply the existence of inapplicable formalisms and, the existence of knowledge which would not emerge until considerably later in her study. I make a similar claim in the present study, and further contend that the deliberate placement of the literature view towards the end helps to ensure that the study remains firmly grounded in the data gathered. Accordingly, on completion of the research act and subsequent analysis, the findings will be challenged by a review of the literatures in the domains traversed, and some of the unanswered questions may be addressed.

Thus, this document is structured in two parts. Part I consists of the conventional introductions to the research, including a justification of my preference for a constructivist paradigm and phenomenological method, followed by descriptions of the research act, and of the research sites. Part II details the phenomenological process, and the synthesised general description of the respondents' lived experience of intergroup behaviours. Literature relevant to the emergent issues is thereafter reviewed, and in the final chapter, the findings and implications for future research are discussed.

3 Although this citation is listed as "unpublished", Dr. Kvasny successfully defended her dissertation in February, 2002, and it is in the process of being published.
Conventions

Because my research rests on the interpretation of narrative and the conviction that I as the researcher am a co-construct of both the narratives themselves and of their interpretation, I have chosen to speak in the first person. To speak in the third person would be to create a false impression of neutrality and separation between myself as researcher, and the phenomena which are the subject of my investigations.

Where I have found it necessary to use fictional or generic names to preserve any promised confidentiality, I have denoted this by enclosing the substituted matter in parentheses.

Delimitations and Key Assumptions

It is widely held that the methodology chosen for the conduct of this research does not support transferability, and the circumstances of the present research justify some caution in attempting to apply its findings universally. However, insofar as the workgroups and organizations are not dissimilar to those found in similarly complex organizations in capitalist economies around the world the outcomes may be reasonably assumed to have some applicability to similar organizations in a similar cultural environment. The research may also presumed to offer pointers to new knowledge, and to indicate avenues for further research. Important assumptions are listed below.

Communication Across A Cultural Boundary

The assumption is made that there are costs, in organizational terms, to the process of communication across a cultural boundary. Such costs are assumed to be in the time spent rationalising encountered differences, and in the potential for adverse attitudes towards a group where differences are observed. If intergroup cooperation is required, it is assumed that any attitudinal problems will diminish the effectiveness of such cooperation.
Group Membership

For the purposes of this research, individuals are presumed to belong multiple groups, some of which may overlap with, or be fully nested within, other groups. For example, an individual may be part of a group of people having a particular functional specialisation, and at the same time, be part of a group dealing with the delivery of a particular product or service. Both of these hypothetical groups may be seen to be a part of an organization which itself is a group.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has introduced the subject matter of the research, and the questions which motivate it. It has explained the reason for the non-traditional structure of the document, and has articulated conventions, and specified the delimitations and key assumptions of the research.

Next, it is necessary to explore the paradigm and methodological choices relevant to the research.
Chapter 2  Methodology

"The only possible interpretation of any research whatever in the 'social sciences' is: some do, some don't."(Earnest Lord Rutherford of Nelson)

Introduction and Overview

This chapter describes the factors that have led to the adoption of constructivism as the paradigm under which this research will be conducted. The chapter further provides the rationale for phenomenology as the choice of method which, it will be argued, fits well within the constructivist paradigm.

I have adopted Guba & Lincoln's (1994) position, firstly, that "paradigm" is the umbrella term which embodies questions of ontology, epistemology and methodology, and secondly, that questions of method are secondary to questions of paradigm. Since a paradigm in the sense the term is used by Guba & Lincoln (1994) is in the final analysis, the "worldview", or set of basic beliefs of a scholarly community to which the researcher subscribes, the choice of paradigm may invite an explanation, but is not open to proof.

This chapter will conclude with a discussion of issues of trustworthiness and credibility, and how the reader may have confidence in the findings of this research.

Constructivism as the Guiding Paradigm

According to Czarniawska-Joerges (1998), a paradigm is the name given to the fundamental beliefs or worldview that people use when they consciously attempt to bring order to, and make sense of, the otherwise overwhelming mass of information which the world presents. This is not inconsistent with Kuhn (1996) who, in his postscript to the original edition, defined paradigms not only as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values and techniques ... shared by members of a given community." (p. 175), but also as "the concrete puzzle-solutions which, employed as models or examples, can replace explicit rules as a
basis for the solution of the remaining puzzles of normal science" (p.175). There is a great deal of pressure on any researcher to adopt one of the various paradigms that are, for the time being, dominant in the domain of the study. These may be the domains in which the researcher has been socialised, or perhaps those which are within the comfort zone of the intended audience or dissertation examiners (Findlay, 1999; Leedy, 1997; Phillips & Pugh, 1994). However, the paradigms which guide disciplined inquiry can, according to Guba (1990), all be characterised according to the stance of the inquirer in respect of three dimensions of the governing paradigm, namely, ontology, epistemology, and methodology. For the purposes of this discussion these are defined as follows:

Ontology: the nature of that which is to be known about the subject.

Epistemology: the nature of the relationship between the inquirer and that which is to be known about subject under investigation.

Methodology: the manner in which the inquirer would acquire knowledge about the subject.

It is worthwhile to see how this framework is applied to the primary research question which has been stated in the following terms:

In the context of a complex organization, how do members of a workgroup, make sense of, and adapt to, perceived cultural differences encountered when communicating with non-members?

Thus, the appropriate paradigm to guide this research is one which best reflects my attitude as researcher:

a) towards whatever is knowable about the process of sense making and adaptation towards perceived cultural differences by members of workgroups in complex organizations;
b) to the relationship between myself as researcher, and the subject matter which is locked in the minds of the members of the workgroups in subject organizations; and

c) to the manner in which I propose to gather and analyse data from workgroups in the subject organizations.

In normal circumstances, since they are all dimensions of the same reality there should be some coherence between the three dimensions of the research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This point is endorsed by Hale-Haniff & Pasztor (1999) who, writing on the topic of a constructivist approach to co-constructed subjective experience, assert:

It is essential that the paradigm, the model guiding the inquiry, the inquirer, and the methodologies, be congruent (online).

Each of these major elements of the paradigm is discussed more fully below.

**Ontological Considerations**

This research is concerned with the consequences of any communication which occurs between these respondents who are members of a workgroup, and those who are not members of that group. My initial conjecture is that the member must make sense of, or construct an interpretation of, any perceived patterns of behaviour, manifestations of values or other culturally derived artefacts. On the basis of those interpretations, the member must adjust the pattern of future attitudes towards, or relationships with, that person or other members of that person’s cultural group.

Attitudes as socially causal factors within sections of society have long been the subject of scrutiny. Durkheim (1951), best known for his interest in issues associated with morality, stressed that social outcomes are influenced by ideas which reside in the minds of individuals. Weber (1922), who is most famous for his work on modern bureaucracy, likewise indicated that there is social significance in the attitudes adopted by individuals towards the world.
When considering the nature of that which is to be known, many scholars hold that the choices are between the variants of realism or relativism (Seller, 1988), though others disagree, suggesting that these extremes are but points on one of several continua (Deetz, 1996). In what is regarded as a classic among texts on qualitative research, Lincoln & Guba (1985) suggest that qualitative research can be grouped under three broad categories, post-positivist, critical, and constructivist. The traditional, or positivist approach to inquiry has taken the so-called “naive realist” stance, which holds that there is an external objective reality, part of a pre-existing given cosmos which, with the right research can eventually be fully apprehended by the inquirer. In response to criticisms of unrealistic applications of naive realism, practitioners of the post-positivist stance adopt an ontology which is described as “critical realism”. This still postulates the existence of an external objective reality, but concedes that it may never be fully accessible to the researcher.

The traditions which come under the heading of critical theory, including feminist theory, neo-Marxism, and materialism, adopt the ontology of critical realism, similar to that of the post-positivists, albeit they believe that the true nature of reality is subjugated, or masked from ordinary inquirers behind a “false consciousness” created by a knowledge elite, or some other class of oppressors.

The constructivist paradigm, in sharp contrast to the others discussed above, adopts a relativist stance towards “that which is to be known”. In this context, the word “relativist” refers to the belief that each person may create a socially and experientially based mental construct of what constitutes reality in respect of any given phenomenon in the particular domain of inquiry. Since each person has a different social and experiential history, it follows then, that each person's experience of a phenomenon lays the foundation for the construction of a new and unique “reality” in respect of that phenomenon. Thus the researcher can and will encounter multiple perceived realities around what, at first sight, might appear to be a single phenomenon. Again this is in contrast with those paradigms which adopt a realist ontology wherein a knowable objective reality exists, capable of being more or less perfectly and unambiguously discovered according to the paradigm in force.
Constructivism is generally careful to avoid using the word “reality” in any sense which implies that there is a single universal pre-existing truth which all researchers can discover. Some critics (Heron, 1996; Irzig, 2000; Sandstrom & Sandstrom, 1995) have suggested that the position taken by constructivists with regard to the existence of reality is akin to solipsism. This is refuted by most constructivists, including Von Glaserfield (1992) who is the key figure in the variant known as radical constructivism:

Constructivism has never denied an ulterior reality; it merely says that this reality is unknowable, and that it makes no sense to speak of a representation of something that is inherently inaccessible (p. 2).

Heron & Reason (1997) chide the constructivists for their equivocation on this topic, taking instead, a clear and unambiguous position:

There is a given cosmos, a primordial reality, in which the mind actively participates. Mind and the given cosmos are engaged in a cocreative dance, so that what emerges as reality is the fruit of an interaction of the given cosmos and the way mind engages with it.... From all this it follows that what can be known about the given cosmos is that it is always known as a subjectively articulated world, whose objectivity is relative to how it is shaped by the knower (p. 279).

My ontological stance in this research is relativist. In other words, whatever the “realities” which exist in the domain of the study, I believe them to be, as (Guba, 1990) suggests:

In the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them (p. 27).

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2 Solipsism: The view or theory that self is the only object of real knowledge or the only thing really existent. (Oxford English Dictionary)
The primary research question is aimed precisely at sense making and perceptions which must surely be the very stuff of relativism. Specifically, the realities that I seek in this particular research, are the constructions placed by individual members of specific workgroups on their encounters with the attitudes, beliefs, values, behaviours and other cultural artefacts of the people outside their own group with who they interact. Whereas I will interact for the most part with single informants as exemplars of workgroups, I do not perceive them to be representative of any aspect of their specific group.

Epistemological Considerations

The relationship between the researcher and “that which is to be known”, is the second factor in determining the appropriateness of any given paradigm.

If a relativist interpretation of what constitutes the “realities” of this study can be taken as given, it follows that the most effective way to access the constructions in the minds of the subjects is to hear the informants’ own accounts of their own lived experience. Behaviours, writings and other manifestations of the constructions placed on experiences by the subject may to some extent make them visible, but none of these afford the ease of access available in a freely divulged narrative. In the current research, this is achieved by means of semi-structured interviews with the subjects, and subsequent phenomenological analysis of their stories. The narrators are purposefully selected (within the bounds of their opportunistically selected organizations) for their roles in workgroups, each having specific responsibility for communication across workgroup boundaries. In short, the primary data of this investigation is the collected co-constructed narratives, arising from the organisational experiences of the informants, aided and facilitated by my own theoretical sensitivity as researcher.

4 Throughout this research, the term “semi-structured interview” should be taken to mean that the informant was free to tell the story in his or her own way, within broad parameters, covering a defined topic area. The researcher may or may not use a prompt sheet which is not disclosed to the informant, to ensure reasonable coverage of the required area of interest.
Positivists are constrained by their realist ontology to adopt an objectivist epistemological stance. This requires that the inquirer must observe the studied object or phenomenon as if disconnected from the matter under observation. In the positivist view, the validity of the observation is compromised by the presence of the observer, or the observer’s values in the field of study.

Post-positivists recognise that the purist disconnected approach of positivist epistemology is difficult, if not impossible to achieve. Adherents of the critical theory paradigms tend towards a subjectivist stance, though it is accepted that the values of the inquirer will be relevant to the findings of the research. In critical theory as well as in constructivism, this has the interesting and important effect of breaking down the distinction between ontology and epistemology. The knowable in any given inquiry is altered by the nature of the relationship between the particular researcher and the knowable.

The naturalistic or constructivist paradigm take this one step further, such that the knower and that which is to be known, are so interconnected as to be inseparable (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the constructivist paradigm, the inquirer is involved with the discovery process in such a way that she or he is regarded as a co-producer of the knowledge being created and indeed the presence of the researcher becomes part of the phenomenon under consideration. This is especially true when dealing with narrative. The production of a coherent and useful narrative is absolutely dependent, not only on the researcher’s interpretive skills, but also on his or her theoretical sensitivity (Gudmundsdottir, 1998b). Different narratives emerge in accordance with the narrator’s perception of the understanding showed by the researcher, or the questions asked. It is in the nature of constructivist paradigm in general, and phenomenology in particular that the nature and the very fact of the researcher’s participation become part of that which is to be studied. Drew (2001) alludes to this when she says:

In phenomenologic research, objectivity is approached directly by identifying and examining the researcher’s subjective involvement with the phenomenon being investigated (p. 23).
Drisko (1997) draws on the work of Hyde (1994) and Reid (1994) to support his contention that any bias if confronted and examined, strengthens research credibility.

To conclude this section, I assert that the subjectivist epistemology of the constructivist paradigm is consistent with both the task at hand, and my own convictions as researcher.

**Methodological Considerations**

The third and final leg in the selection of a paradigm, is the choice of method by means of which to acquire and interpret information regarding the phenomena of interest.

(Lincoln, 1990) asserts that constructivist research is more likely to be characterised by qualitative than quantitative method, concerned with relevance rather than rigour, with selection rather than intervention, and with inquiry in a natural setting rather than in a laboratory. She further identifies the constructivist concern for grounded theory rather than *a priori* grand theory, and emergent research design rather than preordained.

The experimental and manipulative methods of the traditional sciences as used in positivist and post-positivist approaches do not lend themselves to the discovery of co-constructed realities of the kind discussed in the preceding sections. Critical theorists use a methodology which is described as "dialogic and dialectical" (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). This requires a degree of confrontation, in seeking to discover knowledge which, in accordance with the ontology of this paradigm has been subjugated by sectional interests.

A fundamental position taken by constructivists is that knowledge is created rather discovered. New knowledge begins from understandings, constructions, or symbol systems already in use. The constructivist inquirer therefore, attempts to accommodate new knowledge by trying to understand and reconstruct previously held constructions, by integrating new experiences with what went before, weeding out things which do not fit, reorganizing,
supplementing, accepting as right, only those new ideas which can be fitted into, or made to work with, existing ideas.

The inquirer is in a perpetual process of trying to interpret and understand, trying always to clarify, not only what meanings are imbedded in the subject, but how they are imbedded. The nature of the phenomena being explored, essentially narrative artefacts, is such that the method used to explore and explain them should itself be descriptive in nature.

An appropriate tool for the present research is identified by Stablein (2002). Drawing on the work of Husserl, he identifies phenomenology as being committed to rigorous description and interpretation of the lifeworld. He further draws on Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty to point to "embodied, historical, social lived experience" (p. 5), as an appropriate basis for research into meaning of any given phenomena. Creswell (1998) similarly identifies a phenomenological study as one which "describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon. [emphasis original]" (p. 51). Another perspective is that “phenomenology aims to detect and understand rather than to explain, predict, and interpret." (Hedelin & Strandmark, 2001, p. 8). This emphasis on description and explanation recurs in many accounts of phenomenological research (Colaizzi, 1978; Dahlberg & Drew, 1997; Janes, Wells, & Daly, 1997; Roux, Bush, & Dingley, 2001). Many scholars from Husserl onwards have attempted to separate description from interpretation. However, when access to the phenomenon of interest is by means of narrative, there is ample authority for the necessity of interpretation. (Hirsch, 1967) summarises the position of Gadamer in this respect:

Truth cannot reside ... in the genuine re-cognition of an author's meaning ... for this unrealizable ideal naively disregards the fact that every putative re-cognition of a text is really a new and different cognition in which the interpreter's own historicity is the specifica differentia. (p. 245).

In other words, the person to whom a narrative is related is unable to escape the reality of his or her own background in forming an understanding of the content of the narrative.
Experiential Phenomenology as the Preferred Methodology

At the highest level of abstraction, phenomenology can be seen as a two stage process by which a phenomenon of interest is explored and described. Van Manen (2000a) labels these processes "reductio" and "vocatio" respectively. By these terms he means that the researcher will seek to be led back5 to primitive contact with the pre-reflected lifeworld of the subject, and will then use the power of language to render his or her understandings accessible to the audience.

Many variants of phenomenology exist and find favour with philosophers, psychologists and researchers for different purposes. Though especially popular in the fields of psychology (Ashworth, 1976) and nursing studies (Hedelin & Strandmark, 2001; Janes et al., 1997; Omery, 1983; Polit, Beck, & Hungler, 2001; Porter, 1998; Roux et al., 2001), phenomenology has also been widely used in the field of organizational studies (Chikudate, 2000; Sanders, 1982; Schabracq & Cooper, 1998; Stablein, 2000), organizational communications (Macoubrie, 2001), and even information systems (Boland, 1985; Gayle, 1997). Hermeneutic, existential, critical, interpretive and experiential are but some of the distinguishing adjectives applied to various schools within the phenomenological movement. It is sufficient for my purposes to choose a variant which can be seen to address the specific needs of the current research and which has been applied successfully to problems similar to that which is the subject of this research. Tiryakian (1973) from the existential branch, asserts that phenomenology "seeks to find the structure of social phenomena in their meanings, meanings which are grounded in the experience of social subjects" (p. 209).

Having determined that phenomenology is an appropriate method for the conduct of this research, I have chosen to adopt the variant that had been applied

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5 "re-ductio" is Latin for "bringing back". "Vocatio" is Latin for summons or invite... to call forth.
in similar kinds of research, and which was achievable within my own abilities as a researcher. The chosen variant is that which Van Manen (2000b) and Schön (1987) refer to as the phenomenology of practice, or experiential phenomenology. Though the term "experiential phenomenology" is not widely adopted, it is given respectability by (Gendlin, 1973) and (Van Manen, 2000a).

Van Manen differentiates between the philosophers who are concerned more with the method than its practice, and the practitioners who

... tend to work within the applied domains of the human sciences such as education, clinical psychology, nursing, medicine, and specializations such as psychiatry or midwifery (online).

He goes on to list a very long history of phenomenologists from a wide range of domains of practice, whose work might arguably fit under this heading. He lists scholars who worked at first in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium soon after World War II until the sixties, and he refers to current exemplars in the fields of psychology (Giorgi, 1979; Giorgi, Fisher, & Murray, 1975; Moustakas, 1994), nursing (Benner, 1994), and teaching (Van Manen, 1990, 1997, 2000e). Phenomenological inquiry has also been used in organizational studies (Brown, 1978; Chikudate, 2000; Sanders, 1982) as well as in the domain of information systems (Boland, 1985; Gayle, 1997). Klein & Myers (1999) commend the usefulness of the phenomenological method in information systems studies which are characterised as “the conduct and evaluation of interpretive research of a hermeneutic nature” (p. 68), which is clearly applicable in the present study.

**Consequences of the Paradigm Decision**

Relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and a hermeneutic methodology can be regarded as the defining characteristics of the constructivist paradigm. These paradigmatic dimensions have clear applicability to the research question at hand. The constructivist option requires the acceptance of the fact that individuals construct and communicate their own reality based upon their experience and interpretation of a particular phenomenon. The matters under investigation are the products of precisely such a process.
Consistent with the primary research question, the principal entity of interest is the individual who happens to be a member of a workgroup. This study did not study the groups themselves. The group provides the context for the individual in a particular mode of being. The characteristics of the groups as perceived by its member(s) are important to the way the individual relates to individuals from other groups.

**Phenomenological Method**

Although there is general agreement that there is no preordained formula or recipe for the "correct" conduct of phenomenological inquiry (Van Manen, 1990), nevertheless, there are several recurring views in the literature of phenomenological method which describe activities identified as necessary and appropriate ingredients (Colaizzi, 1978; Spiegelberg, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). At its highest level of abstraction, the phenomenological inquiry can be seen as an examination of the phenomenon in the whole, a breaking down of the phenomenon to the parts which are its essence, and finally the explanation of the understanding of the whole. Van Manen (1990) described a set of six activities as one of many possible formulations by which a phenomenological inquiry might be conducted.

(1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;

(2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;

(3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;

(4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;

(5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;

(6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole (p. 30).
Application of Phenomenology to the Present Research

In the context of the present inquiry, Van Manen's six activities, which need not necessarily be executed in the sequence shown, can be identified as follows:

a) identifying as the phenomenon of interest, the lived experiences of workgroup members who interact with non members and who, in so doing, perceive and experience differences of a broadly cultural origin in behaviours, beliefs and values and attitudes;

b) investigating lived experience of relating to and working with people who are not members of their own groups, by gathering narratives from members of the subject organizations;

c) identifying and reflecting on the themes which occur in the narratives relative to inter-group interaction;

d) describing the lived experience of inter-group interaction by writing and rewriting in the eidetic mode, thereby recalling and recreating for the reader, the essences of those lived experiences;

e) remaining strongly animated in pursuit of the underlying essences of inter-group interaction, while resisting the temptation to settle for preconceived ideas;

f) maintaining a balance between the underlying essences or components of inter-group interaction, and the wider spectacle of inter-group interaction itself.

Each of these is discussed in more detail hereafter.

Lived Experiences of the Phenomenon of Interest

Before gathering data in any form, it is first necessary to identify not only the purpose of the exercise, but also the very subject matter of the inquiry. In this
research the intention is to obtain and analyse the narratives of those who, as members of organizational workgroups, interact in the course of their work with those who belong to other groups, and who exhibit differences in cultural expression which ascribed to that "other" membership. According to the classical precepts of phenomenological inquiry as enunciated by Husserl (1931), it should now be necessary for the researcher to establish an epoché, or to put aside prior common sense interpretations and knowledge of the phenomenon of interest. However, there is a strong thread beginning with Heidegger that suggests that the inextricable relationship between the interpreter (researcher) and the work (that which is to be known) is such that a there are "a variety of possible interpretations, each with its own validity" (Steeves, 1994, p.22).

**Gathering Narratives which Reveal Lived Experiences**

From the transcriptions of the narratives obtained in semi-structured interviews, it is my intention to uncover aspects of the lived experience of dealing with the inter-group differences as previously described, for the purpose of subsequent analysis and description. According to Leedy & Ormrod (2000), phenomenological research is typically based on some number of "lengthy" interviews ranging from one to two hours. Most of the interviews I conducted were at the lower end of that scale, though a few lasted up to 90 minutes.

**Reflecting on the Themes**

The interview transcripts are presumed to contain the essential meanings (or "essences") of the real lived experiences of the interview subjects in regard to the phenomenon of interest. Reflecting on the transcripts is a process through which, in accordance with Husserl's oft-cited exhortation to turn to the things

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6 Greek, - the setting aside of all historical and natural assumptions and factual knowledge in order to be able to apprehend more readily the phenomena and the subject's consciousness of them. (Oxford English Dictionary)
themselves, the researcher's efforts are "concentrated upon re-achieving a direct and primitive contact with the world" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p. xv).

Describing Lived Experiences Through Writing and Rewriting

Phenomenological inquiry, as previously suggested, can be seen as a process which culminates in a description of the essences which the researcher has found in the examination of the phenomenon of interest. Van Manen (1990) asserts that "a good phenomenological description is collected by lived experience, and recollects lived experience - is validated by lived experience and validates lived experience" (p. 27). Phenomenological description intends to recreate as vividly and truthfully as possible for its reader, the lived experiences which it describes, thereby fulfilling the requirement to recollect. Sometimes the word "eidetic" is used to refer to some stimulus which has the capability to bring to mind a vivid and lifelike image of another reality. Writing in the process of phenomenological inquiry should possess eidetic qualities, so that the reader may experience to the greatest extent possible, the essences of the lived experiences of the subjects of the research.

Remaining Connected to the Underlying Research Question

Van Manen's text, though widely applied to many applications of phenomenological inquiry, is oriented to the use of the method in the service of pedagogy. In my research, the process advocated by Van Manen is interpreted as a requirement to continually relate the research to the phenomenon under study, which is primarily the manner in which members of workgroups in complex organizations respond to perceived differences in cultural manifestations by individuals who are members of other groups. In practice, this requires that I confront every step of the research process with the relentless presence of the research questions.
Maintaining Balance

Precautions must be taken, according to Van Manen (1990), to avoid losing sight of the main purpose of a phenomenological inquiry which is to identify, explain, and reconstruct the essences of the subjects’ lived experiences of the phenomena of interest. This requires the researcher to ensure that the overall design of the research is targeted to that end, and that various elements of the research are not blind and diversionary alleys.

In this research, the phenomena of interest are the experiences of individuals as members of one or more workgroups, particularly those experiences that reveal what it is like for them to be a member of that group or those groups, and what it is like to interact in that role, with members of other groups. Given the semi-structured nature of the research interviews, it is important for the researcher to discern which conversational threads are related to the target phenomena, and which can be discarded as irrelevant and potentially diversionary.

Issues of Trustworthiness and Authenticity

For any qualitative research, the researcher must provide the reader with some means of evaluation, whether overtly stated, or imbedded in the qualities of the research itself. Adherents of the naturalistic or constructivist paradigm reject the term “validity” on the grounds that it is based upon positivist assumptions which are inapplicable in this context (Guba, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; LeCompte & Preissle, 1994). Instead, they point to a variety of ways by which the reader might judge the appropriateness of the research and its findings. Labels such as “trustworthiness”, with its connotations of goodness, transferability, and dependability are proposed as measures of the quality of research in the constructivist paradigm. An added measure in the constructivist paradigm is “authenticity” which has overtones of fairness and improved understanding (Creswell & Miller, 2000). While there is little agreement on how to label or characterise such evaluative tools, most appear to have as their
underlying motive, the desire of the researcher to engender confidence in whatever truth claims are made in the research itself (Angen, 2000).

Strategies for the provision of evaluative tools are diverse and depend greatly on the chosen methodology. In the broad sweep of qualitative research, Drisko (1997) poses six evaluative criteria: the chosen philosophy and epistemology is clearly identified; that the audience for, and the objectives of the research are identified; a methodology consistent with the philosophy of the research is chosen; the researcher’s biases are made explicit; the work should conform to the ethical code of the field concerned; and the conclusions should be consistent with the research philosophy. These are broadly consistent with criteria proposed by Madison (1988), who adds dimensions of comprehensiveness, penetration, thoroughness.

Within the specific context of phenomenology, Packer & Addison (1989) identify coherence, relationship to external evidence, consensus among participating parties, and relationship to future events as important evaluative criteria. In a study of qualitative research methods used by therapists, Gehart, Ratliff, & Lyle (2001) suggest that it is important that the research should specify the limits to its reliability claims, and should identify for whom it is valid and reliable, and for what purposes.

Specific Evaluative Criteria for this Research

In order to provide the appropriate credibility for this research, it is necessary to specify specific aspects of its conduct which allow the reader to judge the appropriateness of the conclusions reached, and their usefulness and applicability to other areas. To give some framework to this examination, headings similar to those employed by Drisko (1997) and Madison (1988) will be used.

The Chosen Philosophy / Epistemology are identified

This research will be conducted using the Constructivist/Subjectivist paradigm articulated by Lincoln & Guba (1985).
Audience and Objectives are Identified

The intended audience consists of the community of scholars engaged in the study of organizational communication in the context of complex organizations, with emphasis on cultural aspects of teams or workgroups.

The objective is to explore the subjects’ accounts of their lived experience, using experiential phenomenological inquiry to discover and understand the extent to which these particular experiences provide answers to the research questions. To restate, the research questions are:

"In the context of a complex organization, how does a member of a workgroup, make sense of, and adapt to, perceived cultural differences encountered when communicating with non-members?"

and

"How could information technology facilitate the sense-making and adaptation processes?"

and

"By what means can a complex organization reduce the negative impact or capitalize on the positive potential of cultural difference when members of a functional group communicate with non-members?"

Study Method is Specified

Phenomenological inquiry is the chosen means by which the phenomena of interest are studied. As previously stated, there is wide acceptance of the fact that there is no prescribed recipe or sequence of mandatory processes for the proper conduct of phenomenological inquiry. In the context of Van Manen's (2000) useful diagrammatic exposition of the various possibilities of the method in Figure 1, my orientation within the field of phenomenological inquiry is to experiential phenomenology, with some leanings toward the existential approach. The justification for this choice has been discussed previously on p.19 ff.
So that the reader may evaluate the goodness of the research, Drisko (1997) suggests that the researcher should describe both the rationale for, and the manner in which, the study sample is selected. Likewise, the methods for data collection and its subsequent analysis should be detailed. All of these things are laid out in Chapter 3 which describes the research act. Aspects of the data analysis are crucial to the reader's ability to have confidence in this research, and continuing to draw on Drisko's (1997) model, I refer especially to issues of truthfulness, context, confirmability and completeness.

**Truthfulness**

It is important that the lived experience of the subject is visible and undistorted by any bias on my part as researcher (Gehart et al., 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This requirement may raise the question of whether the researcher's role as co-constructor of the narratives constitutes a bias that could be perceived as a threat to the attribute of truthfulness. Such a danger might exist if the researcher set out to obtain stories supporting a pre-conceived picture of reality. Instead, the researcher's role as co-constructor is limited to the provision of a
theoretically sensitised audience for the story, thereby empowering the interview subject to tell his or her stories in ways that reveal particular aspects of his or her lived experience. There are no grounds to assume that this role should give rise to untruth in any form.

Throughout this research, truthfulness will be served by extensive use of low-inference descriptors, including direct and relevant extracts from the interview transcripts. Readers will be able to compare the participants’ own narrative of their lived experiences with any interpretations made by me as researcher, looking for any unwarranted interpretations or diversion from truthfulness.

Context

Credibility is assisted by making explicit, the context in which the study occurs (Drisko, 1997; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Phenomenologic inquiry and the interpretations which arise from it are linked to a specific context. This research is conducted in four specific organizations in New Zealand, and this, combined with the methodology, imposes limits on the transferability of any findings (Himam & Courtney, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To the extent that the subject organizations conform to normative hierarchical structure and behavioural patterns for Western capitalist multinational profit-motivated organizations, then it is reasonable to expect that similar findings will be found in similar organizations. Having travelled in the course of my prior employment with multinational corporations, it is my assertion that workgroups in New Zealand are little different to those that might be found in organizations of similar scale Europe or the United States. National cultures, and local contextual features such as labour laws may impose some constraints on the issue of transferability.

Confirmability

Assessment is aided when the researcher provides multiple sources which tend to confirm the conclusions reached. Many writers suggest that confirmatory meetings with the original subjects are desirable. Eminent phenomenologists Giorgi, Fisher, & Murray (1975) suggest that an appropriate aid to confirmability
exists when “a reader, adopting the same viewpoint as articulated by the researcher, can also see what the researcher saw, whether or not he agrees with it.” (p. 196). Ready access to the subjects’ original accounts of their lived experience together with a lucid account of my identification of emergent themes, interpretation, and other confirmatory processes allow the target audience to judge whether or not my conclusions are trustworthy.

Completeness

To borrow momentarily from the domain of grounded theory, one indicator of completeness or saturation is that the descriptions are rich and comprehensive (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Completeness refers to both data collection as well as to its identification of emergent themes and subsequent analysis. In the present research, interviews were conducted with twenty eight subjects in key communicative positions in workgroups across four organizations. Interviews typically lasted for an hour, which although brief by the customs of other methods, it is not untypical of phenomenological interviews. Partly to satisfy a felt need for member-checking, and partly to seek narrative in some additional areas, two additional interviews were conducted with two different workgroups, each present as a group. These interviews each lasted two hours.

Creswell & Miller (2000) are useful here in looking at the appropriate measures of goodness. They introduce the concept of the lens or viewpoint which is used by the researcher to establish the goodness of the research, and propose three particular lenses as described in Table 1. The first is the point of view of the researcher, and it depends heavily on researcher reflexivity. A second point of view is that of the research subject, and this lends demands prolonged engagement as a condition for goodness. The third viewpoint, and one which is taken up by Stablein (2000), is the viewpoint of external reviewers such as the community of scholars in the field of study. While not mutually exclusive, it is quite normal for a researcher to focus on the use of one particular lens.
Disclosure of My Biases

Drisko (1997) urges researchers to give credibility to their work by identifying each possible source of bias. "Researcher reflexivity" is the term given to this significant validating tool by Creswell & Miller (2000) who encourage its use in the following terms:

It is particularly important for researchers to acknowledge and describe their entering beliefs and biases early in the research process to allow readers to understand their positions, and then to bracket or suspend those researcher biases as the study proceeds (p. 127).

In my own case, it is appropriate to disclose that for eight years, I was an employee at middle management level in the New Zealand Dairy Board, which as one of my research sites, is a significant source of data. My own lived experience of working within workgroups and communicating across its boundaries within that environment informed the explorations I was able to do with members of that organization who agreed to participate in this research. Inevitably, my service in this organization provided me with not only the knowledge to explore the lifeworlds of the respondents, but also caused me to
compare and evaluate their reported experiences against my own experiences and perceptions of real life in that organization.

As one who was accountable for the performance and outputs of a major service function comprised of five or six different workgroups, within a hierarchically structured organization, I had considerable experience of intergroup differences. My roles were variously:

a) as the manager responsible to senior management and the client groups within the organization for the several and joint outcomes of the collectivities within my control;

b) as the client of other workgroups; and

c) as the mentor and referee overseeing the relationships between the diverse workgroups within my span of control.

In each of these roles, I experienced what I later came to recognise as the consequences of different cultural values, ideals, beliefs, and procedures. My predisposition, in entering this research, based upon my lifelong experience of employment in workgroups, is to expect to find that members of workgroups are acutely aware of intergroup differences, and that they adopt a mildly negative attitude toward other groups as a result of the need to interpret the significance of those differences.

During my employment at the New Zealand Dairy Board, my comparatively senior role meant that I had direct contact with almost every manager in the New Zealand part of the operation, and many of those in international positions. Such intimacy becomes both boon and bane for research purposes. It is a boon because being well known to all the senior managers gained me entrance to an organization which is routinely too busy to suffer the attentions of unknown researchers. It was helpful also, in that few barriers were raised in the research interviews, and in all but one of the interviews in this organization, I experienced frank and unrestrained accounts of their lived experiences in their various roles. The one exception was in the case of a young
person newly promoted to a management role since my departure from the organization, who was anxious not to breach any proprieties, real or imagined.

Familiarity was, and perhaps is, problematic in this organization for several reasons. Firstly, my interviews took place over an extended period within two years of my having ceased to work there. All but one of my interview subjects treated me as if I was still a colleague, and it may have been that much was assumed as common ground, not needing to be explicitly stated as would be the case in a conversation between friends. For the most part, any such assumption was not unreasonable as I had maintained close contacts with many friends in the organization, and have a lively and positive interest in the organization to the present day. More dangerously for the reliability of the research, the possibility exists that my familiarity with the organization and its people may have blinded me to aspects of the organization which would be more visible to outsiders.

Because my professional responsibilities at the New Zealand Dairy Board involved the management of telecommunications in all its forms, I was to a very large extent, also familiar with the culture and behaviours of Telecom New Zealand Ltd., at least from the perspective of a major customer. My familiarity stems from professional collaboration with the organization during a certain turbulent period in its history. Since all of my respondents from Telecom were veterans of this era, it provided at least an opening point for conversation and the establishment of some sense of rapport with them. Since the people interviewed in this organization were members of the high level network support area, which is an engineering-intensive activity, I had little operational knowledge of their immediate areas of responsibility except as a client, and thus may have listened to the accounts of their lived experiences with fewer preconceptions than was the case at the Dairy Board.

7 the period of transition from a government department, through the time of being a state owned enterprise, and the early days of its emergence as a privately owned organization.
Likewise, in my past employment, I worked for the New Zealand branch of the Dutch electronics giant, Philips. In several markets, this organization was a direct competitor to, and was in many ways similar in purpose and outlook to, both Alcatel and Ericsson. Each of the latter organizations is the New Zealand manufacturing marketing and sales presence of a European centred multinational. Each is engaged in the manufacture, marketing, sales and support of high technology electronic communications equipment. Though I had never worked directly with either organization previously, they were familiar as competitors, and in the case of Alcatel, especially, familiar in the sense that its culture, processes and behaviours as I experienced them were remarkably similar to those of the Philips organization.

Staff at Philips maintained a lively and necessary interest in the events, successes and failures of its competitors in all of its markets. This was especially true of the Alcatel operation which was comparatively, a neighbour to the Philips organization in Wellington. Ericsson in New Zealand, by contrast is an organization of a more recent era, and since many of its products can more properly be regarded as software than manufactured products, its processes were considerably different to those in place at Philips or Alcatel. Nevertheless many of the narratives which described the relationships between the European head office, and the furthest and most remote subsidiary, its New Zealand branch produced a strong resonance with my own experiences. This sense of familiarity must be seen as a bias to be declared and to be wary of, when interpreting the co-constructed narratives from both Alcatel and Ericsson. From another perspective, this prior familiarity was useful in eliciting lively and relevant accounts from the respondents in those companies.

In keeping with the notion of researcher reflexivity, I will identify the instances where my prior experience must be taken into account in the chapters which describe the research act and the analysis which follows.

**Ethical Stance is Identified and Maintained**

Since there is no explicit organization whose code of ethics is applicable, this research is conducted in accordance with generic ethical practices, as well as
in conformity with the requirements of the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University, under whose auspices this research is conducted. Approval was obtained from the latter committee in accordance with the statutes of the university, prior to the commencement of involvement with human subjects (Appendix 1). In accordance with their requirements, all interaction with human subjects is conditional upon fully informed written consent. At the organizational level, consent was given by the CEO, or by a person with the delegated authority to permit the research to take place. Each signatory declined the option of requiring references to their organization to be rendered anonymous. At the individual level, every participant was informed of their absolute and unconditional right either not to participate at all, or to withdraw at any time up the publication of this research. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and were offered the choice as to whether they wished any reporting of their contribution to be “anonymised”. Each participant was asked to sign a consent form which included those matters as well as permission for the taping and subsequent transcription of the interview. Of the forty one subjects, all signed the form agreeing to their participation, just one asked for anonymity, and no one declined to be taped. On rare occasions when respondents were less discreet than they were comfortable with on reflection, they asked for particular passages to be omitted. These wishes were complied with. No material loss to the research process arose from these exclusions.

Consistency is Strived for

This research aims to deliver outcomes which are consistent with the choice of experiential phenomenological inquiry, and the limits of the data acquired. The conclusions and any recommendations will be limited to those which are justifiable on the data and methods examined in the ensuing chapters.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have discussed the reasons for my choice of the constructivist paradigm as my overarching worldview. I have related the selection of experiential phenomenology to the nature of my research objectives,
and in particular to the need to understand the lived experiences of the research subjects. I concluded by canvassing the issues of evaluation and trustworthiness as they apply to qualitative research in general, and to phenomenological inquiry in particular. I have explained the criteria by which the trustworthiness of this present research may be judged by its readers.

In the chapter which follows, I shall describe the actual research process as carried out.
Chapter 3  The Research Act

Introduction

This chapter begins with the process by which organizations were selected for this research, and the manner in which individuals were invited to participate. It describes my own role as researcher, and the process by which I subsequently collected the data through interviews from which narratives were gathered as primary data.

Site Selection

My first objective in seeking organizations to participate in the research was to gain access to organizations which, in my judgement, seemed sufficiently complex to support multiple workgroups, and which I deemed likely to have a complex network of communications across workgroup boundaries.

Mindful of the limited funds available for the research, I sought, as far as possible, to find organizations where the interviews would be local, thereby avoiding the need for significant travel costs. My third and most pragmatic consideration was to find organizations which would consent to participate.

Any answers to my research questions as defined in Chapter 1, clearly require access to complex organizations. Many authors have described the difficulties of access to complex organizations (Cunningham, 1993; Ely, Anzul, Freidman, & Steinmetz, 1991; Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 1991; Gummesson, 1991; Turner, 1988). Nevertheless, despite having rejected similar requests from others when I worked in industry, I was unprepared for just how difficult it was for researchers of small repute to gain access to organizations of the stature implied by the phrase “complex organizations”.

My first attempts at gaining access to suitable organizations were largely unsuccessful. I had consulted reference works such as “The New Zealand Business Who’s Who” looking for organizations that appeared to have the
required attributes. I wrote introductory letters to 15 potentially suitable organizations throughout New Zealand, requesting the opportunity to explore my research questions in their workgroups and places of work. Most of the invited organizations declined with varying degrees of politeness, while only three organizations responded positively in the first instance. One of these subsequently withdrew as a consequence of the impending arrival of a new CEO from Japan.

With commitment from just two organizations, I commenced my research interviews, hoping that additional cooperative organizations would be found at a later date. Serendipitous encounters with CEOs in semi-social settings provided me with the opportunity to request and obtain cooperation from two more organizations. Subsequent dealings with other individuals in the two organizations concerned led me to believe that these requests would not have been permitted to reach these sympathetic executives if the approaches had been made conventionally, via a "gatekeeper", or by post as was the case with the original mailed requests.

Each of the four organizations that eventually participated is complex in every sense of the word. The New Zealand Dairy Board, with a NZ$7 billion turnover at the time of the interviews was New Zealand's largest, and arguably its most successful multinational, and was the forerunner of today's vertically integrated dairy organization, Fonterra. Alcatel is a French based multinational, which at the time of the research was engaged in both manufacturing as well as marketing, sales and support of electronic communications equipment in New Zealand. Ericsson is a Swedish based multinational, which is a direct competitor to Alcatel across most of their product ranges. Telecom New Zealand Ltd is New Zealand's principal telecommunications common carrier and provider of telecommunications services, as well as the largest single customer for both Alcatel and Ericsson. The close telecommunications industry relationships presented the potential for a conflict of interest, and I was careful to ensure that each company was aware of my involvement with each of the others, and was assured of the utmost commercial sensitivity.
Each of the organizations was large by most standards, and was certainly large in the context of New Zealand business. Each had a significant range of products or services, dealt with by means of complex segmentation of the organization. Most importantly for my purposes, each had a complex hierarchical organization structure which contained specialised functional workgroups.

**Role of the Researcher**

Each organization that agreed to participate was, in varying degree, already familiar to me, as previously discussed on in the disclosure of my biases in Chapter 2.

In the case of the New Zealand Dairy Board, where I had been employed for eight years immediately prior to the commencement of the current research, I had a professional relationship with almost every person who ultimately accepted the invitation to participate. I had worked as a direct subordinate of at least three of them, and had worked closely as a peer with two, both domestically, and on international projects.

In the course of my employment with the New Zealand Dairy Board, I had among other accountabilities, responsibility for the provision of communications technology, and was thus professionally familiar with Telecom New Zealand Ltd. As the representative of a very significant customer with a multimillion dollar annual communications budget, I was moderately well acquainted with its structure, functions, personalities and history.

Past employment with Philips New Zealand Ltd., another European multinational manufacturer in direct competition with both Alcatel and Ericsson was also useful in giving me background knowledge from which to ask informed and relevant questions in those organizations. These previous involvements all contributed significantly to my theoretical sensitivity in the field. In light of my decision to use phenomenological method, the prior experience, far from being a hinderance, was extremely helpful in my interaction with my informants, and especially in gaining richness in the co-constructed stories.
Access to Individuals

Access to individuals in each organization was in the power of a person to whom such authority had been delegated by the CEO. This experience of controlled access reinforced for me, the importance of the person whom some researchers designate as the "gatekeeper" (Cunningham, 1993; Easterby-Smith et al., 1991; Ely et al., 1991; Turner, 1988). In each case, I asked for access to members of a workgroup who had significant contact with people outside their own group. I specified both verbally and in writing, that participation was at all times voluntary, and able to be terminated at any time\(^8\) up to the publication of this document.

In at least two of the organizations, I had grounds to suspect that my invitations to participate had been selectively steered to individuals who could be relied upon not to embarrass the organization, and that, subconsciously or otherwise, a choice had been exercised to exclude the more problematic or outspoken members of staff. Since there were sufficient participants in each case, and mindful of the need to remain on good terms with the "gatekeeper", I chose not to confront this suspicion. This mediated mode of informant selection resulted in a very high proportion of people who might be regarded as senior or middle managers. I did not, and do not, see this as a problem in this phenomenological research, particularly since the precise position and function of the interview candidates was not related to the phenomena of interest in this research. Whoever was available had a story of interest to tell. Additionally, though the focus is on individuals rather than workgroups, there was a satisfactory spread of workgroups represented by the selected participants.

I interviewed twelve subjects from the New Zealand Dairy Board, four from Alcatel New Zealand Ltd., five from Ericsson New Zealand Ltd., and three from Telecom New Zealand Ltd.'s Network Division. The comparatively large number from the New Zealand Dairy Board is reflective of both the large scale of

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\(^8\) as required by the Human Ethics Committee of Victoria University of Wellington
the organization in comparison with the others, and my own profile as a former colleague with the invited subjects. Of the twenty eight subjects, two were CEOs and there were a further six who could be classified as members of senior management groups, though in most cases these were also ex officio members of the groups which reported to them. Indirect infrastructural groups accounted for six subjects, and the remainder are all members of technically specialised groups engaged in the delivery of the products or services of their company. The only instances of multiple reporting from the same group, were the various group managers in the New Zealand Dairy Board who were also members of the senior executive team. In addition, at a later stage interviews were conducted with two entire groups from the Ericsson organization. So as not to compromise the anonymity of the interview subjects, these figures are not analysed by company.

After agreeing a list of interview candidates with the gatekeeper in each organization, I sent a brief letter of introduction and a summary of the research objectives to each of the suggested candidates with an invitation to participate (see Appendix 1). A very small number of candidates, in the order of one or two per organization, chose not to reply to the invitation, but the greater majority consented. The number of willing candidates in each organization was sufficient for my needs, and I made appointments with each and subsequently conducted interviews with 28 individuals in four organizations.

The Data Gathering Process

At the beginning of each interview, I gave the informant another copy of the project summary (see Appendix 1), and asked him or her to sign a form giving informed consent to the process, as well as consent to the taping of the interview. Informants also had the choice as to whether they wished the transcript of their interview to be anonymised. None objected to taping, although there were a few requests for momentary stoppages during interviews, and only one subject requested personal anonymity.

I gave assurances that detail of their narrative would not be disclosed in any form that would enable a third party to identify the speaker. To the greatest extent possible, this has been honoured though the nature of the stories from the
two CEOs who participated makes this somewhat impractical in their case. However, the CEOs, along with almost all other participants, explicitly declined the opportunity to have their contribution rendered anonymous, so that, in the few cases where an individual is unavoidably identifiable, no breach of ethics has occurred, and no harm has been done. I emphasised to chief executives, and to other senior managers, including the gatekeeper in each organization, that the material gathered in interviews would be kept confidential. Subsequently, taking into account the extremely forthright nature of some of the narratives, and the small size of the community from which the subjects were selected, I elected to render all direct quotes as anonymous as was practical. To achieve this, I modified some of the quoted narratives by substituting fictional names wherever specific organizations, groups or individuals were identified in the original text. I have denoted this action, wherever it occurred, by enclosing any substituted material in parentheses. Any material which, by its very nature, could not be so treated without a change of meaning, I elected not to quote directly.

Each interview took place in a venue of the informant’s own choosing. In most cases, by virtue of the individual’s managerial status or job function, this was in his or her own office. In the few cases, where the informant’s normal work environment was unsuited to, or unavailable for, the conduct of a confidential interview, we met in a meeting room, a borrowed office, or in just two cases, in the organization’s staff canteen. Fortunately in those cases, we were able to meet outside of the normal peak use periods of the canteen. Nevertheless, refrigeration and other equipment noise was intrusive on these occasions, and made accurate transcription from the tapes more difficult, though not impossible. Notwithstanding the open nature of the canteen concerned, confidentiality was maintained by choosing a location well away from any other patrons who happened to be present.

Interviews were semi-structured. For my own use, but not visible to the interview subject, I had prepared a broad outline of the topics which I expected to cover as a prompting device to enable me to ask appropriate questions (see Appendix 2). This guide sheet was not used to constrain or structure the interviews, since I wanted the respondents’ own story told as far as possible in
their own way. Instead it was used to allow me to prompt the respondent in the direction of any significant area of interest not already covered in the event that the narrative dried up. This was very rarely necessary.

**Narrative as the Medium of Communication**

I have used the word "narrative" deliberately, and pause here to explain. In so doing, I have elected to follow a number of authors who have defined narrative as a means by which one person can share the meaning of some lived experience with others who have not had that experience. Polkinghorne (1988) for example, defines a narrative as "a scheme by means of which, human beings give meaning to their experience of temporality and personal actions" (p. 11). White (1980) regards narrative as "a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which transcultural messages about the nature of a shared reality can be transmitted" (p.2). According to Onega & Landa, (1996) a narrative is "the semiotic representation of a series of events meaningfully connected in a temporal and causal way" (p.3).

Gudmundsdottir (1995, 1998a) expands on these understandings, emphasising the importance of the context, the relationship between the narrator and the listener, and the reason for telling the story. Of particular significance is her stress upon the importance of the background assumptions and cultural influences which the listener brings to the interaction, and combines with the narrative to create understanding. The researcher who elicits a narrative in an interview situation must be an active and constructive collaborator with the informant in the process of establishing shared understanding of meaning (Fisher, 1987; Gudmundsdottir, 1998a; Opie, 1997).

In respect of this research, it must be acknowledged that the collaboration between the informant and the researcher is likely to be quite idiosyncratic. As I have acknowledged elsewhere, a person with a different background may not necessarily hear all the same things. This is not to suggest that the hypothetical third person would hear untruths, but rather, would hear contextually appropriate narrative selections of the informant's world. It would be unexpected to find that the disclosures made to one researcher are in actual conflict with those made to
another, but instead, the understandings gained by each may encompass different parts of the informant’s world.

Narrative theory is a complex topic in its own right and a full exploration is neither necessary nor appropriate at this point. For my purposes, I have regarded narratives as being comprised of performance and plot. Performance can be regarded as the signs, gestures, attitudes, emotions, and other symbolic devices which give context to the plot. The plot is the syntagmatic arrangement of narrative elements such as actors, events, causality, and motives. A major characteristic of most narratives is the temporal sequence, whereby events are ordered such that a logical relationship between separate events can be seen by the audience.

The following narrative fragment illustrates the importance of temporal sequencing:

“So in terms of what is so special about it, um, I think, in the way the organization has been structured it hasn’t worked that well. And there’s been a bit of um, conflict with other groups” (Ericsson - Technical Manager B)

It is clear from the sequence in which Ericsson - Technical Manager B presents the two sentences, that the researcher is to believe that any conflict between the two groups is probably causally linked to (perceived) defective structuring of the organization. Such a connection might not be made if the story presented a different temporal sequence.

The Interviews

With the exception of two group interviews later in the research, each interview was with an individual, since the primary research question is about individuals who happen to be members of workgroups. This does not mean that the workgroups are not subjects of interest, but rather that it is the enculturated member of the workgroup whose lived experience is to be discovered. There is no expectation that any individual will present a view that is in any way representative of the group as a whole.
Early in each interview, I invited the subject to give an account in his or her own way, what it was like to belong to, and be a part of, a particular workgroup and organization, and what made the experience of belonging to that group uniquely different to the experience or imagination of belonging to any other group. When the narrative stopped, or when the informant showed signs of failing to address the subject matter of the research, I intervened by inviting the informant to tell the story of that particular broad area. When the topic of belonging was exhausted, I steered the participant towards stories of interactions with non-members. My interactions with the participant telling the story were usually informed by my own theoretical sensitivity arising from my prior exposure to the organization or industry concerned. These interactions were entirely consistent with the previously discussed co-producer role which both the constructivist approach and the narrative tradition bestows on the researcher (Gudmundsdottir, 1998a; Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999). It is important for the reader to recall that this research is concerned with the discovery of the meaning attributed by informants to their own subjective experiences, and the attitudes formed as a consequence.

Interviews with each informant were typically of an hour in duration. Few subjects had any difficulty after the first few minutes, in providing a more or less continuous narrative about aspects of organizational or workgroup life which was in some sense evocative or characteristic of life in their own particular working environment. Some of the more senior members of some organizations attempted in the first few minutes of their interview, to consciously construct, or to present an image of their organization which was “suitable for publication”. Without exception, when prompted by contextually appropriate and informed questions based on my prior industry knowledge, even where the questions were based on partial or defective understanding, the informants took the opportunity to talk about aspects of their organization of which they could demonstrate specialised and expert knowledge. The very informality of the interview situation and the freedom to range over whatever was important to them, provided an environment in which informants revealed many aspects of organizational life and intergroup relationships which would have been much more difficult to discover using any preconceived set of questions.
My experience in gathering narratives resonated with that of (Collins, 1998) whose interview subjects enjoyed the experience of having a sympathetic ear, willing to pay undivided attention to their views on a topic where they felt they had an expert opinion, and who increasingly drew the researcher into a dialogue on the subject matter in question. When this occurred in my case, I found my prior experience, and my facility with what Gudmundsdottir (1998b) terms “the language of practice” to be crucial to the continuation of my role as supportive and co-creative listener, though care had to be exercised to avoid tampering with the unfolding narrative. If the interview strayed to matters outside the scope of the research (current affairs, sport, or simple personal gossip), it was necessary to prompt for resumption of the real matter by asking questions concerning the last valid point. If that was unproductive, the interview flow was rekindled by using the prompt sheet to ask about one of the subjects on the list not yet traversed.

**Transcription and Data Capture**

On completion of each interview, I passed the tape to a research assistant skilled in the use of a dictaphone, for transcription. The initial product was a file in Microsoft Word® format. When this was printed, I corrected any obvious transcription errors in which the assistant had misheard or misunderstood what was being said. In accordance with the undertakings given, I expunged any matter which was “off the record”.

The next step was to identify emergent themes. To this end, I chose to utilise the QSR NUD*IST® 4.0 package (Richards, 1997) to simplify the process of relating different text units to the concepts embodied therein. As required for the mechanical aspect of this process I divided the narratives into “Text Units”, each of which I intended to be a sentence or paragraph encapsulating a complete idea or utterance.

Interview transcripts contained an average of 370 text units and interviews ranged in size from 110 and 866 text units. Transcripts with fewer text units are indicative of interviews with people who needed less prompting to give their accounts, and who presented their ideas in substantial chunks of text. The
transcripts with the higher numbers are indicative of a more conversational encounter. There were a total of 10,320 text units.

Once the mechanical issues of accurate and ethical transcription were resolved, I converted the Microsoft Word® documents to simple ASCII text files, as required in order to import them into the databases of the NUD*IST® 4.0 software where I could subsequently study the narratives, looking for emerging categories and thereafter, cluster them into broad groups of concepts or themes.

**Identifying Themes**

I examined each transcript in turn, exercising my best efforts to leave aside preconceptions. Each utterance was scrutinised, and each idea and phenomenon contained found was categorised.

As illustrated in Figure 2, the package permits the researcher to associate codes or categories at will, with each and every text unit. In the anonymised example shown, I have suggested that the text unit in the lower half of the
browser may be associated with, among others, the concepts of strategy, CEO, vision, positivity, identification, organization, unanimity, vision, commitment, and teamwork. Such associations are derived solely from my own interpretation as researcher with what is apparently being said in each text unit. My concern was to find recurring themes and patterns among more than 10,000 text units, so that potential for subtle shades of misinterpretation within a particular text unit are not a significant concern.

Arguably, my initial efforts at classification could be regarded as an example of excessive “microanalysis”, since I originally identified more than 840 conceptual categories embedded in the utterances. It quickly became obvious that this was unmanageable. The ability to use NUD*IST® 4.0 to relate categories to each other made it apparent that the categories could themselves be categorised, and that, what was emerging in the mind of the researcher, and was able to be captured in the software, was a tree structure, or hierarchy of concepts. The software facilitated my efforts to comprehend the mass of information emerging under headings such as entity, attitude, behaviour, belief, perception, perspective, process and value.

Gradually, with the aid of the functions in the NUD*IST® software, and confining my attention to those concepts which had some relevance to the principal questions of this research, several broad recurring themes began to emerge. These were seen to be:

a) Sense of self and belonging
b) Allegiance to stakeholders (farmers)
c) Pride in the product
d) Pride in achievement
e) Work ethic
f) Internal and external competitiveness
g) Defiance in the face of adversity
h) Personalities
i) Sense of others
With minor variations, these themes occurred in each of the organizations concerned. Each of these themes is now discussed in turn.

**Sense of self and belonging**

With very few exceptions, the narratives revealed that respondents identified with the group of which they were a member. The distinction between “we” and “they” in the stories being told made it clear where most people stood. The sense of membership was apparent both at the organizational and at the group level. The very small number who ran counter to the pattern, and who were negative about their groups were in very sharp contrast to the majority of the stories. In one case the respondent was completely alienated from the group to which she was assigned, and was uninhibited in expressing contempt for its members, and for the failure of her manager to address its shortcomings. In another example of attempted disassociation, the respondent spoke very sharply of the failings of group of which he was the manager, apparently unaware that he was creating the perception that he might be the cause of any such shortcomings.

**Allegiance to Stakeholders**

Although it was especially marked in the case of the New Zealand Dairy Board, awareness of stakeholders was present in narratives from all four organizations. The three technology companies all have either foreign owners, or a substantial offshore shareholding, and this was apparently well known to the respondents. However the level of stakeholder consciousness at the Dairy Board was quite extraordinary. The dairy farmers form part of the everyday language of the organization, and to an extent not seen elsewhere, the values of the stakeholders are overtly incorporated into the espoused values of the organization.

**Pride in the product (or service)**

In every organisation, the great majority of interviews reflected a degree of proprietorial pride in the product or service provided by that organization. Again the Dairy Board stood out for the extent to which a belief in the inherent goodness was a part of the organizations fundamental belief system and
mythology. Milk products are regarded by most staff as being a wholesome product, the distribution of which is seen as a humanitarian act, even when carried out for commercial gain. No mention was made of the small but vocal body of opinion which regards milk products as a health risk.

**Pride in achievement**

Interestingly, expressions of pride in narratives from two of the organizations were for precisely opposite reasons. That is, it was possible to interpret their positions in such a way that each appeared to take pride in being unlike the other in respect of their choice as to whether product quality or customer satisfaction should take priority.

**Work ethic**

Most respondents were in a position of responsibility as managers or group leaders, and could be reasonably expected to be apostles of the work ethic. This was a topic which was very explicitly part of the value system at the Dairy Board in particular.

**Internal and external competitiveness**

Narratives commonly revealed a lively sense of competition. Internally, the stories showed rivalry for scarce resources, or for the credit which comes from noteworthy achievement. Externally, most respondents knew with whom they were in competition. In the case of the Dairy board, the unusual relationship between the Board and its owners/suppliers is further complicated by a moderately adversarial trading relationship, in which each perceives that gain for one is at the expense of the other.

**Defiance in the face of adversity**

In almost every case, the narrative touched on circumstances which could be described as “adversity”, such that the respondent appeared to feel embattled. In each such case, there was the strong perception that the respondent believed that his or her group or organization was being unjustly persecuted. At Alcatel, the imminent threat of closure of the automobile assembly industry put the
wiring loom assembly business at risk. In the Dairy Board, there were multiple threats ranging from ideological battles with the New Zealand Business Round Table⁹, to the first stirrings of what has subsequently become the movement to an integrated industry and the formation of Fonterra.

**Personalities**

Powerful personalities have an effect which goes beyond the location of their immediate workgroup, and narratives in this research often contained references to figures who might have been considered outside the sphere of interest of the group to which the respondent belonged. It can be speculated that such characters are significant in the context of the hierarchically larger groups to which the respondent belongs, such as the organization itself.

**Sense of others**

Every narrative described some aspect of how others are perceived, and opinion on how they behave in comparison with the expectations of the respondent. This theme, which must be considered in conjunction with the sense of self and belonging is at the heart of the present research.

In the context of my own experiences referred in the opening paragraphs of Chapter 1, it came as no surprise that the great majority of observations about others, and especially about those from outside the respondent's own group, were in some sense disparaging, and indicative that the behaviour, values, beliefs or other attributes, fell short of those which would apply in the respondent's own group.

This phenomenon will be outlined in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this research.

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⁹ The New Zealand Business Round Table describes itself as an organization of chief executives of major New Zealand Businesses who meet to discuss and develop points of view on matters of common concern. It is an influential political lobby group.
Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have described the manner in which organizations were enlisted to participate in this research, and the subsequent process of selecting individuals who would be able to provide narratives relevant to the topic of the research. I have described the interview process and the mechanics of the process by which the narratives were analysed and initially encoded.
Chapter 4  The Research Sites

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with a rich description based on notes and observations made during the field work at each of the research sites. The intention is to give some insight, unavailable by any other means, into the working environments of the various informants, and thereby to allow the reader to better visualise the context of the lived experiences recounted in Chapter 5. It has to be acknowledged that descriptions of an ethnographic nature are not a normal part of a phenomenology. Readers preferring a more orthodox approach to phenomenological research may choose to proceed directly to the next chapter.

The four organizations in which the research interviews took place have significant similarities and differences:

Each of the four organizations is large, with many staff allocated according to the function to be performed over many operating divisions. All are, to a greater or lesser extent, multinational in their character. Each organization is structured and managed as a conventional Weberian hierarchical bureaucracy, with distinct reporting lines and accountabilities. Each has a CEO accountable via a higher authority such as a board of directors to the owners or stakeholders.

Three of the four organizations are involved in the electronic communications business, two as equipment providers, one as a common carrier. The other is heavily dependent on telecommunications services for almost every aspect of its business.

The New Zealand Dairy Board, and Telecom New Zealand Ltd., are both wholly New Zealand companies, notwithstanding the fact that, pursuant to its privatisation, Telecom shares are traded internationally. Both can be presumed to possess a substantially New Zealand staff, and to have a New
Zealand character. By contrast, Alcatel and Ericsson are the New Zealand branches of French and Swedish based multinationals respectively. Whereas staff at Telecom and the Dairy Board are in close proximity to the ultimate decision making authorities in their corporate head offices, staff at Alcatel and Ericsson are half a world away in distance, and half a day away in time zones. Arguably, the very nature of the products sold by both Alcatel and Ericsson should ameliorate the worst consequences of this separation, though in practice it is still a factor to be managed.

The New Zealand Dairy Board

At the time of the research interviews, the New Zealand Dairy Board was in the process of preparing for its absorption into the New Zealand dairy industry’s so-called mega-merger, subsequently to emerge as “Fonterra”. At the time, the New Zealand Dairy Board was the undisputed powerhouse of New Zealand’s export led economy with annual gross revenues in excess of NZD$7 billion.

The Domestic Multinational

Although the words “head office” were not part of the official corporate language, the most senior management and all of the customary trappings of a corporate head office are located in Wellington, New Zealand. Regional offices are all accountable to Wellington-based senior management.

The New Zealand Dairy Board is (or was) the marketing arm of the New Zealand dairy industry. It was one of several so called “producer boards” which came into existence in the post war years to provide unified marketing abilities for the various sectors of New Zealand’s primary industries. Its existence is established and its powers are defined in the Dairy Board Act, 1961 and its many subsequent amendments. Despite the government intervention and empowering legislation, the New Zealand Dairy Board, like the other producer boards was wholly owned, and run for profit, as a cooperative enterprise by the producers of
the product. In the face of strong political pressure, in 2001 the Board yielded its statutory monopsony\(^{10}\) powers, and its ownership of certain domestic dairy companies in return for empowering legislation permitting it to integrate with the remainder of the dairy industry to become the world's largest Dairy exporting organization.

Throughout its existence, the New Zealand Dairy Board has been based on the philosophy that all dairy product sold to a given market should be coordinated through a "single desk" to achieve the best possible price for the sellers. The alternative to so doing is for a multiplicity of agents competing with, and undercutting, each other to the detriment of farmer interests. Under their now extinguished statutory powers, any other organization wishing to export dairy products from New Zealand had to apply to the Board for a license to do so. Such licenses were granted provided the intended trade was not contrary to the interest of the Board or the industry itself.

Though empowered by legislation, the New Zealand Dairy Board was always in the domain of private industry, and was never a branch of government. It was wholly owned by the dairy farmers of New Zealand. The precise mechanism of ownership was unclear for much of the period of the Board's existence. As recently as 1988, as a consequence of some speculation as to what would happen to the Board's assets in the event of its dissolution, section 13 of the Dairy Board Amendment Act 1988, specifically acknowledged what the industry had always known, that the "Board's assets belong ultimately to growers". A guiding ethos within the Board was that every dollar spent was coming from the farmers' pockets.

New Zealand's 14,200 dairy farmers owned the Dairy Board through the cooperative manufacturing dairy companies to which each supplied milk and in which they owned notional shares in proportion to the volume of milk solids

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\(^{10}\) A monopsony exists when there is a single or a dominant buyer for a product sold by many sellers. Contrast with a monopoly where there is a single or dominant seller for a product with many buyers.
supplied. The farmers elect directors to the board of their local company, and each of those companies in turn elected directors to the Dairy Board. It is worthy of note that shares in the dairy companies are non-transferable and unable to be traded. In short, to be a stakeholder in one of the cooperative manufacturing dairy companies, and through them, in the Dairy Board, it is first necessary to be a dairy farmer providing milk to the dairy company.

Under the Dairy Board Act 1961, the Board was obliged to purchase any and all milk products offered to it for export. It was able to exercise a measure of control over its ability to meet its marketing plans by offering differential prices for particular products. If there was a surplus of cheddar cheese, for example, the Board attempted to persuade the companies to divert milk into other products such as milk powder, or anhydrous milk fat which can be sold more profitably. If this could not be done by persuasion, the Board could exert indirect guidance by altering the price it pays to its suppliers for each product.

(Note: although the Board has now been absorbed in Fonterra, much of the organization still exists and still occupies its Wellington premises. For consistency of style within this research, I shall speak of the Board hereafter in the present tense as if it still existed in its old form)

Head Office - the Physical Location of this Research

The Northern end of Wellington’s Central Business District can be regarded as the government precinct of New Zealand’s capital city. It is also the location of choice for those who have business with the government. Across the road from the Reserve Bank, next door but one to the Treasury, and in close proximity to Parliament, the New Zealand Dairy Board’s head office is located in a telling political setting. It is an imposing, eighteen story building with frontages on Lambton Quay and on The Terrace. Its facade of blue-green glass separated by slender white columns, towers above its neighbours on Lambton Quay. It is unadorned by corporate logos or other identifying marks, and its name “Pastoral House” merely hints at who its occupants are. Only four of its floors have other tenants, while the rest of the space is occupied by the various divisions and groups of the Board’s head office.
On Lambton Quay, one of Wellington’s retail precincts, the somewhat imposing brass-pillared front entrance between a bank and a retail shop is, like the building itself, practically anonymous. There is no evidence of the corporate logo, nor is the name “New Zealand Dairy Board” prominently displayed. It is clear that the Dairy Board does not expect casual visits from passing pedestrians.

The formal entrance to the building is on the Terrace beneath a glass and marble tiled portico. Stainless steel flagpoles fly the flags of New Zealand, of the Dairy Board, and of the tenant organization on the top two floors. Although the name “Pastoral House” is prominent on the structural wall of the portico, the name “New Zealand Dairy Board” is not visible. The entrance foyer is unimpressive. Within the entrance area, an undistinguished retail food outlet contributes visually and with cooking smells, to a slightly down-at-heel impression. The foyer is low ceilinged, and oppressive. Its function is apparently more about the exclusion of the unwanted, than about welcoming visitors.

**Inside Pastoral House**

Receptionists here are seated behind a bank-like security counter, from where they can release the automatic sliding glass doors, granting access to the bank of elevators. An unfortunately placed utility room off the elevator foyer provides for the consolidation and disposal of the building’s garbage. Despite daily clearance, this room sometimes contributes unpleasant smells that further detract from first impressions. Access is granted only after a register is signed and the visitor is issued with a time and date stamped adhesive label which is to be worn on the clothing during the visit. Staff are expected to challenge anyone who is not wearing either a staff ID badge, or a visitor sticker. Staff have magnetic ID cards which give them independent access to elevators and stairwells.

Working areas, by contrast to the impression created at the entrances, are mostly light, clean, and well ventilated. Furnishings on the working floors are of a grade that might be categorised as sufficient if not luxurious. Much of the office space is divided in low-height open plan cubicles, each containing a desk, a visitor chair, a computer, and a lockable cabinet for working files and personal
property. The perceived need to avoid any suspicion of profligate spending of the farmers’ money, and ostentation is reflected in the quality of the fittings.

Even on the thirteenth floor where the Chief Executive, the Chairman of the Board, and the Boardroom itself is to be found, the décor is functional rather than glamorous, with the few stylistic artworks on view being gifts from significant industry organizations in other regions. There is a sense that these must be diplomatically displayed in case their donors should visit. It might be suggested that the attempt has been made to create an appropriately “corporate” area on a “do-it-yourself” budget. It lacks the style, polish or sense of professional design which is to be found in the corresponding areas of Ernst & Young, Mobil Oil, IBM, or Oracle. The suspicion must be that this is a deliberate stratagem, to stay in tune with the “make-do” ethos, and the legendary “number 8 fencing wire” mentality of the dairy farmers who are the Board’s ultimate owners.

Interview Locations

All of the interview subjects had sufficient seniority to enjoy a private, walled office, though most of the 450 staff in the building occupy modular workstations behind low partitions as previously described. Leased pot plants and framed art prints soften the starkness of the internal architecture at strategic points. Computers and telephones are ubiquitous, and very few desks do not have one of each. There is carpet of an industrial grade throughout the building. Reception foyers on each floor tend to be decorated with professional advertising photographs of the kinds of product dealt with by the divisions or groups working on that floor. In other cases, there are photographs of stereotypical “clean green” farmscapes of the kind used in promotions of the wholesome nature of dairy product, or of hygienically sterile stainless steel tanks and pipes which typify the modern dairy industry. These are sometimes augmented by

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11 It is part of the national mythology that New Zealanders with a hammer and some fencing wire can build or repair anything.
framed certificates of achievement, awards for excellence in marketing or quality, or mission statements.

**Artefacts**

The Board reinforces its identity with a number of artefacts including a corporate logo, and a number of product related brands which are among the most highly valued of its assets. The symbolism of the corporate logo (Figure 3) is often mystifying to those seeing it for the first time. It consists of two white milk drops arranged on a field of green in such a way as to represent a stylised version of the North and South Islands of New Zealand. The logo is used on letterheads, envelopes, business cards, posters and the cartons in which product is shipped. It appears on customised pens and promotional devices such as the small plastic desk tidy issued to every staff member with the Board’s mission statement, and various aspects of its quality policy imprinted thereon. It is an instantly recognisable symbol of identity to any member of the New Zealand, or indeed the global dairy industry. Nevertheless, it is less well known than the Board’s major product brand marks such as Anchor, Fern and Fernleaf, which have global recognition value, and which are regarded as major assets on the Board’s books.

Another artefact commonly displayed in the industry is the photograph of a generic pastoral scene with caramel-coloured Jersey cows on a foreground of lush green grass, against a background of snow-capped mountains and blue sky. The cows, the grass and the snow all capitalise on New Zealand’s perceived status as a “clean green” environment in which natural and wholesome foodstuffs are produced. The green and white echo the colours of the organization’s logo. Taranaki in winter sunshine is usually the mountain of choice, since its white capped symmetry is not only visually pleasing, but also appeals to the Japanese market with its superficial similarity to the revered Mt Fujiyama.
The Head Office Environment

Each day, cafeteria staff deliver to the kitchen on each floor, a generous supply of biscuits, and freshly sliced cheddar cheese for morning tea, presumably as a way of reminding staff of their core business. Contrary to the public perception, fresh whole milk is not part of the Board’s product range.

There is a large cafeteria on the ninth floor which serves fresh brewed real coffee at no charge to staff, and which provides a wide range of sandwiches, cakes, drinks, and several choices of hot meals each day. This subsidised cafeteria has on several occasions been rated as one of the best in Wellington when surveys have been done, and is heavily patronised by the staff, whether eating meals at the tables provided, or taking food in paper bags back to the desk to continue working. Despite mild expressions of disapproval from administrators on the risk of attracting vermin, or the risk of crumbs in keyboards, the organization has never seriously discouraged the ethos of working through lunch times, which is not at all untypical of Board staff.

On the same floor as the cafeteria, is a presentation suite, used for sophisticated audio-visual presentations to media and important guests. A pleasant room in this suite doubles as an executive dining room for the members of the board of directors and senior executives during the two or three days of the monthly Board meetings. At most other times, executives choose to eat with other staff in the main cafeteria or, like many of their employees, at their desks.

Meetings of the board of directors occur in a large room on the thirteenth floor. The room is dominated by the Board table. Made of native timbers, this table is in the form of a giant horseshoe which faces a set of lesser desks from which officers of the company make reports and presentations to the Board in session. The board room configuration is not unlike that of a board of inquiry, and people reporting to the Board in session know the meaning of the word “accountable”. Recessed lighting and upmarket multimedia equipment make this one of the most impressive rooms in Pastoral House. An adjacent lounge provides comfort and privacy for directors who wish a place to relax or work while in Wellington.
Social Activity in the Board

On Friday nights, the ninth floor cafeteria becomes the bar for the “Milking Shed”. Most Friday evenings, the Milking Shed functions simply as a licensed bar, with a full range of cheap drinks sold via a ticket system to staff in attendance. Greatest attendance is from younger staff members whose lifestyle permits such freedom. Membership of the social club is free to all employees, and gives access to holiday homes which can be rented for modest prices, on the beach North of Wellington, or for the skiers and alpinists, near Mt Ruapehu in the central North Island. These and all social club activities are funded by the profits made from sales to staff and other corporate social clubs, of cheese and butter at heavily discounted prices. The product offered for sale is usually delivered in foreign language export packs, thus avoiding any temptation for staff to on-sell the discounted butter to local retailers in competition with authorised channels, and at the same time, reminding staff once more of the organization’s core business.

On several nights a year, there are interdepartmental competitions, sometimes in the form of a debate, or more often in a giant extension of “Trivial Pursuits”. Competition for the “Brain Cup” is fierce, and on such nights there is standing room only as supporters cheer on the efforts of their representatives. Some divisions have a realistic assessment of their intellectual limitations, and then they tend to cheer for anyone but the division with whom they have the greatest rivalry in other fields. Importantly in the context of social identity theory as applied later in this research, the Information Systems Group is the bête-noire of all other groups on such occasions. Staff members participate equally enthusiastically in divisional rivalry in physical competitions (the “Brawn Cup”) such as touch rugby, cricket, motor rallying, and athletics. Participation in corporate triathlons, marathons, and Dragon Boating are also well supported.

Corporate Behaviour

Staff tend to dress conservatively. Those with managerial ambitions wear suits, or other semi-formal attire. Senior males usually wear conservatively cut dark suits, and in accordance with the dictates of “power dressing” as it is
practiced in New Zealand, never brown suits or grey shoes. There are possibly insufficient women in senior positions from whom to generalise, but those that are in senior positions also tend to dress conservatively. In recent times, a policy of casual attire on Friday has been introduced, and among the younger members in particular, this is something of a fashion opportunity, with top brands prominently displayed.

It is worthy of note that for the most part, in keeping with their role as part of an exporting organization, Wellington-based staff do not often need to meet customers on a face to face basis. Occasionally, important customers do visit New Zealand, in which case they are shown every courtesy and are wined and dined appropriately by people of the required level of seniority.

**Access to the Board**

Access to the Board for researchers is not easy at any time. Their results orientation is such that wandering academics, especially those with no proven credibility in the field are seen, with some justification, as an unnecessary diversion for the people who would otherwise be required to spend time with them. In my own case, the then secretary of the Board championed my admission in the face of reluctance from his senior colleagues, apparently by way of rewarding both my prior service as an employee, and my frequent advocacy of the Board’s interests in USENET discussion groups. I was fortunate to gain access to the Chief Executive, and twelve other senior and middle managers.

**Alcatel: the “Hi-Speed” Company**

Compagnie Financière Alcatel is a French conglomerate in the electronics and electrical engineering business. It is the sole owner of Alcatel New Zealand, exercising control through another subsidiary, Alcatel South East Asia. At time of the interviews, the New Zealand operation functioned as both a manufacturer and distributor of electronics, one of the few multinationals to have continued to do so since the removal of tariff protections in the mid 1980s.
In some senses this most remote outpost of the Alcatel empire is an "adopted child", since it was acquired as recently as 1987 when Alcatel purchased the assets if ITT, which included the Upper Hutt facility of STC. Arguably, Alcatel as it existed at the time of interview was a synthesis arising out of many acquisitions, and despite the hundred year history of the parent company, no convincing overall Alcatel culture has percolated down to Upper Hutt. To industry observers, including myself, it seems that the people at the Upper Hutt Plant have continued to do what they have always done, despite intercontinental shifts of ultimate ownership. According to the interview subjects this "hands-off" approach is not confined to the New Zealand acquisition.

**Alcatel's Physical Location**

At the time of the interviews, Alcatel New Zealand Ltd. was located in a pleasant suburban back street in the dormitory city of Upper Hutt, North of Wellington. The premises were uncompromisingly those of an electronics assembly plant, with substantial assembly halls situated in the midst of surprisingly pleasant tree lined grounds behind an undistinguished two storey brick office block A pavilion styled building placed in a grove of trees some 20 metres to the South of the main premises housed the staff cafeteria, which was consciously separated from both the factory and the office parts of the structure. In front of the main buildings, an off-street carpark was marked out with reserved spaces for designated senior managers, and a number of spaces for visitors. Off-street parking for lower ranking employees was provided around the side of the building.

**Inside the Building**

The obvious front entrance to the building led to a minimal foyer from which authorised persons could enter the main factory, or from which visitors could follow the signs up a narrow set of stairs to the reception area. At the head of the stairs a passageway led in both directions to various offices, with accounting and clerical type of accommodation to the left, and the more spacious and attractively furnished senior offices to the right. Across the passage from the
stairs, a glass fronted counter gave access to the telephonist and typist who had additional responsibilities as receptionist. A public address system connected throughout both the offices and the main assembly halls was used by the receptionist to summon the person for whom any visitor had called, or to deliver any other message to any person away from his or her desk.

Visitors are ushered to an alcove which served as a waiting area. This unattractive space is lined with company motivational posters, and is copiously provided with the house journals and divisional brochures and newsletters which are typical of such companies.

The limited number of offices I visited in the course of this research were of varying standards. The CEO had a large airy corner office with big windows, a large desk, and a cluster of visitor chairs around a coffee table. Furnishings and decor were of modest quality and strictly utilitarian. The office of the administration manager, by comparison, was towards the rear of the office block, and had no natural lighting whatsoever. The office was situated to allow its occupant oversight of the activities of several clerical staff at desks in the unpartitioned open plan area occupied by his immediate subordinates. Grey filing cabinets and paper provided the overwhelming impression of this area, which seemed typical of a factory office of the seventies.

Other managers were more fortunate, having offices at the front of the building with a view over the street. The offices were equipped with ordinary office furniture, to an adequate, if unexciting standard. Posters, whiteboards and various charts denoting progress against targets were typical of the adornments in the offices.

**Interview Locations**

Two of the four Alcatel subjects used their own offices for the purposes of the interviews. The Chief Executive had a comparatively luxurious space in which the interview could take place. The administration manager's office was almost Dickensian by comparison, dark, cluttered, and overflowing with documents pertaining to the many concurrent tasks in which he was apparently
engaged. The other two subjects commandeered a vacant conference room for the duration of the interview. This room was well lit, though shielded from the corridor by a glass partition which was potentially disconcerting. The room was dominated by a whiteboard, a small PC-based videoconferencing unit, and a massive varnished wood table. Posters proclaimed Alcatel’s then espoused priorities to be:

a) maintain leadership in the growth areas of the telecommunications industry

b) increase penetration of the U.S. market; and

c) establish a “hi-speed [sic]” culture in a streamlined organization.

(From a poster observed on site)

The last stated objective seemed at variance with the evident pride expressed in interviews at the slow, deliberate engineering-based approach to quality in the Upper Hutt Plant.

Artefacts

There were few visible artefacts which proclaimed an Alcatel identity other than the ubiquitous posters which contained the Alcatel trademark. Though the logo is deployed in all the usual ways, on pens, posters, business cards and official stationery, its presence is not as pervasive as the logos of the other participant organizations. This may be attributed to its understated appearance. The posters previously referred to were a mixture of exhortations for internal consumption that Alcatel was henceforth to be a “hi-speed company” [sic], and advertisements for the organization’s expertise in nuclear power generation, the manufacture of electric locomotives, and global undersea cables.
Staff Retention

Alcatel in New Zealand was a small operation which drew the majority of its staff from the dormitory city in which it is located. Alternative employment for most would require a forty minute commute into Wellington each day. The convenience and lifestyle implications of being able to live and work away from the pace of the Capital city were believed to be a contributing factor in the perceived unusual stability of the work force:

.... the average tenure in this place is twelve and a half years, that's very long. (Alcatel - Technical Manager A)

Similar considerations applied to its satellite plant in the provincial town of Masterton, a 40 km drive over a significant range of hills into the rural province of Wairarapa. When people had one of the few available jobs in such locations, it was believed, they were reluctant to relinquish them because other options required long commutes.

Alcatel's New Zealand Products

At the time of the interviews, Alcatel New Zealand still derived a substantial income making automotive looms for the residual auto-assembly industry in New Zealand. Since then, tariff protection has been removed from the auto industry, and all of the clients for this product have ceased to assemble vehicles in New Zealand. Undoubtedly this contributed to the subsequent decision of Alcatel to withdraw from manufacturing in New Zealand and to restructure itself as a sales outlet.

Ericsson Communications: The Swedish Touch

Ericsson Communications Ltd is the New Zealand subsidiary of the Swedish telecommunications multinational. Ericsson claim world leadership in their field, with almost 27,000 employees in 24 countries (Ericsson, 2001). Its founder Lars Magnus Ericsson began exporting telephones from his native
Sweden in 1881. Sales to New Zealand justified the establishment of a sales agency as long ago as 1935, but the company did not arrive in any substantive form until it established a beachhead through the purchase of a small electronics engineering firm in Napier. Its efforts today are directed at consumers, enterprises, and telecommunications suppliers.

The Thorndon Quay premises of Ericsson Communications are located in an unattractive light industrial area at the North end of Wellington’s central business district, adjacent to the sprawl of the city’s railyards. Though only eight stories high, the Ericsson building towers over the old two and three storey buildings in its neighbourhood. Its entrance is inaccessible to people with disabilities by virtue of a set of steps leading up to a confusing entrance way. Once inside, the visitor is greeted by two very professional receptionist telephonists whose task is clearly to greet visitors, make them welcome, and to expedite the meetings for which they have come.

As at the Dairy Board, visitors at Ericsson are required to obtain and wear a visitor identification. The foyer is a large open space which may at some earlier stage have been a showroom for some prior occupant of the building. The waiting area for visitors is at a cluster of seats in a carpeted area in the “shop front” adjacent to the street. A television set displays continuous Ericsson promotional material. The corporate logo is prominently displayed, and depending on the day of week, or the promotional theme, the staff are likely to be dressed in smart casual uniform clothes discreetly embroidered with the company logo and occasionally a promotional message.

Although the Ericsson logo (Figure 5) exists globally in variants of blue on white, or white on blue, the logo as implemented in New Zealand is stark white on Black. This cleverly capitalises on the thematic use of black as the national branding colour applied to almost all of New Zealand’s national sporting teams. It asserts a New Zealand identity for the company. During the running of the America’s Cup yachting campaign in early 2000, for example, Ericsson New Zealand sponsored the New Zealand entry, and staff
wore smart black casual uniform embroidered with the company logo in white in support of the black yacht which eventually retained the trophy.

Furnishings in Ericsson’s head office appear more expensive than most of the other locations visited in the course of this research. The same cannot be said for the premises in a light industrial suburb of Napier. It is located in a street where the atmosphere carries the unpleasant smells of welding, spray paint, various chemical resins. Buildings are predominantly constructed of concrete blocks and corrugated iron cladding, the Ericsson building is distinguished from its neighbours mainly by the company logo, and its secure access. The building is not geared to receiving visitors since access is via a keypad combination lock, and the rare visitor must speak into a microphone to get someone to come to the door to admit them. To the extent that the working part of the premises were visible, the work places tend to be low sided cubicles in a large high-ceilinged open space. The interview for this research was conducted in the tearoom upstairs. This was a large room devoid of decoration, with practical tables and chairs which could serve equally well for lunch and card games or for the occasional meetings held on the premises. Facilities for boiling water, a refrigerator and a water dispenser were the sole visible concessions to staff comfort.

**Telecom New Zealand Limited: The Engineers**

Telecom’s Hamilton centre is a significant network and engineering hub. The tower block which houses this centre which is adjacent to Hamilton’s central business district contains major switching and network monitoring equipment. It has a fortress-like experience with small windows and a grey concrete façade. Not surprisingly, the entrance to the building is controlled by a burly uniformed security guard who verifies the identity of each visitor, the nature of the business and ensures that the person has access only to the person with whom, or room in which the meeting is to occur. Visitors are required to wear a badge at all times, and for the normal visitor, this badge is severely limiting in terms of where in the building is accessible.
This is an engineering centre built for Telecom, and occupied by Telecom people doing things that require little or no contact with external people. The building has the obligatory Telecom logo (Figure 6) in strategic places, but might otherwise be characterised as “featureless”.

Compared with the upper tier furnishings of the corporate head office where I first went to seek permission from the person with the “gatekeeper” function, the offices and furnishings are of a more industrial than executive character. The offices of the respondents are spacious, and the furnishings and décor are adequate for their task. A large whiteboard dominates each of the rooms, and clearly meetings and group discussions are a significant part of their usage.

**Chapter Summary**

In this chapter, I have provided descriptions of the sites which are the locus of the intergroup interactions which are central to this research. Given my extensive history of employment within the New Zealand Dairy Board, I was able to provide a richer description of its working environment than I could offer from my comparatively brief exposure to the other organizations. The cultural artefacts, both visible and intangible are a significant component of the influence of the relevant cultures on the behaviour of the group concerned, and the perception of that group on the part of non-members.
Part II Phenomenological Analysis

The second part of this thesis consists of four chapters. They begin with the phenomenological reconstruction of the narratives collected, and a general statement intended to encapsulate the live experience of interaction between groups in these organizations. Literature relevant to the research questions and the emergent themes is surveyed, and in the final chapter, the findings are introduced together with an analysis of the implications of this research for practice and for further research.
Chapter 5   Exploration of the Data

Introduction

This chapter describes the process of phenomenological reduction and phenomenological writing by means of which the researcher explores the data from the interviews with twenty eight individuals and two groups, and attempts to make accessible to the reader, the essences of the lived experiences described by the research subjects.

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is no universally approved, prerequisite or mandated method or procedural recipe by which to conduct phenomenological research. Nevertheless the steps suggested by various current practitioners (Colaizzi, 1978; Giorgi et al., 1975; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990) not only have a visible consistency, but they provide a practical framework through which to interpret the essences of lived experience. Borrowing useful features from each of these scholars, the procedure I have used for the phenomenological analysis of the present research is outlined below:

a) Collaborate with the research participants in the creation of narratives wherein the respondents give their accounts of their own lived experience as members of workgroups in complex organizations, and of relating in the course of their work to non-members.

b) Break the narrative into meaning units, identifying those units which relate to the fundamental questions of this research, while acknowledging that one piece of text may embody multiple meanings. For practical purposes this meant selecting those text

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12 I have used "meaning units" in the sense of speech utterances which embody whole or complete ideas. Each may be a word, a sentence, or a whole paragraph. For practical purposes, meaning units are synonymous with the concept of text units as deployed in the QSR NUD*IST™ package.
units which described the group itself, the experience of belonging to the group, the characteristics of other groups encountered in the course of the respondent’s work, or interactions with members of those other groups.

c) Reflect on essential themes which describe the lived experience of relating to outsiders as a member of a group (phenomenological reduction).

d) For each respondent, describe through a process of writing and rewriting, the phenomena of belonging to a group, and of relating to outsiders as a member of a group. Describe what happens in the lived experience of each phenomenon, and the meaning ascribed to those experiences by the respondent (phenomenological writing).

e) From the foregoing analysis, create a composite description which exhaustively describes and thus recreates for the reader, the essences of the lived experiences of belonging to a group, and relating to outsiders as a member of a group.

The first two steps above have been described in some detail in Chapter 4.

**Phenomenological Reduction**

As a consequence of the semi-structured nature of the interviews described in Chapter 3, and given that the respondents were invited to describe the nature of their belonging, and their experiences of dealing with others who did not belong, many of the text units were discarded as having scant or no relevance to the research questions. To achieve this, I examined each text unit, selecting those which in any way described the respondent’s lived experience of being a part of a group, or described the experience of relating to people from outside the group concerned, and discarded all others. By far the greatest proportion of the discarded text units could be categorised as monosyllabic responses to questions, reflective repetitions, or conversational space markers, devoid of concepts said such as:
"Yeah, you do. Yeah, I think so. Um..."
(Ericsson - Technical Manager C)

Reduction attempts, so far as it is possible, to suspend the researcher’s own natural presuppositions, seeking to find the essential meanings imbedded in the lived experience of the phenomenon under scrutiny. According to Borrett, Kelly, & Kwan (2000), reduction is used as a means by which “we suspend belief in any framework involved in objective experience, and return to a description of things as they appear in our experience of them” (p. 265).

To put this into practice I borrowed from the process that Van Manen (2000e) terms “Reductio”\(^\text{13}\). Van Manen is at pains to point out that reduction is as much to do with reflective attentiveness to the description of the phenomenon as it is to do with procedural steps. In this research the process which facilitates that reflective attentiveness is to attempt various levels of reduction, and especially those which are classed as eidetic, hermeneutic, heuristic and phenomenological.

Eidetic reduction is sometimes regarded by researchers as synonymous with “bracketing”, but although it requires the researcher to bracket assumptions of meaning, it seeks those universal dimensions which uniquely differentiate this particular experience from related experiences (Van Manen, 1990, 2000b). In short, the researcher must look for what aspects of the description reveal the particular meaningfulness of this experience.

Hermeneutic reduction also requires a bracketing or putting aside of prior conceptions, and requires the researcher to examine and reflect on the assumptions and pre-understandings embodied in the description of the experience, seeking to understand how meaning is built up in respect of this phenomenon (Van Manen, 2000c).

\(^{13}\) Reductio is derived from the Latin verb Re-ducere - to lead back. (Van Manen, 2000f)
Heuristic reduction has as its aim, nothing less than to awaken the sense of wonder in relation to the phenomenon. For practical purposes this requires the setting aside of preconceptions once more, and looking for the questions which arise from the examination of the description (Van Manen, 2000a).

Phenomenological Reduction also requires bracketing of all theoretical considerations, and aims to discover by reflection, what is the concrete experience embedded in the narrative (Van Manen, 2000d).

To carry out the process of reduction in the present research, I reflected on each of the selected text units, attempting to leave aside prior assumptions or knowledge, and to search for what is revealed by the utterance under each of the reductive approaches. Thus, I used four questions as lenses through which to seek the essence of lived experience in each utterance. The questions were:

a) What is uniquely different about this text unit?
b) What additional questions does it raise?
c) What assumptions are embedded in this text?
d) What is the concrete nature of the experience contained in this text?

Phenomenological Writing

To indulge momentarily in reductio ad absurdum, many characterisations of the phenomenological method describe it as a process of breaking the description of a phenomenon down, and putting it back together again. However, the putting back together is done with the intent of enabling the reader to share to the greatest possible extent, the lived experiences of the phenomenon in question. Within the tradition of experiential phenomenology, phenomenological writing is the principal means of recreating those lived experiences.

Van Manen's (2000f) label for the process of making the phenomena accessible to the reader through the power of language is vocatio. This Latin word means to call forth, or to make present. It is the task of the researcher
through the skilful use of language to “call forth” the lived experience of the phenomenon, or in other words, to create the mental stimuli through which the reader may, as nearly as possible, share in the subject’s lived experience of the phenomenon. In the process I used for this research, I attempted to put aside prior knowledge and supposition, and to look not only at the respondent’s text, but also at the essences revealed in the text through the various aspects of the reduction, and thus to discern as far as possible, the real nature of the lived experience as captured in the respondent’s narrative. Then through the process of writing and rewriting, it became my task to attempt to recreate that lived experience in written form. This latter process is described by Van Manen (1990) as a process of bringing thought to speech in written form. He draws on Heidegger’s (1962) definition of phenomenology: "to let that which shows itself be seen from itself in the very way it shows itself from itself" (p. 58). I propose a parallel to the folkloric advice on how to carve an elephant from a block of granite. It is recommended that the sculptor should knock off everything from the block that does not look like an elephant (source unknown). Similarly, the process of writing and rewriting is an iterative creative process, requiring thoughtful scrutiny and subsequent rewording of the resulting texts so that they are polished and re-polished, until the things that were revealed shine through with the utmost clarity. As with the sculpture, the researcher does not add or invent things, but seeks to discover that which lies within. The process does not aim at mere stylistic improvement, although that might be reasonably expected as a by-product of the process. Instead, the researcher is required to engage in a process of finding better ways to articulate and make clearer, the lifeworlds of the informants.

“To the Things Themselves” – The Stories

There now follows a series of subsections, each devoted to the experiences of one of the research participants, and presented in the order of the company for which they work. To the greatest extent practicable, I have attempted to preserve anonymity, although this is obviously not possible with the CEOs. Fortunately, neither requested it.
As described above, I have “filtered” the transcripts of the actual interviews, selecting those utterances which are in some sense expressive of: (a) a sense of identification with a group, whether organization or workgroup, and/or (b) a sense of the “otherness” of those who do not belong, or belong to other groups. To give a flavour for the flow of a typical interview, a brief anonymised sample of one of the raw transcripts may be found in Appendix 4. To honour the undertakings given, and to abide by the conditions of the Human Ethics consents, no further material can be made available. I scrutinised each of these filtered utterances, using at least the four lenses referred to earlier in this chapter. Then, reflecting on the various perspectives of each utterance, I have attempted through a process of writing and rewriting, to reconstruct as nearly as possible for the reader, the essences of the lived experiences of the phenomena as encountered by the respondent. I have not attempted to cast the description in the voice of the respondent, but rather to present a sense of the informants’ realities as they emerged from their stories. Where necessary, I have begun the subsection with a brief introduction as to the role of each respondent, and thereafter, attempted to give the reader a sense of the relevant lived experience of that respondent as communicated to me, the researcher.

Subjects which seemed to come most easily to the informants were either the positive achievements of which they were proud, and/or the dissatisfaction arising from the perceived poor performance of other groups or individuals. In some cases, as discussed in later chapters, informants were sharply critical of their own group, as if they had in some sense renounced membership, and were thereby able to view the group from the perspective of an outsider.

In cases where the topic had not arisen in the course of the initial discussion, I asked the subjects to describe their experience of communicating with non-members. In most cases, subjects were uninhibited in identifying differences experienced when dealing with outsiders. Most such narratives took a somewhat negative or disparaging view of the other party.

Perhaps as a consequence of the selection process previously described, most informants provided narratives which were indicative of a strong sense of identification with the goals and objectives of the organization for which they
worked. Furthermore, the narratives demonstrated considerable knowledge of the industry in which each informant’s organization was engaged. This was especially the case in the New Zealand Dairy Board where, almost without exception, the respondents demonstrated a lively interest in the events, personalities and politics of the global industry of which they are a part. The descriptions that follow are arranged in the sequence of the company in which the interviews took place. Since there each interview stands alone, there is no especial significance to the sequence in the interview outcomes are presented within the company.

**The New Zealand Dairy Board**

Fifteen informants from the New Zealand Dairy Board provided accounts of their existence as members of one or more workgroups. Of these, one was the CEO, and five others were members of the his senior executive team. To the extent that this senior team may be perceived as a workgroup, this is the only real example of multiple reports from the same group. However, this was accidental since, except for the CEO, I had selected them for their delegated responsibility as heads of subordinate group(s). Of the remaining Dairy Board participants, only two are involved in workgroups concerned with end products, and the remainder are the managers of internal service or knowledge-based functions.

**Guiding Vision from a Chief Executive**

At the apex of the management hierarchy in the New Zealand Dairy Board, is the Corporate Executive Team (CET). As well as representing the various functional groups of which each is the manager, its members bring particular skills and experience to assist the Chief Executive Officer in his task of making the policy decisions by which the organization is to be driven forward. Beyond their undoubtedly strong individual records of personal achievement, each member is wholly committed to the achievement of his or her assigned objectives by the exercise of their considerable autonomy. Each is expected to exhibit an unreserved commitment to the success of the organization:
If they don't want to do that - they shouldn't be there ... So, yes I do want those characteristics transmitted to the organisation. I want people to be proud of what they work for. I want them to be - have a sense of belonging. I want them to believe in what they do and I want them to actually crawl over broken glass to achieve their targets. And the job of that team is to create me a climate so that people can get on and achieve to the maximum level of their potential (NZDB CEO).

Despite a unified vision, all is not necessarily harmonious. A degree of "constructive tension" is seen by the CEO as a desirable mechanism for the achievement of certain objectives. However, he is careful to distinguish this from the more overtly adversarial style of relationships which existed in earlier times when managers competed with each other for scarce resources, almost to the detriment of the organization's overall benefit.

In their dealings with the subordinate groups reporting to the senior team, members are intolerant of adverse outcomes which have not been adequately foreshadowed by the managers concerned. Groups failing to meet their agreed objectives find that their autonomy is swiftly curtailed.

**Keeping Everybody Within the Tent**

This respondent (NZDB - Senior Manager A ) is a recent appointee to the New Zealand Dairy Board's Corporate Executive Team, the members of which have always been selected on the basis of their personal attributes including a marked degree of commercial aggression. Prior to the group's most recent restructuring by the Chief Executive Officer, these attributes were seen to be manifested through internal competition, whereby members commonly took decisions to the best advantage of their own areas of responsibility, and the potential detriment of the organization as a whole. The CEO is perceived to have participated in, and understood the failings of this previous environment, and has now worked to replace members with entrenched attitudes, with new members to achieve a team supportive of his overall objectives and vision.
... the most telling thing is that there's nobody outside the tent now\textsuperscript{14} (NZDB - Senior Manager A).

While there remains some "creative tension", competitiveness is now directed towards the achievement of the group's collectively agreed strategic goals.

**A Senior Manager with Subordinate Groups**

This respondent is a member of the corporate executive team, nearing retirement at the time of interview. His accounts address both the most senior management group, of which he is a member, and the group which is comprised of his own subordinates.

The senior group is comprised of the leaders of the various functional groups or Divisions within the Board. For practical purposes, it is mainly the Wellington-based managers who are in day-to-day contact with the chief executive officer. At its broadest level, the purpose of the group is to act as a forum in which members can advise the chief executive, and receive advice in their turn from the chief executive and from each other.

Members see themselves as a talented group, distinguished from other employees by their levels of smartness and intelligence, their work ethic, their expectations of performance, their ambition, and their orientation towards results. They do not like to come second, and see themselves as more willing to take risks than other employees. Members of this group apprehend that they have a greater ability than anyone else to comprehend "the big picture", and to understand fully, the interdependence of various activities within the organization.

\textsuperscript{14} This is a reference to a somewhat vulgar remark attributed to US President, Lyndon Baines Johnson who, when asked if he planned to replace troublesome FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover is reported to have said: "It's probably better to have him inside the tent pissing out, than outside the tent pissing in."
Collectively, the group has few external relationships. Interaction with the Board of Directors is conducted via the chief executive officer, to whom they are all responsible. Interactions with the operational divisions of the Board are the domain of the individual group members who are the designated managers of each activity. Group attitudes towards the major sub-groups within the Board are formed in response to the information provided by those groups. The expectation of good performance and positive results over a long period of time is the standard which shapes the opinion of the group towards all the other elements of the wider organization.

The second tier group reporting to this respondent, consists of individuals who are, in their turn, responsible for the management of groups specialists with defined roles and objectives. Members of this group, though possessed of the qualities of hard driving and results orientation, are perceived to have them to a lesser extent than the senior group, and to be less entrepreneurial. Members of the subordinate group are perceived as rule driven individuals who will perform their specified tasks with exactness and without shortcuts, to a high standard.

**Purposeful Management at a Senior Level**

This member of the senior management team is responsible for a very large percentage of the Board's operations, both domestically and internationally. He is both a member of the senior team, and the leader and manager of a subordinate group.

Members of the senior executive team believe that their group has changed from a being a disparate group of people excessively influenced by individual personalities, to one which is unequivocally the CEO's group, and which now functions as a team. Collective support of the total output of the organization has become the principal focus of the group. Relationships with the offshore regional distribution companies are significantly improved now that the group is more willing to review and reconsider its own decisions, and to think through the information demands it makes on the regions. Even so, a degree of tension still exists as an inevitable by-product of the organizational structure. This tension is managed by having a minimum set of clearly defined non-
negotiable requirements, and well understood delegation of explicit responsibilities to the regions.

The group at the next level down has a different purpose. Chief among the reasons for the existence of this second-level team is the opportunity for the respondent in his role as manager, to convey priorities and to raise issues in need of attention. Nevertheless, this team is modelled after the style of the senior team, and there is a great deal of sharing of information of mutual interest.

Links between this subordinate group, and its peer groups outside the control of the respondent, vary in their quality. Well structured and orderly relationships exist between the subject group and the Finance group, and also with the Research and Development groups. In each case, respective roles are well understood, and few interventions are required of the respondent. Scheduled routine meetings with the manager of the other two groups occur for the purpose of establishing strategic priorities. Project related interactions with the Research and Development group take place within a well established framework of systematic and deliberate procedures designed to ensure that all participants know who does what. Clear definitions exist in this context as to what constitutes a new project, and what is merely an adjustment to an existing product or service, and all processes in this domain are subject to strict prioritisation, and careful scrutiny.

By contrast, the relationships between the subject group and the Marketing group are more combative, with any demarcation disputes needing to be settled by escalation to the senior manager of each participant group. Blurred interfaces and a heightened level of conflict are a consequence of less defined roles and procedures.

Relationships between the subject group and the Information Systems group are improved since that group has come to see itself as a provider of service to the business rather than as a stand-alone entity which is an end in itself. The scheme whereby a designated specialist from the IS group took on the role of account manager and problem coordinator for a specific business group did not meet expectations. Nevertheless, the two groups now work more closely
together, with the business group taking more responsibility for its own information needs.

**Seniority in a Service Role**

Comparatively speaking, this respondent is very new to the senior team, having been rapidly promoted after various assignments to regional offices and a spell in middle management roles. At the time of the interview, his area of responsibility had been significantly expanded by the inclusion in his area of responsibility, of the previously independent Information Systems Group. Three groups were discussed in this interview, namely, the corporate executive team, the financial group of which he was already the manager, and the Information Systems Group.

Members of the senior executive team see themselves as totally committed to the organization, and to the fulfilment of its role within the industry. In general, they have a breadth of understanding of, and are able to discuss in detail, matters relating to the industry. They are able to properly place specific matters within the context of the industry as a whole. These attributes, they believe, allow its members to speak consistently, and with one voice.

Although the CEO is comfortable with reasoned dissent, his membership policy for the senior team is consciously aimed at including people who have similar views on the commitment necessary to do the job, and who will be supportive of his long term objectives. Amongst the goals the senior team has for itself, are the development of an organizational culture which supports its key objectives, and the effective communication of the industry goals.

A significant task for the team is the evaluation of decisions taken by the various business units in the organization, with special attention to the activities of the offshore marketing regions. Regional offices are known to resent what they regard as excessive demands from head office for information. Some of them regard these requirements as a curb on their autonomy, as well as a drain on their resources. The resentment is seen in the context of some re-centralization and a reining-in of the autonomy given to the regions as part of an earlier drive towards decentralization. In the eyes of the senior team, the regions must
recognise that they not wholly independent, but are part of a major multinational, and that as subsidiaries, they are obliged to give an account of themselves to the organization which is both their sole supplier and sole shareholder.

The financial group is composed of four sub-groups each with its own functional specialisation. Though the sub-groups have little specific activity in common, they have in common, highly skilled people who deal with aspects of the totality of the organization, and provide support to each other in their dealings with the offshore groups. It is the role of the finance group to set fiscal policy to achieve corporate goals, and to monitor compliance with it. The group provides the disciplines and initiates actions necessary to achieve the financial aspects of the corporate strategy. It sees itself as the guardian of corporate assets.

Most members of this group have accounting qualifications, and can be characterised as conservative people who carry out their work in a methodical and deliberate manner. It is in the nature of the group and its tasks that it is control-oriented. Nevertheless, its members are not afraid to go beyond the expected bounds of their job, and despite its non-operational nature, they find excitement in seeking new ways to add value to the organization. The group sees that, although it is good at gathering data, it is less expert at convincing others of the need for the data, or at turning the data into useful information.

The IS group is divided into two sections, one concerned with global projects, and the other with systems for the New Zealand market. Their objectives are to think strategically, to question strategy, and to plan and implement Information Systems against specific agreed objectives. Like the Finance Group, the IS group is non-operational, in the sense that it is not directly involved with products or sales. The behaviours and values of the IS group as a whole are not seen to be different from those exhibited by the Finance group. Their background is different and this leads to some frustration in dealing with

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15 At the time of the interview, the reporting change which brought the Information Systems group under the control of the respondent was very recent, and in my opinion as researcher, the account of that part of the respondent's responsibility was from the perspective of an external observer rather than from an active participant.
some of their members whose thought processes are less business oriented and more techno-centric than is considered appropriate. This frustration relates to isolated incidents and a few individuals, rather than to the group as a whole.

The group suffers from a failure to communicate, both across the organization, and internally, information relating to its roles, responsibilities and objectives. When things are not going well, the group is inclined to keep quiet while it tries to put things right. This leads to the perception in other parts of the organization that a lack of active communication is a signal of impending bad news. More expansive communication would lead to more understanding and support from the rest of the organization, and a more positive presence for the group. It is necessary for the group to work to modify and adjust the end goals of their major projects as striving to deliver a three year old objective is seen as an unworthy aspiration.

**Different States of the Same Group**

A member of the Corporate Executive Team who has held senior positions in various parts of the organization around the globe, this respondent was also nearing retirement at the time of the interview. The principal focus of his narrative is the differences in the way in which the senior team functions under the then current CEO compared with its style under the previous incumbent.

The current CEO has effected significant changes in the values and behaviours within the organization. Previously, the organization and the executive team was characterised by a focus on the performance of individual groups rather than on the best overall outcomes. Under previous regimes, there existed a consciously devised adversarial strategy in which members competed with each other for allocation of milk to the manufacture of products in their own area of responsibility. In such an environment, knowledge was jealously guarded, and given only in exchange for some reciprocal benefit. Under the old way of doing things, the organization had a trading culture in which the focus was on production rather than on customers.
Philosophies espoused by the present CEO have caused the senior management group to see itself as a team with shared collective responsibilities for the achievement of a better overall output rather than the maximisation of personal achievements. Members of the group not only collaborate with each other for the greater good, but also share information received in the course of their own work. Recognition is given to individual contribution towards the greater good. The culture of the group is seen to have changed to a customer focus with emphasis on continuous quality improvement.

The transition from the old to the new could not be regarded as complete until the recent retirements or resignations of certain prominent personalities from the old regime. Since the departure of these figures, the senior group has come together as a team. Now there is respect for each other’s skills, and an endeavour to assist each other to achieve the commonly agreed outcomes. A major goal of the senior team as it is now constituted, is that the organization as a whole should perform better than its competitors.

**Inter-group Observations at the Second Level**

This respondent is a senior manager one level removed from the Corporate Executive Team. The respondent sees himself first and foremost as a member of the management team of the division in which his group is situated. His narrative was principally about the relationships between himself and other groups.

Good relationships exist between this group and the marketing group, despite their apparent lack of popularity elsewhere within the Board. This warmth is at least partly due to the respondent’s personal efforts to befriend the manager of that group. Efforts have been made with mixed success to involve the marketing group in various forums especially those pertaining to the allocation of rationed product to various markets.

Organizationally, there are regular formal contacts between the two groups, and there is mutual business benefit in their collaboration. The marketing group differs from this group in that the former are focused on what should be, while the latter deal with what is. Although recent recruits to the marketing group
have been selected precisely for their in-market experience, this group have more hands on experience than their counterparts in marketing.

Relationships with the finance group are less warm, and they are somewhat disparagingly referred to as “the beanies”. Similarly to the Information Systems group, they are held in less respect because they are not “mainstream”, and are not directly involved in the procurement, marketing, sales and logistics of dairy product. Members of the finance group have diminished influence in the respondent’s eyes because they are dispersed among the other groups and divisions of the board, rather than located in a concentrated group of specialists.

Relationships with the Information Systems group are positive at a day to day operational level, but the strategic or management levels are almost invisible to the members of this group.

Regional operating companies are important to this group. Relationships with some are less effective than with others. People in on region are coarsely characterised as “a bunch of arseholes” and this is a result of the management style of that region’s CEO. Another region is resentful that their autonomy is curtailed by the amount of second-guessing of their activities from head office, on the part of various senior executives who in the past, have spent various but usually small amounts of time in that region.

**Pride in Belonging**

As the principal media spokesperson for the New Zealand Dairy Board, this respondent is predictably an evangelist for the organization. As he sees it, most employees share in his sense of belonging to an organization that makes a tangible contribution to the national good. He believes his fellow employees derive satisfaction from the consciousness of belonging to an audacious organization which overcomes adversity from the position of being a “small
player". Some even experience a sense of excitement through having responsibility for aspects of what can be seen as a long term project of significant proportions.

Employees of this organization are differentiated from those of other organizations by their commitment to the maximisation of farmer wealth. In other organizations, a more usual motivation might be the acquisition of market share. Employees are especially aware of the dependence of rural communities upon the achievements of their employees, so they strive to prove their worth to the farmers, and to prove detractors wrong by their performance in the market place.

According to the respondent, the organization has yet to achieve its full potential, but rather, is in transition towards that state. Change within the organization has been significant during recent years, and there has been an evolution from the personality driven organization, arguably appropriate to the "frontier times" in which it existed, to a pattern of roles and behaviours which are more uniform and more in keeping with present thinking as to what constitutes present organizational ideals.

A Truly Unique Group

This respondent is a second-tier manager of long standing in charge of a highly specialised group.

Members of this group are unique in the fact that their work is essentially concerned with global trade politics. All of them were directly recruited from governmental departments for their qualifications and expertise in fields such as

16 Although the New Zealand Dairy Board claims to have the largest share of internationally traded dairy product, it is dwarfed by the volume of domestic trade done by some of its major competitors. New Zealand produces about 4% of the world's fresh milk.

17 This interview took place some two years prior to unification of the New Zealand Dairy industry into the company now known as Fonterra, which may or may not be what the respondent had in mind.
diplomacy or foreign relations and trade. Alone of all the groups within the New Zealand Dairy Board, these people have the background and the training to work effectively with the politicians and trade bureaucrats at the very highest levels in other sovereign nations, as well as in trading blocs and such influential entities as the American Food and Drug Administration, the European Union, and the World Trade Organization. They are set apart from other groups in the board, not only for the contacts they have, but by their mode of working which is distinctly different from any other processes within the organization. The nature of their work has a direct bearing on the trading environment for the industry. It falls to members of this group, not only to interpret the trading environment for the other elements of the Board, but also to gather information from those groups to feed back into the trading environment with a view to influencing it in favour of the Board. A corollary responsibility is to advise other business units within the Board on how best to take advantage of the current and future environments. Given the circular relationship between information received, the trading environment and advice given, members of the group are conscious of the need to communicate effectively and unambiguously across all its boundaries. They perceive relationships with other groups to be mainly cordial and effective.

Members believe themselves to work in a more precise, and more analytical way, and across a broader range of strategic issues over a longer time frame than any other group in the Board. A role of great significance within the Board, is the provision of a situation analysis in respect of global dairy trade. This forms the basis on which the board of directors reaches its position on the all-important price of milk paid out to our stakeholder dairy farmers\textsuperscript{18}. The Board’s primary function is international marketing.

Because of the vertical integration of the New Zealand dairy industry members of this group in particular, and employees of the Board in general, routinely deal with industry issues relating to farmers and to the contributing

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\textsuperscript{18} In the broad view, the Dairy Board maximises its sustainable revenues, so as to return all of its profits to the farmers by way of the greatest possible price per unit volume of milk solids supplied by each farmer.
cooperative manufacturing dairy companies, and the knowledge thus acquired gives them a unique and positive orientation towards the industry’s stakeholders. Members of the group are motivated by their perception of dairy products as intrinsically nutritious and wholesome, and this perspective allows them to feel good about their role in its production and distribution. Their self-esteem is further enhanced by the large size and global scope of the enterprise, as well as its significant contribution to the New Zealand economy.

Attacks by outside parties on the efficacy of the industry’s structure, and the Board’s statutory privileges cause anxiety for many Board employees. In addition, the various relationships between the Board, its supplying companies, and the regional distribution operations are sometime adversarial, and a source of tension, as each sector strives to achieve the greatest advantage for itself. This group is significant in the provision of information to offset the misinformation which is propagated by entities antipathetic to the Board.

A Free Agent

This respondent is a project manager within the operations group without a standing group reporting to her. She has special responsibility as representative of the user community for the business aspects of the major global information systems package, and as such works closely with, though is not part of the information systems group.

The information systems development group has had to be augmented by a number of contractors sourced through the prime vendor. Composition of this group varies as individuals with skills appropriate to the tasks of immediate priority in the project implementation. The character of the group at any given time is shaped by the individuals who are its members at that time. Because of its transient membership, this particular group has no enduring culture or attributes which can be seen as characteristic of the group itself. Short term contractors are unfamiliar with the Board’s culture and ways of doing things, and thus are time consuming in their need to be coached through these things.
The group’s outlook differs from other parts of the organization, over the issue of change management. Within the group, there is the expectation that change management is part of the project development process. In practice, the organization delegates responsibility for change management to the line managers of those groups whose operations are affected by the proposed changes. Although this may be at variance with formal change management methodology, the organization makes the technologists subordinate to the needs of the operational units engaged in the core business of the Board. Outside advice on business issues is suspect within the Board’s operating units, until the source has proved itself. Those who seek to offer advice are quickly categorised as either trustworthy or suspect, and great care is required to avoid being distrusted from the outset.

In order to apply their own skills to best effect within a group in the Board, newcomers must first be immersed in, and attentive to the culture of the group concerned. Dealing with the European region on the global project has been difficult because of differing priorities and objectives. In particular, after the appointment of a new and demanding manager, the Europeans seem to lack the confidence to take project related decisions involving any degree of risk. In the Middle East regional office in Bahrain, managers with the seniority to have decision making power are, for the most part, expatriate New Zealanders. Since few Bahrainis actually need to work for a living, most of the work force in that region are expatriates from the Indian subcontinent or elsewhere. The unstated implication of this observation is that, in general, third country expatriates are not usually appointed to senior positions in this region\textsuperscript{19}.

Within the operations division, though individuals nominally belong to a specific group, the extent of inter-group collaboration on allocated tasks, diminishes the extent to which the groups form distinctive cultures or patterns of behaviour. Members of the this group see themselves as highly empowered, and capable of autonomous decision making, in marked contrast with the top-down

\textsuperscript{19} It is unclear is whether this is attributable to inherent attitudes held by New Zealanders, or is simply a strategic compliance with the norms of the region.
hierarchical control exerted in the Information Systems group. This particular group consists of people whose roles require interaction and freedom to make decisions without being hampered by excessive caution.

**Negotiating Conflicting Demands**

This respondent has many years of middle management experience in the dairy and other industries. He now finds himself in charge of a small group of young specialists whose calculations of product standard costs form the basis of the profitability calculations for companies supplying manufactured dairy products, as well as for the Dairy Board which buys the product for profitable disposal on the international markets. The published standard costs influence the distribution of the industry's profits. These costs are always a contentious issue between the New Zealand Dairy Board and its supplying dairy companies. Because this is a cooperative industry in which profits are returned to suppliers on the basis of the value of products supplied, it is in the interest of individual dairy companies to have the standard costs for their particular combination of products set as high as possible, preferably higher than their own actual costs. The Dairy Board, on the other hand, seeks to have the standard costs more accurately reflect the actual costs of manufacture. By this means, a greater proportion of the payout to the farmers can be seen to be attributable to the marketing skills of the Board.

In this context, the group whose role is to create the complex cost models impartially, is subjected to constant pressure from each of the opposing sides to adjust the models in their favour. Members of this group sense that the perception of their impartiality is compromised by the fact that they are employed by, and located in the premises of, the New Zealand Dairy Board rather than in a more neutral location.

The necessity to be effective in defence of the objectivity and accuracy of their cost models, is a significant consideration for the group in the recruitment of new members. Usual prerequisites for membership include a background in process engineering and "a good brain" as evidenced by a first class honours degree. Most new recruits are carefully selected from the annual cohorts of the
Dairy Industry Graduate Training Programme. The fact that eight or nine of the twelve strong group are actively “poached” by other groups within the organization each year is seen as recognition of the calibre of members who win entry to the group. Although this dispersal of ex-members is useful to the group’s vital network of relationships throughout the organization, nevertheless the rate of turnover is a serious problem that has had to be addressed by financial inducement.

Although the current average tenure in the group is just eighteen months, the group has a social character of its own. Despite the considerable age difference, the manager, who is near retirement, takes pleasure in the company of his group who are mostly in their twenties.

We eat lunch together, and I think that is because people like ... just like each other. I mean I actually sit with [these] people because I like to sit with them ... I find them more comfortable ... I am quite happy just to sit with people I like talking to. (NZDB - Technical Manager A)

Within the Dairy Board, few people understand the highly technical nature of the work done by this group despite regular seminars offered by its manager. On the other hand, as a matter of self-interest, the Dairy Companies make it their business to be intimately acquainted with its processes. They take every opportunity to debate the appropriateness of the cost models, arguing in formal submissions for variations which favour their own interests. Much of the group’s time is spent in methodical consideration of all such submissions, and where appropriate, the formulation of rebuttals. Experience has convinced the group that some organizations deliberately obscure the information necessary for the calculation of accurate and objective costs, and when such obstruction occurs, the group must refer the issue to the statutory committee to which it reports. In the interest of ongoing cooperation, the group chooses its words carefully, preferring to avoid accusations of outright deception.

Despite its sense of being under siege, the group believes it is held in high esteem by the Board’s management. They attribute this to a succession of annual outcomes in which manufacturing costs very closely matched actual payouts to
the industry. Group members believe that the perceived accuracy is an inadequate measure of what they actually do, and in any case, they argue that the nature of their work is incapable of such accuracy, and that the outcomes were fortuitous.

**An Insider with an Outsider’s Perspectives**

This respondent (NZDB - Technical Manager B) is a manager with nominal membership of at least three distinct groups, of which one is unofficial and elective, and the other two are official bureaucratic assignments.20

The first of her groups however, is an aberration, in that it has no officially sanctioned existence, although in its own perception, it is influential. Whereas managers at the highest level in the New Zealand Dairy Board seem confident that they are doing all that needs to be done to achieve the organization’s goals through the activities within their divisions, several of the managers of those divisions perceive much that could be done better, and discern ways to address otherwise unresolved issues. Some of them meet to constitute an informal and entirely unofficial group. Members meet at whim, often at the close of a business day over a selected bottle of wine, lamenting organizational shortcomings and devising schemes to influence the real decision makers to make corrections. Motives for participation in this officially non-existent group vary widely, but in most cases, are seen as the achievement of unfulfilled personal ambition. Regardless of the motive, the intention is to address a number of organizational problems which, in the eyes of the participants, are not being properly attended to:

[It’s] more about ... about how do we influence the real decision makers so that you know, our organisation ... there is some coherency from

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20 My subjective view as researcher is that this respondent, in giving her stories adopted a position of detachment, as if exonerating herself from any responsibility for the attitudes, actions and behaviours of any of the groups concerned
strategy all the way through to what people do day to day. (NZDB -
Technical Manager B)

As the manager accountable for global information system development,
the respondent is, ex officio, also a member of an officially constituted group that
reports to a member of the senior management team. The previously autonomous
Information Systems Group of which she is the manager has been divided and
restructured to become part of the organization’s global finance and accounting
function. Participation in the group of managers thus constituted is problematic
for a number of reasons.

Most of the members of this group are male, who are specialists
accountable for the management of various aspects of finance, taxation, treasury
functions or accounting. The group meets regularly for reasons of internal
information exchange. Certain participants in these meetings, antagonise the
respondent who, as one of only two female members, experiences unwelcome
jokes and remarks apparently intended to assert male dominance. Her annoyance
is compounded by her perception that managerial control is not exerted to
eliminate these avoidable behaviours. Her mental engagement in this group tends
to be as a critical but uninvolved observer, and this stance is reinforced by her
perception that her colleagues attempt to constrain her participation to matters
related to information technology, rather than acknowledging her wider strategic
management expertise.

As the person accountable for the organization’s global information
systems strategy, the respondent is also the manager of a large group of
specialists, comprised of both permanent and contracted employees. Despite the
fact that the permanently employed members of this group are drawn almost
entirely from people who were members of the old Information Systems Group,
the group as it now exists is fortunate to be treated as a newly constituted entity.
Although it is seen as a largely unknown quantity within the organization, the
group is able to enjoy the kudos for its recent achievements without inheriting
any of the residual blame for past errors or failures, even though individual
members may have had a direct role in prior negative outcomes. The group has
yet to find a way to reconcile regional office aspirations to autonomy in
information systems, with its own newly acquired role as the architect of global information systems.

In another example of detachment, the respondent perceives members of the group to be completely at odds with her own values in their excessive concern with detail, and aversion to risk. Anxiety is exhibited within the group arising from uncertainties over the organization's role in the future of the New Zealand Dairy industry. Morale swings from highs when things are going well, to severe depression when setbacks are encountered in the current projects.

Despite her seniority in the domestic context, when working with the regional operating company in South East Asia, she finds it necessary for the success of her projects, to delegate the presentation of her ideas to her male subordinates. She recognises that to insist on her rights in the male dominated culture of that region would ultimately be counter productive, and would in all probability damage the project concerned.

Role Privilege and Influence

This respondent is a young man who has served in the head office human resource management function long enough to have acquired a measure of seniority. During the period of his employment, the management of human resources has been transformed from a mundane clerical function involving the routine administrative dimensions of employment, to a significant service function with strategic implications for the organization. As the group responsible for advising senior managers and regional CEOs on the placement of appropriate individuals in important roles, members of the Human Resources Group are keenly aware of their ability to be influential. Having privileged access to information about individuals as well as about future directions and opportunities within the organization, the group has a strong sense that it is a significant and powerful agent for change.

Integrity, impartiality, confidentiality and discretion are among the values claimed by the group for itself. Members also lay claim to high levels of the specialised skills appropriate to their discipline, as well as to strong abilities in communication and networking. People in endless and unpredictable variety are
recognised as the commodity with which the group works. Members of the group place special emphasis on their pride in belonging to their own group, but also identify very strongly with all the positive values that they find in the organization itself.

**Compliance Role**

As head of a small but powerful service unit, this respondent theoretically has relationships with all other groups of the Board. Her story, however is focussed mainly on her awareness of her own group.

Members of this group are highly motivated people who see themselves as acting with absolute professionalism. Through their exposure to all the other groups in the Board, they believe they have a broader understanding of the organization than any other group. Members typically stay in the group for three years, and this rate of turnover is attributed to the value placed on them by other business units, combined with the fact that individuals acquire expertise in specialist areas and choose to further their career in that direction. The team is excited by, and takes pride in what it does. The idea of conforming to “best practice” is endorsed and encouraged.

Since the role of the group is to provide quasi-independent assurance to the Board that a subject group has appropriate controls in place, and is in compliance with them, relationships are particularly important. This group depends on sound relationships with all groups in the Board to do its job, and thus it must work hard to maintain cordial relations with people at all levels within the organization.

**Demarcation Issues**

The young women who comprise this group believe from their experience that people in sales and marketing roles are prone to hyperbole in their claims for the merits and attributes of the 1,200 different dairy products sold by the organization. According to this informant (NZDB - Technical Manager D), they see their role, at least in part, as the protection of the organization from potential legal consequences of any misrepresentation. The group uses the nutritional
science qualifications of its members to moderate such claims before they are published. The compliance monitoring role sometimes puts the group in adversarial relationship with the very groups it is trying to serve. Historically, the group's policing role has been perceived as obstructive and negative, especially in the Asian regions. A strategy devised by the respondent, of having group members address problem claims with constructive alternatives rather than a simple veto, has contributed significantly to the esteem in which the group is now held by its clients.

Members see their primary role as the provision of accurate, up to date and reliable research-based information that can be used in the promotion of dairy products for specific purposes.

We (are) saying OK, these are the nutritional trends out there, we want to come up with products using milk as a carrier ... to promote the goodness of milk using some of its health promoting properties, or whatever it is.

(NZDB - Technical Manager D)

Members of this group see themselves as uniquely differentiated from all other groups in the New Zealand Dairy Board by virtue of their graduate qualifications in the field of nutritional science, and perhaps to an even greater extent, by the nature of the tasks and responsibilities which they see as exclusively theirs. Another specialist group of applied science graduates within the industry has caused a great deal of tension for members of this group by activities which have, on several occasions, crossed agreed demarcation lines. Watching for, and resisting, new infractions takes time, and raises stress, both of which detract from the group's ability to devote all of its attention to its core activities, and raises antipathy towards the external group.

**Alcatel New Zealand Limited**

Four respondents from Alcatel provided narratives. They were the CEO, and three specialist group managers.
A Chief Executive's Turnaround Mission

Alcatel in New Zealand is the result of the acquisition of the former STC company in Upper Hutt. The former members of an American multinational, are now adapting their values and processes to those of the French based multinational which has become their new owner. Prior to the merger, this group saw itself as part of a typically American design-and-build organization. At senior levels, the New Zealand operation was seen to have been in a state of mild decline, and was compared unfavourably with its Australian counterpart.

So it was somewhat downtrodden, it was defensive, my complaint at the people working here at the time was that it hid behind obstacles. ... it was an organisation that eluded success for a number of years. (Alcatel CEO)

Restructuring efforts have resulted in some new, highly skilled, and industry-experienced staff being brought in to offset some of the organization’s perceived shortcomings, and to align the local organization with the values and cultures of its adoptive parent. Among the values now promoted as appropriate, are leadership, loyalty and fellowship, fairness, diversity, customer awareness, performance and, in some sections of the organization, a desire to achieve world fame through excellence in some aspect their performance. There is now a conscious effort to focus more on marketing and technical support than was the practice in the old engineering-dominated days.

A matrix of responsibilities for specific products and projects has been overlaid onto the pre-existing hierarchical line management responsibilities. Considerable improvement is claimed in many aspects of performance, but remnants of the old defensiveness and self pity linger.

We have got in the car loom area. people who are working hard, and say “we're doing well, we've got a market share and that's good”. But it's not regarded as a high class product, it's regarded as a low class product. So that I don't think this place thinks of itself as credit worthy because it's got a low class product. Whereas in actual fact I think that what we're doing with that is really very good (Alcatel CEO).
Alcatel New Zealand reports to the parent organization through the Australian regional office. Although differences between the two markets are not fully understood by the Australians, they are believed to respect the improvements achieved and the relationship is more evenly balanced than before.

**Negotiating Organizational Transition**

Changes in the telecommunication industry, including the their absorption from the former STC organization have had an unsettling effect on the members of Alcatel in Upper Hutt, according to this respondent (Alcatel - Technical Manager A). They no longer feel in charge of their own destiny. On completion of the merger, there was a hiatus during which little attempt was made by the French headquarters to establish any kind of global organizational character. Far flung subsidiaries such as those at Upper Hutt were left to their own devices, and Alcatel was seen to act in the manner categorised by Porter (1986) as a multidomestic organization. More recently, a new global Alcatel character has begun to emerge, and in this new enactment, the organization is acquiring a strongly European flavoured, hierarchical, engineering oriented nature, with rigorous processes.

Locally, the engineers who have occupied most management positions have been given marketing training. Although it is recognised that a certain minimum of engineering competence is a prerequisite for credibility in the market place, there is a sense that there is an excessive emphasis on engineering at the expense of other business expertise.

That's something that has hampered Alcatel somewhat. Just that whole character of the company. Alcatel has been struggling to really make an impact, where they did more consumer oriented technologies, like mobile communications and cellphones. Hampered, not because they're slow to change technology wise, but to actually understand. To relate to the customer, to be responsive to them, to be dynamic. Technology wise is not an issue here, but again that whole marketing thing. Marketing is still largely staffed by engineers. Product management is certainly, all engineers. Although again that is changing a bit now. So products were
engineered. We built and designed “good products”, rather than what the customer needed. (Alcatel - Technical Manager A)

Low staff turnover at Alcatel is seen as a mixed blessing. An average tenure of over twelve years is seen to lead to a certain stagnation of thinking, with limited opportunities to introduce new staff and new ideas.

Recent restructuring of the hierarchies and workgroups in the New Zealand branch of Alcatel was intended to embody values and behaviours that are significantly different from the corporate Euro-centric vision. In particular, in accordance with current New Zealand management practice, there are very few hierarchical layers, and there is considerable empowerment of individuals. Where a particular task or project so requires, an appropriately skilled person is appointed on an ad hoc basis for the duration of the project. Team processes are now strongly emphasised, and a number of product specific responsibilities have been given to standing teams established for the purpose. These changes do not sit well with some of the older managers who are known to hanker for the old ways of doing things.

An Administrative View of a Manufacturing Operation

After Alcatel’s new CEO was recruited, the organization underwent a further period of change beyond that which followed from its acquisition by the French company. As an observer not directly involved in much of the change, this administrator believed he was able to maintain a detached view.

Although the CEO brought a great deal of enthusiasm for the idea of matrix management and the consequent establishment of “Business Area Teams”, several of the managers who had been with the organization throughout its various transformations, exhibited an initial cynicism towards the new ideas. They saw themselves as too busy fighting the immediate “fires” of their business area to be involved in superimposed change, but were eventually persuaded to overcome their reservations:

Some were a little cynical on ... umm, “oh, we tried some of these things before and nothing has ever happened”. Because we have kept it rolling
and [The CEO] has kept it moving for about three iterations over the two and half years ... we will be into the fourth one this year ... I think they still see that it is rolling, it is happening and people have seen the benefit of putting themselves in a room with four or five other people for a couple of hours outside of their job. (Alcatel - Administrator)

Much effort was invested in a process intended to instil a sense of ownership and involvement

We were talking about ... a vision or mission statement for the company ... the whole company in Upper Hutt has been involved in developing that mission. This is people from the factory floor - every environment - they have been used to sit down ... and they have been asked to come up with what they - how they see the company in two or three years time ...We have worked through that iteration three times - where they have come up with the statement ... That's changed the culture of the place. (Alcatel - Administrator)

A Service Manager in a Technical Enterprise

As Chief Financial Officer, this respondent has a team of ten people, which is substantially fewer than the thirty five of six years earlier. This shrinking is attributed to improved systems and the advent of automation. Overall, the local organization has downsized from 412 staff three years earlier, to just 222 employees.

Alcatel is seen as an organization with strongly entrenched rules and procedures. Even selling is bound by the bureaucracy inherited from its days as an ITT subsidiary. Similarly rigorous procedures apply to the finance section. Globally, the organization has experienced a considerable transformation from a somewhat ponderous and inflexible past to a new agility which is branded internally as making Alcatel a “hi-speed” [sic] company. There is a recognition that customers not only want a good price, but also good support and timely delivery. Some of the changes in the local organization are seen as a result of a number of new staff who are disparagingly referred to by some of the original staff as “Telecom rejects".
Of the six participants from Ericsson, two were responsible for internal service functions, and the remainder were in charge of groups delivering service and support to the company's major industrial customers.

**Provincial Isolation**

Napier is a pleasant provincial city with an equable coastal climate, and an attractive un-pressured outdoor lifestyle that is rarely available to telecommunications engineers and technicians elsewhere in New Zealand. However, according to this respondent (Ericsson - Technical Manager A), the lifestyle must be traded against the higher salaries available for equivalent work in bigger centres, living here is clearly attractive to the members of this group, since their staff turnover is much lower than in other units of the Ericsson organization. Against the benefits, they must offset their inability to access some of the benefits available to their Wellington based colleagues, who can exploit their proximity to management, and can use that ease of access, not only to gain exposure for their achievements, but also to lobby, for training, equipment, and other resources.

It's harder to build up a relationship when you're more remote, so to sit in the back pocket of your boss is a little bit harder. (Ericsson - Technical Manager A)

Management have recently changed their perception of the group's purpose, and cast it reluctantly, almost unwillingly, into a cost centre role. By this action, the group is deprived of opportunities to seek new business and to shine as a profit centre. These facts, combined with the group's geographic isolation from the remainder of the organization, raise anxieties within the group about its continued survival. Motivated by this, and consistent with their belief that to be an engineer is to be frugal and competitive, they strive to minimise costs. Even the smallest opportunities for revenue generation, including those which other groups perceive as not worthwhile to pursue, are assiduously
followed. In the mind of this group, other groups are insufficiently conscientious about cost reduction, and are too selective in their pursuit of revenue.

Though the group sees the customer account teams as being reasonably good at what they do, they perceive them to lack the detailed technical knowledge available within this group. This, they believe, creates some risks for both customers and the Ericsson organization when the account teams propose technical solutions without invoking the aid of relevant experts. Conversely, although the technicians see themselves as systematic problem solvers, they tend to be introverted and sense that they lack the necessary people skills and business awareness to sell, unaided, to customers.

A Group on the Eve of Extinction

This respondent (Ericsson - Technical Manager B) manages a group specialised in the technical support of a subset of Ericsson's considerable product range. Its stock in trade was the technical knowledge and the necessary skills to configure and support the products concerned. Because it had not achieved the outcomes expected of it, it was about to be dissolved. The respondent adopted a position of separation, discussing the attributes of the group as if from the perspective of an outside observer bearing no responsibility for the situation under scrutiny.

To be honest there's different characters in my group. And some perform really well, and some don't perform very well. And the ones that do perform the best, are quick learners, um, methodical in how they sort of get things done, and they're - they have a knack of identifying who they should go to, and establish relationships with those people, even if, like they're taking on a new product that they don't have much technical information themselves about, or experience with. They know how to sort of, build that experience quickly, and to become useful as part of the process, even though they don't know all that knowledge in their head, but they're able to get the information (Ericsson - Technical Manager B).
There is a sense that the structure in which it existed was not particularly supportive of this group. Rather, there was conflict and “finger-pointing” as various protagonists struggled with demarcation issues. Suggestions were made that parties on either side of these disputes had not performed their tasks well.

**Supporting Technologists**

This respondent (Ericsson - Technical Manager C) manages a geographically dispersed team which has the challenge of providing technology support to an organization full of technologists. The group’s eleven members are divided among the Auckland, Wellington and Napier offices. Focussed as they are on technical issues associated with the organizational infrastructure, the group is conscious of a differentiation between themselves and the groups more directly involved in manufacturing and sales.

I wouldn't quite go so far as to say it's a ‘them and us’ type philosophy, but it’s definitely, we look with some mystery upon some areas of the business. "What do those guys do?" And I know they look at IT with the same view. "What do those guys do?" We're quite visible to the company obviously in terms of the frontline support functions that we have. But there is a lot of things that we do that aren't that obvious. And that comes through when it goes wrong. You tend to take for granted, if everything's running well, the IT services are available and the systems are running, we don't have too many problems. (Ericsson - Technical Manager C)

Specialisation by groups within the organization raises certain barriers for effective collaboration. As an internal service provider, the IT group finds that it must treat the other groups as a “black box”, and thereby lays itself open to accusations of not having understood the underlying business needs of the client group, or of not sharing their values and priorities. Attempts are made to give priority to requests that impact on external customers, but ultimately the group must set its priorities based on its own understandings of the real urgency behind any given service request. Internally, the group has some issues with its own performance, and there is general acceptance of the need for improvement.
Surrounded by Software Engineers

This respondent manages a highly specialised group responsible for the first line twenty four hour seven day support, of a major service of the country’s largest telecommunications provider.

Populated chiefly by technicians and engineers, the sixteen strong group is predominantly engaged in the support of software, and Unix based products, as well as some proprietary hardware. The technical members of the group are characterised, not unkindly, by the respondent as “techno-geeks”. They are difficult to get interested in talking about non-technical matters, but once the topic is laden with technical jargon, they become animated. Although the group members are logical in their thinking processes, they are volatile, and easily provoked to anger by small grievances. The group seems to have an adversarial attitude to management. Members of this group do not seem to engage in collective social activity, and are reluctant to participate in work related social functions, preferring to spend their private time with people other than their colleagues.

Within the group, there is a perception that the sales people are sometimes blinded by the business opportunity to the technical inappropriateness of a particular solution, and that this tendency is attributable in part to the lack of technical knowledge in the sales team. Distress is caused when sales people make promises, or commit the organization to the support of what the respondent termed “harebrained” product configurations which are normally avoided when the appropriate consultation processes have been followed.

In some cases this kind of mismatch is merely a cause for irritation, but where it escalates into actual difficulties for the customer there is genuine anger. Since the group’s raison d’être is the assurance of one hundred percent system availability, there is strong resentment of ill-advised installations which are impossible to support at the required level. Although a great deal of emphasis is placed on the professional pride as a major motive for this indignation, it is also acknowledged that a performance bonus is linked to a very tight service level
agreement with the major customer, and inappropriate configurations thus have a
direct fiscal impact on the members of the group.

Relationships between this group and the major customer are
predominantly between peer level managers in this company and in the customer
organization. Due recognition is given to the strategic importance of this
relationship, and every effort is made to ensure its strength and effectiveness.
Nevertheless, conflict does arise over different perceptions over the way certain
issues should be handled. Most members of the group in question have at some
time been employees of the major customer, and in many cases left that
organization because of some personal dissatisfaction. This situation is a mixed
blessing, since on the one hand, many of the group have mildly negative attitudes
to their most important customer, while on the other hand, they have an
advantageous familiarity with the behaviours, values and processes of the
organization. Both Ericsson and the customer recognise that the members of this
group would find few other opportunities in New Zealand for the employment of
their unique skills and industry knowledge, and rather than drive them off-shore,
the organizations deal with the situation pragmatically.

Within Ericsson, this group sees itself as being proactive achievers who
compete to be at the forefront of new developments. Many of the group’s
initiatives are rapidly taken up other groups, and this is seen as evidence of a
competitive response.

Technical Sales

This respondent (Ericsson - Technical Manager E) is responsible for a
subset of functions in one of the larger groups in his organization. This group
sells major items of telecommunications equipment in direct competition with
the organization’s major customer. The group has responsibility for sales support
and marketing functions, dealing with the top end of the business market.

Members of this relatively stable group are perceived as dedicated,
enthusiastic, customer-focused people who have an engineering background, and
a “go do it” mentality. Whereas certain other groups are able to have individuals
who are devoted to the performance of a single function, the wide range of
customers demands more versatility from this group. Nevertheless, each member may have a particular specialisation. The abilities of the group are seen as a an important marketing tool:

those people, they are one of our key differentiators of the market ... the selection process is such that we do have the very customer focused people on the front end. ... At the end of the day a box is a box, it's our quality of service ... that really is our edge on the market at the moment (Ericsson - Technical Manager E).

Normal inter-group rivalries emerge in opinions expressed about other groups. One group with a single major customer is seen to simply wait for, and process, orders rather than getting out and selling as this group must. On the other hand, two other groups which are similar in purpose and makeup, albeit in a different market segment, are seen in a more positive and entrepreneurial light.

Although the company’s products may be technologically advanced, the local organization itself is perceived to have the Swedish attributes of solid reliability and a caution about change. This manifests itself as a tendency for the organization to undersell itself, and to refrain from pushing its presence in the market place.

**Administrative Viewpoint**

As a Wellington based manager representing a service function centred elsewhere, this respondent interacts with most other groups in the organization.

Most of the other members of the organization are seen as being from an engineering technical background. It is thus a challenge for this group to strive for understanding of the techno-centric groups, and to come to grips with what their objectives are. The group does not wish to be seen as solely concerned with conformance or compliance, and tries hard to add value to the efforts of other groups, offering constructive alternates when administrative obstacles occur.

As an organization, Ericsson is seen in a very positive light by this respondent. From his perspective, they are seen as innovative, and quick to
change. It has a good relationship with its people, and treats them well. In return for its range of benefits, it expects hard work. Special effort is rewarded.

**Network Control Centre, Telecom New Zealand Ltd**

Three Engineers from Telecom New Zealand's Network Control Centre in Hamilton participated. Each was the manager of a large group of technicians and engineers.

**Managing A Newly Formed Group of Engineers**

Within the context of a very large organization, this respondent can be regarded as a middle manager, three hierarchical layers removed from the CEO. Nevertheless, his group which was recently formed pursuant to the most recent of restructuring efforts in the organization is reasonably large and has a substantial quantum of responsibility in the network technical support area.

The organization for which they work is in a unique position in that it has undergone the transformation from a major government department to a large and highly competitive private enterprise organization with a near monopoly market share in many sectors of its business. Perceptions of predatory practices and abuse of the monopoly position have resulted in considerable consumer backlash against the organization. Nevertheless, many of its present managers are wholeheartedly aligned with the private enterprise free market posture now adopted by the organization, and they strongly defend the appropriateness of the manner in which they conduct the business. They point out that it is precisely the arrival of the free market "level playing field" ideology which forces them to compete directly with the new entrants into the field, and that they would be rightly pilloried in public opinion if they neglected to maximise their opportunities. It is conceded that their aggressive pursuit of profit is construed as arrogance by some.

Despite the negative public attitudes towards the dominant supplier, Telecom espouses a strong customer focus, although the respondent agrees that there are still some corners of the organization dealing with consumers, to which
this message has not yet permeated. Organizationally, the major thrust is to get and retain customer business, but some of the pre-privatisation indifference is still experienced at the level of those who deal with the minutiae of customer requirements.

This recently formed group within Telecom consists of approximately one hundred employees. Membership of the group is the outcome of a very careful and deliberate selection process designed to find individuals who are not only technically competent in a broad sense, but who are judged to be capable of working harmoniously with each other and with the respondent who is their manager. Rigorous structured interviews resulted in a “service driven” group which is already generating very positive and spontaneous customer feedback.

Members of this group are expected to take ownership of their responsibilities without the need for close supervision. To this end, the members are highly skilled, well rewarded, and empowered to take appropriate actions on their own authority, though they have been firmly instructed that they keep their manager informed, escalating issues to him when appropriate. Despite this perception of individual empowerment, the respondent expects members of his group to function as a team. They are instructed that although their principal goal is to deliver service their primary customers, nevertheless a significant secondary goal is to make their manager “look good”.

Relationships with other groups is not yet perceived as an issue for this group. The respondent anticipates no problems from this source since the group’s members were selected among other things for their ability to manage relationships, and find ways through problems to solutions.

**Keeping the Pulse of a Nationwide Service Function**

Responsible for the maintenance and support of various essential components of the network, this manager is accountable for some sixty five supervisors and technicians around the country. Despite the nation-wide distribution of the group and despite working for the largest provider of bandwidth in the country, members of this group are reluctant users of available conferencing technologies, preferring to rely on air travel and face-to-face
communications for the most effective maintenance of clear understandings among themselves.

The sheer size and diversity of Telecom make it difficult to characterise. Rather, it has many different characters depending on the area of the business considered, and the personality of the dominant individuals in each. Each group is seen to be different, and there is a belief that the character of a group is closely aligned to the market it serves.

In dealings with Ericsson, it is surprising to the respondent, how different that group feels despite being a participant in the same industry as Telecom. Some of the difference is due to the international contacts inherent in the multinational. All engineering contacts in Ericsson seem to be with upbeat people who never stop selling the company. It has a sense of identity which Telecom has yet to find. Ericsson is a sales company, unlike its competitors which are technology companies.

Consciously created competition among the various groups creates a constructive tension intended to foster efficiencies. This is less effective however, where a group is largely inward looking. Certain historical attitudes persist with Telecom, and some of the regional rivalries from a transitional organizational structure still linger. Likewise, some long serving members of the organization dislike present values in the organization, and express a yearning for an illusion of golden days now past. Nevertheless, when attacks occur from outside, such as criticism of the CEO’s salary, or of a particular competitive position, members of the organization tend to react defensively.

This group is comprised mainly of people who are seen as experts in their own technical areas. Characteristically, the group perceives itself as capable of doing any task in its domain. Efforts have been made by the group to establish standardized frameworks for the performance of various technical processes wherever in the country they are implemented.
Managing the Old Hands

This manager is a long term Telecom employee who is accountable for a range of network support functions carried out in a group with approximately one hundred and fifty staff.

Most of the employees in this group are people who have stayed with the organization over a long period of time through its various transitions from government department to state owned enterprise, and more recently to private enterprise. Staff turnover or “churn” is lower in these technical roles than it is in sales or service environments.

Sheer size is a factor which makes membership of Telecom unique, at least in New Zealand. Despite the large size there is a strong sense of identification and belonging, and of extended family. Criticism from outsiders is taken personally. There is a sense of pride in being a part of Telecom. Aspects of the operation are world-leading, especially the unified and highly automated monitoring and control of so many aspects of Telecom’s network in the Hamilton centre.

Members of the group overwhelmingly have technical or engineering backgrounds. By the very nature of the work, members of the group are process driven, paying careful attention to prescribed processes and procedures. They are people who are good at “dotting the ‘i’s and crossing the ‘t’s”. A small number of employees lack the required discipline, but on the whole, the group conforms to the pattern.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, after introducing the concepts of phenomenological reduction (reductio) and phenomenological writing (vocatio), I have then attempted through a process of writing and rewriting, to create for the reader, aspects of the lived experiences of each of the twenty eight respondents. These fragments are produced, as free of assumptions and theoretical preconceptions as I could possibly make them.
Chapter 6  Describing Situated Experience

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the reader with a general description which summarises or encapsulates the meanings attributed by the respondents to the experiences arising from their membership of one of the workgroups in the subject organizations, and from relating to people who are not members of that group.

The preceding chapter consisted of my attempts, based upon a process of reduction and subsequent synthesis, to create an eidetic "situated description" (Stablein, 2000, p. 9) of each individual respondent's lived experience relevant to the issue of intergroup communication. These narratives were described as "eidetic" in the sense that they were intended to provide sensory cues that, as nearly as possible, allowed the reader to share in the lived experiences as co-constructed by the respondent and the researcher. In the current chapter, the synthesis is taken one step further, such that:

The situated description ... (serves) as the basis for the general description of a work group, ... The aim in writing a general description is to abstract from the specific case(s) to the potentially generalizable. While the situated description is a final output of this study, the general description is a very tentative research outcome. (Stablein, 2002 p.16).

Consistent with recommendations from diverse phenomenological traditions (Moustakas, 1994, Stablein, 2002; Van Manen, 1990, 2000g) for the application of phenomenological method, this chapter attempts to construct a general interpretation or to re-present the essentials of the experience of belonging to one of the workgroups in the subject organizations. The quality of my interpretation can be judged as Giorgi et al.(1975) suggest, by the extent to which any reader, having adopted the viewpoint I describe, can accept that my interpretation is a reasonable one from that standpoint, even if he or she might have arrived at a different conclusion.
The present research is entirely consistent with the above emphasis on the interpretation of the meaning of a particular set of phenomena to a particular set of people. It makes no claims to generalizability, except in as far as the findings may suggest avenues for further research in the areas discussed.

Like most other qualitative methods, phenomenology seeks to explain the particular (Hyde, 2000, p. 84). Van Manen (2000e) is circumspect in his claims for the outcomes that may be expected from phenomenology:

Phenomenology is used to gain an understanding of the lived experience of members of workgroups. "... phenomenology does not produce empirical or theoretical observations or accounts. Instead, it offers accounts of experienced space, time, body, and human relation as we live them. (online)"

Phenomenological method sets out precisely to provide a description of a particular lived situation free of theoretical biases. For many phenomenological studies, the description itself is the end point as suggested by (Macoubrie, 2001):

Local meanings for specific people are what phenomenological research is designed to discover. This is a quite different purpose than looking for cause-and-effect. People doing phenomenological research thus are usually not building theory, but trying to closely understand the lived experience of human beings. Naturally, they also use quite different methods than do theory-oriented researchers (online).

Nevertheless phenomenological method is often used as a foundation for theory building, and has found especially wide acceptance for this purpose in the field of Nursing Studies (Forbes, 1999):

Some phenomenologists criticize the use of this method to construct theory claiming that the results of such research are not, and should not be considered, generalizable (Wilson & Hutchinson, 1991). However, the method uncovers commonalities of the phenomena and its meaning(s) among participants. In describing those commonalities, one is describing a theory that explicates the shared essential nature of the phenomena of
interest. Therefore, the method is suited to generating theory inductively as well as to describing phenomena of interest (p. 76).

It is precisely in the description of commonalities, or the identification of recurring themes, that this research seeks to discover, or point to, emergent theory that is pertinent to the research questions. In the present study, the phenomena of interest are the lived experiences of twenty-eight individual workgroup members, and of two entire workgroups, from four different organizations. The essences of their lived experiences are encapsulated in the narrative accounts provided in individual interviews.

What Emerged

In the search for the answers to the research questions, respondents were invited to share dimensions of their lived experience, firstly as a member of whichever group or groups they called “us”, and secondly as part of the relationship with non-members of that group, who might loosely be identified as “them”. In the literature of social identity and of group identification, the term “in-group” is used to describe the group under study, whereas “out-group” is used to refer to any group with which it is being compared. For the purposes of this study, an out-group member can be also regarded as any person who is not a member of the in-group, whether or not that person is a member of an identified group.

In almost every case, the respondent’s conception of a salient out-group was given in contradistinction to the conception of his or her own group. The few exceptions were those instances where the respondent was alienated from his or her own nominal group, and the comparison was made with some personal internal standard not disclosed in the course of the research. Just as any definition of “day” requires an awareness of “night”, so any articulation of what it means to be “us” requires the existence of “not us” or “them”. Conversely, the concept of “them” has meaning only in opposition to the concept of “us”. We commonly
define what something is, in the context of what it is not\textsuperscript{21}. Clearly then, in order to discuss the nature of the experience of dealing with "them", the respondent needed to have a lively understanding of what was meant by "them" and "us".

Free to tell their story in their own way, the respondents adopted a number of approaches to providing an account of their lived experience in whichever group or groups they regarded as "us". Many focused on "what it is like to be us", rather than their reactions to someone being different. Given the interconnectedness of the concepts of "us" and "them", the very description of what is uniquely "us" tells much about the respondent's conceptualisation of "them". In all cases, even where attention was focussed on the respondent's own group, there was a clear awareness in the narratives of the dichotomy between those who constitute "us", and all others. With few exceptions, respondents found positive things to say about their own group or groups. Some respondents were uninhibited in the expression of their reactions to others. Outright criticism of other groups was rare, although in most cases, the very fact that the other group does things differently to the respondent's group was seen to carry with it, an implied reproof to their own values and ways of doing things. In just one narrative there was spontaneous praise for another group, and even in that case, the out-group was from an external organization.

**Essences**

In Moustakas's (1994) discussion of options for the conduct of an empirical (or experiential) phenomenological study, he keeps the ultimate purpose in sight:

> The understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience *in the context of a particular situation*

\textsuperscript{21} There are well recognised limits to this kind of oppositional thinking. For example, it must be possible to describe or define a culture or an ethnicity without having to compare it with some other group.
Italics original] is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge (p.14).

Consistent with this view, and with my own statement of intent for the conduct of this phenomenological investigation as detailed in Chapter 2, the remainder of this chapter provides the place in which the researcher must synthesise a generalised understanding based on the insights gained in earlier stages (Giorgi, 1979; Stablein, 2000).

Relevant to the research questions, a number of important recurring themes emerged from the underlying stories and the individual syntheses in the preceding chapter. They were

a) “Who are “We?”” – the stereotypes constructed by each individual of the group under discussion, and the individual’s identification with and acceptance of that stereotype as representative of him or herself;

b) “Who are They?” – the stereotype constructed by each individual acting in a particular membership role, of salient out-groups for the purpose of sensibly interacting with those groups;

c) “Why Don’t They Do Things Our Way?” – the suppositions, assumptions and rationalisations put forward by each individual as a mechanism for making sense of experienced or perceived differences;

d) “Making Allowances for Them” - the conceptualisations and behavioural strategies devised by each group (as represented by the individual respondent) as a mechanism for the amelioration of problems arising from observed differences; and

e) “Will Technology Solve Our Problems?” – the attitude of respondents or groups towards the technology as a means of overcoming the perceived differences between groups.

These emergent themes form the framework for the next step wherein a generalised interpretation of each of these themes is presented. The significance
and usefulness of these generalised interpretations for theory and practice are discussed separately, in Chapter 8.

**Understanding Who "We" Are**

Each of the workgroups in this research has, within its parent organization, exclusive responsibility for the performance of one or more business functions or business outcomes. The most commonly offered justifications for the existence of these particular workgroups, is the delegated responsibility for the performance of a specific skill-constrained or product-oriented function. Group members are assigned to a particular workgroup, either because they possess the specialist functional capabilities required for the performance of the role assigned to that particular group, or else as the result of simple bureaucratic division of labour.

On the basis of their collective attributes, skills, education, training, institutional knowledge, and experience of their members, many groups claim unique capability, within their organization, of performing the tasks which are their formally delegated responsibility. In their belief, no other group within the organization has the requisite combination of professional qualification, personal skills and experience on the job, to perform the task to the standard required for the conduct of the organization’s business. This perception is closely related to the belief within several groups that the organization is critically dependent for its success, on the expert performance of the functions of which only their group is capable. Thus, group members take satisfaction in exercising their professional skills on a task which is important to their organization.

Except in individual cases of alienation, respondents claim positive distinctiveness on behalf of their own group. Such claims to distinctiveness rest, not only upon exclusive possession of, or rights to, the performance of some cluster of functions, but also on the assertion of superiority. They make these claims in respect of their levels of achievement in that performance, as well as in some combination of generic attributes such as integrity, intelligence, initiative, industry, loyalty, analytical ability, work ethic, and strategic vision. Most claims
to superiority in performance are made by comparison to some abstract non-specific norm rather than against a specific and tangible group.

These claims take no account of similar but competing claims to superiority from other groups, either because members are unaware of them, or because they prefer not to consider competing claims which challenge their own perception of superiority. Superiority claims which are more situation-specific are made by some groups in respect of such attributes as pride in belonging, levels of achievement, the ability to be influential in their field, or in the privileges, special knowledge, or power that accrue from their functional specialisation. In one organization especially, an additional dimension of positive distinctiveness is claimed in respect of their sense of identification with the best interests of the stakeholders through the institutionalised use of language which is replete with references to the stakeholders.

Where respondents are alienated from the group of which they are nominally members, the positive distinctiveness claimed is personal, and is contrasted with the less favourable constructions they place upon their groups.

Positive distinctiveness claims are reinforced by narratives of various historical events, with special emphasis on obstacles overcome, threats survived, improvements made, restructuring achieved, and setbacks endured. The components of these historical narratives causally linked with positive outcomes, and are seen as demonstrative of the positive qualities of the group. In what might whimsically be termed a “we-ification” of history, each member uses the plural and possessive pronouns in these narratives, to claim the group’s action in any situation as part of his or her own history.

The exploits of individuals whose personal characteristics or actions are in some sense extraordinary, or who have acquired celebrity status, at least within that group are usually perceived to enhance perceptions of the group, at least in the eyes of its members, especially where those exploits take the form of some positive contribution, outstanding achievement, or inspirational behaviour. Even where individuals demonstrate force of personality in less constructive ways, the best possible interpretation is made of their part in the group’s history,
and even if there are quite deleterious behaviours, the person or events are often sanitised through expressions of admiration for acts of courage, engaging personality or personal charisma.

Belief in positive distinctiveness is also demonstrated by pride in the intrinsic quality of products or services offered by the organization. This is especially the case where properties of the product are perceived to be in some way beneficial to society. Where the product is irredeemably mundane, even though produced to the highest standards of quality, this dimension of distinctiveness is more difficult to claim. Consideration must be given to the possibility that sample selection may have been skewed towards individuals who might well be expected to express such sentiments. However, even those who were inclined to express cynical viewpoints seemed to feel the need to be proud of the products with which they were associated. My own experience as a former employee of the New Zealand Dairy Board, and of a competitor to Alcatel and Ericsson lends verisimilitude to these claims. Pride in achievement is a common component in the construction of a sense of positive distinctiveness. In the subject organizations, there is pride in remaining defiant in the face of apparently overwhelming odds, and a clear sense of having made a mark in the world, despite being from a small country in the South Pacific.

**Understanding Who “They” Are**

Group members are generally reluctant to identify a referent when laying claim to their own positive distinctiveness. Nevertheless, they are acutely aware of the existence of, and the other-ness of, individuals and out-groups with whom they have dealings. They have little difficulty in identifying specific actions, behaviours, values, attitudes and beliefs on the part of other individuals or groups, that compare unfavourably with those of their own group. The positive distinctiveness of their own group is maintained for most group members precisely by the construction of an unfavourable interpretation of the observed differences in others.

What one team might construe as prudent conservatism in themselves, may be judged by their referent group as culpable risk aversion. What one team
might see as autonomy or entrepreneurship, the other may decide is reckless disregard for the interests of the stakeholders. Different attitudes to risk taking, entrepreneurship, fiscal prudence, procedural compliance, combativeness, competitiveness, and priority setting all contribute to the reinforcement of negative distinctions against other groups by comparison with the respondent’s own. Other groups are commonly compared unfavourably along such dimensions as integrity, work ethic, professionalism and customer focus. Even deep-seated cultural values in groups of other ethnicity or religious conviction are sometimes construed in the least favourable light.

When it is necessary to concede a point in the favour of another group, members are often able to deliver the compliment in a qualified or half-hearted way, such that it is clear that the out-group, even though it is doing something well, could nevertheless perform that task in some better way. Although the interviews did not necessarily include members of reciprocally involved pairs of workgroups, there was little evidence to support the idea that the positive or negative distinctiveness judgements were symmetrical or in some sense in lock step. As discussed at the beginning of this section, the sense of superiority was often without the benefit of a specific referent.

Different goals and priorities are also a differentiating factor, especially between groups characterised by a technical specialisation, and groups directly involved in selling. Whereas the former may give priority to product quality and service, the latter are more likely to favour customer satisfaction. There is recognition of the necessity for the allocation of different roles to different groups, and indeed the exclusive possession of particular roles within the organization is a significant feature in a group’s sense of identity. Demarcation is thus an issue which becomes more or less dominant, according to the imminence of any perceived threat from another group. This issue is less severe though still troublesome where inter-group collaboration is not occurring to the extent that it should.
Understanding Why They Don't Do Things Our Way

Group members reveal the manner in which they have made sense of perceived differences through anecdotes and narratives. In their accounts of their interactions with, or perceptions of, other groups, they reveal their various interpretations of such differences. Sense making in relation to observed difference most commonly results in differences being interpreted as a threat. Even where no direct risk of harm to their own person or group can be identified, group members find many apparently innocuous differences to be, at best, an irritant, or more likely, an affront to their own sense of the proprieties. The fact that an out-group places different values and priorities on various aspects of business processes is also threatening, in that it is seen as a denial of, or an affront to the in-group’s foundational beliefs.

Different priorities may sometimes be interpreted as understandable responses to the other groups’ different circumstances, and in a small proportion of instances, observed differences may be interpreted as something to be admired, and even aspired to.

Several differences are interpreted as a direct threat to a individual’s own group, as for example, when groups are competing with each other for the same limited resource. Perceptions of task ownership and demarcation in particular, appear as a direct challenge to the in-group’s continued existence. Even in situations where the designated roles require collaboration between functionally diverse but complementary groups, there is ongoing tension as to the precise location of the role boundaries between the two groups. Demarcation issues may take several forms, of which the most common is the infringement by one group on an area of responsibility that has been claimed as the exclusive responsibility of another. A more problematic variant occurs when the former manager of a group, speaking from a position of seniority, attempts to intervene in operational decisions on the basis of potentially outdated knowledge. Likewise, groups with responsibility for compliance monitoring within an organization are forced into potentially confrontational proximity with other groups who may resent infringement on their autonomy and exclusive possession of a field.
In considering the reasons for observed difference, group members are usually able to postulate plausible reasons for those differences. Suggested explanations may include factors such as role difference, training or educational backgrounds, or even the level of understanding of the wider organization necessary to the functions of the group. Out-groups are each perceived to have a distinctive personality. The difference is attributed to factors as diverse as the nature of the work done by the group, the unique history of the group, the presence of charismatic or forceful individuals within the group, or a predominance of members having a particular gender, ethnicity, nationality, or occupational training. The concept of satisficing applies in the sense that, as soon as a plausible interpretation is developed, there is no motive for the group member concerned to investigate further or apply rigorous methods to pursue some better explanation or underlying objective truth to account for the difference.

Making Allowances For “Them”

Unexplained difference seems more threatening than difference to which a cause can be attributed. Just as the discovery of an un secured door swinging in the wind provides a comforting explanation for unexpected noises in a strange house at night, so plausible reasons for the choices made by members of other groups seem to diminish the sense of unease occasioned by the encounter with inter-group difference. Group members attribute the differences between their own group and a salient out-group to factors such as gender, ethnicity, culture, or fiscal circumstances. It is not necessary for there to be strong evidence for the chosen explanation, or even that such explanations should stand up to scrutiny. Rather, it seems enough to have an explanation which, for the time being, is sufficient to satisfy the group member’s need for a plausible explanation of difference.

Groups typically seek to find ways of working effectively with others despite the observed and rationalised differences. Adaptation strategies to such differences vary widely among the subject groups. At the simplest and least demanding levels, the very act of rationalizing the reasons for such differences, is sufficient adaptation, since a plausible explanation forms the basis from which to
make allowances for differences, and to accept them as reasonable and appropriate. In some cases, adaptation is minimal, and in such cases, the result tends to be exaggerated perceptions of negative distinctiveness, and consequential emotional responses such as fear or anger. In the few cases where respondents report overt attempts to adjust and accommodate perceived differences, more productive outcomes are seen.

Efforts are made in other cases to work with other groups in such a way as to pre-empt the likelihood of direct conflict. Examples of this strategy occur when groups that have in place, agreed procedures for the conduct of collaboration, and pre-arranged processes for the adjudication and resolution of intractable conflicts. Some group members have the difficult task of adapting to the perceived other-ness of a group of which they are, at least nominally, members. In each such case, the group member adapts to perceived distinctive differences between his or her own set of values and those of the group by maintaining a mental separation from the group and its perceived shortcomings.

Seeking a Technological Solution to Communication Issues

Group members are sceptical as to the ability of any communications technology to effectively mediate any significant or ongoing relationship. Members commonly believe that even the richest of technologies is so defective, by reason of its inability to convey the full spectrum of nonverbal communications as a face-to-face encounter, as to be unreliable for any important communication.

E-mail is seen as an especially dangerous medium for important communications. It is recognised as the most terse of the available media, and by the very nature of emerging email usage standards, is even more prone to misinterpretation than an ordinary letter or memo on paper. It is seen as the most deficient in its capability of providing any richness of understanding, or contextual clues to the other party's situation.
Simple telephony is so imbedded in the life of the organization that it is not seen as a separate mediating technology, but is just part of the infrastructure. Most take the position that no meaningful relationship can be established via more advanced technological channels unless a prior face to face meeting has occurred, and that thereafter, simple telephony or emails would suffice as a mechanism for the maintenance of the relationship. An underlying relationship might be refreshed with further face to face meetings every one to two years. Where no prior meeting has taken place, the necessary positive goodwill towards members of the out-group is extremely unlikely to develop.

Minority opinion suggests that a relationship sufficient for the performance of routine interactions at least, might be established using mediated communications. Despite prior video-conferencing experience with an in-house facility, the technology is not highly regarded by most group members as a useful addition to the value of any given communication process.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a general and potentially generalizable description intended to encapsulate the meanings ascribed by the participants as members of workgroups, to the lived experience of interaction with other groups. In particular, it has seen group members draw comparisons between themselves and others to the greatest advantage to their own self concept. Their assertions of uniqueness and superiority disregard the fact that others are making similar and competing claims. A natural corollary of their claims to uniqueness and superiority, is that their perceptions of other groups are necessarily unfavourable by comparison.

It has described how other groups are seen and understood, based on a judgement of the out-group from the observer’s own worldview. The chapter has explored the limited manner in which group members make reciprocal adaptations to perceived differences.

In its last section the chapter demonstrated the perceptions of the respondents that currently accessible technology is inadequate by virtue of its
limited media richness as a mechanism for the resolution of problematic relationships.

In the chapter which follows, the themes observed will be compared and contrasted with the literatures relevant to these themes, in order to provide the basis for the eventual analysis and conclusions to be draw from this research.
Chapter 7  Review of Prior Literature

Introduction

As foreshadowed in Chapter 1, it is now appropriate to compare and contextualise the findings that have emerged in the course of this study with prior scholarship in the various fields traversed. The literatures concerned can be used to confirm or to question the validity of findings, and also to illuminate areas not adequately answered by the phenomenological study. A number of specialised bodies of literature have direct relevance to the present research, and the matters emerging from the earlier chapters suggest an examination is required of the literatures of organizational theory, organizational communication theory, and social identity theory.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to canvass the entire spectrum of each of these over-arching categories, but instead to focus on specific scholarship within each, that is directly relevant to the emergent themes from Chapters 4, 5 and 6, and to the research questions articulated in the Chapter 1.

Since the research is situated in organizations, then the field of organizational studies is foundational, though not necessarily the central issue. Likewise, since the research is concerned with patterns of communicative behaviour occurring within the organization, then organizational communication theory which seeks to understand and explain such things, is also foundational, though still not the central focus of the research. Emerging as the major paradigm in the research is the extent to which individuals see themselves as members of specific groups, identify themselves as such, and become aware of the differences between themselves and those who are not members.

This focal concern brings social identity theory and group identification theory to the forefront of the investigation. Of special interest and relevance in this chapter, as illustrated in Figure 7, is the body of literature near the intersection of organization theory, organizational communications theory, and social identity theory.
Organization Theory

As previously stated, this research takes place entirely in the context of four modern New Zealand industrial organizations of conventional hierarchical form, engaged in the production and delivery of goods and services for profit. In order to understand this context, it is necessary to explore relevant literatures in the field of organizational theory as it applies to such organizations such as these.

For the purpose of this research, it is necessary and appropriate to provide context for the primary focus of the study, which can loosely be characterised as intergroup relations in the context of modern complex organizations. The exploration of prior literature on organization theory will therefore centre mainly on recent scholarship relevant to the nature and characteristics of organizations as typified by the four participant companies. It is appropriate to begin with a short exploration of how an organization is defined, and to follow with a brief overview of some of the foundational theorists in the field.

Definitions of Organization

Weick (1969) describes organizing as "... a consensually validated grammar for reducing equivocality by means of sensible interlocked behaviours. To organize is to assemble ongoing interdependent actions into sensible sequences that generate sensible outcomes" (p. 3).
The word “grammar” may be interpreted here as a set of rules or an operating paradigm. The key elements of this definition are rules, action, and outcomes. Weick’s description is focussed on process, and does not refer to the environment in which organizing is occurring, nor yet to the purpose for which it is occurring. Many definitions of organization focus on the notion of purposeful collaboration (Barnard, 1938; Blau & Scott, 1962; Etzioni, 1964). Westley (1990) provides a rather less cumbersome definition that is more visibly applicable to the four subject organizations of this study, when he describes an organization as:

... a series of interlocking routines, habituated action patterns that bring the same people together around the same activities in the same time and places (p. 339).

Hall (1987) likewise provides a helpful definition embodying the perspectives of environment, structure, process and purpose when he defines organization as:

... a collectivity with a relatively identifiable boundary, normative order, ranks of authority, communications systems, and membership coordinating systems. This collectivity exists on a relatively continuous basis in an environment and engages in activities that are usually related to a set of goals. These activities have outcomes for organizational members, the organization itself, and for stakeholders or society at large (p. 9).

Most of the definitions which have relevance for the present research, focus on outcomes, and the behavioural norms in place to achieve those outcomes. Definitions such as those provided by Hall (1987) and Westley (1990) may not fit every possible organizational form, but are clearly recognizable in the four purposive collectivities encountered in the present research. Each organization represented, operates in a specific market, and in a structure characterised by both hierarchical structure and rules according to which processes are carried out, and converting inputs into outputs to achieve a profitable outcome.
Such organizations tend to assume that members will recognise that their own self-interest is inextricably entangled with the achievement of the desired outcomes and the overall success of the organization. They take for granted that employees understand this relationship, and that they will, in broad terms, behave in accordance with organizational norms in order to ensure the best possible result, and their own survival in employment.

**Recent perspectives on organization**

Arguably, the features identified by (Weber, 1922) as typical of a modern bureaucracy are still present in most organizations. It is certainly the case in the four participant organizations in this research, that all of his six defining characteristics of a bureaucracy are present. Each has: fixed areas of authority, each governed by its own rules; a hierarchy of authority with implicit super- and subordination; a formal record keeping system; the expectation that each person is thoroughly and expertly trained to perform his or her allocated functions; the expectation in normal circumstances that each person, for the duration of his or her employment, is exclusively committed to the organization; and a knowable system of rules, guidelines and policies.

Nevertheless, despite the ongoing validity of founding principles, there seems an inexhaustible supply of new perspectives on the concept of organization, and its sub-domain, management. This may be attributable in part to “new” organizational forms such as multinational organizations, distributed organizations, network organizations, and the so-called “agile organizations” whose very existence endures for just as long as the objective for which they are established. Pfeffer (1997) suggests that some of the fundamental concerns in the field of organizational studies as it is presently understood, are, how the fact of belonging to an organization influences its members, how the members impact on the organization’s outcomes, what factors affect the efficacy and success of organizations, and the interaction between the organization and its environments. These are all perfectly valid concerns, though too wide ranging for the present purpose. More immediately relevant to the present study is the literature of workgroups and teams.
Workgroups and Teams

Most organizations, including those that participated in this research, delegate the responsibility for various functions to groups established precisely for the purpose of dealing expertly with that particular class of function. Even after the flattening processes of the 1980s and 1990s during which many large organizations rationalised their structures by reducing the number of layers in their management hierarchies, the outcome in most cases was increased dependence on specialised workgroups such as those from which the respondents in the present study were drawn. A number of writers such as Bailey (2000) regard the terms "team" and workgroup" as sufficiently synonymous to use the terms interchangeably. For the purposes of this research, no distinction is made between the two terms.

Drawing on the earlier work of Hackman (1987), Jehn (1997) defines a workgroup as:

a group of more than two people within an organization operating as an intact social system, within well understood boundaries, to achieve measurable tasks (p. 257).

Kirkman & Shapiro (2000) refer to earlier works by Cohen & Bailey (1997), and Sundstrom, De Meuse, & Futrell (1990) to provide the following definition of teams:

Work teams are defined as groups of individuals who work interdependently and are mutually accountable for task accomplishment (p.175).

The word "team" is clearly an appeal to the metaphor of the sports field, perhaps to denote a degree of taken-for-granted loyalty towards the group and its leader, and a mutual sense of commitment among its members. Neither definition would exclude any of the respondent groups in the present research. To the extent that it is possible to rely on the reports of the individuals selected for their membership of the group, then each of these definitions is applicable to all of them. For example, each group is reported to demonstrate a sense of identity, its
members are claimed to work interdependently, they are said to possess knowledge of their roles and boundaries, to know what their accountabilities are, and have a drive to achieve their allotted tasks.

A considerable body of workgroup literature relates to conflict within and between groups (Hope Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999; Jehn, 1995; Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992; Labianca, Brass, & Gray, 1998; Sherif, 1966). It is claimed by some that conflict is not necessarily counterproductive, and there is a school of thought which has echoes in the participant organizations, that competition between groups can be used as a tool to lift overall performance (Wagner, Pfeffer, & O'Reilly, 1984). Several of the narratives from informants from the New Zealand Dairy Board tell of precisely such a strategy, implemented as a conscious choice on the part of the previous CEO, and not entirely dispensed with by the incumbent CEO at the time of the interviews. On the other hand, the narratives obtained in this research reveal that members of a group may well find themselves at odds when required to collaborate with another group, but are unable, as suggested by Trice (1993) to reconcile their worldview or priorities with those of the other group. Overt competition for scarce resources and, as in at least two instances in this research, demarcation disputes can cause intergroup conflict and simmering, morale destroying resentment of significant proportions. Some scholars suggest that the resultant internal competition leads to undesirable behaviours, sub-optimal outcomes, and even dysfunctional relationships for the organization (Chandy & Tellis, 1998; Hitchcock, 1992; Vizjak, 1994).

It is clear from the stories presented that the respondents attribute to the workgroups, defining characteristics that allow them to have a sense of belonging to a uniquely differentiated group. Many of these characteristics are in the form of what are claimed to be commonly held values, beliefs, ideals, behaviours and embedded ways of doing things. In short, the defining characteristics of any workgroup discussed in the present research are precisely the characteristics that collectively are regarded as a culture. It follows therefore that many of the perceived differences between the groups take the form of intercultural differences.
Organizational Culture

The primary research question asks how group members make sense of, and adapt to, perceived cultural differences. This begs the question of the very existence of culture in an organizational context. Although there is no unified view of precisely what organizational culture is, there is at least a substantial body of informed opinion that, included in its artefacts are the ways in which people who are members of a culture-forming collectivity, think, believe, and behave. For this reason, culture, in its organizational context is of vital interest in the present research.

The placement of the discussion of culture at this juncture is for convenience alone. Culture is an attribute of organizations, and of workgroups and occupational groups, and the culture of those entities might legitimately be discussed under the heading of organizational theory, just as it might have been discussed later in the context of the discussion of organizational communication.

In the organizational context which will be discussed later in this chapter, writers appropriately acknowledge the debt owed to the disciplines of sociology and anthropology (Alvesson & Berg, 1992; Kessler, 1999; Manning, 1992; Smircich, 1983) whence arises the underlying concept of culture. However, even in those parent disciplines, there seems to be no unified or definitive view as to what culture really is (Doney, Cannon, & Mullen, 1998; Gudykunst, 1997; Langan-Fox & Tan, 1997; Sackman, 1992).

When Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) surveyed the field, just 81 years after the word in its modern sense had entered the English language, they identified in excess of 160 academically respectable definitions of culture. Kroeber & Kluckhohn observe that the English word derives from “Kultur” which made its debut in a German dictionary in 1793. The word “culture” in the sense now used, was first recorded in 1871 where it was defined by Tylor (1974) as:

... that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (p. 1).
Arguably this definition did little more than wave in the general direction which the study of culture was to take. Tylor's definition is framed very loosely. A “complex whole which includes” (and thus by implication is not limited to) a list of artefacts “and any other capabilities and habits” is a description that could accommodate a very diverse set of phenomena, not all of which would satisfy our current understandings of what constitutes a culture. Geertz (1973) usefully brings his interpretive perspective to bear when he defines culture as:

... that fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their action; social structure is the form that action takes, the ... network of social relations. Culture and social structure are different abstractions of the same phenomena (p. 145).

Rule centred definitions or those which see culture as a prescriptive framework are categorised as normative. Political scientist Harold Lasswell's (1966) definition is a good exemplar of this group:

‘Culture’ is the term used to refer to the way that members of a group act in relation to one another and to other groups (p. 203).

Lasswell's identification of groups as the locus of culture is noteworthy in the context of the current research. It will be seen during the discussion of organizational culture that the normative approach is very common in that domain. Another perspective useful in this research is provided by Martin (2002) who defines culture simply as “that which cultural members share” (p. 16). This fits in well with the widely used understanding based on the writings of Goodenough (1971), that culture is observable as those patterns of shared and learned beliefs, values, behaviours and artefacts which characterise members of a group.

From an etic perspective, it can be argued that whatever is experienced by an outsider as the consistent culture-like characteristics of a group must be a manifestation of that group’s culture. Thus, for example, in the present study, particular groups may be experienced by the outsider as displaying the characteristics of an “engineering culture”. Such a judgement might be based on the observation that its members behave like engineers. They value logic and the
rigour of scientific method. They are systematic and thorough. Product quality is more important to them than impressing the customer with speed of delivery. They are disinterested in organizational politics unless they impinge on their ability to carry on with their work. They are dedicated to the particular range of products in which they have expertise, and so on.

Drawing on anthropological understandings of culture, it might be suggested that a group must be of a certain size and significance in order to be regarded as capable of culture formation. At least, in the traditional view, the group must have existed for long enough to have encountered and devised solutions for significant problems in its environment, and it must have passed these learned solutions on to more recent members as the appropriate way to deal with such problems. For the purposes of the present research, I have taken the position adopted by Hogg & Terry (2000), in that I am regarding an organization as a group, and all subdivisions within the organization, whether or not they are nested within, or overlap with any other subdivision, as groups. Some of the possibilities are represented in Figure 8, where each of the shapes in the illustration is representative of a group.

![Diagram of organizational groups]

Figure 8 - Organizational groups - nesting and overlapping
Thus, within the organization, which is itself a group, there may be groups dedicated to the performance of specific functions, groups comprised of people with specific occupations, groups comprised of people in specific locations, and most and interesting of all and most relevant to this research, groups dedicated to the application of a specific occupational skill for the performance of a specific function, in a specific place. It is worthy of note that at least one class of groups, occupational affiliation, transcends the organization's boundaries. I take the position that all such groups, large or small, old or new, are capable of developing and demonstrating attributes which are indistinguishable from culture, and which, if they were associated with a large group of some longevity would be classified as a culture. This might be conceived as an enactment of the popular phrase, "If it walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it's probably a duck". Alternately, it could be seen as an embodiment of the assertion by Thomas & Thomas (1928) that "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (p. 571).

Members of culture forming groups can be presumed to be both co-constructors of the group's continually evolving culture, and at the same time, to be themselves shaped by the very same culture. As if this were insufficiently complex, each individual may have concurrent memberships in many culture-forming groups, both within, and external to, the organization. It is commonplace for an individual to belong to groups which have radically different, or even conflicting values. Values arising out of membership in a religious group can easily be at odds with the values of a commercial organization. The Islamic abhorrence of usury, for example, is difficult to accommodate within the profit-maximising ethos of a conventional Western bank. These issues are dealt with later under the headings of social identity and group identification theories.

Each individual must reach his or her own compromise to reduce the dissonance produced by such conflicts. Thus, each member of any given group brings to its ongoing process of culture formation, a personally unique set of building blocks, and an individual contribution to the shape of the group's overall culture. This is a useful consideration for this research, insofar as the phenomena of interest are centred around individuals who are members of workgroups,
rather than on the individual as a representative of any given workgroup. Culture, according to Linstead & Grafton-Small (1992), "represents the sum total of shared or overlapping meanings across subgroups and subcultures" (p. 340). This additive or contributory view of culture formation lends weight to the notion that the shape of the culture of any given group is heavily influenced by the sum of cultural attributes of its current members.

Anthropologists and sociologists may very well question whether an organization is sufficiently differentiated from the society in which it has its being to be considered to have a culture. Nevertheless, many scholars in the field of organizational studies do not seem share such doubts or make such fine distinctions, and have produced a very substantial body of literature on the topic of organizational culture. As in the field of culture itself, a recurring theme in the literature of organizational culture, is the multiplicity of apparently respectable definitions in use, and the lack of consensus as to a unifying central theory. This issue of definition is problematic, not least because the question continues to arise as to how organizational culture differs, if at all, from any other kind of culture.

A useful beginning point for the examination of the literature of organizational culture is how each author defines the topic. Edgar H. Schein (1984, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1994a, 1994b, 1996a, 1996b, 1999) is among the most respected, and arguably the most frequently cited authors in this field. Schéin's (1992) widely used definition is:

The culture of a group can now be defined as a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 12).

Thus, Schein's definition stresses that culture consists of patterns of assumptions, shared by the group, learned over time, validated by the experience of the group, and handed down through generations of membership. This latter
aspect of his definition is problematic in the present context, since many of the groups represented are in their first generation, and are therefore restricted to whatever they have learned for themselves during their relatively brief existence. In all probability, the collective culture is no more than the sum of whatever prior cultural attributes the constituent members have brought with them. Furthermore, the propensity of modern organizations to restructure frequently, as is the case in all four of the organizations concerned, implies that there will always be new groups which may exist for some purpose and thereafter, be extinguished. This poses the question of whether a new or transitory group can be said to exhibit a culture. Alternately, it asks the question as to whether a sufficient condition for the transition between no culture and a new culture exists, only after the first severance occurs of a founding member, combined with the first recruitment of a new member. An implication of the latter view, is that such a group operates in a cultural vacuum until the specified milestone is achieved.

Others have rephrased Schein's definition as an inherited recipe for survival in a particular environment or context. Schein himself expresses the view that a necessary condition for the development of a culture is that the group in which it is formed should be a stable social unit which has been in existence for a duration sufficient that its members have devised, and observed the efficacy of, solutions to significant encountered problems. He further asserts that for the outcomes of this problem solving process to be regarded as culture, the group should have passed the knowledge on to new members who were not party to the original solution. This is certainly consistent with the generic cultural definitions such as the Kroeber & Kluckhohn (1952) synthesis which suggests that the essential core of a culture consists of "historically derived and selected... ideas and ...values" (p. 181). Likewise it is attuned with Mead's (1937) definition of culture as behaviours which are successively learned. As with Schein's (1992) definition, this presents difficulties for the short term group, and the issue will be addressed hereafter.

Like Schein, Smircich (1983) is a much cited scholar whose most important work for the purposes of the current research provided a number of important ways to view culture in the organizational context. Amongst her many
useful insights into this complex topic is the notion that culture is the explanatory mechanism for the orderliness and patterning which we see in our lives and in organizations. It is certainly the case that several of the groups represented see the orderliness and pattern of their organizational lives in terms of the metaphor of their occupation, be it engineering, or accountancy. Smircich (1983) outlines several important ways of conceptualising organizational culture. She identifies culture as an independent variable, as an internal variable, and as a root metaphor. Importantly for the current research, and especially in the respect of the issue of new or transient groups discussed below, she identifies culture as being "imported into the organization through its membership" (p. 343).

**Subculture**

Arguably, circumstances exist whereby groups which are subsets of a larger one, form variants of the culture of the parent group. Such derivative cultures were first given the somewhat contentious title "subcultures" by researchers of the Chicago School of Sociology in the 1940s. Gordon (1997) provided an early synthesis arising from that school, suggesting that a sub-culture is defined as

... a sub-division of a national culture, composed of factorable social situations such as class, status, ethnic background, regional and rural or urban residence, but forming in their combination, a functioning unity which has an integrated impact on the participating individual (p. 41).

Gordon's (1997) definition is unheedful of the fact that the very notion of a group as large as a nation having a definable culture is itself controversial, given that most nations are multi-ethnic, and that ethnic groups often transcend the boundaries of the nation-state (Karakasidou, 2000). Likewise, given the multi-ethnic nature of most nation-states, it seems improbable that members of all the possible cultures contained therein would assent to the prescriptions of a single overarching national culture. Cohen (1997), viewing cultures as a recipe for coping with the environment, identifies as a necessary condition for the construction of a new cultural form, "the existence in effective interaction with one another, of a number of actors with similar problems of adjustment" (p. 48).
He goes on to assert that individuals will see as meritorious, the means they have collectively devised to resolve shared problems within a larger group. They will, he suggests, identify criteria of status which "represent new subcultural values different from or even antithetical to those of the larger social system" (p. 51).

Trice (1993) suggests that for many people, the practice of their occupational tasks is more central to their being than belonging to the organization by which they are employed, and thus subcultures form around occupational groups. Consistent with this, Clarke, Hall, Jefferson, & Roberts (1997) require as a necessary condition for the existence of a subculture, that the subculture must centre on the process of resolving the distinctive and focal concerns of the group. Some scholars argue that the term has been so widely used (and abused) that it is no longer useful and should be dropped (Clarke, 1974; Kornhauser, 1978).

As a generalization, it is typically held that a group forms a subculture when it retains a large part of the culture of its parent group, but introduces variations to accommodate differences in the environment, or specializations in the way in which the group fulfils the purposes for which it exists. Subcultures are further classified in accordance with the direction of the variances which distinguish them from the parent culture. Of particular interest are those groups which have a culture whose values or practices are significantly in opposition to those of the main body, in which case they are identified as having formed a counter-culture. This perspective is usefully enhanced by Trice (1993):

Although subcultures have probably always been a feature of all but the most primitive and tiny societies, the great complexity of modern society undoubtedly encourages their formation ... Subcultures have the same elements that cultures have: distinct patterns of ideologies and distinctive sets of cultural forms (p. 175).

It could be argued that, if a large body of people who are members of a culture was reduced in numbers, one by one, then there is no predefined point, prior to its reduction from the last remaining dyad to a single person, that the conditions necessary for the sharing of a culture by the remaining members have
been extinguished. An obvious corollary of this view is that no group with numbers greater than three is too small to form subgroups with a capacity to generate cultural forms. Considering the same issue from smaller to larger, it is hard to discern a point at which the collectivity of members is considered sufficient to pass from being a subculture to being a culture-forming society.

For the purposes of the present research, several questions must also be addressed. To what extent is any given group in some sense a subgroup of a hierarchically higher group? Even more problematic for the current research is the question of the minimum conditions for the formation of a culture (or subculture).

To deal first with the issue of what constitutes a group, I adopt a position consistent with Hogg & Terry's (2000) discussion as to what constitutes a group, and assert that any group of three or more people having some attributes and purpose in common, whether or not it is a subset of a larger group, can be considered to be a group in its own right. Thus for example, the organization is a group, the major functional division within the organization is a group, the people who are united by their common professional or occupational skills may be a group, and the smallest cluster of individuals to whom a collective responsibility has been delegated is a group.

On the question of what constitutes a culture, as distinct from a subculture, I adopt a similar stance. It is difficult to find a definition of what constitutes a subculture that differs appreciably from the definition of what constitutes a culture. If the subgroup is perceived to be culturally homogeneous with the parent group, then it should be the case that there are no significant differences in belief, values, behaviours, etc., and therefore few, if any, grounds for internal perception of difference.

Is an organization merely a subculture of the larger community in which it has its existence? Is the culture of the local community merely a subculture of the larger cultures of the region or nation? In some cases at least, the culture manifested in an organizational context can be visibly different to, and as suggested by Morris, Davis, & Allen (1994), can be a moderating influence upon
the broader societal culture. Furthermore, for the limited purposes of the current research it can also be stated that whatever cultural attributes such a group might have, they can be considered collectively to be a culture, without the need to consider the distinction between cultures and sub-cultures.

**Culture and Short-term Groups**

Conventionally, in order to be considered capable of forming and sustaining a culture, a group is expected to have existed for some period of time sufficient to have resolved significant problems in their environment, and to have passed on to new members the learned solutions as the appropriate and preferred method for solving such problems. What then, can be said of recently established groups, or those formed solely for the completion of a particular project? Are they to be regarded as existing in some sense in a cultural vacuum, like Peter Pan without his shadow? Or are they, by the very brevity of their existence, unavoidably identical in cultural attributes to the larger group of which they are a part, no matter how diverse the sources from which its members are drawn?

Narratives drawn from the experience of a number of relatively new first-generation groups represented in the current research suggests this is not the case. It seems likely that the previously discussed summative approach of Linstead & Grafton-Small (1992) may be of some assistance, together with the idea that, if the group at least exhibits consistent beliefs, values, behaviours and cultural artefacts, it can be considered to have something which has the appearance of a culture. In the context of the present research, the idea that culture is carried by individuals is important here (Gregory, 1983; Hughes, Seidman, & Williams, 1993).

As already suggested, the belief that culture is necessarily intergenerational or inherited, is problematic for the current research, and perhaps for the generalised notion of culture in work-groups since, in the comparatively fluid structures of modern organizations, such groups often have a transient existence, measured in months rather than years. It raises the question of how to categorise culture-like manifestations emerging from groups which are of recent origin.
The dilemma may be resolved by calling on the cultural perspective which suggests that the culture of a group is in some sense, the aggregate of the cultural influences of its individual members (Fayerweather, 1959; Slocum, 1971). It is most certainly the case that a group which has not yet lost any of its founding members nor added to their number, may still be experienced from the perspective of an outsider, in all the cultural dimensions along which a group with a legitimate culture is experienced. Culture, after all, is made manifest in behaviour (Martin, 2002). Provided that the members of a group are normally stable, in the senses of both membership, and of psychological health, then an outsider unaware of the group's hitherto short life, should consistently experience something that may be interpreted as the manifestation of a culture.

Several questions remain to be answered. Over what time, and by what mechanism might the various cultural influences within individual group members coalesce or aggregate to manifest themselves as any kind of unified culture of the group? What are the necessary and sufficient conditions for a group to "incubate" a new or modified culture? Against what definition of culture can the researcher be satisfied that there is sufficient evidence for the existence of a culture?

The difference between whatever is the source of these artefacts, and a true culture is inconsequential from the perspective of dispassionate observers, and the newly formed group is experienced as if whatever it has is indeed a culture.

**Occupational and Workgroup Culture**

Interviews in the subject organizations of the present research were strongly indicative of unique values and behaviours according to the role and occupation of the group concerned. Trice (1993) asserts that occupations themselves may be regarded as a culture, and that by their very presence in an organization, a group of people having a common occupation may constitute a subculture within the organization. Such a view is endorsed by many scholars (Barley, 1983; Carliner, 2000; Hansen, Kahnweiler, & Wilensky, 1994; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Trice goes on to suggest that such a subculture is potentially
powerful, and this view is supported by the observations made within the organization during the present research. In particular, it is observable in some companies, including some of the participants in this research, that accountants often exert more influence on the organizational direction than those engaged in the production or delivery of the goods or service which are the primary business of the organization. Likewise, members of the human resources function in this research were very conscious of their ability to exert influence by virtue of their occupational privilege.

Interestingly, engineers and technical people, though aware of their importance to the primary purposes of the organization seemed oblivious to their political potential, and were more interested in the attributes of their product or service, than in effecting organizational change. However, groups of specialists from a given occupation may sometimes exercise influence in subconscious ways and Scott (2000) suggests that:

... engineers or other occupational communities form "invisible colleges" of peers trading know-how (Dodgson, 1993; von Hippel, 1994) identifying with each other and promoting trust (Miles & Snow, 1986). Trust is often instantaneous because of a common profession such as engineering-engineer-to-engineer links are strengthened by the common occupational culture (p.106).

This is not to suggest that all engineers, or people with an occupation in common, like each other, since in the present research, some of the strongest expressions of intergroup rivalry were reserved for rival groups in a cognate discipline. Greene (1999) rightly observes that differing occupational cultures may be a problem as well as a benefit to organizations, as it becomes necessary to accommodate to the various values and expectations of each group. It can also be problematic when the necessity arises to create cross-functional groups in which members have orthogonal cultural values.
Theories of Social Identity

All participants in this research were deliberately selected as individuals who happened to be members of a particular group rather than as a representative sample of the group in which they were employed. Nevertheless, with the notable exception of the two informants who were unable to identify with their groups, participants tended to speak with the voice of their group. For all practical purposes, respondents spoke as if on behalf of the group from which they were selected. Individuals tend to ascribe to themselves, the same characteristics or stereotypes which they ascribe to a social category to which they choose to belong (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; van Knippenberg & van Schie, 2000). Likewise, sharing of their experience of interaction with other groups revealed that negative stereotypes are commonly ascribed to those other groups, without regard to the objective validity of such stereotypes. These matters are the domain of group identification theory (Tolman, 1943), and even more, of its descendant, social identity theory (Tajfel, 1970; Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Turner, 1975) and self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987) which are of seminal relevance to this study.

Social Identity Theory

Terry, Hogg, & McKimmie (2000) characterise social identity theory as "a general theory of group processes and intergroup relations, which distinguishes group phenomena from interpersonal phenomena" (p. 339). Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell (1987) refined this to address the specific issue of how people categorise themselves in their self-categorization theory. Terry et al., (2000) point to the emergence from these two threads, of a unified process model called "referent informational influence" (Hogg & Turner, 1987). In this model, "the norms of the group are inferred from prototypical properties of the group. The prototype informs a group member what behaviors are typical and, hence, appropriate, desirable, or expected in the group" (Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 2000, p. 343). Thus the engineering, technical, accounting, and management prototypes are observable in several of the groups represented in this research.
A great deal of the literature on social or group identity connects acts of identification and intergroup differentiation with the need for self esteem on the part of the individual. De Cremer (2001) draws on work by Hogg & Abrams (1988) and Long & Spears (1997) to question whether self-esteem is a cause or a product of such differentiation.

Tajfel & Turner (1986) place social identity theory in the context of Sherif's (1966) "realistic group conflict theory" which, at its core, suggests that intergroup conflict arises where the groups concerned each make competing claims for scarce resources, including such intangibles as levels of power and prestige. Arising from realistic conflict theory, are the beliefs that: intergroup antagonisms are diminished where the relativities between the groups are institutionalised and accepted as the status quo; and conversely, where one of the groups begins to question or challenge the legitimacy of such institutionalised differentiation, then intergroup tensions escalate.

Tajfel's (1970) studies leading up to the development of social identity theory found intergroup tension even where there were no grounds for conflict, and where individuals on each side had minimal involvement in the groups concerned. This gives rise to the more direct assertion by Tajfel & Turner (1986):

The mere awareness of the presence of an out-group is sufficient to provoke intergroup competitive or discriminatory responses on the part of the group (p. 13).

This is developed further to the empirically tested assertion that group members who perceive themselves to be in opposition to another group, value their perception superiority over the other group even more than they value that over which they are competing. That is, the competition itself, takes priority over that which is being competed for.

Social identification in an organizational context is significant to the current research. Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail (1994) suggest that members identify with a group when their own self-concept contains the same or similar attributes as those they ascribe to the group. They go on to assert that individuals will find their membership of a group or organization attractive if it confers
distinctiveness on them, and that their own self-esteem is enhanced if they identify with an attractive perceived identity. Examples of this were provided by respondents from the New Zealand Dairy Board where members' own sense of self worth was clearly enhanced by the perception that their product was wholesome and nourishing, and was in effect, a service to humanity. Identification, it must be pointed out, is not the same as commitment, and does not guarantee any action on the part of the individual (Riordan & Weatherly, 1999; Stryker & Burke, 2000).

Ashforth & Mael (1989) argue that individuals derive their identity from a number of sources, many of which derive from their employment in the organization. Stories gathered in the course of this research clearly reflected that individuals identified with a number of categories, some of which are nested and overlapping, and some of which may be seen as isolated. Respondents variously identified themselves non-exclusively as members of a profession or skill group, a workgroup, a geographically located team, an age group or generation, the category of managers, and of the organization itself.

Strength of identification is enhanced, especially in complex organizations by the distinctiveness and prestige of the in-group, by the salience of out-groups and by a number of lesser factors such as liking, proximity and goal sharing (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al., 1994). In the subject organizations, even where occupational and other similarities existed between groups, distinctiveness was usually conferred if by no other reason than the uniqueness of the role assigned to the group. Nevertheless, members sought to tell of qualitative distinctiveness, whereby their group was seen as intrinsically superior to the out-groups in whose context it was being judged. Group prestige was evident in the stories of some group roles, especially those involving seniority, special privilege, or the performance of strategic functions such as negotiation in the highest circles of world trade politics. Just as regional pride is activated when a rival city or region is discussed, so the discussion of other groups was almost invariably in such a manner as to reinforce perceptions of the qualities of the narrator's own group.
Respondents' narratives were mostly indicative of preferential identification with their own immediate workgroup rather than with occupational or professional groups or even the organization itself. This is consistent with findings on this topic by Becker (1992), Becker & Billings (1993), van Knippenberg & van Schie (2000), and Zaccaro & Dobbins (1989).

Much of the organizational management literature aimed at practitioners embodies the assumption that it is possible to manipulate the identification of employees with the organization's goals and objectives as defined and adjusted from time to time by management. "Airport bookstall" literature is replete with references to "rich culture" in which employees do identify with their organization. Such texts often imply that there exists a recipe by which such a state may be achieved. The truth appears to be somewhat more complicated as discussed hereafter.

**Self-categorization Theory**

A comparatively recent and important outgrowth from social identity theory is self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987). To represent it in the most simple way, self categorization theory suggests that individuals bring social categories into effect by ceasing to consider group members as unique individuals, but rather in terms of the stereotypical characteristics constructed for that group. Interestingly, it is suggested, the individual applies this process of depersonalization not only to members of an outgroup, but also to members of the in-group including him- or herself (Hogg & Terry, 2000). These behaviours are readily observable in the present research wherein narratives describe the actions of persons as the actions of auditors, or of marketers or of engineers. Likewise, the narrators are often in the persona of a group member rather than as a fully unique individual.

**Organizational Communication Theory**

While the theoretical aspects of workgroups and their cultures are an essential part of what has emerged, nevertheless, at its heart this research is about issues arising from the communication act between groups having different
cultural attributes within the four subject organizations. The literature of communication in an organizational context is therefore especially significant to the study. Confusion even within the field as to the precise domain covered by the term organizational communication (Shelby, 1993), and the extent of the possibilities (Cheney, 2000) are such that it is appropriate to constrain the literature discussion to those elements of organizational communication theory immediately relevant to the research questions. In particular, after the style of Lasswell’s (1948) famous dictum, it is important to discern who, in the subject organizations, is communicating what kinds of information, how they selected the mode of communication, to what kinds of other groups are they communicating, for what organizational or group purpose, and to what extent does the communication achieve its intended purposes. Thus, as well as looking at some of literature of organizational communication, it is also necessary to examine the issues of media selection and media richness.

Figure 9 - Boundary relationships of communication types (Shelby, 1993, p. 261)

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22 Lasswell’s dictum is widely used as one of the elementary models in communication. It asks "who says what, through which channel, to whom, with what effect?" (Lasswell, 1948, p. 37).
There is extensive debate as to what constitutes organizational communication. For the purposes of the present research, the term is used in the broadest sense to describe the overarching concern with the processes of communication in the context of organizations, as represented by the largest circle labelled “organizational communication (1)” in Figure 9. This is to distinguish it from the narrower discipline represented by the shape labelled “organizational communication (2)” and which is defined by Reinsch (1991) as “communication intended to affect (overthrow, modify, fortify) organizational structure” (p. 308). For the purposes of this research, the discussion of the field will focus on the nature, purpose and effectiveness of communications between organizational groups, both within and spanning the boundaries of organizations such as those which participated.

Much of the literature of organizational communication has adopted the voice, assumptions, and strategic perspectives of organizational management and administrators (Cheney, 2000; Redding, 1979). The present research, by its use of experiential phenomenology, attempts to hear the voices of all its respondents, and by weight of numbers, these are predominantly representatives of workgroups at the operational level of the organization.

Yates & Orlikowski (1992) draw on the structuration theory of Giddens (1984) together with rhetorical theory’s concept of genre to assert the existence within organizations of genres of communication generated by recurring patterns of communication need. In the context of the subject organizations, such genres might include inter-group meetings, memos, telephone calls, e-mails, audio-conferences, video-conferences, or other technologically mediated means of collaboration. Each genre, they suggest, becomes patterned by “the reciprocal and recursive relationships between media and communications over time” (online).

Arguably, it is not just the media and the communications, but also the participants, individually and collectively, who are both shaping, and being shaped by the nature of the interaction between parties. Thus, in the subject organizations, there are preferred channels for communicating with specific groups, and particular styles of communication for particular purposes.
From an entirely different epistemological perspective, Tucker, Meyer, & Westerman (1996) reach a remarkably similar conclusion. Using Spender's (1993) conceptualisation of tacit knowledge as the unexpected knowing embedded in any communication, they assert that shared knowledge, which is not able to be explicitly communicated, is propagated by means of shared experiences, intimacy and reflection. They further suggest that communication systems at the group level are comprised of this tacit knowledge, together with the patterned behaviours of organizational processes, as illustrated in Figure 10.

Figure 10 - Individual and Collective Communication (Tucker, Meyer, & Westerman, 1996, p. 63)

Within the somewhat diffuse multi-disciplinary boundaries of organizational communication, scholars discuss many issues which also arise in other domains. Of relevance in this research Ulijn, O'Hair, Weggeman, Ledlow, & Hall (2000, p. 306) cite Biemans (1993) in respect of the mutual disapproval and latent conflict that commonly occurs between such disparate groups as engineers and marketers. These attitudes were clearly present, though in varying degrees, in the narratives obtained in the course of this research. Ulijn et al (2000) go on to suggest that effective and consistent use of communication channels may serve to break down these problems. Consistent with Weggeman's (1989) questioning of the traditional structures and channels of control, the accounts provided by group members in this research are indicative of limited efficacy for centrally imposed rules. They also tend to endorse his assertion that groups which draw on their own values and sense of professional capability to
create a locally appropriate governance system. Weggeman further suggests, in a way that is entirely in accord, both with the lived experiences of the respondents in this research, and with social identity theory (discussed later in this chapter), that members of such groups each regard their own values, processes and specializations above those of other groups.

Intercultural communication is important in the context of the present research, precisely because the groups interacting with each other are each assumed to have culture-like attributes that differ from those of other groups. Interactions between groups therefore, are of an intercultural nature, even though participants may in all probability, be of the same nationality and ethnicity, and be employed in the same organization. Though her perception of intercultural communication relates to communication between people of different national cultures, Varner's (2000) view has some relevance in the present context. She argues that a business interaction between members of different cultures, takes place in a different environment than the native culture of either participant, and that a new construct is formed, specific to the locus of that interaction (Bell, 1992; Bolten, 1999). From the perspective of several participants in this research, this seems to be the case, though it may be that the new context is a compromise satisfying neither party.

**Theories of Media Selection**

Within the broader topic of organizational communication, an important question is, by what medium and through what channel is any given communication act most appropriately effected? Though not explicitly articulated in the narratives, there is a sense arising from expressed frustrations and researcher observations, that certain communication acts are directed to a specific medium for no better reason than that this has been the organization's habit. The adoption of other, and possibly more effective, methods seems deterred mainly though inertia and concerns about the authority of messages carried on newer media.

Several narratives raised the inadequacies of available technologies such as e-mail and the various forms of electronic conferencing for their perceived
needs. This raises some obvious questions such as whether the appropriate technology is being used for the intended purpose, whether the existing technologies are being used appropriately, and of course, whether or not other technologies might be more effective. Wherever the question arose, respondents in the present research saw technologically mediated communications as being seriously deficient for their purposes. With very few exceptions, the shortcomings of even the richest media were seen as so severe, in comparison with the richness of face to face communication, as to make the use of technology for any substantial organizational task, or for the creation and maintenance of any organizationally significant relationships, the less preferred option. Media richness theory (Daft & Lengel, 1984, 1986; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987) tends to foreshadow such an outcome. Other theories important in the consideration of the choice of media include social presence theory (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) and media choice theory.

According to the advocates of media richness theory, each person wishing to send a message, will select a medium of sufficient richness for the purpose of the message. Lengel & Daft (1988) argue that media must be matched to the richness necessary for the analysis or resolution of the problem to be solved. King & Xia (1997) suggest that it is a waste of scarce resources to have face to face meetings for the exchange of simple information when simple lean media such as memo or email have sufficient richness for the task. On the other hand, where there is ambiguity and it is necessary to “interpret cognitively conflicting situations” (King & Xia, 1997, p. 880), then the richest available medium is required. Figure 11 borrows from Lengel & Daft (1988) to illustrate the relationship.
Communication Problem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Routine Analyzable Tasks</th>
<th>Complex Unanalyzable tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate Selection</td>
<td>Appropriate Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple or routine tasks do not need to consume expensive resources such as time spent by people in meetings.</td>
<td>Complex tasks requiring analysis and interpretation are best dealt with using media that provide rich information and resolve ambiguities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate Selection</td>
<td>Inappropriate Selection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routine tasks may usually be dealt with by lean media such as written messages or e-mails.</td>
<td>Complex tasks may not be properly handled if dealt with by using a medium that lacks the necessary richness or fails to resolve ambiguities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11 - Selection of Appropriate Media

On a message by message basis, there is no hesitation on the part of the respondents in the present research to use technology, and especially lean media such as electronic mail and in-house computer applications for routine functional purposes. Where they do display appropriate apprehension and reluctance to use technological media, is in the context of the creation and maintenance of business-critical relationships. According to the stories provided by the respondents in the present research, those expressing reluctance, were doing so on the basis of unsatisfactory prior experience with media too lean for the purpose for which it was employed. King & Xia (1997) suggest that whereas some potential users of technology may suffer from debilitating self-doubt, management manipulation of media availability and repeated use of preferred technologies may overcome issues of outcome expectations and perceived efficacy. King & Xia (1997) go on to assert that:

... individuals with high computer self-efficacy will demonstrate higher outcome expectations regarding computer use than individuals with low self-efficacy (p. 882).
The people in the research interviews who were most vocal about the perceived shortcomings of allegedly rich media are mostly engineers and technicians whose job it is to support and sell the very technologies in question, and this appears to conflict with King & Xia's apparent assumption that it is a lack of mastery preventing their wider adoption. A similar assumption seems to underlie the concept of channel expansion (Carlson, 1995; Carlson & Zmud, 1994, 1999), in which it is postulated that sustained experience with the medium itself, with the topic for which the medium is used, with the organizational context, and with the other participants, enhances the perception of channel richness. The clear implication of this, is that resistance to the use of the technology is attributable to a (presumably culpable) lack of persistence on the part of the reluctant participants.

According to Webster (1998), the factors most affecting user choice for a rich technology such as desktop videoconferencing are “critical mass, medium richness, situational influences, social influences, media symbolism, and the individual characteristic of medium experience” (p. 258). The relevance of each of these for the present research is commented upon in turn.

Critical mass exists for a group in the present research, when each other group or party with which a relationship is to be maintained is equipped with compatible equipment capable of supporting the necessary mediated communication when required. Critical mass can be said to exist for most of the groups concerned, in as much as most internal groups are similarly equipped, as are the majority of their external contacts. This will be less true in respect of external customers of the New Zealand Dairy Board.

Media richness theorists agree that face-to-face communication is the richest of all communication options, and that axiomatically, everything else is less rich. For all the participants, perceptions of media richness even for advanced technologies such as full motion video-conference were less than they believe to be necessary for the creation and maintenance of effective intergroup relationships in accordance with the research questions of this investigation.
Problematic intergroup relationships in the present research were varied in their situational circumstances. Some were physically adjacent to the subject group, and were not regarded as appropriate candidates for the deployment of technology, given that the face to face option was readily available. Others were physically far distant, though the situation was complicated for some by the fact that the desired respondent was in a different time-zone.

In at least the three technology companies of the four participant organizations, it might be expected that the environmental norms would favour the use of the very technologies for which those organizations exist. In the engineering and technical workgroups within those organizations. This would be even more the case.

As with the case of social influences, it is natural to expect the use of the organization’s own technology might be regarded as highly symbolic, yet in no case, did this appear as a factor. The irony of not using the organization’s own product did not seem apparent to the interviewed respondents.

Individual experiences were, for the most part, not supportive of routine use of even the richest of media, due at least in part to the limited quality of existing implementations. Low resolution images on desktop video-conferences, or indeed even on large scale devices, do not give the same impression, or the sense of psychological presence as obtained from face-to-face eye contact.

Other Relevant Theory

In addition to the three principal domains identified in the introduction to this chapter, the very phrasing of the research questions, together with the emergent themes requires an understanding in an organizational context, of what is mean by sensemaking and what is meant by adaptation.

Sensemaking in Organizations

Sensemaking as an organizational process is addressed by Weick (1969, 1995), who is careful to distinguish it from the concept of interpretation. Building on Festinger's (1957) theory of cognitive dissonance, he regards it as an
active process whereby individuals and groups attempt retrospectively to resolve any ambiguity or dissonance in the way various elements of any situation are connected. Inability to make plausible linkages is troublesome to those trying to make sense of a given situation. Individuals and groups faced with ambiguity or dissonance will attempt to achieve resolution by the construction of a set of causal relationships between the elements. Weick is explicit that any such linkages need be merely plausible rather than accurate. Sensemaking is a process which results in an interpretation (Hannabuss, 2000). Greenberg (1995) explains sensemaking as “a process whereby organizational members translate an organizational event and construct a meaningful explanation for that event” (p. 185). Importantly for the present investigation, she goes on to say that these understandings frame future action, and may even be influential in changing the existing values and meaning systems of members. Thomas, Clark, & Gioia (1993) draw on Weick’s earlier work in their exploration of sensemaking which they model as a process of “scanning-interpretation-action-performance” (p. 240). Sensemaking is triggered by a novel situation, a situation in which there is a discrepancy between what is observed and what is expected according to existing schemas, or by a deliberately initiated requirement to think about a situation (Louis & Sutton, 1991). For this study, in most of the narratives which are revelatory of sensemaking, the process is triggered by a discrepancy between what is expected and what eventuates.

**Story as Sensemaking**

The process of sense making through story has been well canvassed in earlier literature (Berry, 2001; Boje, 1991, 1999; Boyce, 1995, 1996; Daiute & Nelson, 1999; Fisher, 1984, 1987; Hansen & Kahnweiler, 1993; Taylor, 1999; Watson, 1995; Weick, 1995). According to Kelly & Zak (1999), “Narrative makes implicit, the narrator’s view of life experience” (p. 299). Members of organizations make sense of situations as discussed above, and share that sense by explanations in the form of stories which, as they are told and re-told become accepted by members of the organization as truth (Gabriel, 1991). In this context, Czarniawska-Joerges (1997) provides a useful definition of story as “a plot comprising causally related episodes that culminate in a solution to a problem”
“Stories are abstract conceptual models used in explanations of observed data” (Pentland, 1999: 472)

**Adaptation in Organizations**

Where individuals, or groups of individuals from different cultural backgrounds must work with each other, and where the differences between the two parties are in any sense obtrusive, it is clear that some adjustment must occur if the interaction is to succeed, and even more so if subsequent interactions will follow.

Lin & Germain (1999) define adaptation as “the process of various system parts moving toward increased congruence or fit” (p. 7). Ueltschy & Krampf (2001) draw on that work to suggest that adaptation between cultures is a function of the extent and duration of contacts between the two groups. According to Lin & Germain (1999), adaptation can be said to occur when differences are acknowledged and respected, when one group modifies its own cultural forms to accommodate the needs of the other, or in the most extreme case, when members of one group try to embody elements of the other group’s culture into their own practices. In the present research, the highest level of adaptation discussed is at the intermediate level where some modest accommodation is made. Interaction adaptation theory (Burgoon, Le Poire, & Rosenthal, 1995) predicts that culturally different groups interacting will engage in at least some level of reciprocity, with a tendency towards more positive or courteous responses as the natural predisposition. However, it does seem to suggest that like begets like, so that a bad start may be difficult to recover from.

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter has set out to provide a basis for comparison between the findings of the research, and the prior literatures in the fields traversed by the research. Confirmation or disconfirmation were looked for. In addition, the literatures reviewed filled some of the gaps not addressed by the findings.
Within organization theory, a number of relevant definitions of organization were explored. Some relevant recent writings in this field were reviewed. It is necessary to understand what an organizational work group is, and how and why it is important to the organization. Workgroups and teams were explored, and deemed to be synonymous. This chapter has sampled the literature of organizational theory as it bears on these questions, with attention to organizational structure, and to work groups and teams.

As an adjunct to the literature of organizational theory, organizational culture has been explored, to learn how and why people shape and adopt patterns of belief and behaviour in the organizational context. Additional attention was given to the cultural attributes of workgroups, since it is precisely in the field of workgroups that the current research occurs. For the present research, among the most important understandings to emerge from the consideration of culture and its various forms, is that, in the context of the groups studied, rigorous exploration of culture itself is superfluous. What is important to this research is an understanding of why and how members of any given small group exhibit distinctive beliefs, values, behaviours and other artefacts. Because a number of workgroups in this research are either newly formed, or are of a transitory nature, special consideration was given to the question of whether culture can exist in such groups, and the extent to which a positive answer is at odds with the existing scholarship of group culture. Again, for present purposes, it is not necessary to establish whether or not the various attributes of a group whether short or long term, are truly a culture in the sense the word is used by an anthropologist. It is sufficient that the mental framework under which a group operates, the behaviours it exhibits, and various other artefacts are experienced by others as being cultural manifestations.

Organizational communication theory was surveyed for literature relevant to intergroup interactions, and in the context of attempting to use technology to diminish the consequences of intergroup tension, questions of media selection and media richness were also addressed.

Social identity theory was identified as the predominant paradigm, and developments from Tajfel's (1970) original exposition on this topic were
canvassed. Of particular importance was the body of literature on how members of other groups with their own distinctive characteristics, experience, interpret, and react to those behaviours.

An important part of the chosen phenomenological method is that the researcher is required to examine the phenomena of the respondents’ lifeworld, in order that they may be represented free of preconceptions, and commitments to particular theoretical frameworks. Accordingly, this literature survey was conducted after the process of data collection and phenomenological writing as discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 8 Implications for Theory and Practice

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to lay out the conclusions that can legitimately be drawn from the research which has preceded it. After setting out the acknowledged limitations of the findings, the chapter will first enunciate what was discovered. It will discuss possible extensions to the existing body of relevant theory, and then discuss the present limitations to the use of technology to mediate inter-group relationships, and possibilities for more effective use in the future. The chapter will conclude with a summary of its findings, and a discussion of possibilities for future research.

Limitations

Consistent with the previously stated purpose of a phenomenological study, the findings of this research have limited transferability, but might reasonably be applied to similar knowledge-based workgroups in broadly similar profit-oriented complex organizations of sufficient size to have interdependent workgroups with delegated responsibility for the performance of functionally specialised tasks.

The research was conducted in a very specific cultural and organizational context. All interviews were carried out in one of four complex private enterprise organizations operating in a New Zealand setting. The organizations in which the respondents and their workgroups are employed are each in their own way, high technology organizations, each of which has a strong and direct involvement in the underlying technologies of their industry, and a strong commitment to their marketing activity. Furthermore, each of the organizations concerned is conventionally and bureaucratically structured in such a way as to create clusters
of specialist expertise in the form of workgroups to which the performance of tasks dependent on that expertise is delegated\textsuperscript{23}.

In Chapter 2 under the heading "Disclosure of My Biases", I referred to a predisposition to expect that I would find acute awareness of inter-group differences, giving rise to mildly negative attitudes. Having taken care not to influence the interviews, I must acknowledge the possibility that this predisposition may well have sensitised me to see evidence to support this in my analysis. However, I contend that the evidence was there to find, and that the findings are consistent with other studies of the behaviour of workgroups.

In the twenty eight workgroups represented during this research, only five were represented by women. Four of the five women participants shared stories of significant discrimination on gender grounds, both domestically within their organization, and in their dealings with overseas cultures where different attitudes to women were at least anticipated. Although this is an issue of potential interest for further research, I lack both expertise in the field of gender discrimination, and evidence that this issue is germane to my research questions on intergroup communications. While acknowledging the importance of this issue, I have elected not to pursue it further in this research.

Although New Zealanders perceive themselves to be citizens of a liberal multicultural country, all but one of the participants were tertiary educated professionals of Caucasian extraction and, in my judgement, of middle class backgrounds. The sole exception is a woman who is a naturalised New Zealander of Sri Lankan ethnicity. No persons of Maori\textsuperscript{24}, other Pacific Island, or Asian descent were encountered. I make no attempt to justify, interpret, or elaborate on these facts beyond the observation that, in context of the "professional" occupations, they are not entirely surprising in New Zealand. No reference to intra-group ethnic or cultural conflict diversity arose in any story provided. Since

\textsuperscript{23}... or was so structured at the time of the interviews.

\textsuperscript{24} The Maori are the indigenous people of New Zealand, representing some 14\% of New Zealand's population.
the groups were, for the most part, ethnically and professionally homogeneous, I am forced to assume that issues of ethnicity and class simply did not arise for the participants, and can draw no meaningful conclusions from the apparent imbalance of ethnicities.

Except for the two interviews conducted with entire workgroups, respondents were individuals with management or supervisory responsibility for the subject workgroup. Although this did not always translate to top level seniority, it may be assumed that a higher level of commitment to the workgroup and the organization is implied than might have been the case if the respondents had been of lesser organizational status. There was some initial concern that issues of self-presentation might arise, especially in the cases of the two chief executives, but after the first few minutes of each interview, the collaborative nature of the discussion tended to rule out such a possibility.

Despite the multinational dimensions of each of the organizations, the explicitly New Zealand context must be acknowledged. In the context of the industries in which they take place, the very conventional nature of the delegated tasks and roles, in very conventional organizations, tend to constrain patterns of activity in ways that might be observed in any Western capitalist organization, anywhere in the world. Such similarities can be verified against the voluminous literature of organizational theory (Drucker, 1997; Hofstede, 1991; Kanter, 1983; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Pettigrew, 1979; Porter, 1986; Rodgers & Shook, 1986; Sundstrom et al., 1990; Terpstra, 1978; Trice, 1993; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979), and are also endorsed by my own experience in other such organizations. Nevertheless, this research was conducted in a New Zealand context. Hofstede's (2001) widely cited survey of national cultures suggests that New Zealanders rank low on the power distance scale, high on individualism, approximately in the middle of the masculinity and uncertainty avoidance scales, and low on the long term orientation. Anecdotal evidence suggests that New Zealanders have a preference for informality, and dislike regimentation. None of these dimensions were examined in the present research, and it must be conceded that they may have some relevance to the transferability of the findings.
In the nature of a phenomenological study, the accounts of lived experiences are co-constructed between the respondent(s) and the researcher. In the positivist paradigm, this might be considered a significant limitation. In the interpretivist world, and especially in the phenomenological context, the researcher's impact on the outcomes, once declared, is seen as an essential component of the research. In this research, my prior intimate knowledge of one organization as a former long term employee, and my professional familiarity with the telecommunications industry in which the other three organizations are situated must be seen as a significant input to the interactions that resulted in the constructions of lived experience, and of their subsequent interpretation. These matters were fully disclosed and discussed in Chapter 2.

**Emergent Themes**

This research has used the methods of experiential phenomenology in order to provide the reader with the best possible understanding of essences of the lived experiences of the participants as they experience and perceive those phenomena that emerge from interactions between diverse groups. Drawing on the insights provided in Chapter 2 from Moustakas (1994), Stablein (2000) and Van Manen (1990, 2000e), this research has followed the steps I prescribed for the conduct of this phenomenological research. In the broadest terms, the research has followed a process of breaking the experiences down, and attempting to encounter what Merleau-Ponty (1962) termed "direct and primitive contact with the world" (p. vii) prior to "letting the things speak for themselves using the vocative power of language" (Van Manen, 2000e, online).

Initial coding of the research interviews provided by the various respondents identified many hundreds of potentially interesting but elemental concepts such as beliefs, attitudes, perspectives, processes, and behaviours. Within a single broad concept such as "processes" I identified sub-classes such as governance processes. Within that, I identified further categories such as outsourcing, decentralisation, and decision making. The hierarchy of interesting concepts and categories of concept rapidly and somewhat mechanistically ballooned out to an unworkable 843 concepts. In order to reduce this to
manageable proportions it became necessary to concentrate on those factors which appear to have direct and obvious relevance to the research questions. In particular, I have concentrated on those aspects of the respondents' narratives that address the stereotypes they constructed of their own group or groups, their stereotypes of other groups, and their perceptions of the quality of the interactions between their own group and the other groups. Stories of positive interactions with other groups are few in number, and relate to peripheral, or trivial aspects of group behaviours. Emphasis is placed, therefore, on interactions that are seen to be in some sense, hostile or problematic. Such hostility is perceived to come primarily from threats, either direct or indirect, or from perceived affronts to the respondents important beliefs and values.

As enunciated in Chapter 1 and elsewhere, this research has set out to explore the process of sense-making and adaptation, in respect of perceived differences of a cultural nature between workgroups in complex organizations. In particular, as promised in Chapter 2, it has through chapters 4, 5 and 6, identified and reflected upon the themes which occur in the narratives relative to the phenomenon of interest; and described the lived experience of the phenomenon through writing and rewriting in the eidetic mode, intended to recall and recreate for the reader, the essences of those lived experiences.

The current chapter examines those insights and, seeks to discover how the synthesis based on the essences of lived experiences, may be used to extend existing theory, and whether there are implications for practice in the field of organizational communication.

Scrutiny of the derived phenomenological reconstructions of the 28 individual respondents and two workgroups studied for the research, and of the reconstruction and synthesis of essences which emerged during the process of writing and re-writing, revealed a number of recurring themes. Among the most consistent of these themes were:

a) the use of story as a means of making sense of lived experience, and especially the experience of interacting with others;
b) in-group members tend to construct self-stereotypes such that they can claim distinctiveness in their attributes and processes;

c) in-group members tend to construct comparatively unfavourable stereotypes of members of any out-group within the in-group’s environment, thereby allowing them to maintain and enhance their belief in positive distinctiveness for themselves;

d) the belief that, despite their own inextricable involvement with the manufacture, marketing and supply of communications technology, most if not all media do not provide sufficient richness for the creation and maintenance of significant relationships; and

e) the belief that existing lean media might be used to sustain a significant pre-existing relationship if that relationship was initially established, and will periodically be refreshed by substantial face-to-face encounters.

The narratives embodying these themes were synthesized into a generalized description of the experience of relating to other groups, in Chapter 6. In order to see how my reconstruction of the essences of lived experience in these four organizations has shed light on the theory relevant to the research questions, I have made use of the “mind mapping” technique after the style espoused by Buzan (1991), and implemented in the Mindman® software package (Jetter, 2001). As illustrated in Figure 12 below, I looked for the main themes which emerged in the writing and laid out in schematic form, the principal areas of interest arising from the research thus far. Two areas stood out as being worthy of special attention because they directly relate to the questions at the centre of the present research. They are the stereotypes group members assign to themselves and others, and the factors pertaining to the quality of intergroup interactions. Relevance is judged on the extent to which the issue is connected to the research questions.
Emergent theory.

- Interactions
- Organization
- Group
- Members
- Purpose
- Market
- Prestige
- Profile
- Image
- Context
- Public
- Media?
Figure 13- Detail from Mindmap

Mind maps are read from the centre outwards, with each idea surrounding the core being elaborated in successive stages. In Figure 13, for example, which displays a section of the larger map in Figure 12, the first concept to the right of the title is Organization. Attributes of interest within this were judged to be Groups, purpose, prestige and context. Groups are further expanded to sub categories of purpose, background and members. Attributes of interest in respect of members are judged to be Individuals and stereotypes. Within stereotypes, there is focus on abilities and skills, capability, and attributes. The process can go on until, in the judgement of the map’s creator, a given branch is saturated for the purpose for which it is drawn. Such maps are limited, to the extent that they cannot accurately depict the full complexity of some relationships, but they can at worst, record the fact of a relationship. My use of such maps is purely to establish the visible linkages through which various components of some complex whole are related to each other.

Within these organizations, group members create stereotypes for themselves and the others with whom they have contact. These stereotypes relate to issues such as their general and functional skills and abilities. They also relate to the capability and capacity of individuals to perform reliably, the required volume of work. Attributes taken into consideration in the construction of the stereotypes include work ethic, autonomy and initiative, and approach to risk. Other significant attributes include the extent to which the individuals identify with their products, their group, their organization, and their stakeholders. Also important are the perceptions of how each individual values such things as rigour and thoroughness, spontaneity and entrepreneurship, product quality and
customer service. Likewise, important aspects of problematic intergroup interactions can be seen to relate to threats and affronts. Most prominent among the direct threats to the group with which the individual identifies, are competition in all its forms, whether experienced as aggressor or defender, especially those wherein the groups compete with each other for scarce resources of whatsoever nature, and those where issues of demarcation and territorial exclusivity are at stake. Interdependence is also threatening, where the group either relies on another group, or must perform to the requirements of another group. Indirect threats are typified by perceived comparisons of performance and outcomes, even where the groups under consideration are not in the same arena. Affronts arise where the values and beliefs espoused by members of the in-group are perceived to be rejected by members of the out-group.

It is precisely in the comparisons between stereotypes of their group and of others, that group members find their own identity and achieve an understanding of the identities of others. In accordance with the literature of social identity theory as discussed in 0, these stereotypes tend to relate to the groups’ abilities and skills, their capabilities and capacities, and various other attributes including values, logic, and spontaneity.

The second major focus area is the factors surrounding the qualities of problematic intergroup interactions. As the diagram demonstrates, the issues of interest include perceived threats, both direct and indirect, as well as affronts to the respondent’s own foundational beliefs, values, attitudes and priorities.

Much of the literature relating to workgroups is focussed on conflict resolution, either within the group, or between groups. In the narratives gathered in the course of this research, very little intra-group conflict was revealed, and a surprisingly small amount of inter-group conflict, at least at an overt level. This does not deny the expression, sometimes quite forcefully, of negative attitudes towards other groups. Overt inter-group conflict was reported in just two cases. The first was in respect of perceived demarcation issues, and the second related to the contempt one workgroup member reported towards a second group whose work ethic was not seen to match that of his own group, thereby letting down the customers concerned. The dimension of the workgroup literature that was most
in line with the narratives was the issue of alignment with organizational goals. Most groups, especially those with technical or engineering specialties were confident that their expertise in their specialised area was unchallenged, and for the most part, they conveyed the image of groups unafraid to exercise their own judgement to make decisions on their own ground.

**Findings and Significance**

Four categories of findings arise from this research. They are findings related to:

a) the mechanisms of sense making
b) the mechanisms of adaptation;
c) group membership and group interaction; and
d) the application of technology to issues of inter-group relationships.

These are each detailed hereafter.

**Findings Related to Sense Making**

In these four organizations, members of functionally specialised workgroups interacting with non-members, make sense of perceived cultural difference through the use of anecdotes and stories. Given that this entire research is based on narratives constructed and gathered precisely for the purpose of accessing the constructions and meanings placed by the respondents upon their lived experiences, it is potentially problematic to focus reflexively on the data gathering mechanism as a phenomenon of interest in its own right. However, as discussed in 0, there is a great deal of support for the identification of story as being among the most important of cultural artefacts, both within organizations and elsewhere (Boje, 1991, 1995, 1999; Boyce, 1996; Fisher, 1984, 1987; Gudmundsdottir, 1996, 1998a, 1998b; Martin, 2002; Weick, 1969). I assert that it is impossible to ignore the role of story in sensemaking, notwithstanding that its inclusion gives it the status of a metaphenomenon.
Story is very clearly the mechanism by which the participants in the present research make sense of all the phenomena they observe. They were rarely at a loss for explanatory anecdotes or stories make their understanding of the behaviours of events, behaviours and other phenomena accessible to a willing audience. It is well understood, and consistent with narrative theory (Boje, Rosile, Dennehy, & Summers, 1997; Boyce, 1995; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998; Fisher, 1984; Gudmundsdottir, 1996) that stories are co-constructed by the narrator and the listener, and that perspectives are given according to the principal narrator’s perception of the listener’s prior grounding in the subject matter of the narrative. It was certainly the case in my interactions with the various informants of this research that my own background knowledge was probed and tested in the course of the stories unfolded. Thus the stories related to me as researcher were highly influenced by each respondent’s perception of the relevance of my own prior background and industry knowledge. Another person with a different background, having a less (or more) intimate acquaintance with the organizations and industries concerned would almost certainly have heard a story which was neither worse nor better, but different, according to the respondent’s perception of that person’s understanding.

In every case, the shared stories in so far as they concerned other groups, or even as they concerned their own group, provided in varying degrees of sophistication, an exposition of how the respondent made causal links between elements of stories to derive interpretations of various historically observed phenomena. In many cases, the stories were tentatively offered, as the narrator ensured that I, the listener, co-constructor and recipient of the story, was able to participate properly in the sharing of understanding. Occasionally, some parenthetical explanation was required to enable me to play my part fully.

Sense-making stories told by the respondents in the course of this research were especially noteworthy for the fact that each focussed solely on the point of view of salient in-group and showed scant awareness of the similar sense-making processes and interpretations taking place within their peer groups.

These behaviours lead to the belief that narrative-based sense-making tends to be a one-way process, satisfying a group’s need for the opportunity to
articulate its environmental understandings, but lacking any corresponding imperative to attend to the stories of other groups, and even less, to attempt to reconcile the equivocalities and overt paradoxes raised by divergent interpretations.

Where narratives were directed to comparisons of the attributes of a given respondent's group to the remainder of the organization, the researcher would be obliged to conclude that, if each story were accorded the status of objective truth, then every group in the organization would have qualities considerably above organizational average. No evidence emerged in the course of the research to suggest that these inflated perceptions of positive distinctiveness were in any sense deleterious to the organization.

Findings Related to Adaptation

The mere fact that workgroup members can make sense of, or understand what another group does, is but a first step on the road to making interaction possible. Where there are values, priorities, beliefs, behaviours, or other attributes relevant to the collaborative process, there must be some compromise on the part of one or both groups, and a process of adaptation must be undertaken if the two groups are to work harmoniously together. In the example referred to earlier, where there was a serious mismatch between two groups in respect of their work ethic, the informant reported an unwillingness to entrust their relationship with customers to the less industrious group. The opportunity for compromise lies on a spectrum between the slower group "lifting its game", and the harder working group accepting a lower standard that lets customers down. If no compromise is reached in such a case, then the outcome would be that the two groups are unable to work together.

Adapting to Difference to Achieve Goals

Most narratives concerning external contacts were in connection with groups with whom some form of collaborative action was required for the achievement of organizational goals. In the few cases where the subject of narratives were not directly involved, the issue of adaptation did not arise.
Where groups must work together for a common purpose, then problems arising from cultural differences, needed to be resolved, usually by way of compromise on the part of either or both groups. The extent to which each party feels compelled to compromise seems from observation, to be governed by the normal rules of competition and rivalry, so that relative power between or among rivals tends to determine where the boundaries get drawn (Porter, 1980).

Where there is unresolved conflict, groups escalate the problem to their respective managers who will then impose a jointly negotiated solution which, at least in theory, is in the best interests of the organization at large. The necessity to escalate in this manner is sometimes avoided by the use of an agreed framework for the conduct of the relationship between the groups. This is typically more feasible where the nature of the transactions tends to be routine, and not unique.

Clearly, differences between groups arouse the strongest feelings where the actions of one group impinge on the areas which another group perceives as its own preserve. Stories told with the most feeling in the present research were those in which the narrator was describing some sense of grievance arising from the belief that another group had encroached in some manner on matters which were seen as the exclusive preserve of the narrator’s in-group.

Findings Related to Group Membership and Group Interaction

These narratives embody biased perceptions of each group’s attributes with the intention of enhancing the positive distinctiveness if the group in the eyes of its members.

Constructing Positive Self-stereotypes

Social identity theory has a considerable body of literature that suggests that an individual who categorizes him or herself as part of a group, and who identifies with that group, tends to shift self perception to embrace as personal characteristics, the attributes and qualities ascribed to the group (Hogg, 1992;
Hogg & Terry, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Van Knippenberg & van Schie (2000) articulate the manner in which individuals become like the groups to which they belong or aspire:

Through identification, individuals define themselves as members of social categories and ascribe categories that are typical of these categories to themselves (p. 138).

Thus, if a respondent in this research perceives autonomous decision making as an admirable quality of a group with which he or she identifies, it is likely that he or she will be motivated to internalise those qualities as personal attributes. Group identification theory is derived from social identity theory. Henry et al (1999) differentiate group identification from social identity theory, firstly by making the point that the former occurs in interacting groups, whereas the latter can be applied in a variety of societal roles available to the individual. They go on to assert an emphasis on intra-group processes, and the manner in which group members identify with each other. In the context of the present research, Newman & Newman (2001) usefully suggest four prerequisites for the existence of a group:

a) those who would be members of a group must have both the capacity to categorize people into groups, and to recognise the distinguishing features that define members;

b) its members must experience a sense of history as a member of the group;

c) its members must have some emotional investment in the group; and

d) its members engage in a continuous process of social evaluation of the group and its relation to other groups.

These criteria are, broadly speaking, consistent with the definitions of workgroups and teams discussed in 0. All of these attributes with the debatable exception of the sense of history are evident in the narratives provided in this study. This attribute is problematic only in the context of recently formed groups.
where shared history was negligible. No evidence appeared to indicate that new
groups were, in any sense, less of a group as a consequence.

There is a body of research relating to group identities voluntarily
acquired rather than ascribed (Huddy, 2001; Taylor, 1989). For the purposes of
the present research, this is of little relevance, since individuals are almost
invariably assigned their roles in organizations of this type, and from the stories
gathered, no element of such voluntarism was detected in the structures of the
four organizations investigated. Group membership for most respondents was
predetermined by the match between the occupational skills and capabilities of
the individual and the required functions of the group. A food technologist, for
example, is usually situated in a group whose role needs those special skills.
Likewise, though an accountant will often be found in either a specialist
accounting role or a generalist management position, accountants are not
normally considered for placement in groups whose principal function is of a
technical or engineering nature, such as the support and maintenance of major
telephone switching software. In the common-sense view, individuals are useful
participants in a group if their skills and/or experience are relevant to the group’s
purpose.

Group boundaries were more permeable at Alcatel than in the other three
organizations, but mainly to the extent that the organization has a strongly
engineering based culture. In this context, a talented individual with an
engineering background is seen as being capable of performing a variety of
management and marketing roles. In all the participant organizations, the
generalist management roles are open to people from a variety of vocational
specializations, but in all cases candidates are selected from the small subset of
employees who can be classified as having stood out by virtue of achievement
orientation, and by their alignment with organizational purpose. One of the chief
executives made this more explicit:

You asked me what sorts of people they are. They are all ... have been
achievers in their own right and they have a whole range of strengths and
weaknesses ... I want them to believe in what they do and I want them to
actually crawl over broken glass to achieve their targets (NZDB CEO).
It is important that positive identification is not confused with pride in the organization, since a member who does positively identify with an organization may feel either pride or shame, depending on the perceived attributes, behaviours, and actions of the organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Group members "personally experience the successes and failures of the group" (Ashforth & Mael, 1989, p. 21), and the sense of being associated with success is identified by van Knippenberg & van Schie (2000) as a necessary, though not necessarily sufficient, condition for job satisfaction.

It was clear from the interviews in this research that group members enjoy being able to believe that their work is respected by their peers. However, respondents also appear to derive special satisfaction from the belief that they are part of a group that is uniquely able to make a significant contribution to the overall success of the organization. Uniqueness is a problematic concept in the discussion of groups, and even more so, in the discussion of their cultures. That any of the participants groups is truly unique in terms of its function and broad attributes is unlikely, and indeed some of the groups in the study may be seen to be similar to other participant groups. Nevertheless, most narratives were imbued with a sense of the respondent’s belief that his or her group was in some positive sense, unique (Martin, Feldman, Hatch, & Sitkin, 1983). A plausible explanation is that, within the ambit of organizations known to the respondent, the group under discussion is indeed unique. Also possible, is that respondents used a highly qualified perception of uniqueness, limited to a belief that they are the only group in that organization, who have those skills, and who perform that task, in that location.

The possibility also exists, that a tendency toward selective thinking about the community from which uniqueness is claimed, is a characteristic of New Zealanders of the social and professional classes represented in this research. The wry but commonly used phrase “world famous in New Zealand” (Campbell-Hunt et al., 2001) suggests that New Zealanders are reflexively aware of this tendency. Whatever the justifications, it seems to be the case that perceptions of uniqueness relate more than anything else, to the tendency on the part of individuals to construct a social identity for the group to which they
belong, such that by identifying with it, they confer upon themselves a sense of distinctiveness or differentiation from all others. Dutton et al. (1994) suggest that it is "that which is distinctive, central and enduring" (p. 239), that causes the individual to identify with a group, while Ashforth & Mael (1989) argue that "it is precisely because identification is group-specific [italics original]" (p. 28), that uniqueness claims are made. As with other dimensions of social identity theory, the perception of uniqueness does not require the existence of objectively verifiable uniqueness (Huddy, 2001).

A number of groups represented in this research claim an ability to perform a function of strategic importance to their organization. According to their conviction, no other group within the organization has the skills, background or qualifications to perform the task which is currently exclusively their own. In the groups where such a belief is held, the narrative reflects a very positive self-stereotype. No anecdotes of this kind conceded any failings or shortcomings. This tends to support the belief of Turner et al. (1987) that individuals are selective about which of the attributes of the group to which they belong will be highlighted and incorporated in their own self image.

However, although individuals seek to identify with uniqueness, it is also that case, at least in the organizations and groups represented, that there was little, if any, overlap of functional responsibility, and in the limited context of their own organizations, groups could legitimately claim to be uniquely privileged to perform a particular set of tasks. In one case, an organizationally single group with nationwide responsibility for the support of a particular class of technology was divided between two major cities. Each of the two halves is arguably performing the same role, yet in the part of the group interviewed, members saw themselves as positively distinctive, when compared with their counterparts in the other city, both in terms of technical skills and social attributes.

Internal service groups tend to interact with most other functions within their organization, and depending on the depth of their interaction and the amount of knowledge exchanged, often lay claim to an understanding of the organization's strategic situation which is superior to that of other groups, and
thereby improve the stereotypes they create for themselves. Although it is possible to build an identity or stereotype for the self without comparison to an external referent, nevertheless, much of the respondents' stories of who they are, draw upon comparison with others, with the clear implication that stereotypes for the others have been constructed.

Narratives tended to confirm social identity theory by demonstrating that where there is interaction with other groups, perceived differences between the groups will be exaggerated in such a way as to allow the individual to maximise their own self esteem through belonging to the preferred group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Even though the claims to superiority were at times mutually contradictory, several respondents profess the belief that their group, in comparison to all other groups, has more relevant knowledge, has a better grasp of organizational realities, and a better insight into organizational strategy. They claim better access to important resources, and more ability to influence outcomes. Many groups perceive themselves to be more industrious than all other groups in their organization. Others see themselves as more willing to take risks, or more fiscally prudent. That these claims are antithetical to each other is not altogether surprising, given the belief of some social identity theorists that stereotypes are not necessarily congruent with the observations of third parties. As previously discussed, there need be no rational basis for inter-group discrimination to exist, it is sufficient that the in-group member is aware of the very existence of the other group (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Pepitone (2000) takes a very "black and white" view of this problem:

In assigning traits to two categories of people, subjects use stereotypes they hold about the people in the two categories; people and traits are associated without a shred of objective evidence for the association (p. 239).

Those with a technological or other science-based expertise claim to be more logical, and more focused on product quality, and more rigorous in their adherence to best practice. Respondents of an entrepreneurial bent claim to be more focused on customer satisfaction and more willing to take risks. Almost all groups perceive themselves to be making a better than average contribution to
the organization’s success, and/or to be more committed to the best interests of the stakeholders. Paradoxically, groups in the same organization construct their own positive stereotypes on the basis of values, behaviours, or attributes that are incompatible with, or inimical to, the very values that reinforce the self image of the neighbouring group.

Several respondents in the present research were members of two, or even three groups. Typically, this arises when a individual is both a member of a senior team, a member of a group of peers, and an ex officio member of a team of which he or she is the manager. Multiple roles raise the question of “salience” which group is the one with which they identify most strongly for any given purpose, or at any given time. Narratives from the respondents made it clear that individuals do indeed switch their sense of identification from group to group according to the context of the moment. “Salience” is the term used by social identity theorists to refer to the fact that, where a person is a member of multiple groups, one of them is psychologically activated as the membership which is, for the time being, “salient” (Oakes, 1987; Stets & Burke, 2000). During the period for which one particular membership is salient, it can be expected that the individual will identify most strongly with, and act as a member of that particular group. Huddy (2001) summarises the view of social identity theorists on salience: “when the group is salient, group identity is paramount” (p. 131).

Whereas this offers a useful view for the dichotomy between group identity and individual identity it does not entirely clarify the question of salience in the context of multiple groups. The narratives of respondents who clearly have multiple group memberships within their organization each deal with their view of individual roles *seriatim*, and thereby tend to support the perception of primacy for the currently salient group membership role. However, the small number of very senior managers who provided stories of a subordinate group of which they are a member by virtue of being its manager, gave accounts of that group which never lost some of the perspectives which properly belonged to their role as a member of the more senior management group. The very language of the narrative, and especially the use of the third person pronoun suggests that,
despite clear pride in the achievements of the subordinate group, and a sense of ownership of that group’s performance, there is little or no salience switching.

So they have individual training or skills, umm, they don't tend to be the same hard driving results orientated group. They have a narrower focus, umm, they have a set of objectives that as a generalisation they will perform to without exception. They are much more exact about their business, they are not going to take shortcuts. They are going to do it promptly according to a set of rules. They are not entrepreneurial like [senior management] kind of people (NZDB - Senior Manager B).

This must give rise to the suspicion that salience shifts on a continuum rather than between clearly separate modes. Further, it tends to endorse the existence of a hierarchical relationship between certain membership roles, such that the ones most important to the individual’s personal self-identity, may override or modify the attributes of the group membership role of a subordinate group, even when that role is nominally salient. Stryker & Burke (2000) observe:

Persons have as many identities as distinct networks of relationships in which they occupy positions and play roles. ... [Identity] theory asserts that role choices are a function of identities so conceptualized, and that identities within self are organized in a salience hierarchy reflecting the importance of hierarchy as an organizational principle in society (p. 286).

Some go further and suggest that chosen group identities are not random or circumstantial, but rather, are manipulated to ensure that “the most meaningful and self-favoring identity becomes salient”. (Hogg & Terry, 2000, p. 125). According to Pratt & Foreman (2000, p. 20), multiple group identities require the existence of multiple conceptualizations of the organization, but they make the point that such conceptualizations need not necessarily be antithetical to each other.

It is clear that a sound sense of their own position as members of a particular group within the organization is a necessary condition for the construction of stereotypes for members of other groups. Arising from the issue of multiple group memberships, is the question of role conflict, whereby a person
may well find that the beliefs, values, and behaviours required in one role are in direct conflict with those required in another. Stories told in the course of this research tend to endorse the view of (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) who suggest that such conflicts are likely to be constrained by the nested nature of the groups to which an individual belongs. None of the respondents in the present research spoke of any membership whose requirements were in direct conflict with those imposed by another membership. Nevertheless, a degree of tension can be observed between the strategic fiduciary responsibilities of a manager, and the more localised pragmatic objectives which might exist in another role held by that person, such as being a member of a group of engineers.

I think when you go across into management your views change, and you see things in a different light. And suddenly you realise that management isn't always against you, as you seem to think when you're a true engineer (Ericsson - Technical Group Manager E).

Whereas the many aspects of self-stereotyping to be found in the stories are interesting, their real usefulness arises as a basis for comparison and sense making with the stereotypes of others constructed in the course of interaction with them.

Creating Stereotypes for Others

Other groups are frequently described in the stories provided in this research. For the most part, such narratives are concerned with groups routinely encountered within the organization by the respondent, either in the course of collaboration in the performance of some service relative to the business of the organization, or else as competitors for some desired objective. Other encounters with out-groups may be episodic, for some ad hoc purpose. Stories provided, naturally focus on those groups with which there is recurring and intensive interaction, and where there is the greatest potential for inter-group friction. It is appropriate to recall that the stories told, are those of an individual workgroup member, describing the outcomes of his or her own sense making and adaptation processes, and that such stories do not represent any kind of collective opinion from the informant’s workgroup. Nor, it should be added, do the stories have any
special priority over the viewpoints of the subject groups. Instead, they embody the stereotypes constructed by the informant arising from the that person’s lived experience.

Out-groups are often characterised by the respondent in ways that are less than flattering. This observation is consistent with earlier references as to how group members enhance their own self identity by skewed interpretations of the attributes of others. It is endorsed by Flynn, Chatman, & Spataro (2001) who draw on earlier work by Kramer (1991) to restate the widely adopted belief that individuals interpret perceptions of others so as to reinforce negative stereotypes, and thereby to enhance their own self esteem. Hopkins & Rae (2001) describe this in terms of the in-group enhancing its own status by the derogation of an out-group.

This seems nowhere more true than when the out-group concerned is in possession of some special skill on which the respondent’s own group or organization is dependent. As Flynn et al. (2001) suggest, in-group members form their impressions of out-group members in the context of their self interest, and closely watch the behaviours of the outsiders, measuring their attributes against those required for membership of the observer’s team. Narratives gathered in this research tend to indicate that the need to depend on members of an out-group for the performance of some business-critical function is perceived as a potential threat to members of the in-group. In the context of such perceived risks to success, in-group members commonly treat members of the group on whom they are forced to depend, as potential adversaries whose goals and behaviours may come into conflict with their own (Williams, 2001).

Consistent with the notion of maintaining positive distinctiveness, group members attempt to reduce the cause of their concern by the creation and maintenance of out-group stereotype for group such that the importance of the out-group’s contribution to the relationship is derogated in comparison to their own contribution (Hopkins & Rae, 2001). Information systems specialists provide a case in point. As members of the business units in an organization acquire more knowledge in the domain of information systems, they begin to
suspect that the more esoteric activities able to be carried out by the specialists in the field only, are in some sense, a stratagem for power retention.

And it is fair to say that business is now taking a lot more responsibility for its information systems requirements than historically it took. And that's ... I think that's a general trend. But we are getting past the ... the you know, the sort of the weirdo, the multi-national weirdos on Level 3\textsuperscript{25} (NZDB - Senior Manager C).

Implicit in the stories of almost all respondents are the stereotypes they have constructed for the salient out-groups in their lived experience. Whereas some respondents preferred to speak of the qualities of their own group, the perceptions of the other groups are imbedded in their beliefs about their own superior performance. Among the most commonly expressed perceptions of difference are the attitudes of the out-group towards the apparent attitudinal conflict between product quality and responsiveness to customer satisfaction\textsuperscript{26}.

Marketing is still largely staffed by engineers. Product management is certainly, all engineers. Although again that is changing a bit now. So products were engineered. We built and designed good products, rather than what the customer needed (Alcatel - Technical Manager A).

Overt polarization seems to exist between respondents whose focus is on service or product quality, and those who value entrepreneurship even though, objectively, the two values need not necessarily conflict. Those whose orientation is technical, tell stories that value rigorous adherence to best practice, and disapprove of “corner cutting” and rule bending. Those involved with sales and marketing tell stories that typically value opportunism and entrepreneurship, and disparage those who are rule compliant and risk averse.

\textsuperscript{25} The reference is to a team of information systems consultants supplied by a major vendor on short term contracts from overseas to fill a gap in locally available specialist expertise.

\textsuperscript{26} This observation is not intended to endorse the validity of any such dichotomy, merely to observe the fact that many respondents seemed to regard the choice for one as a rejection of the other.
Few narratives relating to other groups purported to provide objective information about the other group. Most such stories contained highly situated subjective judgements intended to highlight differences, and even if not intended to overtly disparage or derogate the out-group, then at least to enhance my perception of the respondent’s own group by comparison. Except for the somewhat clinical evaluations of subordinate groups offered by one of the two chief executive officers who participated, most stories describing the actions or attributes of other groups implied that their performance fell short of what the respondent’s own group would believe to be appropriate. Thus the respondents in this research tend to confirm assertion that intergroup comparisons are intended to maximise for the in-group member, the perception of favourable difference, and to create “evaluative advantage” for the in-group. (Hogg, 1992, p. 91).

In very few cases were the out-group anecdotes downright derogatory, and intended to convey and invite condemnation of those groups’ behaviours as unprofessional or inadequate. Most intergroup comparisons are more carefully worded and convey the impression of judgements passed more in sorrow than in anger. It might be conjectured that the narrator in such cases is constrained on at least two fronts. On the one hand, the out-group is usually still part of the organization which is itself a group to which the narrator belongs. By acknowledging such shortcomings, even though they are in another part of the organization, the narrator is at diminishing the perceived value of a group to which he or she belongs, and is thereby undercutting a significant component of self-identity. On the other hand, the very act of telling an out-group member (such as me, the researcher) may well be seen as an act of organizational disloyalty, and the act of “snitching” may be inconsistent with the narrator’s own self-concept (Dutton et al., 1994). It is also likely that the respondent may hesitate because of concerns as to what construction I as the audience might place on an act that has the potential to be seen as disloyal.

The Particular Outlook of Technical People

Engineers in the three telecommunications organizations are especially conscious of the fact that no other group within the organization is able to simply pick up and carry out the very specific and highly technical duties currently
performed by their own group. Similar attitudes can be seen to exist in the
narratives from other specialist fields such as auditing, accounting, information
systems, product costing, and trade politics. In each case, even though some
portion of their professional expertise might be in the public domain, the
specialists appear to believe that only another specialist with the same skill sets
might perform the functions unique to their group.

For the engineers, attributes such as trade or professional qualifications,
training, certification, industry experience, and specialised sectoral knowledge
are perceived as the predominant marks by which group members are separated
from what are seen as more mundane, and less intrinsically valuable tasks and
functions carried out by other groups. Narratives provided by engineers tend to
show a belief, consistent with the practices in the science of their occupation, in
an underlying objective reality addressable by means of logic, professional
rigour, and formulaic step-by-step problem solving. The concept of a single
identifiable best practice for any particular problem in their particular domain is
consistent with the accounts given by the technology professionals. Their value
systems tend to place the quality of service delivered or product supplied above
most other considerations, including whatever the customer, the sales people, or
the administrator might have expressed as a requirement. Such a value priority is
apparently made possible by the belief that organizational success is based on
quality products and services which in turn are derived from adherence to an
unambiguous and discoverable best practice.

Broadly similar issues arise from a number of other specialist groups
whose training and background might be acknowledged as having a base in
scientific method. Such groups include audit, information systems, finance and
accounting. In the special case of Alcatel where most managerial positions are
filled with individuals from an engineering background, this world view tends to
be pervasive.

Similarly, chief executive officers and other senior individuals following
in the traditions of Adam Smith, Frederick Taylor and Max Weber, can be seen
to hold to the belief that there is a single best way to carry out the functions of
the business.
Reacting to Issues of Self Interest

Although many intergroup relationships can be positive, or at least neutral, the relationships of most interest are those where some dimension of the interaction is perceived negatively by at least one of the participants. In this research, I observed that the examples of interaction in which at least one party felt some degree of hostility to the other party, were all related to a perceived threat, or to a sense of being affronted by some choice or preference on the part of the other party which called into question, values or beliefs of importance to the offended person. Actions by other parties seen as threatening, could be classified as either direct or indirect threats. Issues arising from a sense of threat are discussed in turn.

Direct threat

Direct threats observed in the course of this research typically involved competition between the respondent’s group and some other group, either to the fundamental issue of survival, or to the ability of the group to perform up to the respondents’ aspirations. As discussed under the heading of positive self-stereotypes, exclusive possession of some important task is a significant issue for most groups, and any threat to that outcome creates a situation of conflict for the parties concerned.

Similarly, where a group is competing with another group for advantage, whether in external competition, or internally for scarce resources, the natural awareness of the other group as adversary tends to create a tension between the groups, and consistent with social identity theory and group identification theory, tends to give rise to the perception of negative distinctiveness when the relevant out-group is contrasted with the in-group.

Interdependence between groups is another ground for perception of direct threat. Dependence on another group for service gives rise to anxiety as to that group’s ability to perform, and may cause fears that the in-group’s own performance may be jeopardised by any inadequacy on the part of another group.
They tend to go home at 4 o'clock on Friday and if you want something after that then you wait until Monday ... they thought they could hold all the spares centrally ... and save the company money but I pointed out, what happens if the 111 police queue goes down at 2am in the morning, who's going to go up to get the part, or who's going to tell the Police Commissioner, I'm sorry, you can't take any 111 calls till Monday? No thanks. Give that one a miss (Ericsson - Technical Manager E).

Almost as threatening is the pressure felt by the in-group when it functions as a supplier of service to another group, in which circumstance, the out-group can become demonised by the in-group members as being unreasonably demanding. This is exemplified in at least two of the subject organizations by the information systems function. The narratives seem to describe a customer base which is always demanding of more service and more flexibility than the group can comfortably or safely deliver. Group members drawing on their perceived organizational identity (Dutton et al., 1994) believe in good faith that they are simply exercising prudent judgement, in the best interests of the organization, protecting it from the unpredictable risks associated with uncontrolled complexity. However, when the same members formulate a construed external image (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991), that is, their perception of how they are seen by outsiders, they believe that they are being seen as unreasonably rigid, uncooperative, and obstructive. The conflict between doing the right thing in accordance with the respondent's on perception of the one best way, and doing the right thing in accordance with a philosophy of providing the highest levels of service as required by the customers, imposes considerable pressures:

One thing that I've learnt over my career is that you can't allow too much diversity. The only way you can take control of the business, as such, is to impose some standardisation. So we have fixed standards in terms of the desktop environment, with the type of laptop you can buy ... You know if someone says I need the software, to do their business, and it's fully licensed and so on, then in most cases we'll let them install it, or we will
install it. And to a greater, or lesser degree, we'll support it as well
(Ericsson - Technical Manager C).

Members of the in-group can be seen to experience anxiety when the
potential exists for them to fail in their obligations to the out-group as they see
them. In the example cited above, the organization is trying to accommodate
customer demands, even though they have sound reasons for a different course of
action.

Where meeting the demands of the out-group is, in any sense, optional
and is seen as being in conflict with the in-group’s own priorities, then the in-
group must resolve the conflict between what it sees as its job in terms of its own
perceived organizational identity, and the outcomes of refusal for the construed
external image.

Not all perceived threats can be seen to have a direct and tangible impact
on the respondent’s group. Nevertheless, indirect threats such as those which
may damage the self esteem of a group may be treated as seriously as the more
overt threat.

**Indirect Threats**

Groups performing similar functions to a salient out-group, or competing
for management approbation from the same authority as the out-group can find
themselves each being judged against the other. In the present research, there are
few examples of groups in overt competition with other groups in the same
organization for a given task or function. More common, is the situation of
multiple groups competitively striving for management approval by being seen to
perform at a higher level than other units in the same hierarchical structure. In
most cases, respondents demonstrated the belief that their groups need to
continuously strive for high performance in comparison with other business units
in order to achieve the management approval that reinforces their own sense of
positive distinctiveness. No respondent was so supremely confident of their own
superiority as to be unconcerned about comparisons with other groups, even
where the function or purpose of their group was so unique as to ensure no direct
competition.
**Affronts to Basic Values or Beliefs**

Previously discussed dichotomous positions are seen by many respondents as a direct challenge to, or even a rejection of, their own foundational beliefs, values, and priorities. Very little in the narratives provided gave any hint that the respondents were challenged on the basis of the position taken by the out-group, to re-evaluate their own position. Rather, the image conveyed is one of entrenchment of the prior stance, and a strengthening of the negative perception of the other group. Examples of foundational beliefs include the conviction that there is a single "best way" to perform a particular organizational role, or that responsiveness to customer requirements is the pre-eminent consideration. Another example is the strength of identification with such group values as the work ethic. Clearly a group that is comparatively less industrious is unlikely to be troubled by another that works harder, unless the difference is aired to the public view. On the other hand, the group that does work hard, for long hours is deeply offended when another group is visibly less committed. The sense of grievance is exacerbated in the circumstances where the perceived laziness impacts on the perceived

**Findings Related to the Application of Technology**

**The General Issues**

Where some aspect of the relationship between members of different groups is problematic, whether as a result of friction and hostility, or simply by virtue of the effort required to bridge the gap between the different modes of operation between the groups, the question arises as to whether technology might be used to ameliorate the difficulties. Underlying this question is the presumption on the part of the researcher that difficulties experienced in communications between two parties of different cultural backgrounds are compounded by culturally derived artefacts in which the message content is embedded.
In the model proposed in Figure 14, a person transmitting an idea from a given cultural context would usually embellish the bare content of the message with a variety of artefacts in the manner which is customary for people of that particular culture. Such artefacts might include tone of voice, posture, demeanour, proxemics, attentiveness, phraseology, and a whole range of other non-verbal dimensions of communication. In a simple text-based medium such as e-mail, a range of conventions including the decision to use, or not use honorifics, or prefatory greetings, and expressions of goodwill at the closure, all contribute to how a message via this meeting is perceived. In some organizational cultures, these embellishments are entirely superfluous, while in others they are a necessary sign of respect. Given an unrestrained communication medium such as that which exists when two people are in each other’s presence, it can be seen that the signal received by the recipient is comprised of not only the original idea, but also the artefacts of the sender’s culture. The message is interpreted from within the recipient’s cultural environment and from that perspective. The possibility thus exists for misinterpretation.

Many, though not all, of these culturally sourced artefacts are incapable of transmission by simple voice telephony, while other aspects cannot be transmitted via an essentially text based medium. It should also be acknowledged that the original idea and the manner in which it is expressed may be coloured by the culture from which it originates, and in these circumstances, no filtering by technology will ameliorate any difficulties arising from the difference. At best, a limited range of external cultural trappings may be removed from the communication process.
Even a full motion videoconference channel is incapable of transmitting the full spectrum of non-verbal communication behaviours. Thus the initial presumption in my research question is that most technologically mediated communications are stripped of cultural artefacts, whether accidentally or by design, and the recipient is left with the bare content of the communication. It was further presumed that, by careful media selection, and by the purposeful selection and insertion of appropriate transmission-capable cultural artefacts, the potential for misinterpretation might be better managed, and the quality of intercultural communications improved.

Three of the participant organizations in this research are intrinsically committed to the manufacture, marketing and sales of communications technology, and its members might reasonably be expected to endorse the proposition that technology can provide solutions to business communication problems. The fourth organization, as New Zealand’s largest multinational, with a workforce in excess of six thousand, and a global presence with offices in over sixty countries, has a long and necessary history as an early and successful adopter of communications technology²⁷.

In organizations such as these, it might be anticipated that members, from their identification with organizational purpose, and their prior experience with technology, would be supportive of the idea that technology adds value to the communication process. Instead, the respondents were almost universally sceptical, and even where advanced in house facilities were available, most respondents including those who managed the provision of such services, were very clear in their belief that no mediated communication was a satisfactory or sufficient substitute for communication in person.

In their accounts of using telephones, email, audio and video-conference facilities, respondents raised the usual complaint of the missing dimensions of the process, and expressed the belief that it is impossible to fully interpret the

²⁷ It was in the management of this function that I was employed by the New Zealand Dairy Board.
communication, or to know the other person over such channels. Telephony is so thoroughly integrated into everyday life, so much part of the infrastructure of doing business, that few mentioned it as a specific technology, except to observe the absence of "body language". In their discussions of technology, respondents based their opinions on their prior, and in some cases extensive, experience of e-mail, audio-conference and video-conference. A very few mentioned instant messaging and electronic "chat rooms" as further possibilities.

Support was expressed for technology mediated communication in the limited context of a supplemental channel for the maintenance of an already existing sound relationship, developed in the first instance on a face-to-face basis. Respondents' stories contained the implicit belief that there is a continual evaluative dimension to communications in every relationship. Each communicative action or utterance is carefully scrutinised for hidden meaning or sub-texts, or any change in the current understanding of the relationship. An initial meeting, and periodic subsequent "refresher" meetings provide some basis for interpretation of the overt content of mediated messages. However, even these are not seen as providing the same quality of relationship as is possible for relationships established and conducted in person.

Where a relationship is required for the support of an essentially simple and non-problematic business function, such as routine collaborations, or the supply or acquisition of a commodity product or service, then a very small number of respondents expressed a belief that such a relationship could be created and sustained on technology alone. This is very much a minority viewpoint among the respondents from the organizations involved in this research.

Precisely because the content of technology mediated messages is separated from its cultural context, recipients appear to lose significant and important clues as to how the content is to be interpreted. The very attributes of

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28 In this context, the phrase "body language" is used as a metonym for the entire spectrum of non-verbal communication.
the communication processes that may cause friction in normal intergroup communication are part of the range of non-verbal communications that are stripped when technology is deployed. This causes a great deal of anxiety to the respondents who prefer the full range of communicative behaviour for the interpretation of the behaviour and intentions of those with whom they interact. Even in those cases where the different communication style is an irritant in face-to-face communication, the absence of some components of the other party’s communication causes even greater problems for the recipient.

**Applying Technology – Electronic Mail**

It is a cliché in communications literature that the absence of body language is problematic in telephony, and even more so in e-mail. Simple e-mail is perceived as problematic in any single message, and even more so as the basis for an ongoing relationship.

Media richness theory suggests that communications should contain sufficient information to allow discussion and debate (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Ferry, Kydd, & Sawyer (2001) define media richness in terms of its ability to carry multiple cues through multiple channels, to provide for a variety of language or symbol systems, to permit timely feedback, and to provide a degree of personal-ness or social presence. Despite the best efforts of proponents for a code of net etiquette (Rinaldi, 1998; Spinks, Wells, & Meche, 1999), the medium is devoid of any effective or universally accepted code of conduct. E-mail messages, even within an organization, may therefore vary from extremely terse and highly ambiguous messages, to long and complex documents modelled upon the mode of writing once used for formal written communication. There is often little understanding of net etiquette, and as a result, messages may arrive in the correct plain ASCII format, in HTML format, or even as attachments in Word™ format. Messages have been received in flashing colour, with embedded musical or other multimedia artefacts. There is little conformity to the net etiquette standard that say the signature portion of an email should not exceed four lines. The medium is further devalued by the existence of Unsolicited Commercial Emails (UCE, also known as “spam”), pornographic messages, or the well-
intentioned but unwelcome chain letters, and the ubiquitously distributed but
time-wasting jokes (Notess, 2003).

Respondents in the current research agreed that most people used e-mail as an easy way to deliver immediate but non-strategic responses, and observed that although the messages are potentially immediately available, the medium is intrinsically asynchronous, and that there was no certainty as to when, or even if, the intended recipient would access any message.

Although a very carefully composed text message can be a very effective and accurate form of communication, a very large number of communication acts between groups are comparatively informal and require a medium that allows spontaneity, or immediacy of response.

As a generalisation, respondents recognised that most users take less care over issues of grammar, spelling, and form than was the norm in earlier text based media. Its ability to be used to express and send spontaneous reactions, often without the forethought that used to be given to letters and memoranda, present some risk to both sender and recipient. The sender might easily respond inappropriately on the basis of first impressions of a situation. The very immediacy of the medium is not conducive to the observances of niceties such as good spelling or grammar, and respondents likened e-mail to putting conversational responses into text form and sending them. Some profess to find the lack of care and precision, and what is sometimes termed slovenliness in the formulation of e-mails to be offensive, and denotative of a lack of respect for the recipient.

**Applying Technology – Audio-conferencing**

Audio-conferencing must be seen as a special case (many-to-many) of simple telephony which is normally dyadic. In terms of media richness theory, it obviously offers some advantages over e-mail for certain kinds of interaction. The very nature of the medium requires careful management (McDonough & Cedrone, 2000), and even more careful attention to interpretation. Unless the participants are all well known to each other, well understood protocols are required to ensure that each participant is aware of who is talking at any moment.
Likewise, appropriate “turn-taking” must be managed to ensure that all who need to be heard are given the opportunity. According to the anecdotes provided by the respondents, uncertainty as to whether distant participants are attentive, or even present, can be disconcerting. Any extended conference-based communication process such as training or business presentation presents special challenges, not least of which is the maintenance of participant interest and attention without physical presence, and without any feedback to presenter for extended periods.

And audio conferencing, you know, I’ve done some half days ones, and you know, you’re just totally exhausted by the end, because you have to use different senses and different... And most companies you talk to would tell you at the end of the day there is no substitute for one-on-one, sort of, communications (Telecom - Technical Manager C).

Applying Technology – Video-conferencing

Video-conferencing attempts to address some of the earlier deficiencies by providing a live concurrent visual dimension to the process, thereby enhancing media richness in comparison to text based systems or audio-conferencing. According to Chapman & Rowe (2001), a number of technology factors are worthy of consideration in evaluating the efficacy of the medium. It is suggested, for example, that the medium limits the viewer’s access to certain nonverbal communication cues, either by virtue of a selective camera angle, or by virtue of lack of optical resolution on the screen. Much is omitted from a head-and-shoulders view, and the video-conferencing system’s refresh rate combined with the resolution eliminate such subtle clues as a tapping foot, a rapidly blinking eye, or a trembling hand.

The structure of mediated interactions are also needful of careful attention. On the one hand, it has been suggested that participants who have a negative experience are likely to ascribe blame to the medium rather than the other participant(s) (Taylor & Fiske, 1975). Another variation from face-to-face communications is that reduced visual cues tend to result in longer
conversational turns and less interruption (O'Connaill, Whittaker, & Wilbur, 1993).

Respondents in this research, however, were scathing of slow frame rate videoconferencing, and several times expressed the view that as much could be achieved by a simple telephone call made while viewing a photograph of the other party. Even high bandwidth full-motion videoconferencing is not seen by the respondents as the equivalent of face-to-face communication, since the two dimensional representation fails to communicate atmosphere, context, or personal presence, and is capable of being managed or manipulated to produce staged impression in a way that is more difficult in real life.

**Answering the Research Questions**

This research has set out to address a primary research question and a number of secondary questions, which it has done in ways described in turn in the sections below.

**Sense Making and Adaptation**

The primary research question was:

*In the context of a complex organization, how does a member of a workgroup, make sense of, and adapt to, perceived cultural differences encountered when communicating with non-members?*

The individual respondents and the groups interviewed for this research were all members of complex, technology-based organizations in a New Zealand context. Consistent with the beliefs of many scholars in the field (Boje, 1995, 1999; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997, 1998; Fisher, 1984, 1985, 1987; Gover, 1996; Gudmundsdottir, 1996, 1998b), all respondents made sense of their interactions with other groups by means of organizational stories or anecdotes, each told from the unique perspective of the respondent who is, for the time being, in accordance with self-categorization theory (Turner, 1985; Turner et al., 1987), a prototypical member of this particular group.
In keeping with social identity theory and group identification theory, the stories embodied comparisons, express or implied, between the respondent’s own group and the out-group which was the subject of the narrative. Respondents selected aspects of their experience so as to highlight the positive in their own group and to diminish the qualities and achievements of the other, thereby to maintain and support their own belief in the comparative superiority of their own group, and ultimately to improve their own self concept.

Respondents who had memberships in multiple groups, demonstrated the possibility of holding and using multiple perspectives. In the cases where one of the memberships was hierarchically senior to the other memberships, as in the examples of senior management team members at the New Zealand Dairy Board, the values and beliefs appropriate to that membership were never subordinated by the values of the less senior group. That is, the values and beliefs derived from identification with the group which contributed the most to that person’s self image seemed to remain in place, even during those times when another group was salient.

Adaptation effort was variable, arguably minimal, and to the extent that it occurred in any particular case, consisted principally of group members reciprocally taking the trouble to learn about the salient out-group and adjusting their own communication practices to minimise overt blockages or conflict. In most cases, the adaptation consisted of nothing more than finding an explanation for the differences. Such explanations were not necessarily factually correct, but were at least plausible, and to the extent that they were “good enough” for the purpose, could be regarded as satisficing.

**Application of Technology to Sense Making and Adaptation**

In light of the findings above, the question must now arise as to whether there is in fact a problem to be solved by means of technology. It will be remembered that the first of the secondary research questions asked:
How could information technology facilitate the sense-making and adaptation processes?

The process of knowing is inextricable from the interpretive behaviour of humans (Kakihara & Sorensen, 2002; Maturana & Varela, 1992; Weick, 1995). It follows therefore, that if technology is to be directed to the process of knowing, the design of any such technology must take into account the basis from which new interpretations and sense-making will occur. There is a school of thought that sees the most effective technology designs in minimalist terms, providing the recipient with the bare essentials, and allowing them to apply their own cognitive skills to the solution of the problem (Mackenzie, 2002).

This thrust appears at odds with the experiences and preferences of the respondents in the present research. In their reports, each technology discussed, suffered in varying degrees from the problem that the technology stripped the communication process of some or all of the contextual attributes that allow the recipient of any message to maximise their ability to interpret it correctly. In other words, they were seeking more help from the technology than it was designed to give, or was capable of.

Various technologies offer differing degrees of media richness. In the most extreme case of text only technologies, each message tends to be pure content, without the enhancements offered by the spectrum of non-verbal communications in a live situation. Audio-conferencing allowed extra clues such as the tone of voice, speed of delivery, and dramatic phrasing to accompany the words. Video-conferencing further enhanced the experience, according to the technical quality of the implementation. It could reasonably be claimed that desktop videoconferencing provides little more than an enhanced visualisation, whereas a full broadband video-conference system allows gestures, posture, and to a limited extent, demeanour to be seen. As suggested by (O’Connaill et al., 1993), the limitations of the technology itself do not provide an experience as rich as face-to-face communications.

Whereas technology makes possible certain interactions that, by reason of distance or time zone, might otherwise not be practical, it is unlikely that it will
allow communications of a quality equal to that experienced in the face-to-face situation, and even less likely that it will surpass them.

**Optimizing the processes of Inter-group Interaction**

The second of the secondary research questions asked:

*By what means can a complex organization reduce the negative impact or capitalize on the positive potential of cultural difference when members of a functional group communicate with non-members?*

Narratives provided in the course of this research reveal that the factors which most contribute to effective inter-group communication are an agreed understanding of common purpose, and simple routine transactions. Where simple transactions are not possible, friction is diminished by the existence of an agreed framework for the negotiation of complex intergroup transactions.

(Ashforth & Mael, 1989) suggest that repetition of positive aspects of various groups in management utterances can lead to reinforcement of a positive perception of a specific group.

**Contribution**

The importance of this research lies in:

a) its phenomenological exposition of the essences of intergroup relationships in these particular groups within these organizations;

b) its findings in respect of the lack of attentiveness to the sense-making stories of other groups;

c) its situated confirmation of aspects of social identity theory and group identification theory;

d) its findings in respect of the current perceptions of the value of the deployment of technology as a solution to the encountered intergroup communication issues.
A phenomenological investigation may be regarded as a contribution to knowledge and an end in itself, revealing as it does, the essences of a particular kind of lived experience in a particular environment. In this study, the investigation has provided situated understandings of intergroup relationships in New Zealand technology companies, involving various functional specialisations including technology and engineering, marketing and service functions.

The insights provided by the phenomenological investigation have tended to confirm aspects of social identity theory and self categorisation theory.

The research has tended to confirm that individuals in workgroups are sceptical of technologically mediated communication, regarding currently available forms as incapable of alleviating the perceived negative consequences of cultural differences between such groups.

**Extensions to Theory**

Phenomenological analysis of the participants’ narratives tends to justify the following interpretations of the recurring themes encountered in the interviews and their subsequent analysis:

Positive self stereotyping of the groups concerned by the members interviewed, is strongly based upon members’ perception that their group’s collective ability to contribute to the overall success of the organization is unique in the sense that it is not replicable by any of the other groups in the organization.

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29 Although the New Zealand Dairy Board’s primary function is marketing, its members see their business as being firmly imbedded in a very advanced area of food technology.
When members of the groups in this study interact with individuals who are perceived as representative of another group, they make sense of observed differences by means of explanatory narratives.

Where members of the groups in this study encounter differences of behaviour, values, priorities, and other cultural artefacts in the course of their interaction with members of other groups, they adapt to the observed differences by means of compromise to the minimum extent required by the relative power of the two groups in order to achieve the necessary collaboration.

When members of the subject groups perceive direct intrusion on matters of self interest to them, by individuals or members of any out-group, they will strengthen their perceptions of positive differentiation between themselves as a group, and the individuals or members collectively, of the out-group concerned.

Members of groups in these organizations, whose specialisation is of a technical nature, construct an especially strong differentiation between their self-stereotypes, and their stereotypes of those whose expertise is oriented to sales or administrative functions.

Whereas existing relationships of a sound and positive nature might be supplemented by means of communications technologies, presently available communications technologies lack the richness required by members of these groups, to be used as the sole or principal medium for the creation and subsequent maintenance of effective ongoing relationships.

It is apparent that individuals in these four New Zealand organizations perceive their own membership of workgroups, and react to members of other workgroups in a manner entirely consistent with the general thrust of social identity theory and group identification theory. It is further apparent that the mere application of technology will not alleviate the underlying causes of problematic inter-group relationships. Each of the six outcomes listed above will now be examined in more detail.
Implications for Further Research

At the conclusion of this research, it is appropriate to ask where from here?

Channelling the Storytelling Instinct

If storytelling or narrative is the primary mechanism by which we understand and make sense of our world (Berry, 2001), then the question must arise as to why such an important activity is left to chance in the organization. Stories are made in many ways for many purposes. Fundamentally, they are communicative. Always they are told from a particular point of view, to express a particular point of view. Narrators differ in their perceptions as to what is caused by what, and the explanatory power of any given story is part of a continuum.

Though it is scarcely possible to suggest that an organization might attempt to control or manipulate the fundamentally human activity of storytelling, the question which is worthy of further exploration is how organizations might benefit from knowing what sense its members make of any given set of circumstances, and how they might tap in to such a rich vein of organizational understanding.

The Impact of Role-Performance on Outcomes

A compelling theme emerging from almost every narrative, is the centrality of performance to the members of the various workgroups in these organizations. Consistent with social identity theory and self-categorization theory, an important aspect of the individual's self-concept is the stereotypes he or she is able to construct about the groups with which he or she identifies. Most discussed in all the interviews was the role in which the members of the respondent's group are able to say "This is who I am. This is what I do". Although they were not explicitly articulated in the following words, the respondents' narratives told me things such as:
"I am an accountant. I provide accurate and reliable information for the prudent management of the organization."

"I am a food technologist. I research the nutritional value of various products so that the company can make truthful and defensible claims about them in its marketing activity."

"I am an information systems consultant. I ensure that the systems we develop match the business needs of the organization as the operational people see them."

"I am a telephone engineer. I support the software that keeps the entire national digital mobile system working."

"I am a human resources consultant. I provide advice to chief executives on the appropriate placement of staff in positions of high responsibility around the globe."

"I am a divisional manager. I coordinate the activities of many groups to ensure that the required strategic outcomes are achieved."

This combination of role and task (role-performance) is clearly highly significant to most respondents. In the few cases where overt hostility to other groups was expressed, the cause was invariably that the other group was in some sense an obstacle to the respondent’s own role-performance.

It must be conceded that it is human nature for individuals to represent themselves in the best possible light. Nevertheless, on the basis of the narratives, I assert that the focus on role-performance was so pervasive as to provide verisimilitude to the belief that this was the primary identity for most respondents, at least within their work context. The narratives thus tend to support the contention that individuals employed in roles of the kind typified by the groups in this research will perform their tasks conscientiously and in good faith as they see it. This may not necessarily equate to the level of performance or other outcomes hoped for by management.
Equally, it seems clear that the motivation is not primarily for the organization, nor perhaps even for the financial reward, but rather because the individual group member derives a large part of his or her sense of self from the fact of his or belonging to the group in that specific role. It is precisely in doing the job well as a group member, that the individual is able to contribute to a perception of positive distinctiveness for the group, and by so doing, is able to enhance his or her own self perceptions. Conversely, if delegated tasks are done badly, the construed external image of the group is downgraded, and with it, the individual’s sense self worth.

It is entirely likely that members of groups engaged in routine and unskilled processes may be less committed to excellent role performance, especially if they believe it to be the case that different performance levels do not enhance the stereotypes they have of a group which is important to their self-identity. From the narratives provided in this research, it is very clear that individuals in workgroups at least of the types represented, derive satisfaction from their contribution to the creation of the best stereotype possible for their workgroup. Conversely, the inability to make a difference is a cause of frustration.

In this context, a potentially profitable avenue for future research is the extent to which an organization might enhance its outcomes by ensuring that as many individual employees as possible are placed in groups and roles such that they can apply their cognitive abilities to problem solving, thereby to enhance the performance and outcomes of the group relative to referent groups. By such means it might be speculated, the workgroup members are able to see enhanced positive distinction accruing to their group, and can therefore enhance their own self image.

Channel Adequacy and Complex Relationships

Although all respondents in the present research are users of technology mediated communications, and most have participated in video-conferences and audio-conferences, there was near unanimity in the belief that these technologies as presently or foreseeably implemented are inadequate for the creation and
maintenance of important relationships. Given the irony of such opinions from the three telecommunications companies, this outcome deserves further scrutiny.

Although it is unlikely that any of the respondents would have used the phrase "media richness", those who expressed an opinion on the topic knew that the channels to which they were objecting were inadequate to convey "body language". By this they were referring to the full range of non-verbal communications that might contribute to the reproduction of a "psychic presence" even remotely like that available in a face-to-face communication. Lacking such richness, they tended to the belief that the technology had failed the test of usefulness, and that only face-to-face was truly adequate.

The area worthy of further explanation is the extent to which individuals might be persuaded to suspend such radical judgements until dimensions of the problem had been better explored. As discussed in 0, the need for media richness is a function of the uncertainty or ambiguity associated with the communication process concerned. It seems evident that there is a spectrum of complexity in communications, ranging from the simple unambiguous text based transaction that passes some small quantum of information, to the extreme ambiguity of negotiations on matters of international trade politics.

Lingering Psychic Presence?

Noteworthy in the interviews with workgroups was the strong majority in each case for the proposition that technologies such as videoconferencing might be successfully used for important relationships provided that the parties had met in some significant way, in person, prior to the use of the technology. Further, they argued, that the relationship could be maintained over long periods of time if face-to-face acquaintance were renewed periodically, perhaps annually.

This perspective is puzzling for its belief that the absence of immediate richness in the communication channel can in some sense be compensated for by the memory that each participant has of what sort of person the other is. Given that psychic presence might be conceived to convey things like mood, attitude, posture, and so on, it seems improbable that a year old memory of the person can
serve or substitute for these purposes. As a phenomenon, the belief is apparently akin to the idea expressed only half in jest, that a telephone call while viewing a photo of the called party is almost as effective as some low quality implementations of videoconference.

The question arising for further research is the question of whether, or to what extent, symbolic representations of another party can substitute for the carriers of psychic presence expected of a truly rich medium.

**Implications for Practice**

The fact that groups within the same organization interpret their environment differently from each other, and that they are apparently either unaware of, or indifferent to these different interpretations around them is potentially damaging to the organization. Notwithstanding the widespread organizational practice of setting groups in adversarial relation with each other in the belief that creative tension is beneficial, it is at least inefficient, and at worst inimical to the achievement of organizational goals to have groups translating their diametrically opposed interpretations into antithetical action. This research points to a need for the organization to hear and reconcile all the different narratives with the intention of achieving a unified organization-wide understanding of its motives and goals. In other words, the organization should ensure that its own over-arching goals are universally understood and accepted, and should take care to address any situation where the goals of a workgroup are at odds with those of the organization. It is not suggested that all groups can or should have a homogenous set of goals, but rather that there should not be any fundamental contradictions. No group should be working to frustrate the goals of either the organization at large, nor should they be working to sabotage the legitimate outcomes of any other group in the organization.

To the extent that there will always be differences of a cultural nature between the various groups that constitute a complex organization, then there will also be ongoing processes of adaptation. Notwithstanding the suggestion from the domain of adaptation theory that politeness and reciprocity will prevail (Burgoon et al., 1995), the suspicion must arise that the process of intercultural
adaptation is worthy of examination to ensure that any given adaptation occurs in
the manner which produces the appropriate outcomes for the various participants.
It is not the role of this research to adopt a managerial or any other worldview,
but it seems evident that adjustments to the ways in which groups think, behave
an act should be as the outcome of a careful process of scrutiny and deliberate
judgement, rather than allowing the outcome to be influenced by such random
factors as the personalities of the individuals involved, or the relative sizes of the
groups.

If it is accepted that individuals more readily identify with groups whose
attributes they admire and aspire to, then it follows that a group making a unique
and important contribution to the organization on the basis of the same skills and
professional abilities as the individual will be an attractive prototype for that
individual. If it follows that internalisation of the group’s objectives may follow
the individual’s identification with the group, then it may be worthwhile for
organizations to structure its groups and their roles so as to foster each one’s
sense of making a unique contribution.

Consistent with the desire to have workgroups aligned with the motives
and goals of the organization, it is unproductive to have one members of one
group so antagonistically inclined to another as to impede the likelihood of
effective collaboration. To address this concern, it is potentially worthwhile to
scrutinise the areas in which members of each group sees other groups as a
threat, and to examine ways to minimise such perceptions. According to the
theories of social identity, it is in the nature of human belonging to construct
stereotypes which are advantageous to the self, and included in this is the notion
that the self image is enhanced by interpreting other groups in a less favourable
light.

Whereas issues arising from cultural difference in inter-group interactions
do not appear to lend themselves to resolution by the deployment of
communications technology, nevertheless there may be gains to be made by
committing certain kinds of transactions to such channels. In particular,
consideration should be given to ways in which relationships in which ambiguity
is less prominent may lend themselves to various forms of telecommunication.
Some work is required to overcome the erroneous belief that every act of communication must necessarily draw on the full spectrum of non-verbal communication.

**Conclusion**

My own extensive service as a practitioner in management roles in organizations of exactly the kinds represented in this research, suggested to me that intergroup tensions are a significant, and potentially avoidable drain on the energy and resources of the organization. It is rare, in organizations such as these, for a workgroup to act as a closed system, or to exist in isolation within the organization. All of the twenty eight workgroups represented in this research interacted in some way with other groups, both within, and sometimes external to the organization.

The research questions posed in Chapter I target the process of interaction between groups, as the locus of enacted attitudes arising from perceived differences between groups. Perceptions of difference between groups give rise to attitudes towards other groups that are usually adverse. Negative attitudes, in my experience, make organizational life more difficult than it needs to be. This raises the questions of how and why these attitudes to difference are formed, how they are enacted, and what can be done to minimise their adverse personal and organizational consequences. The use of technology as a potential palliative, needs to be explored.

This research has attempted to answer questions relative to the interactions between workgroups in organizations in a way which will be helpful in solving some of the problems which I once faced as a practitioner. The use of phenomenological method in pursuit of these answers has been rewarding in itself, offering as it does, a privileged insight into how members of such workgroups really experience their lived realities, and what meanings they place on these experiences. Given the complexity of those realities, it comes as no surprise that the most valuable outcome is a whole new set of questions.
Reference List


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Appendix 1 – Glossary

Definitions

A number of concepts which occur frequently are deserving of an explanation as to the meaning attributed to them in this research. They are listed in alphabetical order below.

Artefacts

Artefacts\(^{30}\) are manifestations of culture. In the context of the organizations involved in this research, artefacts include (but are not limited to), architecture, art works, customs, décor, dress codes, folklore, letterheads, logos, organizational language, rules, narratives, standards, style, symbols, traditions, trademarks, and vocabulary.

Attitudes

Rokeach (1972) defines a value as “a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner” (p. 112). Bennett (1999) contends that attitudes, by comparison, are relatively volatile, and are formed in respect of any given situation on the basis of “deep seated, culturally derived values and beliefs” (p. 85).

\(^{30}\) Artefact is the British spelling. American usage is “artifact”
Beliefs

In an organizational context, a sufficient definition is “beliefs encompass an individual's cognitive organization and understanding of important entities and relationships within one's working life” (Bennett, 1999, p. 85).

Culture

Martin's (2002) definition of culture as “that which cultural members share” (p. 6), is broad enough to encompass most possible uses of the term in this research. Hofstede (1991) usefully defines culture in the organizational context “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one organization from another”

I intend to treat culture in this research from both an emic and an etic perspective. The perception of one’s own culture is the basis from which one experiences and interprets the culture of another.

Group

A group, for the purposes of this research, is defined by Tajfel & Turner (1986) as:

... a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus about the evaluation of their group and of their membership in it (p. 15).

Importantly, it should be understood that this definition is understood to apply to any group regardless of size, and will be applied equally to nations, organizations, or workgroups, regardless of the fact that some of these groups may be nested within, or overlap other groups. The justification for this stance may be found in 0.
**Intergroup behaviour**

Following on from the definition of groups (*q.v.*), intergroup behaviour is defined by Tajfel & Turner (1986) after the manner of Sherif (1966) as:

... any behavior displayed by one or more actors toward one or more others that is based on the actors' identification of themselves and the others as belonging in different social categories. (p. 15)

**Media Richness**

Media richness is initially defined in terms of the capability of a medium to reduce ambiguity in a message (Daft & Lengel, 1986). For practical purposes this is generally interpreted as the extent to which a medium can provide contextual cues with a message, and provide feedback.

**Organization**

Many definitions of organization focus on the notion of purposeful collaboration (Barnard, 1938; Blau & Scott, 1962; Etzioni, 1964). Hall (1987) defines an organization as:

An organization is a collectivity with a relatively identifiable boundary, normative order, ranks of authority, communications systems, and membership coordinating systems. This collectivity exists on a relatively continuous basis in an environment and engages in activities that are usually related to a set of goals. These activities have outcomes for organizational members, the organization itself, and for stakeholders or society at large. (p. 9)

**Organizational Culture**

For this research, the concepts of culture, group culture and organizational culture are interchangeable, and only the size of the group changes.
Stereotype

A stereotype is defined as a widely held belief concerning people based on their membership to a particular group whereby individuals are treated and evaluated as members of a group rather than as individuals in their own right. (Comer, 1998)

Team

In the context of this research, a team is regarded as a small group, and is treated as being synonymous with workgroup.

Workgroup

A workgroup is a subset of the group concept. Throughout this research, workgroup is used to mean a small group with a stable membership, typically less than 30 in number, to whom responsibility has been delegated within an organization for some quantum of organizational responsibilities. The nature of the work is likely to be specialised, either functionally (the kinds of work to be done) or regionally (the location where work is to be done).

Value

A value has been defined as “a conception, explicit or implicit, distinctive of an individual or characteristic of a group, of the desirable which influences the selection from available modes, means and ends of action” (Kluckhohn, 1951, p. 395). Rokeach (1973) defines it as “an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally and socially preferable to alternative(s)” (p. 159).
Appendix 2 – Ethical Clearances

As discussed in Chapter 2, approvals for the conduct of research involving human subjects was obtained as required under the relevant statutes of Victoria University of Wellington. Relevant documents within this appendix include

a) Request for Ethical Approval
b) Approval Notification
c) Request for permission to do research in organization
d) Information for potential participants
e) Sample of corporate consent form
f) Sample of personal consent form
Item (a) Request for Ethical Approval

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Application for approval of research projects

Nature of Proposed Research:
(a) Staff Research Y/N
(b) Student Research Y/N Degree Ph.D. Course Code COMM690

Project Title: The Application of Information Technology to Issues of Communication Associated with Multinational Trade

Investigators:
(a) Principal Investigator
Name: Brian Harmer
Dept/Group Department of Communications Studies
Professional Code of Ethics: None mandatorily applicable, but propose to follow those observed by anthropology.

(b) Other Researchers
None planned

(c) Supervisor
(original names omitted) (Principal academic supervisor)
(original names omitted) (administrative supervisor)

Proposed Starting Date November, 1996
Proposed Date of Completion November, 1997
Proposed Source of Funding To be explored further, but otherwise independent

Ph.D. Project - Brian M. Harmer
Page 1 3 November 1996
organizations as an introduction to the companies. If possible, a letter of endorsement will be obtained from the CEO to encourage voluntary participation from others within the organization.

(f) Payments to be made to participants

None

(g) Other Assistance to participants

None

(h) Special Hazards and / or inconvenience

Some interview material may need to be kept confidential, and may not be able to be anonymised if the information is unique to that individual.

(i) How Informed Consent to be obtained

Standard letter of consent administered to each willing subject (copy attached)

(j) How issues of anonymity to be dealt with

It is anticipated that some CEOs might prefer their entire organizational identity to be "anonymised", in which case the identity of the organization will be disguised in the published narrative, and care taken to ensure that the context does not reveal the identity of the respondent.

Where individuals want to be "off the record", the placement of the account in the narrative will not reveal to which organization the anonymous owner of that account belongs.

(k) Procedure for storage of, access to, and destruction of data both during and at the conclusion of the research.

To all intents and purposes, the handwritten notes, and recordings of interviews will be in the sole custody of the principal researcher. Paper documents and compact cassettes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher (for the time being, Hu 16). Derivative word processing or other files will be stored on the personal PC of the researcher, both at home, and on campus. There is no network access to the data concerned. The hard disk is fully backed up on a weekly basis, with two generations of data retention.

Only the supervisors and examiners will conceivably be shown any of the data.

If any of the respondents requires a copy of the notes from their interview, a printed copy of the raw data will be made available.
(l) **Feedback Procedures**

A transcript of all interviews will be given to the respondents. If a respondent requires changes because they have had "second thoughts" about the wisdom of exposure, that section of the interview will be expunged. If they disagree with the record, despite the fact of the recording, the amendment will be noted, but a record of the original utterances will be retained.

A copy of the completed thesis will be offered to the CEO of the participating organizations.

(m) **Reporting and Publication of results**

As required by the Ph.D. statute.

Signature of Investigators as listed on page 1 (Including supervisors)

___ ____________ ____________  
Principal researcher

___ ____________ ____________  
Principal Academic Supervisor

___ ____________ ____________  
Administrative Supervisor
Item (b) Approval Notification
(Note original project title on this form)

MEMORANDUM

TO: Brian Harmer
FROM: Professor Graeme Kennedy
Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE: 20 November 1996
SUBJECT: ETHICAL APPROVAL: THE APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY TO ISSUES OF COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATED WITH MULTINATIONAL TRADE

Your application for ethical approval has been approved.

Date of Approval : 19 November 1996
Duration : 30 November 1997
Conditions : Nil
Other Comments : Nil

[Signature]
Graeme Kennedy
Convener
HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE
Item (c) – Request for permission to do research in organization

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Dr Michelle Vosloo to Upgrade a to Baa to Maa

<date>

Attention: <CEO>
Dear <name>,

Re: Request to Research in <company>

I am a lecturer in the department of Communications Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. For my doctoral thesis, I am examining the way in which membership of particular groups within an organization raises barriers to effective and efficient communication within organizations such as yours.

Throughout the thirty years I spent working in multinational organizations prior to becoming a full-time academic, I was struck by the attitudes which members of functional groups adopt when dealing with people who are not members of their group. My subsequent research leads me to believe that group memberships of all sorts, give rise to sets of beliefs, values and attitudes which amount to localised sub-cultures. This is of concern to the organization when the sub-cultures are not aligned with its own overarching culture.

Cultural differences, both within the organization, and also between the organization and its customers, are widely recognized sources of costly miscommunication. My thesis is that multinational organizations such as yours may benefit from a fuller understanding of the processes through which such differences of understanding arise, and discovery of strategies by which counterproductive attitudes may be avoided.

I seek your permission to work with your organization to discover the extent to which such differences of perspective exist between various groups, not only within the enterprise, but also between the local market, and the company as a whole. If you grant me access, I would first gain some familiarity with the organization, and then interview representative members of various groups within the enterprise in some depth. I propose to analyse the transcripts of my interviews to discover how members various groups form attitudes to members of other groups, and to what extent this has impact on the effectiveness of internal communications.

All activities I might engage in within the organization would be governed by the stringent ethical guidelines laid down by Victoria University for any research conducted under its auspices. Confidentiality would be assured to every person and organization from which information is obtained. Of course a doctoral thesis must eventually be published, but sources can be made anonymous if necessary.

Conscious that I am asking for the time of busy people, I can at least offer to share my findings with the contributing organizations in the expectation that fuller understanding will lead to solutions to problems which are little understood at present. I would be grateful for the opportunity to meet you and discuss this proposal in more depth, and hope that you will consent to my application to work with the organization.

yours faithfully,

Brian M. Harmer
Lecturer
Item (d) Information for potential participants

VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON
Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui

PROJECT SUMMARY

The Application of Information Technology to Issues of Communication
Associated with Multinational Trade

This project is for the purposes of the doctoral thesis of the researcher, Brian Harmer, a lecturer in the Department of Communications Studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand.

The purpose of this project is to look at the various groups which exist within multinational trading organizations, and to see to whether communication is affected when it occurs between members of different groups. Of special interest is communication between groups which are in different cultural environments.

The process of information gathering is by interviews with key individuals from representative groups in each participating organization. The interview will not follow a fixed questionnaire, but will encourage the participant to tell the researcher what it is like to communicate with the various other groups on a day to day basis. Interviews should normally take approximately one hour, but a follow up interview may be requested to clarify any unanswered questions.

The researcher will make a transcript of all interviews, and the participants will be given a copy and invited to make any required modifications.

Even though the organization has allowed the project to proceed, individuals are free to accept or decline the invitation to participate. Having accepted the invitation, individuals may still withdraw and have their previous contributions deleted without having to offer any explanation at any time up until completion of data gathering.

Individuals may request that their interview be kept anonymous if they so wish. Under the stringent code of ethics which the University requires of its members, the researcher may not use the information gathered other than for the purposes of this project, and may not disclose the information to anybody other than his own supervisors. He may not show individual contributions to the employers. On completion of this research project, all notes and recordings will be destroyed or erased.

Your participation will be much appreciated.
Item (e) Sample of Corporate Consent Form

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CORPORATE CONSENT TO PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title of Project: Culture at the Boundaries: Adapting Communications to Cultural Differences in Multinational Organizations.

As Chief Executive or duly authorised officer of the New Zealand Dairy Board I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered to my satisfaction.

I understand that I may withdraw the Company or any information provided by its employees from this project (before data collection is completed), without having to give reasons and without penalty of any sort.

I understand that the information given by employees of this company will be treated as confidential to the researcher and his supervisors, and is provided solely for the purposes of the doctoral research programme which has been described to me. I understand that this research will culminate in the publication of a thesis which will not divulge any commercially sensitive information to which the researcher has had access during his work with my company. I have been assured that if I so require, any information given may be disguised so that my company is not identifiable as the source.

I understand that although the company has agreed to allow employees to be interviewed, their individual participation is completely voluntary, and that any or all of them may decline to participate without penalty. It is also understood that individual participants may also choose to make their contribution anonymously, and that code of ethics to which the researcher is required to subscribe, prevents disclosure to the company of any such anonymous contributions.

I have been assured that only the researcher and his academic supervisors will have access to the notes and recordings made of such interviews, and that all notes and recordings made during interviews in which I participate will be destroyed on completion of the project.

I consent to the company's participation in this research project.

I do / do not wish the company's contribution to be made anonymous.

I do / do not wish the company to receive a copy of the completed thesis.

Signed: 

Name of Participant: 

Date: 

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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Title of Project: The Application of Information Technology to Issues of Communication Associated with Multinational Trade

I have been given, and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have them answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I may withdraw myself or any information I have provided from this project (before data collection is completed), without having to give reasons and without penalty of any sort.

I understand that the information I give may be published in a doctoral thesis, and that if I so desire my contribution may be used in a way that does not identify me as the source.

I understand that, with my consent, any interviews in which I participate may be taped for the sole purpose of assisting the researcher to record information accurately. I have been assured that only the researcher and his academic supervisors will have access to the notes and recordings made of such interviews.

I have been assured that the researcher will show me a transcript of any formal discussions with me, and that I may request modifications and corrections if I so desire.

I agree to take part in this research.

I do / do not wish my contributions to be rendered anonymous.
I do / do not consent to the interview(s) being taped.

Signed: [Signature]
Name of Participant: [Name]
Date: 3/1/97
Appendix 3 – Interview Guide Notes

The following document was used purely as a checklist, intended to remind me as the researcher to prompt the respondent in the direction of any important omissions in the event that the respondent’s own narrative went off the indicated subject area.

Checklist

Each subject will be asked for sufficient personal information to place his or her responses into the context of the cultures which formed them. The following section contains fixed questions:

1. **Person**
   1.1 Name
   1.2 Organization
   1.3 With regard to your own nationality, are you:
      - a native of the country in which your organization is founded, but seconded to this country?
      - a native of the country in which your organization is founded, but living in this country as a permanent resident?
      - a native of a third country?
      - an indigenous citizen of the country in which you currently work?
   1.4 What is your highest level of educational attainment?
   1.5 In what area did you receive vocational training?
   1.6 What is your age?
   1.7 Are you willing to discuss any religious influence on your life?
   1.8 Are you willing to identify your position on the political spectrum?

2. **Function**
   1.9 What is your job title?
   1.10 Please describe what your job entails.
   1.11 Do you identify more with your current job function or with the vocation for which you trained?
   1.12 Are you in the head office of your organization, or a regional subsidiary or branch?

2. **Organizational Culture**
   2.1 Are there rules, ways of behaving, values, understandings, which are characteristic of your organization?
   2.1.1 Describe them
   2.1.2 Are they necessarily the best way to think, believe, act?
2.1.3 Why do other groups or organizations act differently? □
2.1.4 Is there visible evidence of the organization's character? □
   - uniform? □
   - logo? □
   - architecture? □
   - letterhead? □
   - colour scheme? □
2.1.5 Are there any heroes / heroines? □
2.1.6 Any myths / legends / sagas? □

3 Internal Communication

(The following questions which looks at the success or otherwise of intergroup communications within the organization will be elicited through the narrative of the subject)

3.1 Are you a member of any groups or teams? □
3.2 Which of these is the most important, and why? □
3.3 For each team in which you are a member answer the following:
   3.3.1 Name of the team □
   3.3.2 What is the purpose of the team or group? □
   3.3.3 Who are the members? □
   3.3.4 Why are they members? □
   3.3.5 What do you have in common? □
   3.3.6 Does membership of the group enhance your position or self esteem? □
   3.3.7 Are there some members who "don't fit"? □
      3.3.7.1 In what way? □
      3.3.7.2 Are they a threat to the effectiveness of the group? □
      3.3.7.3 Why do you think they don't fit? □
      3.3.7.4 How do you react to their non-conformance? □
      3.3.7.5 How should this be resolved? □
      3.3.7.6 Why hasn't it been resolved? □
   3.3.8 Are there some people who ought to be members but are not? □
      3.3.8.1 Why is that? □
      3.3.8.2 What would need to change to include them? □
3.3.9 How effective is the group? □
3.3.10 What are its strengths? □
3.3.11 What are the barriers to effectiveness? □
3.3.12 How do non-members feel about the group □
   3.3.12.1 do they respect its abilities and achievements? □
   3.3.12.2 do they aspire to membership of the group? □
   3.3.12.3 do they understand the difficulties you face or the effort you put in? □
   3.3.12.4 why do you think they feel that way? □
3.3.13 How do you feel about the attitude of non-members toward this group? □
3.3.14 Describe an episode which illustrates the relationship between this group and another group □
3.3.15 Who does this group aim to influence? □
3.3.16 In what way to this group aim to influence other groups? □
3.3.17 How effective is this influencing role? □
   3.3.17.1 To the extent that it is less effective than desired:
      3.3.17.1.1 Why do you think that is? □
      3.3.17.1.2 What attributes or behaviours of the target group prevent them being influenced as intended? □
      3.3.17.1.3 Describe your attitude toward their resistance □
      3.3.17.1.4 To what extent is the resistance due to their being in another environment or culture? □
      3.3.17.1.5 How relevant is the environmental or cultural difference in your view? □
3.4 Are there important groups within the organization to which you don’t belong? □
   3.4.1 Where are they located? □
   3.4.2 Who belongs? □
   3.4.3 Would you like to belong? □
   3.4.4 Why can’t you? □
   3.4.5 How do you feel about your exclusion? □
3.4.6 How effective is this group? □
   3.4.6.1 To what extent is any lack of effectiveness due to the fact that they are not familiar conditions at your location? □
   3.4.6.2 To what extent is any lack of effectiveness due to an exaggerated emphasis on local conditions? □
3.4.7 What is good about the group? □
3.4.8 What is bad about the group? □
3.4.9 What needs to happen to improve their performance? □
3.4.10 Why do you think they haven’t done the things you suggest? □
(reiterate Questions 6 through 9 for each group of which you are a member)

4 External Relationships
(Looks at the success or otherwise of communications between the company, and participants in the local market)

4.1 Do you interact with local external people or groups on behalf of the organization? □
4.2 Identify the classes of people or group with whom you interact. □
(Retail customers, other corporate customers, governmental customers, transport organizations, regulatory agencies, lobby groups, religious or other special interest groups).
4.3 For each class of contact, answer the following? □
4.3.1 What is your role with respect to this group? □
4.3.2 What outcomes are expected from the interaction between you and the group? □
4.3.3 What is most difficult about dealing with the subject group? □
4.3.4 To what do you attribute the difficulty? □
4.3.5 Do you think this group behaves differently from an equivalent group in your company’s home market? □
4.3.5.1 In what way? □
4.3.6 Can you think of way to overcome the difficulties? □
4.3.7 Describe the relationship between you and this group. □
4.3.8 How do you think this group relates to your competitors? □
4.3.9 Are there any indigenous competitors? □
4.3.10 Does your company understand the difficulties you encounter in this market? □
Appendix 4 Sample of Interview Transcripts

The text hereafter is an extract from one of the transcribed interviews. In keeping with the undertakings given to the informants, and of the conditions of the Human Ethics Approvals, more extensive samples will not be provided. The numbers are sequential identifiers assigned to each text unit by the NUD*IST™ software when it first reads in the raw data.

212 Oh, I think the first thing is ... the relationship the Board has with other parts of the Dairy Industry in New Zealand. That is ... particularly for Wellington people. ... central to it ... and the culture that goes with that of ... identification with farmers, identification with ... cooperatives ... so they would be the first thing I would say.

213 NZDB - Technical Manager D

214 The second thing which I would hope would be the case but I'm not sure that it is ... oh I think it probably is ... is that ... people believe they're involved in a worthwhile business ... in the sense that it's worthwhile for New Zealand, and that the products that we deal with are ... are ... y'know ... they're not flippant things ... they're ... they're real. And wholesome.

215 NZDB - Technical Manager D

216 And they're important to New Zealand farmers and they're important as a whole. Big!.

217 NZDB - Technical Manager D

218 And the other thing that must dominate our culture is that we're international.

219 NZDB - Technical Manager D

220 So we're not selling ... bloody toothpaste to ... y'know ... parents in Paraparaumu ... we're doing something that's bigger .... and ultimately I suppose more important than that.
221 NZDB - Technical Manager D

222 I hope ... I would think that's what ... we're doing it on an international scale.

223 NZDB - Technical Manager D

224 I suppose ... sorry can I just say one more thing?

225 Brian Harmer

226 Please

227 NZDB - Technical Manager D

228 One other thing that sort of .. keeps coming back is to this ... carping ... nagging ... worry about ... what our form is ... what our future is.

229 NZDB - Technical Manager D

230 Now I think all the other things I've mentioned are positives. But the negative is that people say oh, y'know there's criticism and we ... and there are all these problems that are constantly being talked about. Um ... and that's a negative.

231 Brian Harmer

232 The statutory power and the Business Round Table and all that sort of thing?

233 NZDB - Technical Manager D

234 That sort of stuff ... but also the conflict with the dairy companies which is within the organization's more of an issue. And there's a conflict with the international companies as well.

235 NZDB - Technical Manager D

236 So there's a high level of tension. People might say it's constructive tension but ... ah ... nonetheless, tension. And that's a negative.

237 Brian Harmer
238 Yes it's an overlooked dimension of culture isn't it ... the negatives. Obviously it does contribute. You think people spend too much time on the negatives? On these ... tension issues?

239 NZDB - Technical Manager D

240 I don't know whether they spend too much time on it, but they are inevitably ... ah ... in people's minds and it features in the work that they do.

241 NZDB - Technical Manager D

242 I mean ... an illustration of this is to say ... that we're all an integrated industry and that we are working for ... the dairy farmers ... and nobody argues with that.

243 NZDB - Technical Manager D

244 But then, you go from the general to the specific and your job in production planning is to ... y'know ... avoid the companies screwing us on a,... particular pricing contract ... so you ... you actually don't have a common interest at that point, you have an adversarial position.

245 NZDB - Technical Manager D

246 Y'know it take's a mature sort of person to be able to reconcile those two positions.