Interpersonal dynamics: a communitarian perspective

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Interpersonal Dynamics: a communitarian perspective

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The Changing Roles of Management Accounting as a Control System

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Abstract

Conventional theories of power within organisations focus on the extent to which one party can impose their will on others through social influence. Discussion of the way that same-sex and opposite-sex attraction impacts on the workplace is rarely theorised either because it is considered uncivilised or taboo. Investigations are also hampered by resistance amongst research participants even when care is taken to establish mixed groups from different organisations. As a result, holistic theories of management control that take account of sexual behaviour remain rare.

This paper examines empirical data from an 18-month critical ethnography to present new theory on interpersonal dynamics, socialisation and identification. A grounded theory is developed that suggests social decisions are closely linked to the psychology of giving and getting *attention* and *assistance.* As relationships develop, patterns of giving and receiving create economic and social dependencies that evolve into the tacit rules of social life and affect the bonds between people.

Sharp conflicts occur when one party wants to change the relationship *and* the other party resists. The process of renegotiation affects the stability of directly and indirectly affected relationships and can change patterns of influence and bases of social power. Individuals' commitment and health can be affected. Decision-making and impacts are affected by the state of *other* relationships, past experiences, social and economic dependency and the aspirations of both parties.

Findings are reviewed against existing theories of power to offer a radical perspective that power has two-faces, the ability to influence and the ability to *resist* influence. Authoritarian behaviours can be activated by perceptions of *powerlessness* rather than a sense of power. The implications for handling conflicts and harassment claims are discussed, together with comment on gender theory and its relationship to corporate governance.

Introduction

Power within organisations is frequently discussed in terms of the extent to which one party can impose their will on others through social influence, persuasion or coercion (see French and Raven, 1958; Etzioni, 1961; Lukes, 1974; Janis, 1982; Kunda, 1992; Thompson and Findlay, 1999). Discussion of the way that same-sex and opposite-sex attraction (sexual and non-sexual) impacts on the workplace is rarely theorised because the ethical issues are provocative and controversial (but see Burrell, 1984; Hearn and Parkin, 1987; Farrell, 1994, 2005; Gummesson, 2000; Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2004). The process of bringing taboo subjects into the public domain for discussion is problematic:

> *Certain phenomena are not considered acceptable subjects of study or should not be put in writing. They might be embarrassing to those involved and even trigger the anger of powerful people. Consequently, there is a tendency to avoid these phenomena, although they may be of decisive importance for a particular process.*
>
> (Gummerson, 2000:111)

The knock on impacts can be substantial:

> *Researchers are confronted with the problem of choosing between a presentation of anonymous cases in which they can be frank or case studies in which names are given but unpleasant aspects are excluded. To be able to understand and interpret a process, these taboos are of essential importance.*
>
> (ibid:115)

This paper examines empirical data from an 18-month critical ethnography (Thomas, 1993; Dey, 2002) to present new theory on interpersonal dynamics. A grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001) is developed that suggests social decisions are closely linked to the psychology of giving and getting *attention* and *assistance* and impact not only on organisational life but the interpretative frameworks of academics.

I will argue that "deep structures" (Putnam et al, 1993:230) regarding male/female behaviour impact on interpretation, and that gender discourses need to be unsettled in order to approach research and interpretation afresh. In section 1, I review the status of sexuality in organisation theory and the different discourses on gender that impact on public (and academic) conceptions of men and women at work. In section 2, I describe the research strategies adopted during the course of the ethnography. A selection of data is presented in section 3 from which a framework for understanding relationships is developed. In section 4, this is used to develop a grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) that

explains how social influence affects decision-making. The theory is authenticated using a second case and analysis of further data. Critical discussion and comment takes place in section 5, and implications for the literature and a summary are given in section 6.

1. Literature Review

Hearn and Parkin (1987:13-14) contend that:

> *The ways we talk, walk, flirt, touch and so on, as women or as men, may all be instances of being sexual at work, and at the same time be means of displaying different sexual identities that are at least partly work-based and organisationally determined … Organisations become obvious places for the development of sexual relationships, be they unspoken glances, mild flirtations, passionate affairs, or life-long arrangements.*

While feminist scholars have articulated the way that sexual attitudes have a deep-rooted impact on social control, status and career progression as well as a host of expectations with regard to appropriate and inappropriate behaviour (see Friedan, 1963; Farrell, 1988, 1994; Townley, 1994; Eagleton, 2003) the way that gendered behaviour triggers and resolves workplace conflict, or impacts on productivity, is largely ignored in mainstream texts on organisation behaviour:

> *Read the 'mountainous' literature on industrial sociology…and you would imagine that organisations, so finely analysed, are inhabited by a breed of strange, asexual eunuch figures…[this is a product] of deeply-rooted power relations between women and men that deny major and huge aspects of reality, along gender lines.*
>
> (Hearn and Parkin, 1987:4)

Burrell (1984) regards this as symptomatic of a culture in which the notion of 'civilisation' contributes to a desexualisation of the workplace. Suppression of sexuality becomes a tacit management control strategy to keep workers' minds on productivity to the point where "work itself involves drawing on libidinal energy and diverting it into work objects rather than sexual objects" (Hearn and Parkin, 1987:12). The lack of theory regarding sexual behaviour in the literature, therefore, can itself be seen as an outcome of the civilising discourse that regards it as an inappropriate subject or hidden source of power (see Foucault, 1976; Elias, 1978).

While some books on the subject have appeared, Gummesson (2000:113) draws attention to the view that "[the] presence [of sexual relationships] is not described, let alone explained by much of the sociology of organization". Leinonen (2004:12) found that "gender conflict was painstakingly avoided" by her participants even in a research project designed specifically to investigate this, and conducted using democratic practices recommended by Habermas (1987). A glance through text

books on organisation behaviour (see Buchanan and Huczynski, 1997; Robbins, 2001) reinforces the view that theories on the impact of sexual behaviour at work are still conspicuous by their absence.

1.1 Intersubjectivity and Social Structure

Agreements are, in a social – if not a legal - sense, an attempt to achieve a level of shared understanding and values between *individuals*. Once made, individuals usually feel bound by psychological contracts to keep to implicit social agreements (see Schein, 1980; Rousseau, 1995) but the inherent ambiguity in language, and the impossibility of ever fully understanding others, leaves plenty of scope for both accidental and deliberate misunderstanding (Griseri, 1998). These misunderstandings are particularly useful to a researcher as they reveal the differences in people's values and their link to various private and collective interests that evolve over time.

The evolution of personal relationships, therefore, has a profound impact on the development of enduring and changing social structures at work. No discussion of workplace culture can divorce itself from the way individuals meet, bond, and evolve their relationships. Nor can social life be understood without exploring how such bonds affect both individual and collective decision-making, socialisation and identification (see Kelman, 1961). These processes are important in considerations of the "culture management" literature (see Peters and Waterman, 1982; Kunda, 1992; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; Collins, 2001) and "social engineering" (see Thompson and Findlay, 1999). How do we identify with "the other" and what makes them "significant" to us?

Patriarchy and Sexism as 'Deep Structures'

Friedan (1963) is credited by many for identifying the "problem that has no name"[1]. She left it to others, however, to define how patriarchy advantaged men, and disadvantaged women (see Rowbottom, 1973). While Friedan has remained uncharacteristically sympathetic to the impact of patriarchy on both sexes (see Friedan, 1980) the argument that it is a historical "deep structure" (Putnam et al, 1993:230) has been consistently advanced as a way of understanding discrimination and harassment of women:

[1] Interestingly, Friedan does not even index the word *patriarchy* in *The Feminine Mystique,* but she is credited by others for establishing its conceptual importance to the woman's movement.

> *The sexual division of labour and the possession of women by men predates capitalism. Patriarchal authority is based on male control over the woman's productive capacity, and over her person.*
>
> (Rowbottom, 1973:117)

Feminist scholars have continued to articulate the way that patriarchal values pervade modern life. In making the assumption that men still control (or want to control) women, sexism and sexual harassment have become synonymous with conceptions of the way *men behave towards women,* but not how women behave towards men.

Hearn and Parkin (1987:4) typically adopt a gender-neutral approach to the "booming silence" on sexuality at work, but sporadically underlying assumptions resurface and orient readers towards the view that men are responsible for the intimidation and dominance of women. For example:

> *…interest in and outrage at the nature and scale of sexual harassment in work organisations has increased…This represents part of the broader concerns of women against male violence and objectification in its various forms…*
>
> (Hearn and Parkin, 1987:35)

Over time, however, the discourse is becoming more balanced. There is growing recognition that male points of view have not been fully integrated into feminist theory. Firstly, Segal (1990) argues that empirical studies do not support the presumption that (sexual) violence emanates from men alone. She examines the implications of Nancy Friday's study into sexuality and violence (Friday, 1980) to reveal that women fantasise about sexual aggression far *more* than men [2]. We should, therefore, be unsurprised that one of the most popular romance novel "formulas" feature successful men at work *overcoming the resistance of women* [3]. Secondly, Segal challenges the idea that aggressive behaviour is linked to dominance. She argues instead that aggression is most acute when parties feel *powerless* rather than powerful. Both unsettle the idea that men dominate women, or are even motivated by a desire to do so.

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[2] Cited in Segal (1990:213). Only three men out of three *thousand* (just 0.1%) had "fantasies of enacting rape from men, whereas being raped or forced were the most popular themes among women respondents".

[3] Farrell (2000:194-195). Harlequin changed its romance novel formula after discovering that 70% of its readers had jobs outside the home. The result? A 20,000% increase in profitability over 10 years with nett revenues up from $110,000 to $21m and an 80% market share. Sources for the figures are provided in the original text.

Claims regarding male aggression have also been challenged by both clinicians and academics (see Farrell, 1994, 2000; Goldberg, 2000; Hoff-Sommers, 1995). Hoff-Sommers argues that there is a lack of rigour in both journalistic and academic claims regarding levels of male violence, and draws attention to the way that public data[4] is often a reflection of institutional interests and processes rather than actual behaviours. She particularly attacks the uncritical reporting of journalistic surveys in the mass media that fuels women's fears. When the scope of enquiry is limited to academic studies involving *both* sexes, findings consistently suggest that men are *less* violent in their personal relationships than women[5].

The most recent scholarship on intimacy[6] at work also casts considerable doubt on earlier claims regarding harassment. Kakabadse & Kakabadse (2004) found very low rates of harassment, and allegations that were made were extremely rare in the formative stages of a relationship. They were far more likely to occur during relationship *breakdowns* and be highly contestable. In contrast to the views of McDowell (2003) that male/female relationships are characterised by inequality and aggression, the authors report positive reactions and outcomes from close relationships[7]:

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4 Hoff-Sommers contends that nurses are trained to spot symptoms of domestic violence in women but there is no such training to spot symptoms in men. Farrell (2000) reports that when men need hospitalisation after domestic violence, their most frequent explanation is that they received a 'sports injury'.

5 Both Hoff-Sommers (1995) and Farrell (1994, 2000) discuss these issues at great length and an increasing number of academic studies support their contention that women are marginally more violent than men in personal relationships. For an annotated bibliography of 155 academic studies, see http://www.csulb.edu/~mfiebert/assault.htm.

6 There is insufficient space to discuss the various meanings of intimacy here so I hope you will accept my working definition. An intimate relationship is one that is sufficiently close for two people, of the same or different sex, to feel comfortable discussing their own loving relationships with each other. Loving relationships may includes those with a partner (spouse/lover), children, parents, friends, siblings and each other.

7 In their survey, nearly 40% reported that friendship resulted from intimacy while just over 10% reported bitterness after the relationship ended (page 70). It was much more common for both parties to report positive outcomes. In terms of organisational impact, 66% reported no personal impact (page 79), while 22% reported no impact for their group while 35% felt there were some "general negativities" (page 76).

> *What also comes out of this survey is that, in the eyes of many, intimacy at work is basically not a problem, is on the increase (or at least will not go away) and many report improvements in work performance resulting from the exhilaration of intimacy experiences. So, what is the problem that requires treatment and attention?*
>
> (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2004)

1.2 An Alternative Discourse on Gender

Since the 1970s, an alternative gender discourse has examined feminist claims from a different perspective. Behaviour is not driven by men's desire to dominate women, but from "both sexes' … instinct to protect the female" (Farrell, 1994:23). Hierarchy in social life, therefore, is articulated as a response to the desire for love, companionship and protection, and not simply a reaction to market economics (Williamson, 1975) or contractual agreements (see Berle and Means, 1932).

By drawing attention to the impact of deeply ingrained courtship processes on men's attitude to work and money, Farrell (2005) articulates the drivers of gendered behaviour that leads both to disparities between men and women at work and social processes that create divisions between earner and carer:

> *…our sons are still expected to pay for…dinners, drinks, dates, dances, diamonds and driving expenses [while] our daughters are still internalising that the more desirable they are, the more boys will pay for them…All of this is to say that men's and women's* ***work*** *choices are rooted far more deeply than in mere rational work decisions. Understanding the power of these roots helps us understand where our freedom to choose may be undermined not by the other sex but by our own biology and socialization* [emphasis added].
>
> (Farrell, 2005:137)

These issues matter because the scholarly research into masculinity (see Collinson and Hearn, 2001) argues that careerism amongst men is one of the masculine behaviours that *subordinates* women at work (and therefore creates hierarchies in which men dominate women) rather than a strategy to win respect and find love.

As a result, ethnographic investigations of relationship development can provide useful insights into intentions and states, as well as patterns of deference and the impact on hierarchies of power. An ethnographer can not only track the development of relationships, but also be subject to them, or proactively test behaviours to see the effects for themselves. In the remainder of this paper, I progressively clarify these issues through successive presentations and analyses of empirical data.

1.3 Gender Neutral Frameworks

While there is insufficient space to do a wide-ranging review of other frameworks, it is hard to ignore the enduring and popular Transaction Analysis (TA) theories established by Berne (1964) and popularised by the I'm OK – You're OK books (Harris, 1970; Harris and Harris, 1986). These continue to sell not just to the wider public, but are still promoted to managers by consultants[8], are responsible for a network of "transaction analysts", and continue to be referenced in the academic literature on psychology (see Gross, 2001).

The relevance to this paper is that Berne's theories are firmly focussed on interactions. He develops an easily understandable framework based on a theory that our childhood feelings (our "child") and childhood experiences (our "parent") are integrated and updated through the development of our cognitive functions (our "adult")[9]. Authoritarian behaviour, it is argued, comes from our 'parent' while seductive and playful behaviour derives from our 'child'. These are mediated by our developing cognitive abilities to create rational behaviour and "knowledge" stored in our 'adult'. As the adult matures, it is argued that s/he progressively becomes "game free" (Berne, 1964) and eradicates the motivation for authoritarian and seductive behaviours.

Communitarian Critique

The main problem, particularly from a liberal communitarian perspective (see Etzioni, 1998; Tam,1999; Lutz, 2000), is that broader historical and current social contexts and processes are not accommodated (except through the PACs of other people, particularly parents). There are, in my view, two additional and insurmountable problems that are created by the presumptions implicit in TA theory. Firstly, relationships are treated as a 'given' – the theory provides no account of *why* enduring relationships form in the first place. Secondly, it assumes that people want to stay in the relationships they have, which is frequently not the case or not possible. While TA (and PAC) might be useful in understanding long-term durable relationships within the family or community, it is more limited in what it can bring to a discussion of *workplace* relationships.

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8 As I was to learn personally when Leeds University invited a high-profile consultant to speak to a group of managers.

9 Commonly referred to as Parent-Adult-Child, or PAC for short.

To understand interpersonal dynamics, *symbolic interactionism* offers a framework for appreciating the dynamism and variability of behaviour. Blumer (1969) sets out three things that – when taken together – differentiates symbolic interactionism from other ways of studying interpersonal behaviour. Firstly, he contends that people behave towards others on the basis of the meanings they have for them; secondly, that meanings are developed through a process of interaction (between people, or between people and things); thirdly, that the meanings are derived from, and then used to guide future actions, through an *interpretive* process on the part of a human actor (see also Prus, 1996).

It is not that TA – and its more acceptable academic equivalent, Schema Theory (Rumelhart, 1975) - have little to offer (they do, and I will come back to them later in considering a new theoretical framework), it is that they encourage individualistic and incomplete views of relationship dynamics and change. They fail to adequately explain how a person's behaviour is modified by the social influence of others, or the way that *intentions and behaviours towards people and things change as their meaning for us changes* (Blumer, 1969). How, for example, does a person we regard as "friendly" (i.e. a social opportunity) come to be regarded as "hostile" (a social threat)? Why does this process of change occur and what are the impacts on the social networks to which each party belongs?

2. Methodology

The primary case study was undertaken in a company that wanted an in-depth study of its "culture management" approach to corporate governance. As they co-sponsored the research (see below), I had no influence over the selection of the primary case study company. I was able to influence the collection of additional primary data from SoftContact and the Mondragon Corporacion Cooperativa (MCC). This provided material for comparison and critique. SoftContact comprises two organisations: a common ownership co-operative and an employee-owned sister business. The way democratic values were re-interpreted over a 13-year period, particularly in the formation of the spin-off company, is helpful to this research.

Data was collected over an 18-month period from October 2002 to March 2004 including 7 months *working* inside the company. I participated in social events, weekend and evening working, and socialised with staff outside work. Inevitably, close relationships developed, and in order to balance these I moved about the organisation frequently, mixed at social events, and socialised outside the

workplace. I deliberately sought friendships with people from across the company (not always with success).

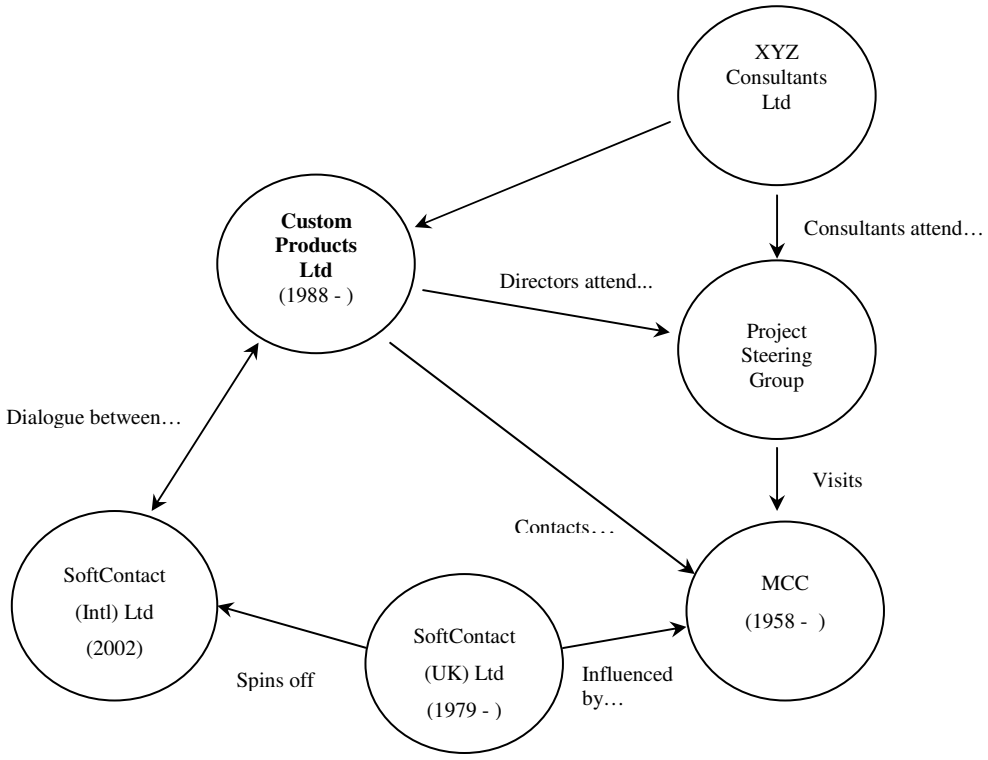
A journal was used to capture my experiences and the comments/conversations of staff members each time I was in the organisation. During the work placement many of these had to be recorded on a digital dictaphone, transferred to computer, then summarised and analysed at the end of the data collection period. To ensure that analysis took place during data collection, I captured reflections, the evolution of theoretical thinking, and comments on how relationships changed over time. In the ethnography I appear as Andy – all other characters have been constructed from multiple cases to represent *discourses* that arise out of different combinations of gender/status. All the dialogue is authentic, but the names, ages, job titles and personal information are fictional in order to protect identities. I summarise them below:

Andy	Age: 40, white male, married with children, junior consultant, XYZ Consultants
Ben	Age: 35, white male, married with children, HR Officer, Custom Products
Brenda	Age: 35, white female, divorced, no children, Director of Finance, Custom Products
Carol	Age: 29, white female, divorced, no children, Production Worker, Custom Products
Diane	Age: 45, white female, married with children, Support Services Manager, Custom Products
Gayle	Age: 28, white female, single, Company Administrator, SoftContact
Harry	Age: 41, white male, married, has children, Managing Director, Custom Products
Hayley	Age: 26, mixed-race female, single, no children, Temporary Female Worker, Custom Products
John	Age: 39, white male, separated, has children, Sales Director, Custom Products
Larissa	Age: 27, mixed-race female, single, no children, Purchasing Officer, Custom Products
Neil	Age: 43, white male, single, no children, Technician, SoftContact
Pauline	Age: 52, white female, divorced, has children, Technician, SoftContact
Simon	Age: 35, white male, divorced, no children, Marketing Manager, SoftContact
Tim	Age: 55, white male, married with children, Senior Consultant, XYZ Consultants

In the ethnography as a whole there are six organisations (5 formal, 1 informal). Data in this paper is drawn principally from two of them, Custom Products and SoftContact[10]. This research project was initially co-sponsored by XYZ Consultants and Custom Products. Mid-way through the project, Custom Products withdrew and the project was funded to completion by XYZ Consultants. Diagram 1 below shows the relationship between the different organisations.

[10] This paper is based on two chapters of a doctoral thesis.

Diagram 1 – Participant Organisations in the Research Project



In keeping with grounded theory, I limited theoretical reading during data collection (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Partington 2000, Goulding, 2001; Locke 2001) in order to focus on texts that were circulating amongst company managers and directors. This helped me to understand the influences on management thinking and how these informed their actions while limiting the influence of academic literature.

All methodologies have their limitations. Ethnography's strongest claim is that it can "penetrate the various complex forms of misinformation, fronts, evasions and lies' that are considered endemic in most social settings" (Gill and Johnson, 2002:145). But this strength leaves the researcher deep in the contestable world of social meaning, relying on their own interpretative skills to theorise about findings. Where data comes from more than one source then its authenticity is more reliable. In the sphere of behavioural and linguistic meaning, however, all claims are open to challenge. My best hope is to capture a series of authentic interpretations, rather than unchallengeable truths.

3. Developing a Theory of Relationships

In mid-2002, Harry, the MD of Custom Products called Andy, the CEO of SoftContact (International), to ask if they could meet. Harry had read Andy's book on "social enterprise" (see DTI, 2002) and called to ask if they could share thoughts on corporate governance. Andy had e-mailed the book to John[11] who gave a copy to Harry. Harry and Andy met in May 2002[12] and they continued to correspond by phone and e-mail while also exploring ways to trade[13]. When SoftContact stopped trading[14], Harry wrote to ask Andy if he could bring a consultant from XYZ Consultants to a social evening they had arranged[15].

At this meeting, Harry suggested that Andy might like to apply to XYZ Consultants and work with Tim on a project they were organising. Andy did so, and started his employment on 28th October 2002. Under Tim's guidance, Andy began to work on a 3-year project to advise the board of Custom Products on workplace democracy, employee-ownership, and the impact of their workplace culture.

3.1 Initial Data on Male/Male Relationship Formation

From a theoretical perspective, a number of things emerge from these early interactions. Firstly, Harry's motive for meeting Andy is to seek *intellectual assistance* for *economic* and *social* gain. This evolved as an informal business friendship while they explored ways to trade. Andy made

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11 Harry's co-director.

12 E-mail from Harry to Andy, 25th April 2003 in which Harry reflects back on their original meeting nearly a year before.

13 FileRef: JN1, Para 1421. Andy reflects on his contact with Harry (and Custom Products Ltd) prior to joining XYZ Consultants. Andy and Patrick (Executive Director of SoftContact (UK) Ltd) co-tendered for an IT project at Custom Products Ltd in the summer of 2002.

14 Company documents show that SoftContact (International) Ltd stopped trading on 22nd August 2002 and was voluntarily wound up by its members on 9th September 2002.

15 E-mail Harry to Andy, Sept 2nd 2002.

himself known to Harry through the marketing activities of a company he founded[16]. Andy, therefore, was seeking *attention* (for both himself and the company he wanted to promote) by offering *assistance* to people interested in the concept of "social enterprise"[17]. The *assistance* offered is *intellectual*, but the intended outcome of the assistance was *social* and *economic* advantages to "social" entrepreneurs.

Given the outcome (that Harry's relationship helped Tim to recruit Andy) this early meeting is the culmination of a process whereby the offer of *assistance* by Andy prompted John to *assist* Harry, prompting Harry to *assist* Tim, who in turn offered *assistance* back to Andy so that Andy could *assist* him (Tim), John and Harry! In the process, nearly all parties saw the potential for *intellectual* benefits and *material* gain, while Andy and John also managed to establish a framework within which they provided *emotional support* to each other [18].

In the formative stages of relationships, therefore, *giving and getting access* and *giving and getting information* are crucial for parties to make decisions about their future relationships together. After the exchange of commitments, parties to a relationship may develop its social dimension by providing each other with *emotional support*.

3.2 Initial Data on Male/Female Relationship Formation

At the outset of the project, John asks Diane (Support Services Manager) to contact Andy to arrange an induction week. Andy meets a number of staff, including Ben with whom he strikes up a friendship at the company's "culture classes"[19]. In the next block of empirical data, I draw on

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16 The company, registered on 1st August 2001 by three men, started trading on January 1st 2002.

17 In an e-mail to *The Economist* dated 9th August 2002, Andy describes his book as "the first book specifically aimed at entrepreneurs and managers interested in the development of social enterprise. This is currently a 'hot topic' with significant government funding going into regional agencies to promote social firms and social enterprise".

18 By late-September, they were recommending each other books. From November 2002 onwards, they consistently enquire and follow up on personal issues in each other's lives by e-mail. (See CP2003, Paras 32, 210, 218, 1111, 1122, 1355 (Andy shares his poetry), 1399 (John responds) etc).

19 These run once a year at Custom Products and are conducted on alternate weeks (7 sessions in all).

Andy's reflections and interviews with Ben to trace the development of their relationship, and also Ben's relationships with Brenda, Diane, Hayley, Larissa, John, Harry and Carol.

On the 25th November 2002, Diane began organising Andy's induction and sent him a booklet about the company's philosophy:

> *I received and read the "We Believe" booklet. I was moved - genuinely moved - by the piece about Reecey [20]. The booklet is a powerful marketing tool - I found myself wanting to work for the company just on the strength of this booklet. When I opened the centre pages, the image was extremely powerful and well presented - it had real impact .*[21]

Andy underwent a 3-hour interview with Diane. This also had a considerable emotional impact:

> *I got emotional several times during the interview; firstly, when we discussed a management training course I attended at Procter & Gamble [22] – Diane shared her own experience that was similar. I could feel my body going tight and rigid while talking about it. Secondly, I got emotional talking about my strengths and weaknesses. I focussed on 'caring too much' and sometimes hurting people. I became a bit emotional and felt tears in my eyes.* [23]

Andy undertook induction training led by Diane. Together with a new starter called Larissa, he learned more about the company's culture and product range:

> *Diane described a Presentation Evening - gifts were given to newcomers, and those with 5, 10 (and now) 15 years service. The two big awards, however, were for the person who had developed the most (voted for by managers), and the person who best embodied the values and culture of the company [24]….[When] she described the reaction of the person who'd received the award this year, I felt genuinely moved - to be voted this award by your fellow employees must be an experience beyond measure, I imagine.* [25]

In addition to these ritual ceremonies, Andy found that the evening, like many other 'socials', involved quite a lot of bawdy humour.

> *Diane described the 'Bum of the Year' award in which staff voted for the most attractive butt from a series of pictures. These were the 'butts' of a number of male members of staff!!! John - to his horror (he thought his butt would not be attributed to him) - was named as 'Bum of the Year'. Diane got quite carried away talking*

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[20] A founder member of the company who died in the mid-1990s. The booklet contains a tribute to him.

[21] FileRef: JN1, Paras 154-156

[22] FileRef: FC-P0, Page 88, Andy's CV shows that he worked from 1987-89 at Procter & Gamble (HABC) Ltd, firstly as a Business Analyst and then as Data Centre Manager.

[23] FileRef: JN1, Paras 185-187.

[24] This was awarded by a vote of all employees who had completed 1 year's service.

[25] FileRef: JN1, Para 324

> *about John's butt and described her reaction when it first appeared. She said it was "as good as any male model!"* [26]

Both Andy and Larissa commented on the friendly atmosphere and it seemed to Andy that the organisation had a thriving social life (both informal and formal) with sexual attitudes that were quite liberal. However, during conversation Andy found that Larissa had not found it easy to settle in at first[27].

> *Larissa was curious about what I was doing. I said you can be "as nosey as you like" and she opened up. She said that when she first started she felt everyone was brainwashed. I thought "what a funny thing to say". When she got her contract she questioned something in it and got a very peculiar reaction, as if she'd done something wrong. However, she enjoys the culture now, but did feel strange for quite a while. I suppose she learned to keep her mouth shut - this is my interpretation - it seems she watched what she said after she got that reaction.*[28]

So even as Andy was enjoying the camaraderie on his first few days, he noticed that Larissa had an experience that unsettled her and made it harder for her to speak up (although she had behaved in keeping with the ethos of the company by being 'open and honest').

The emotional impact of the interview and opening week had an immediate effect on Andy's and Diane's relationship when they met again at the Christmas Party a few days later. Andy comments on her playfulness with John.

> *Diane was very friendly and put herself about, chatting with Harry, John, myself and Larissa. When we arrived she had her arm around John, and later she was hugging him. I learned she was married, but she seemed totally unconcerned at flinging her arms around a number of men (me included) and appeared to be having a good time. Later, she took advantage of this closeness to put an ice cube down John's trousers. There was obvious mirth, but I did not feel that John found this funny and I felt a pang of sympathy for him. But he had to laugh…whether he felt like laughing or not.* [29]

3.3 Analysing Andy's Induction Week

The first thing to note is that this is the first contact Andy has with women. The founders and senior directors of Custom Products are men, and the consultant recruiting him to XYZ Consultants is also a man. Andy himself established a company with two other men which split from a company

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[26] FileRef: JN1, Para 330

[27] FileRef: JN3, Para 1250

[28] FileRef: JN2, Para 152

[29] FileRef: JN1, Para 495, 527

established by six men[30]. In both the primary and secondary cases, women were recruited into the business to handle administrative and personnel functions. At Custom Products and SoftContact, women also have managerial and technical roles (see below).

While men's activities account for virtually all the entrepreneurial behaviour observed, women dominate the ranks of management and administration. Men outnumber women on the board at Custom Products but women dominate even more so in the operational management team. The company's staff are (in practice) managed by 9 women and 1 man [31]. At SoftContact, even though the company was originally established by 6 men, women started to outnumber men during the second decade of trading, and at times outnumbered men both in terms of directorships and team leader positions. By the end of the second decade, after a change in recruitment practice, the balance shifted back towards men [32].

Analysing Gendered Behaviour

In terms of basic dynamics, much the same holds. Diane *gives* Andy *attention* in order to *assist* Andy's induction. Andy responds, and *gives information* to *assist* Diane. Diane offers *material assistance* in the form of a booklet that provides *intellectual* material for Andy to read before the interview. Secondly, the booklet, the interview and the induction effect emotional changes in Andy, and it appears that they are designed to do this. All the same elements are present.

However, what leaps out of the data is the immediate presence of sexual behaviour both in the workplace and a social setting – initiated in both instances by a woman. In the workplace, Diane tells a story of sexual behaviour at the "presentation evening" (by men, it should be added, but for the amusement of the women). This includes an account of her feelings towards one of the directors'

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30 FileRef: FC-S1, Document 90. Andy was given part of a PhD thesis (author unknown) about SoftContact (UK) written in the mid-1980s, about 6 years after trading started. This information comes from page 251.

31 As at 24th November 2003. An e-mail from Andy to all 20 managers/directors shows there were 12 women and 8 men. The board had 4 men, 2 women. Managers, therefore, were split 10 women, to 4 men. Three of these men were 'technical' managers and had no personal reports. One of the women had no personal reports.

32 FileRef: CS Emails, paras 580-590. The balance was 7 to 3 in December 2001. This is based on a document agreed in General Meeting on the desired split between the two companies.

"butts"! In the social setting, Diane "flings her arms" around a number of men (including the external consultant, Andy), and puts ice cubes down John's trousers.

I will classify all the behaviours in more detail after the next block of empirical data, but for now let me define a framework within which to understand what is emerging.

Table 1 – Dynamics of Relationship Formation

Class	*Sub-Class*	*Non-Sexual*	*Sexual*
Assistance (Economic)	Physical	*Giving* and g*etting* commitments to meet face-to-face, travel and relocation to facilitate meetings, and direct assistance with tasks that involve physical effort.	N/A
	Intellectual	*Giving* and *getting* conceptual ideas that facilitate other tasks, or provide alternative ways of understanding.	N/A
	Material	*Giving* and *getting* material support (money, resources). *Giving* and *getting* material gain (payments, profits, trading)	N/A
Attention (Social)	Access	*Giving* and *getting* access to people, intellectual ideas, resources etc.	*Giving* and *getting* touches and looks that are sexually stimulating. Displaying any part of the body that others find sexually stimulating (butts, cleavages, legs etc.)
	Information	*Giving* and *getting* information about people, ideas and tasks so that access can be facilitated or assistance offered	*Giving* and *getting* sexual stories, sexual jokes, "private" information about love lives.
	Emotion	*Giving* and *getting* access/information or assistance that facilitates the expression, discussion or understanding of emotions	*Giving* and *getting* access/information that stimulates sexual interest.

In the next set of data, I examine the role of both non-sexual and sexual attention in the bonding of teams, and develop a more detailed classification of behaviours.

3.4 Relationship Maintenance

Andy met Ben at the company's culture classes but had not seen him at work. He later learned that Ben had decided to attend the classes during the final weeks of his convalescence – he had been sick:

> *Ben told me he had been off for six-months. He was very open with me and said he'd had a breakdown. He was pleased to be back - it is evidence that the company sticks by staff that have difficulties. I'm not sure what caused his illness.* [33]

[33] FileRef: JN2, Para 122

Andy and Ben quickly struck up a workplace friendship and for the duration of the project Ben acted as a key informant for Andy. As a worker inside the "support services" team, Ben was an invaluable contact, but care should be taken in interpreting his contribution because of his closeness to the management function. He was, throughout the period, having a challenging time in his personal life and the reasons gradually become clear.

Carol joined the company while Ben had been on sick leave, but they met at the company's "culture classes" before Ben's official return to work. Andy also attended these as part of his critique of the company's culture and picked up from Ben details of his first encounters with Carol:

> *(After Class 1) There was one young woman - probably about 30 years old - sitting opposite who looked at me quite a lot. We gave each other a big smile at one point. I don't know her name or what she does yet.* [34]
>
> *(After Class 2) Carol is the name of the woman who smiled quite a lot at me in the first class. Even though she sat herself down at the far end of the table (as far away as it was possible to be from me) we acknowledged each other and instinctively gave each other a wave. This strikes me as odd behaviour on both our parts because neither of us have spoken to the other yet and I still don't know what she does. Later, when I was getting a coffee and everyone was readying themselves for the continuation of Harry's talk, she very noticeably (to me) turned around to look at me and smiled - I instinctively smiled back. I'm unsure of her reason for giving me attention, but I am conscious that I find her attractive.* [35]

Ben was struck by Carol's body language. He claims that she swung her whole body around directly towards him while others remained seated at the table. She was wearing jeans and lent back in her chair in such a way that Ben felt "nervous". While he "definitely liked" the attention it also made him "uncomfortable" and he did not talk to her[36]. Ben claims that the dynamics between himself and Carol continued at each successive culture class and continued upon his return to work until he was convinced she was flirting with him[37]. He recalls that the attention was "nice" and "one of the reasons I enjoy coming into work"[38].

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[34] FileRef: JN1, Para 758

[35] FileRef: JN2, Para 1113

[36] FileRef: JN1, Para 1115

[37] FileRef: JN2, Para 107, 1157, 1187-1189, and especially 1229-1231 when Ben reports that "she came right over to the desk where I work and looked directly at me while she smiled. I held her look until I felt a rush of adrenalin go right through me. I thought she was coming onto me."

[38] FileRef: JN2, Para 1157, 1229

He also found that Carol was not completely committed to the company.

> *Carol was ambivalent towards work. Initially she said that she was working at Custom Products "until something better comes along". I took this to mean that she did not much care for the work. However, later, when I asked where she worked before she commented that she'd worked many places before coming here and added: "I like it here, so I'm staying." She's still undecided what she wants to do in the long term.* [39]

At this time, Ben's marriage was suffering the after effects of his wife having an affair. Reconciliation was made more difficult by his wife's ongoing contact with her former lover, and (as evidenced here) Ben's own tendency to grow close to attractive women inside work[40]. However, during this period (March 2003), Ben talked positively about the relationships he had developed since returning to the workplace, and the effect it was having on his self-esteem:

> *People are bonding inside the team. I went and got a card and cakes for Hayley's birthday and when I gave them to her she gave me a hug* [41]*. Then I told her I had not had a good weekend. I was a bit cautious at first - I said all marriages have their problems - but then she opened up and told me about her mother having breast cancer and how this had affected her and her family over the last decade. I found myself explaining in more detail about what had happened at home.*
>
> *We listened to each other - I think this isn't anything more than friendship - but it was nice to talk a bit. I did feel the need to talk. I just feel closer and closer to people at work. This weekend I got Carol a card because I like the way she smiles at me. I was a bit nervous about that but after the weekend I've had, I just thought "what the hell".*
>
> *These are little things - people are letting each other into their life a bit. This opening up is not just within our team - we had a drink after the culture class. We were all chatting away and talking about Diane's son and the great battle she has over his schooling. I think she needed to get it off her chest. She says that she does not get out for a drink often, which (laughs) means that maybe I'm bringing her out of herself, I don't know, because she's been out for a drink several times with me.*
>
> *John was also there, and he opened up about the past. Harry and some other directors all have PE degrees (John, Harry and even Reecey). They have this common bond between them through an interest in athletics. Lots of people opening up and getting to know each other better, talking about themselves and their past. I would have talked more privately to Diane if I'd had the chance, but with other people around I thought I would wait. I could tell that she needed to let things out, so I let her, but I do want to talk to her about things before I tell her of my decision.*[42]

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[39] FileRef: JN2, Para 465

[40] FileRef: RV01, Para 85. Andy recorded that "Ben thinks women latch onto him because he is a good listener (and also, in my opinion, because he is good looking). He comes across to me as a very private person who does not go out much. The question here is who is doing the chasing!" Andy checked this directly later (JN3, para 997) and asked if he warranted a reputation as a "ladies' man". After a moment's thought Ben said "I think it is unfair, but yes, I can see why people would say that."

[41] Hayley was a temporary female worker who had joined the HR team to assist with a training evaluation.

[42] FileRef: JN2, paras 1242-1252

Ben's motives for sending a card to Carol would – 10 months later - become central to a conflict between himself and his manager. At the time, Ben told Andy and later told John. Andy also discussed it – in the context of a discussion about workplace relationships - with John. Inside the card, Ben invited Carol for a drink and suggested they meet after the final culture class. In the card he gave her his mobile phone number but when she did not respond, he decided to invite Harry, John and Brenda instead. Ben reports that Carol stopped flirting for a while but later they resumed "smiling" at each other[43].

Hayley, in the week before the end of her temporary contract started to pay Ben more attention.

> *Darling Hayley. She kept coming up and interrupting me from time to time. I'm sure she didn't need to, she just liked to. She was wearing a lovely black top today so I didn't mind being interrupted by her at all. We had lunch again, and again I felt - just like yesterday - that there was a bit of sexual banter going on. I was having a coffee with Diane - we were talking about the night out for her leaving do, we ..... I was asking her if she was going to get an outfit (she said "yes", and I said that I might get one). We were talking about the fact that she was unable to stay over the night. She asked me if I would walk her back to her car - and she gave me such a look that I began to wonder what would happen if I did.* [44]

Ben confided in Andy that he was considering breaking off the relationship with his wife[45] because he felt that the environment at Custom Products gave him the support he needed to make a substantial change in his life. The consequent domestic arguments led to his moving into a separate bedroom for several months[46] and his coming into work upset.

> *That morning I went into work. Both Diane and Hayley could see I was upset. Diane was very supporting and comforting. She held my hand and gave me a hug. She gave me her home number and said I could kip at their place if I needed to. I don't think I will need to but it is lovely that she offered this because it is unpredictable how things will unfold in the coming weeks. Most of my focus was on Diane at that time. I could see that Hayley felt bad for me and wanted to talk too. When I came out of the meeting, I touched Hayley - that's not the right way to put it - I put my hand on her shoulder and said that I would talk to her at lunch time.*
>
> *At lunch I talked with Hayley and opened up about what had happened - not massively - but enough to know what had happened at home. She was very kind. She amusingly talked about my need to get back into the dating game. I said that I thought I would wait a bit before I do that. She kept telling me that I "wouldn't be lonely" and that I would have "no trouble". I said that I got frustrated with the games men and women play, sometimes even when they don't know it. She looked at me knowingly and said "Oh yes, men and women know*

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[43] JN2 Para 1518, JN3 Paras 239 ("smile still there"), 527, 608, 807.

[44] FileRef: JN2, Para 1392, 1414, 1480

[45] FileRef: STP1 – Document 45, see also JN2, para 169.

[46] FileRef: STP1 – Document 45. Ben comments that he is not looking for relationship, but that the friendly support that he had around him gave him the confidence to "feel okay" about his decision.

> *when they are playing games". I particularly remember her eyes as she said this - they became very narrow and quite piercing.* [47]

Once this news circulated around the company, others offered their consolations and help. Harry, the MD, wrote to Ben personally[48] and John took Ben out for a drink to give him support. As Ben was already socialising with Harry, John, Diane and Hayley on a regular basis, he decided to invite Brenda to these social evenings[49]. Ben had been reticent to do so due to a perception that Brenda had conflictual relationships with her subordinates[50]. Having picked up negative comments from Hayley and others, he also found Brenda was unpopular with women across the organisation:

> *When I was at lunch - the subject of Brenda working long hours was the topic of conversation. Larissa said that she went late and got in early in the morning. One night Larissa left at 8.30pm and Brenda was still there. She saw Brenda again at 7.30am the next morning and asked if she had bothered to go home. I can see this from both sides, that Brenda loves her work, enjoys her responsibility, is not married any more and does not have a man in her life. Why shouldn't she want to work long hours to develop her career? But [someone else] said "That Brenda! Why doesn't she get a life?" That was quite strong I thought.*

Andy thought this may be sexism, particularly as staff did not criticise John for working long hours in the same way.[51]

From Friendship to Flirting

The formal relationships between Brenda, Diane and Ben started to change shortly after Ben informed the whole departure about his changed circumstances at home. As I outline below, there are discernable changes in virtually all the relationships Ben had with his immediate colleagues but it took him some time to realise this. He continued to grow closer to Diane through talks at the pub about work and home issues. They both had two children and Ben supported Diane through a difficult period with her daughter, while Diane gave Ben support to work out things in his marriage:

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47 FileRef: JN2, paras 1360-1368

48 E-mails: Harry to Ben, 26th April, Ben to Harry, 6th May

49 E-mails, Brenda to Ben 3rd April, Ben to Brenda 3rd April.

50 FileRef: JN2, Para 1165, 1330, 1396. Andy recorded Hayley's comment that whenever Brenda said "can I have a word?" she felt she was being disciplined. He followed this up – indirectly – in telephone interviews and identical sentiments (see CP2004, paras 3233-3253) were expressed. Hayley also reported feeling she was low status and that Brenda was "all rhetoric" when it came to the company's commitment to "equality of respect".

51 FileRef: JN2, Para 1384

> *Diane was smashed at this point, but we talked very openly. She was arguing that because of the Data Protection Act "you can't say anything to anyone unless they need to know" because you are in breach of the Act. We talked about the problems of divulging financial information. Under the Data Protection Act it is considered private. I asked how can we validate the fairness of a pay system if the information has to be kept private? I found there were anomalies in the pay system (that two directors were paid more than the maximum in the policy presented to staff) and that this could never be exposed if this information was kept private. It was quite a debate.* [52]

Ben found that his female colleagues not only showed concern about his situation, but that they took a keen interest in his immediate plans:

> *I'm not sure how we got onto the subject, but now my situation is known, they asked me some questions about how I felt. I said that I expected to have a period on my own - I'd been like that before - and Diane said something similar to Hayley's comment that "I wouldn't be lonely" (Pause…as if trying to work something out)…. in fact she said that to me at the pub the other week - but she fleshed it out a bit this time, which was that people had been asking about me, about whether I was married, about my children. Brenda was there while this was being said.* [53]

After Hayley's departure from the workplace, Ben found that Brenda opened up much more and talked about commitment to her career.

> *What I got from talking to Brenda was how passionate she is about the whole "community" thing. She really believes in it, that we are building something worthwhile. I do too. (Curiously – as if working something out) There was something strange, however, in the way she was asking me "how do you think you are going down?" She told me that I had no sense of status, and that I did not seem to appreciate the impact I was having. From the way she looked at me, I don't think she was talking only about my work.*[54]

Ben continued to socialise with Diane and Brenda outside work, and occasionally took up Diane's offer to stay the night so that he could drink. Over one late night coffee, Diane again commented on his "admirers":

> *It was the small hours. We were going to go back to Brenda's to open a bottle of whiskey but were too tired and decided to go. The whole evening unfolded how I like it.....good meal, good company, lots of chat, and as the evening winds down round a table, everyone drunk, talking about how you feel, talking to each other in ways that you don't talk in the workplace when you feel inhibited.*
>
> *We had a coffee and talked on a much more personal level. Diane said again that I have some admirers. I asked if she'd tell me but she wouldn't. She explained that this was part of the way the Data Protection Act worked, that if she told me and something happened that she could be personally liable. I said that the kids have to come first, but that I don't want to turn down the chance of any interesting friendships. I said that if anyone asked again, that she had my permission to say that I was unhappily married.*[55]

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52 FileRef: JN2, Para 1484

53 FileRef: JN2, Para 1383

54 FileRef: JN2, Para 1476

55 FileRef: JN2, para 1496-1498

Ben does not seem to be fully aware of the dynamics that are going on around him at the time, but in the conversations he later had with Andy, he did start to reflect on the meaning of people's behaviour. One incident concerned him quite deeply, and this caused much greater reflection:

> *Brenda. (Pause). The barriers have definitely come down ... I have one or two worries about an e-mail I sent. We have been open and complimentary. I said that I found her very sharp and thrive on the feedback she gives. She said that she was "so pleased" that I had come back to the company. She talked about Fred. He'd sent an e-mail which just said "Thank you". Brenda sent one back saying "What for?" Fred just said: "Ben" so she is very happy with my work at the moment.*
>
> *I can't generalise. The place is impacting on me now I'm back. Not to put to fine a point on it, Hayley is a beautiful woman and she really took to me. As for Brenda, she's been supportive and I find myself respecting her more. I sent an e-mail because we are building up a clutch of things that it would be good to discuss outside work, so I said that maybe it is the time to go down the pub with John. But Brenda, the next day, seemed glowing with excitement. I think she was flattered by my invitation. She came in wearing a low-cut top and I think she's trying to flirt with me. She's smiling much more at me. Staring at me. When I reflect about things, about the way she was very complimentary at Hayley's leaving party, being very open, and standing close up, I just.....(pause)....well, she has my respect but I don't fancy her. I hope that.....I hope....this might sound crazy but this is affecting me because I don't know how to go into work now. It bothers me because I don't want a complicated relationship with my director. I hope she doesn't think I'm asking her out on a date. All this.....all this attention....is changing my self-perception and also making it difficult for me at work. I think, maybe, I am more likeable and attractive than I think I am.*[56]

A few weeks later, as things started to settle at home, Ben mentioned to Diane that he had registered himself on an Internet directory. A woman writer had contacted him and they had started corresponding. He found Diane's reaction quite peculiar.

> *It made me think back over my own behaviour. I can't understand why she would say "look, you are not going to find love here". I liked people but did not generally make comments to them or about them. It made me self-conscious and I felt vulnerable. Another man has been sacked for comments he'd made about women's attractiveness and I'm now worried that I've made a couple of comments to Diane about finding one or two people attractive. I can't imagine a woman would ever be taken up on this if she made comments about men.* [57]

Ben later discussed this man's sacking with John and Andy and also talked about it to Brenda in his job appraisal. His concern over Diane's comment was fuelled by feedback from Brenda. Hayley told Ben that Brenda may like him and be jealous of the way the two of them had flirted[58]. When Andy learned of this, and considered Diane's behaviour when he first met her, he felt there was an inconsistency in the way people were being treated. He took up these issues in discussion with John[59] and reflected on them:

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[56] FileRef: JN2, Para 1470, 1505-1507, see also RV01, Para 53.

[57] FileRef: JN3, Para 164

[58] FileRef: RV01, Paras 69-76, Ben and Hayley e-mailed each other about Ben's appraisal.

[59] FileRef, JN2, Paras, 194, 203-204

> *Ben mentioned his feelings to me about the male worker who lost his job. He also mentioned Brenda's reaction when he discussed his flirting with Hayley during his job appraisal. He felt that it has not gone unnoticed but that they'd let it pass. He didn't say it to Brenda … but he's worried about his position because he probably behaved more "inappropriately" (in Brenda's view, not his own) than a man who was sacked [for making complimentary remarks about the way women looked]….What came out is that Brenda felt flirting in the workplace is problematic. She's saying what a manager must say, I guess, but it does not sound as if she is blameless herself. Brenda feels managers/senior people must be extremely careful, that flirting is not worth it "unless you feel someone is really special". I went away - thought about it – and thought about John's view that this is unfair and inconsistent. Brenda feels managers must behave differently but that does not square with the policy on fairness, consistency, gender equality etc. Why must managers (and men?) behave differently?* [60]

During Andy's own induction, Diane had commented enthusiastically on the quality of John's "butt" but was now criticising Ben for responding to her comment that he had "admirers". Andy also gave regard to Ben's comments that Brenda and Diane appear to have discussed his "flirty" behaviour and contrasted this with Ben's descriptions of Brenda (and possibly Diane) trying to flirt with him. Indeed, given that Brenda's earlier flirting impacted substantially on Ben, Brenda's comment that a manager should only flirt if they "feel someone is really special" might be another subtle attempt to communicate her feelings to him. Andy felt that Ben's behaviour was now being monitored quite closely and that John's comment regarding a "dual-standard" with regard to sexual behaviour may have some substance. He also felt that Diane's sensitivity to Ben's interest in someone outside work might be an indication of jealousy.

In summary, the dynamics surrounding Diane, Hayley, Ben and Brenda illustrate both how a team can develop intimate friendships, but can also experience tensions when changing circumstances outside work affect relationships inside work, and vice versa. In the section below, I review these dynamics and further develop the framework to increase understanding of relationship dynamics.

4. Analysing Interpersonal Dynamics in a Work Team

Firstly, a few critical reflections on the data. Much of it comes from Ben and Andy, which skews the perspective. While this provides good access to a male perspective, the data available for counter-perspectives is weak. Ben reports that the women looked at him a lot, but to notice this he must have been looking at them! We do not have contemporaneous data on the impact that his behaviour had on Brenda's, Hayley's, Carol's and Diane's *feelings*, although their actions suggest that they all wanted some kind of close relationship with him.

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[60] FileRef: JN3, Para 224

In Brenda's, Hayley's and Carol's case, there are indications that their interest is partly sexual, but this is much more ambiguous in Diane's case although her repeated comment about Ben's "admirers" might indicate interest. Nor do we know if any of the parties were game playing (Berne, 1964) or had a serious intent. Because we have better data on Ben's feelings, we can be more confident that his sexual interest was in Carol and Hayley, and not Brenda and Diane, but in none of these cases does he appear to want to develop this interest beyond mild flirtation.

Table 2 identifies the behaviours observed during these interactions to provide a fuller picture of the way communication takes place between parties in a relationship. The framework for understanding relationship formation was developed using the Grounded Theory method of open and selective coding (see Locke, 2001). Empirical data was analysed with NVivo and a wide range of behaviours were identified. These were progressively reorganised as a result of giving presentations and receiving feedback (to peer groups, conferences, academic associations, research participants and project supervisors). After several months, the core categories of *attention* and *assistance* emerged, and the lower levels were formalised when sub-categories were merged together.

The detailed table of behaviours below was developed using a *verification* process (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This involved cutting and pasting empirical data into NVivo and analysing the behaviours observed to check they could still all be assigned to the framework[61]. The data was analysed until "saturated" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001) to establish the rigour of the framework and provide a comprehensive view of the ways people act during periods of relationship formation and group bonding.

[61] The dataset is actually larger than is presented here – the full dataset is based on one chapter of a doctoral thesis.

Table 2 – Linking Behaviours to Relationship Dimensions

The core behaviours are characterised by a range of actions, many of which are non-verbal. Those marked with an asterisk (*) might indicate sexual interest, or be interpreted by the recipient as such.

Assistance	Physical		Meeting, Organising, Making, Avoiding
	Intellectual		Organising, Theorising, Interviewing, Teaching, Evaluating, Noticing, Checking
	Material		Paying, Awarding, Feeding
Attention	Access	(Preventing)	Ignoring, Withholding*, Frightening, Forgetting, Withdrawing, Fearing, Barring, Resisting* (8)
		Non Verbal (The **withholding** of these behaviours, and the verbal/sharing behaviours below can be regarded as attempts to *deny* access and exclude individuals)	**Body Language:** Touching*, Looking*, Smiling*, Waving, Turning*, Flirting*, Approaching*, Copying*, Kissing*, Crying, Laughing*) (11)
		Non-Verbal	**Behaviours**: Meeting*, Reading, Offering, Trading, Attracting*, Employing, Inviting*, Consenting, Agreeing, Arranging, Sending*, Acknowledging, Awarding, Attending, Playing*, Questioning, Encouraging*, Giving*, Listening, Helping*, Impressing*, Supporting, Committing (23)
		Verbal	Phoning, Storytelling*, Complimenting*, Writing, Apologising, Talking, Asking, Describing, Bantering*, Informing, Texting*, Arguing* (12)
		Sharing	Confessions*, Contacts, Plans*, Reflections, Suggestions, Resources, Time, Space, Interests (9)
Attention	Information	Acquiring	Enquiring, Exchanging, Telling, Finding, Discovering
		Using	Understanding, Speculating, Organising
	Emotion	N/A	Intending, Caring*, Fearing*, Wanting*, Aspiring, Coveting*, Appreciating, Liking*, Enjoying*, Feeling Jealous* (Jealousing?), Worrying.

In the next section, I develop a theory of social influence, and the way that seeking / avoiding intimacy, and perceptions of dependency, impact on our propensity to agree or disagree with another

party in a relationship. I will explore how these can come into conflict to induce anxiety while a person explores how to overcome contradictions.

4.1 Developing a Theory of Social Influence

The above framework is useful for identifying the behaviours taking place in an organisational context, and the role they play in relationship building. In this section, I discuss the way that they indicate the intentions of one party towards another and the impacts that these intentions have on everyday decision-making. In the above interactions we can observe the following:

1) Andy and Ben *increase* the *attention* they give each other from the outset of their relationship and maintain it through both work and personal contact.
2) Ben *assists* Andy with his consultancy project. Andy *assists* Ben with reflecting on changes in his life.
3) Carol initially *increases* the *attention* she *gives* to Ben and he eventually responds and *increases* the *attention* he *gives* to Carol. She then *decreases* her level of *attention*, and Ben responds by *decreasing* his *attention* as well.
4) John and Harry **periodically** *increase* the *attention* they *give* Ben after news of his marriage collapse.
5) Diane, Hayley and Brenda all increase the *attention* they *give* Ben after his marriage collapse, and Ben accepts the *increases* from Hayley and Diane, but *decreases* the *attention* he *gives* Brenda and considers withdrawing further.
6) Nearly all the parties increase the *emotional support* they *give* each other over the period this data was collected (the exception being Carol who does not attain this level of closeness with any of the others in this sample).

While these behaviours can be observed, the question is why? The obvious answer – at the highest level at least – is that parties are constantly probing each other, or responding to the probing of others, and adjusting their behaviours to determine the levels of *intimacy* that both parties are comfortable with. The *direction* of change is perhaps the most relevant as this indicates the overall intention of one person towards another in the current context. Longer-term intentions, or behaviour in other contexts, are impossible to gauge.

Talking about love lives appears to be part of the process of bonding both in groups, and also on a one-to-one basis. Talking privately on a one-to-one basis is one of the most intimate behaviours in the data. The characters who do not **regularly** discuss their loving relationships are Brenda and Harry. All the other characters, to some degree, discuss their love lives regularly. Andy later found

that Harry and John withhold information from each other about their private lives, indicating that perhaps they are not as close as is sometimes perceived[62].

Another aspect of the dynamic is that parties drift from one person to another. For example….

1) Ben *increases* the *attention* he gives Diane, Hayley and Carol as he *decreases* the *attention* he gives his wife.
2) Ben *increases* the *attention* he gives Brenda, but when Brenda gives him attention he does not want, he *decreases* it again and *increases* the *attention* he gives Hayley and Diane.
3) Brenda and John *decrease* the *attention* they give to people outside work to *increase* the *attention* they *give* to people inside (to further their *careers*).
4) Others comment that Brenda should *decrease* her *attention* to her career in order to "get a life" (i.e. conform to their ideals rather than her own and *increase* the *attention* she *gives* to others outside work).

Overall, what comes across from this data is the **inseparability** of personal/professional domains, and how they combine to determine commitment levels not just to the workplace, but also to colleagues and people outside the workplace. There is not a seamless distinction between work and home, and impacts are observed in both directions. In this data, the intimate friendships at work are particularly important in sustaining commitment to the workplace – a perspective that has been sidelined by cognitive psychology explanations of motivation (see Watson, 1996).

4.2 The Dimensions of Dependency

In short, we can observe social decisions being taken constantly on the basis of one party's desire to increase or decrease intimacy with another. These, however, are mediated through the wishes or obligations of both parties to obtain and provide *assistance*. These 14 behaviours, I argue, can be adopted voluntarily as strategies to gain or deny access to others for social reasons. Alternatively, they may be adopted to fulfil obligations arising from the employment relationship. Therefore, Ben's anxiety after Brenda reacts to his invitation to the pub is felt because of a conflict between his obligation to engage in inclusive behaviours as an employee, but his personal desire to adopt exclusive behaviours to withdraw on a personal level. This translates into negative thoughts ("I don't know how", "I don't want", feeling "vulnerable" as he starts to get "worried"). Such conflicts set the context for periods of *cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957) as an individual tries to resolve contradictions in their social relationships.

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[62] FileRef: RV04, Para 69. John asks Andy not to divulge personal information to Harry because "he is not a man of the world". Andy believes that John is afraid of how Harry would react.

The Social Domain

In the theory developed below, I show the top-level classes of social behaviour (the desire for attention) and the top-level classes of economic behaviour (the desire for assistance). Initially, I arranged these in a hierarchical fashion. However, after additional reflection it seemed that the relationship is recursive and not hierarchical. Firstly, let us consider the progression of behaviours in the *social domain* (attention).

Access > Information > Emotion

At first glance, it appears reasonable to assume that access enables a person to acquire and use information, and that this leads to changes in emotional behaviours. However, we can also read the line from right to left. *Displaying an emotion gives information* and increases the *access* that the recipient has to the other's feelings. When emotion is displayed, one party is telling the other party something about the *state of the relationship*. It is better therefore, to conceptualise this domain with double-headed arrows.

The Economic Domain

Similarly, when providing assistance, we can read the top level concepts in either direction:

Intellectual < > Physical < > Material

Prior to providing physical assistance (making, meeting, organising), there must be prior thought. The development and provision of *intellectual* skills appears to come before their (physical) provision. Before *material assistance* can be provided, the agency of both *intellectual* and *physical assistance* is required. But as with the first example, we can read this line from right to left because *material assistance* (investment of money, time and resources) is required to acquire and develop *intellectual skills,* and their acquisition typically requires physical intervention (e.g. learners, teachers, consultants, academics!). Once acquired, the use of those *intellectual* skills also requires a *physical* infrastructure through which to communicate (the intellectual) or deliver (the physical) "product".

Integrating the Social and Economic Domains

With regard to the relationship between the two domains (social attention and economic assistance), I initially theorised that attention came before assistance. However, upon closer inspection, this too seems simplistic. Firstly, *assistance* can be used as a primary strategy for *getting attention*.

Secondly, as soon as assistance is offered, the giving party frequently receives reciprocal assistance or attention (i.e. "thanks" or a "return favour"). Giving and getting attention, therefore, is *both a prerequisite and by-product* of getting and giving assistance. Conversely, while giving and getting attention might appear to be undertaken for its own sake, in this dataset every friendship has an economic impact because as soon as access is gained assistance is forthcoming whether originally sought or not. It is hard to imagine a social relationship that does not result in one or both parties assisting each other in some way (making, paying, feeding). The more intimate the social relationship, the greater the economic impact. Therefore, while we can distinguish between social and economic actions, the two domains are recursive and interlinked.

Potential Impacts on Decision Making

But how does this influence the way we make decisions? I contend that increases in economic dependency *or* a desire for greater intimacy gives us an increased incentive to agree. For example, Ben's material dependency (pay) requires him to maintain access to Brenda (so that she will continue to employ him). The effects of this can be very subtle. Let me illustrate this with two fragments of data. Firstly, Ben explains in an e-mail to Hayley.

> *"During my job review I said how uncomfortable this made me feel initially, but I understood how/why the situation had been handled and felt that it had been handled well"*

His dependency and need for continued access to Brenda inclines him to be complimentary about the way Brenda and Diane handle the sacking of "Phil the temp". However he later adds:

> *"Custom Products needs to bring its equal ops attitude into the 21st Century, though. Brenda is so 1990s in her approach!"*

Although he initially depersonalises Brenda (by calling her Custom Products), Brenda has director level responsibility for the company's equal opportunity policy and he feels able to criticise her *to Hayley* with whom he wants to maintain a close relationship. Commonly such behaviour is characterised as "two-faced" – a more charitable explanation is that Ben's attitude to each party is contextual. He wants both relationships; one for exchange reasons, the other for communal reasons (Mills and Clark, 1982). This impacts on the way he talks about the relationship to different parties. But it also matters who he is talking to, his dependency on that person, and his desire to maintain that relationship. All these social factors are juggled together with the impact on any goals that are pending. Ben will not criticise Brenda to her face because of the need to maintain the relationship, but outside the workplace talking to friends who no longer work with him, he feels much freer to say what he thinks.

4.2 A Theory of Social Influence

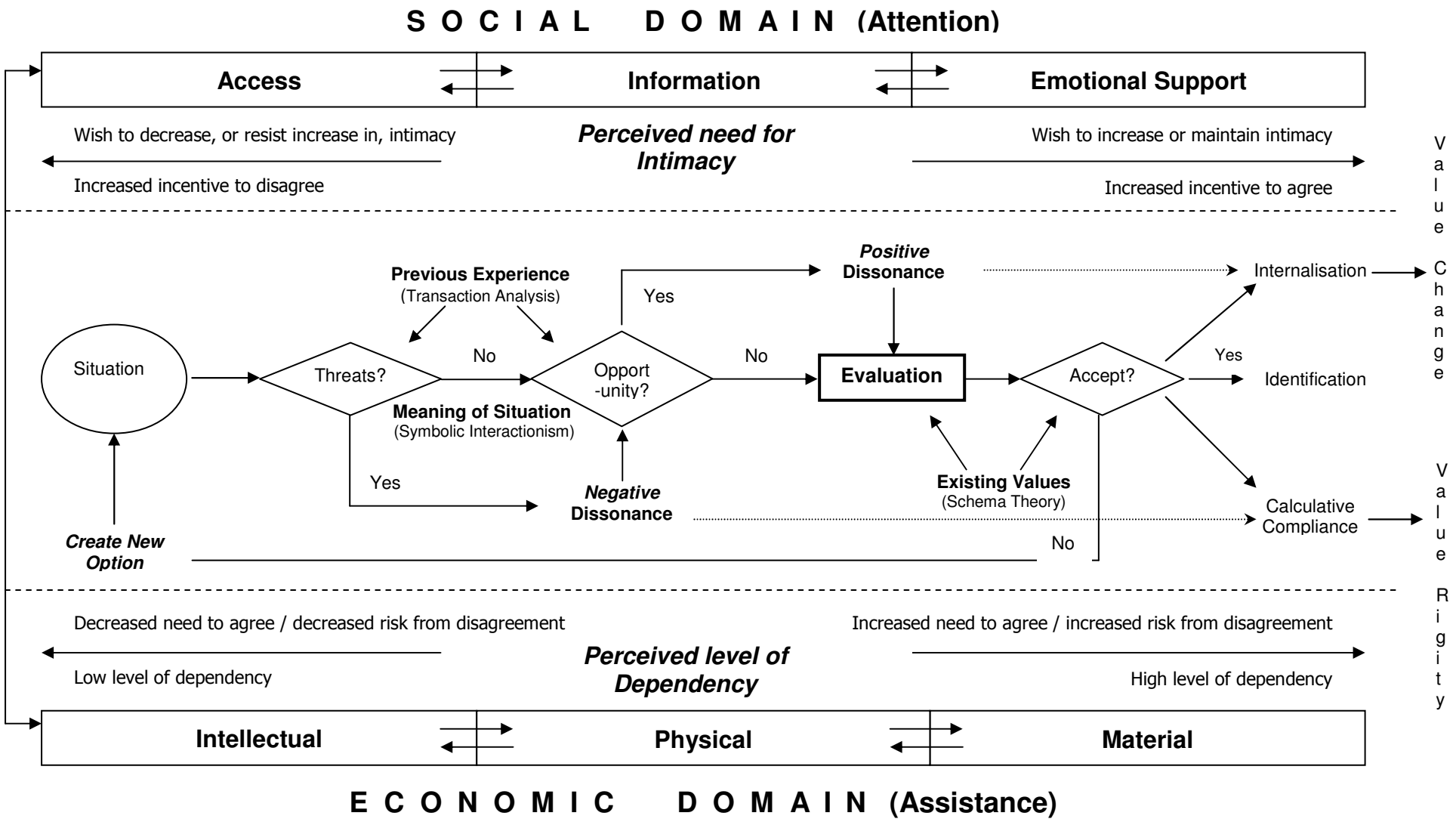
On the next page, I present *a theory of social influence*. This brings together the framework developed here (as an overarching social and economic environment in which decisions are made) and other theories relevant in the field of interpersonal behaviour. I argue that in a given situation we are influenced by economic dependencies and social aspirations in each relationship. The way we interpret a situation is influenced by our previous experience. Here, the TA theories of Berne (1964) are useful, particularly if we focus on the "parent" and "child" – which according to Berne contain "raw" experiences that have had their meanings updated by the "adult".

A threat only *feels* like a threat depending on our perception of a situation (Blumer, 1969; Weick, 1995). Given Weick's comments on the way we react emotionally to a changed environment, I have put the perception of threats before opportunities. In practice, I suspect, we evaluate multiple threats/opportunities concurrently – but the priority given to threat detection is an assumption that others can test. If either a threat or an opportunity is detected *cognitive dissonance* occurs (Festinger, 1957).

I distinguish between *negative* and *positive* dissonance, and *consonance*. In Festinger's original theory, he differentiates between consonance and dissonance. However, I contend that *consonance* and ***positive*** *dissonance* are different. Consonance implies that the meaning of a situation is in harmony with a person's current values. If this is the case, then no value changes would take place as a result of accepting a situation. However, if the situation presents an opportunity that is desired, but requires a change of values, the dissonance that occurs inclines a person to update their values in the process of accepting the situation (i.e. it is seen as easy to justify because of the perception of positive outcomes). The acceptance contributes to the *internalisation* of new values (Kelman, 1961).

Negative dissonance occurs where acceptance of a situation is perceived as a threat to the self. If the situation is accepted, perhaps for reasons of material dependency, or to maintain a desired relationship, the behaviour is *calculatively compliant*. In other words, the public behaviours differ substantially from a person's private thoughts (privately the person still thinks "I'm right, you're wrong").

Diagram 1 – Theory of Social Influence in Decision-Making



Whether there is positive dissonance, consonance, or negative dissonance an *evaluation* and decision needs to be made regarding *acceptance* of the situation. Here again, *transaction analysis* (Berne, 1965) or *schema theory* (Rumelhart, 1975) usefully describes the way that values impact on our decision-making. The outcome of acceptance is either *internalisation* through positive dissonance, *identification* through consonance, or *calculative compliance* through negative dissonance (see Kelman, 1961). Positive dissonance leads to value change while negative dissonance leads to value rigidity (Griseri, 1998). If the person does not accept the situation at all, they have the option of trying to change it. After making an intervention, the parties go through the process again until the situation is acceptable to them.

It is important to remember that *both* parties to a relationship go through this with regard to the *same* situation, and that the "situation" is usually a change in their shared social and physical environment. What if they cannot influence the situation sufficiently to make the outcome acceptable? If withdrawal is not possible (either not physically possible, or *perceived* as emotionally impossible) the impacts on a person's emotional and physical well-being may be considerable. If one party proceeds to withdraw, this may also have multiple impacts (both socially and economically) on both parties, with possible effects on their personal and shared social networks.

In order to test this theory, I now complete the story of Ben's relationships with Andy, Brenda, Diane and Harry. In doing so, the theory will be applied to offer new ways of looking at decision-making behaviour and to understand how "truths" are constructed to reflect different interests.

4.3 Authenticating the Theory with Further Data

In July, Ben reconciled with his wife and they start to attend counselling sessions together[63]. Harry, making a rare comment on his personal life, greets the news warmly:

> *Ben,*
>
> *That's great news. I must admit to having felt distressed at your predicament; made even worse (for me) whenever kids are involved. I wish you both well… My own marriage whilst deeply loving is far from straightforward. A change of mindset since having children has helped us both view our relationship from a different perspective. Now, irrespective of how angry or let down we might be feeling with one another,*

[63] E-mail Ben to Harry, 3rd July 2003.

> *separation is never discussed or even considered as an option. We've found that this approach does lead to disagreements being resolved with greater pragmatism.*
>
> *Let's get another 'social' in the diary.*[64]

Ben's relationships with Diane and Brenda settled into a new kind of equilibrium, and the working atmosphere became sufficiently jovial for Ben's sense of security to return[65]. Ben continued to meet Diane outside work for drinks, but tried to avoid social situations where he might be left alone with Brenda. This was sometimes difficult. Brenda once arranged a 'social' to take place after a team meeting. When Brenda suggests that just he and Diane have a meal out followed by drinks at her house, Ben suggests opening up a social to the whole department. Brenda intervenes to "keep it small" [66]. Brenda also invited Ben to stay at her house after a summer party. To Ben's relief, she withdraws the accommodation offer at the last minute[67].

Ben also deepened his relationships with Harry and John, socialising with John on a regular basis. They talked regularly about their marriages and over time their conversations became intimate.

> *(E-mail Ben to John, 25th July 2003) I could feel myself relaxing and coming out (being myself) and I realised how much I now value your friendship. I appreciate that the things you shared with me were very private - and I'm glad that you are starting to feel you know the direction you want to take your life.* [68]

The legacy of Ben's period of vulnerability, however, left him feeling that "Custom Products needs to bring its equal ops attitude into the 21st Century"[69]. It took him many months to feel ready to raise equal opportunity issues again, but by January 2004 he felt ready to do so:

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64 FileRef: RV03, para 126. See also FileRef: CP Email 2003, Para 2691. Harry's and Brenda's reluctance to discuss their love lives **regularly** with anyone is a "finding", in my view. Diane/Brenda do discuss Brenda's love life, but Brenda does not discuss it with Ben.

65 FileRef: JN3, para 117. Ben remarks that he felt more accepted by Brenda/Diane and able to make a "big contribution". At para 125, Ben comments on the large amount of laughter in their departmental meetings.

66 FileRef: JN3, para 123.

67 FileRef: CP2003, Brenda to Ben, 4th September 2003. Brenda says "my offer to accommodate you has fallen through and Diane has kindly offered to take good care of you". At para 3178, Ben remarks "I was always a bit on edge at the prospect of staying over at Brenda's … so this change was something of a relief."

68 FileRef: CP 2003, Para 2759. John later initiated divorce proceedings and started a new relationship with someone outside work.

> *(Ben to Diane, 19th Jan 2004) Was my domestic situation discussed at board/manager level? The reason I ask is there was an incident in the canteen where you said to me "You won't find love here". It seemed to me at the time like a warning.*[70]

This prompted an exchange between Diane and Ben as follows:

> *(Diane to Ben, 20th Jan 2004) My comment on your not finding love here was because I felt you were making a conscious effort to seek out a relationship and I was worried about the possibility of your privileged access to files being used in an inappropriate way. When I said that people were asking about you it was in a general way, as people do when there is a new person around. A small group of people, male female and a mixed age group, were just curious to know more about you ie. your age, marital status and did you have any family. If I have misled you in any way I apologise for that. I hope you can forgive me.*
>
> *I'll give you a call and we can mull over this more than is possible in an e-mail. Thanks for the lovely Christmas card.*[71]

This account is substantially different from the story told by Ben at the time. In his account, Diane made comments repeatedly during his marriage break-up and the context suggested to him (and Diane confirmed this later) that *women* in particular had been asking about him.

> *(E-mail, Ben to Diane,22nd January 2004) Some people made me feel nervous, and there were others whose interest I liked. I wanted to choose my response from a position of knowledge - that was all. …I think I was looking for an intimate friendship, rather than a (sexual) relationship - certainly I have always found most comfort talking to close female friends and wanted more at that time.… There was one person I particularly liked (who I thought was showing interest in me) so I did drop a private note to them but they did not respond and I did not pursue it.*
>
> *I feel closer to you than anyone else at work - you are my best friend. So, I don't think there is anything to forgive - you were rushed off your feet with recruitment at the time!! Would you like to meet for a drink soon?* [72]

Ben and Diane had a drink and discussed their mutual concerns.

> *Diane and I parted, I think, on good terms. It is very difficult to divide the work sphere and the personal sphere. I did talk to her about my reasons for inviting Carol for a drink and that was quite painful, because it touches back on how I felt in my marriage. So I did get quite emotional. I also explained that I had later written to Carol to explain the circumstances, and that I had now reconciled. I just thanked her for making me feel better at the time.*
>
> *I now feel pushed into a situation where I have to explain this to Brenda and she is going to jump to conclusions about my motives and actions and be judgmental. So I do not feel particularly good. I am also concerned that it may spill over into the home.*[73]

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69 FileRef: RV01, Paras 69-76, E-mail from Ben to Hayley, 10th July 2003

70 FileRef: CP2004, Para 216

71 FileRef: CP2004, Para 238, 242

72 FileRef: CP2004, Para 279-283, 299-304

73 FileRef: JN3, para 938

Earlier the same day Brenda called Ben into a meeting to raise her concerns over his drink invitation to Carol. Ben was sufficiently distressed afterwards to meet Andy and discuss it with him at length:

> *Brenda claims that Diane was sufficiently upset for her to ask why Diane was feeling down, and this resulted in Diane showing her some of the emails I sent. I was absolutely mortified that Diane had shared this because she is the only person I have confided in (apart from you) and I'd asked her to keep these confidential. Brenda started questioning my professionalism saying she may need to raise this with Harry*[74]*. The thought just fills me with dread. Anyway, we left it there. I was having a drink with Diane anyway so we left it that I would get back to Brenda. I called Hayley and chatted to her for quite a while. She thinks Brenda may be jealous, and feels rejected or hurt or whatever. The thought had occurred to me as well.* [75]
>
> *When I was out for a drink with Diane, she tried to communicate to me that I should not trust her too much, or think too highly of her. I think she was telling me in a subtle way that she's not been entirely truthful and that if I say anything to her, she is duty bound to repeat it to Brenda. If she starts withholding things from Brenda, her own position will be adversely affected. I put a very high value on my relationship with Diane so I won't push this. I called her twice at home the night this all blew up, but she was still at work (until about 10pm). I am genuinely concerned for her. I feel she was pressured into revealing a confidence - something that will probably cause her a great deal of stress. I am concerned that she could have been bullied.* [76]

Thereafter, Andy and Ben decided to stay in close contact and started to call each other on a daily basis. Ben decided to write to Brenda at length about the issues she had raised[77] and made clear that he felt Brenda's intervention into such sensitive matters might make the situation worse.

> *My own view is that managers should not seek to intervene into the private lives of staff unless it is affecting the work environment adversely (and even then with great sensitivity and care for the individuals involved). No amount of 'management' will stop people making relationships at work and I feel that attempts to do so will usually be seen as unjustified interference and be far more damaging to the workplace than a 'live and let live' attitude.*[78]

Brenda replied as follows:

> *Ben,*
>
> *I appreciate your response, which you really didn't need to share such personal issues with me, as that certainly wasn't my intention. Your response does illustrate the difficulties of separating personal and professional issues, which I can fully appreciate was even less clear for you during that time…..Surely this confirms how personal and professional boundaries had been crossed in your role here?*
>
> *I don't feel that there needs to be any further analysis of this. What is required from you Ben, is an acknowledgement that considering your role, you did over-step the mark professionally on the occasion with*

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74 FileRef: JN3, 938. Ben claims that Brenda "just jumped in with Jackboots" *before* she enquired into Ben's motives or sought any explanation for his behaviour.

75 FileRef: JN3, Para 938, 941-942

76 FileRef: RV04, para 118

77 FileRef: CP2004, Ben to Brenda, 4th Feb 2004.

78 FileRef: CP2004, 6th Feb 2004, para 824

> *Carol and you recognise this for the future. We all have to take responsibility for our actions and this is no exception. Hopefully upon your acknowledgement, we can draw a line under this, but if you feel that I am being in any way unfair, then we shall discuss further how to progress this serious matter.*
>
> *Just to acknowledge your comments regarding relationships in the workplace. I am not sure that you fully understand my views or in fact the company's views, as we don't actively discourage relationships forming at work - but that could be a discussion we have another time.*[79]

Brenda's views here are substantially different from the way Ben reported her comments during his job appraisal many months earlier when she expressed the view that flirting always leads to "trouble" and discouraged Ben from behaving in this way[80]. John also reported that Brenda discouraged him from having workplace relationships, even with people based in other offices[81]. She also appears to have forgotten her acceptance of some of Ben's drink invitations[82], her invitation for him to have an all night whiskey-drinking session with Diane[83], her attempt to organise an intimate drinks party at her house[84], and her invitation for him to stay overnight after a party [85].

After discussions with his wife, Ben felt that he should challenge Brenda's views because of the apparent hypocrisy:

> *A "serious matter"? What is materially different from the invitation I sent to Carol and the invitation I sent to you? Are you saying that because of my role, that I cannot choose who I have drinks with? The question that keeps going through my mind is why are you making an issue of this? This incident, in particular, seems fabricated to make an issue out of nothing. I don't like that.* [86]

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79 FileRef: CP2004, 6th Feb 2004

80 FileRef: RV01, para 75. Ben says in an e-mail to Hayley "Brenda commented that this type of behaviour typically led to "trouble" and was particularly inappropriate for "senior" staff. I was being told to be more careful in the future, close to a warning I felt."

81 FileRef: JN2, Paras 203-204

82 FileRef: JN2, Para 1470, 1505-1507, see also RV01, Para 53.

83 FileRef: CP Email 2005, para 1297. Brenda says in an e-mail to Ben/Diane on 6th April 2003: "It was probably a very wise move not to continue the social event beyond the taxi - well done Diane for that intervention!"

84 FileRef: JN3, para 123.

85 FileRef: CP2003, Brenda to Ben, 4th September 2003. Brenda says "my offer to accommodate you has fallen through and [Diane] has kindly offered to take good care of you".

86 FileRef: CP2004, Para 866-883

Ben had a further meeting with Andy. Andy had once been elected to lead a sexual harassment investigation. He described the process adopted together with an external consultant's advice on how to investigate harassment and counsel people who experience it. Ben maintained a diary from that point on and copied his e-mails to Diane.

During the meeting that sparked off the conflict, Ben claims that Brenda questioned the morality of his drink invitation to Carol on account of his married status. She also queried the way he had made the invitation (using a 'private note'). Ben responded that the 'note' was the most appropriate way to invite Carol as she was working evening shifts and was not on e-mail. He felt that his drink invitations were a private matter and added that he had also sent a card to Andy to invite him for a drink. Ben claims that his behaviour towards men and women was identical, but Brenda kept insisting this case was "different"[87]. As a result, Ben wrote the following:

> *…I regard your attitude as sexist in saying that I can socialise with men of my choosing, but not with women of my choosing. You raised issues in a judgemental way, with no prior knowledge of what really happened, or what my real motives were. You made little attempt to understand, and you were unnecessarily insensitive in the way you questioned me. The way you commented that Harry might have to be informed was interpreted by me as a threat to "behave or else". This is bullying behaviour.*
>
> *I have spent a lifetime working to eliminate adversarial management practice and conduct relationships on the basis of equality. That means that you are as accountable to me for your behaviour as I am to you. I have explained myself to you, so I would now like you to explain yourself to me. We can keep the dialogue going until we both understand, then let the matter drop. This is now a matter of principle to me - that I am free to choose my own friends. I will not compromise on such a matter. I think any embarrassment I might feel is insignificant compared to the protection of such a principle.*[88]

In the week that followed both Diane and Ben were deeply affected. It was not possible to establish the full impact on Diane because Harry intervened to protect her. Ben was unable to sleep properly and lost 9lbs in weight (4 kilos)[89].

The theory of social influence outlined earlier would predict that each party's decisions would be influenced by economic dependencies, the desire to maintain relationships, past experiences and value systems. The "truth" would be constructed in accordance with the way each party

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87 JN3, Para 937.

88 FileRef: CP Emails, Ben to Brenda, 8th Feb 2004, para 941-943

89 FileRef: JN3, para 962. Ben reports to Andy "I do not think I have got more than ten hours sleep in the last five days. I have lost 9 pounds. Every single waking moment that I am not busy in a task that I have to do, my mind is just working overtime and overtime and overtime trying to work out what is going on."

perceived their interests, and they may attribute "errors" to those who challenge their version of the truth. In the passages below, the reconfiguration of the group starts to take place when Brenda rejects dialogue:

Brenda: *"How are you?"*

Ben: *"Not good, I'm afraid."*

Brenda: *"Ben, I'd like to get Harry involved. Do you consent to that?"*

Ben: "*I would rather you explained your behaviour in an e-mail as I've done to you. Can you do it in writing?*

Brenda: "*Well, I'd rather get Harry involved. Do you not want that?"*

Ben: "*I think it may not be in your interests Brenda, but if you'd like to do that then I guess I would consent to it."*

Brenda: *"What do you mean that it may not be in my interests?"*

Ben: *"I think I'd rather not elaborate."*

Brenda: *"I don't understand."*

Ben: *"I think I may have hurt your feelings and that this is driving your behaviour."*

There was a short silence, then Brenda confirms that she still wants to involve Harry. They discuss how Ben will get copies of e-mails to Harry. Ben wants to deliver them personally, but Brenda says she cannot give him Harry's home phone number.

Brenda: *"I'll get him to call you, can't you just e-mail it too him?"*

Ben: *"I want to put it all together in chronological order. He needs to see correspondence between myself and Diane to make sense of correspondence between you and me."* [90]

Within the hour Harry called Ben. Ben reports that the conversation was awkward as Harry has to go out. Eventually he agreed to e-mail the correspondence. Later that night, Harry called again and Ben immediately sensed there had been extensive dialogue between Harry and Brenda.

Harry: "*Ben, I don't see how she could do anything else."*

Ben: *"This is ludicrous, this is the most ludicrous thing I've ever been through."*

Harry "*Ben, I think you need to look inside yourself a bit."*

Ben's notes say that he found Harry's remark inflammatory because he felt Harry was prejudging him. The consequence was that "unspoken words started to rattle around in [Ben's] head" and he got angry[91].

[90] FileRef: RV04, paras 179-198. Ben followed Andy's advice to record all conversations. This conversation is a transcript of notes made by Ben's wife during the conversation. Ben filled in Brenda's side of the conversation.

Ben: *"You are stereotyping me and she's portraying me as a philandering husband. That is just not true"*

Harry: *"But Ben, you say that you find her attractive and that you wanted an intimate…."*

Ben: *"That does not mean that I wanted anything other than friendship…Besides, this was all 10-months ago."*

Harry: *"That just your interpretation…what about…"*

Ben: *"Of course it's interpretation. What else is there but interpretation? Harry, when I was separated I had to put up with all sorts of attention that I did not want. I just wanted to sort things out at home and make sure my kids were okay."* [92]

The conversation ended in some acrimony, with Ben's wife also shouting comments about Brenda's behaviour. Harry did not respond further and called a meeting to interview both Ben and Brenda[93]. Accounts of this meeting vary widely, and are contested, but the outcome was that Ben was disciplined, informed that he must be more sensitive, should drop the issue and "move on"[94].
It transpired that Brenda had informed Harry much earlier (at the time she received the e-mails from Diane) and had been taking Harry's counsel throughout. As Harry later wrote to Ben:

> *I am not in a position to question your explanation of how the meeting between the Brenda and yourself made you feel; only you can describe your own feelings. I can however question your assessment of Brenda's motives in raising the Carol issue with you. You should recall from earlier discussions around this topic that Brenda only raised the issue with you following consultation with myself (after she had been made aware via Diane). This fact does not fit at all comfortably with your view of 'a woman scorned bent on a revenge mission'.*[95]

Harry does not consider the possibility that Brenda may be using him to discipline Ben (much as a child might use their parent to discipline a brother or sister).

After the investigation, Ben and Brenda returned to work as normal. However, when Ben finds that another member of his team (a woman) has started a relationship with a man inside the company, and

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91 FileRef: JN3, para 972. Ben says "I can't help but be very disappointed that he accepted Brenda's point of view, applying the same stereotypes that she had applied. When he did that, I got quite angry and proceeded to put across a robust defence of myself. My defensiveness was quite great at that time. I was both disappointed and angry with him."

92 FileRef: RV04, paras 200-209. (see footnote 81).

93 John minuted this meeting.

94 FileRef: RV01. This document, written by Andy, details the dilemmas and difficulties regarding Ben's ability to "move on".

95 FileRef: CP2004, Harry to Ben, 14th June 2004. para 3384.

that Harry had been aware of this *before* the meeting with himself and Brenda[96], Ben raises the issue with Harry during a social event.

> *When I raised this with Harry he did not want to talk about it. He came out with phases like "I think you have lost the plot, Ben", "I have deep concerns about your judgement", "You are digging yourself even deeper in a hole", "If you can't see the difference in your situation, then you're losing it completely".* [97]

Ben had further discussions with his wife and another meeting with Andy. Andy recommended that Ben should write out an account of his experiences and reflect on them. Ben did this, comparing his own conflict with others inside the company that showed similar patterns. In this account, Ben characterises the behaviour he found objectionable in the following terms:

> *The attack was not physical; it was psychological. The invasion into my private life, forcing me to relive and open up events that took place when I was separated from my wife (putting my marriage at risk again), and making me account for my sexual attitudes and behaviour (a drink invitation?) felt like "psychological rape".*

Despite the strong imagery, the account finishes on a conciliatory note:

> *Complete forgiveness requires mutual understanding - there is no other way. Any progress depends on both parties acknowledging each other's experience, fears and mistakes. We are still nowhere near achieving this but I will keep trying. If understanding can be achieved, we will have made a quantum leap towards…developing strategies to avoid this in the future.* [98]

Originally intended for his own diary, Ben received an e-mail in which Harry again expresses disappointment over the way he believes Ben is misrepresenting events and asks him to consider his conscience[99]. As Ben had reflected at great length, he sent his diary account to Harry, Diane and John, as well as colleagues outside the management group who had given him emotional support. He also gave permission for his views to be discussed with others if thought appropriate[100]. Ben's paper, however, angered Harry even further:

> *How can you justify your claims? Are you now dismissing the process that we painstakingly went through? Have you forgotten the criticism made regarding Brenda's handling of the dispute? What motivation would I have, to offer blind support to someone if they were acting so blatantly against the best interests of the organisation? If I took such a narrow perspective, how would I maintain the levels of support within the company?*

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96 FileRef: JN3, para 977.

97 FileRef: RV04, para 63

98 FileRef: CP2004, Para 2869, 2877

99 FileRef: CP2004, Para 2807, e-mail from Harry to Ben dated 6th May 04

100 FileRef: CP2004, para 2869.

> *As a result of your recent disclosures I now feel that you have destroyed any remnants of trust that existed in our relationship. How can you possibly justify circulating your flawed account in the knowledge that it presents such an incomplete interpretation of events? The only conclusion I can reach in questioning your motives for taking this course of action is that you were attempting to bolster your increasingly untenable position in respect of your allegations against Brenda.*
>
> *I question your preparedness to truly listen to and take on board views that are in conflict with your own version of events. While you claim to do this, there appears to be very little movement on your part, even in the face of contrary evidence and opinions expressed by others. John's suggestion that you "rationalised" events to justify your own thoughts and actions seem well validated.*
>
> *Your actions have now resulted in a serious escalation of an issue that we had attempted to deal with in a calm and responsible manner. Your decision now gives me no option but to communicate the status of the situation more widely.*[101]

It may also be the case that **Harry** is rationalising events to justify his own thoughts and actions. Harry's "preparedness to truly listen" needs to be questioned as well. When Andy called Ben's colleagues to find out their views on the paper, a different picture emerged:

Andy:	*What are your general impressions of the paper? Is the paper an accurate and fair representation of the culture?*
Informant 1:	*It is so true. Although people don't want to admit it's true, it is. The culture will work with certain groups of people, but the majority are "playing the game". They are saying only what [the directors] want to hear and it is widespread that "you keep your mouth shut as you know what it's like here". Don't get me wrong, there is a lot of good here and I love my job, it's just the crap that goes with it that sucks.*
Informant 2:	*What can I say? I thought it was brilliant and hit the nail on the head, but, and it is a big but, I think that the way it will be received is as follows. None of them can do anything wrong or be thought of as flawed. Someone who criticises to this degree must be barking and that person's stability must be questioned.*
Informant 3:	*I feel that Ben captured very successfully the essence of the company and I was pleasantly surprised.*
Informant 4:	*Everything I understood I agree with. I can't see anything unfair. This document is enlightening in so many ways.*[102]

Andy's access to Ben was compromised when he started to feedback these issues to Harry because he worked out that Andy had been in contact with staff members throughout the dispute. His response was to claim that Andy was exaggerating:

> *You exaggerate the relevance of the views expressed by a very small group of disaffected individuals … in order to support your own interpretations.*[103]

Andy, however, reported the following to Tim (at XYZ):

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[101] FileRef: CP2004, paras 3412, 3432-3434, 3442

[102] FileRef: CP2004, para 3208, 3237. The comments come from telephone interviews and e-mails collected by Andy in late April/May 2004. The informants requested anonymity.

[103] FileRef: CP2004, para 3446

> *The people that became informants were random in the sense that it was a matter of chance that Ben fell into conversation with them…They became informants because they were sensitive and supportive of his unhappiness (a positive aspect of the culture). They probed for some time before feeling comfortable sharing their own experiences – once these started to come out it was hard to stop them. The people I talked to were generally enthusiastic about their jobs (and wanted to stay for that reason) and they were comfortable within their own peer groups. It was their conflicts with directors that left lasting memories and a legacy of caution and fear.*[104]

When Andy would not retract or substantially modify his findings, Harry terminated the contract with XYZ Consultants and all contact between Ben and Andy ceased. Before contact was broken, Andy managed to find out from Ben what happened after the interview with Harry:

> *Ben claims he was pulled to one side and told his behaviour was "unprofessional". He was asked not to date anyone in the company. Ben said that this was unreasonable – that what he did in his own time was his own business. He was then told that he would not go anywhere in the company if he dated people – basically the message was "if you have relationships with people here, you are not going to get promoted." It is absolutely hypocritical. Just look at [a director] who married his subordinate after a workplace affair. She later became a director.*[105]

Ben later copied private correspondence (between himself and an Internet friend) so that Andy could understand how he saw the events in retrospect:

> *You know how I felt through that difficult period so I think you will believe me when I say that I was not sure what I wanted, but that my principle concern was to establish new stable friendships with both women and men that I liked and trusted. They would not accept this. Because I was honest enough to admit an attraction, they maintained that I was seeking a sexual relationship.*
>
> *It has been difficult, but I have to be philosophical. It is the hypocrisy that gets me; the hypocrisy of a person I went out for drinks with, who tried to flirt with me, later objecting to my inviting someone else out; the hypocrisy of a director who had an affair with an employee…taking the moral high ground [over a drink invitation]; the hypocrisy of another [director] who I'd told about this drink invitation, saying nothing while others sat in moral judgement and encouraged me to admit I'd 'screwed up'. Such is life. This is the tabloid reality.*
>
> *Do I sound angry? A bit. But mostly I feel sad because I made good friends (I thought) and those friends no longer trust me. I miss them.*[106]

Ben accepted that he would make no headway inside the company and started looking for another job[107]. His relationships with Harry, John, Brenda and Diane collapsed and he moved to another department and successfully formed new relationships. Diane, who Ben had described a few months earlier as his "best friend", rejected him completely and returned the gifts he had bought her. When Ben e-mailed his paper to Diane in a last attempt to get the issues discussed, she responded:

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104 FileRef: CP2004, para 3671

105 FileRef: JN3, para 979

106 FileRef: CP2004, para 3586-3592. E-mail from Ben to an internet friend on 12th August 2004.

107 FileRef: CP2004, para 979

> *I have always been open and honest, and as I would with any of my colleagues, I have offered you moral support when you needed it. There are, however, areas of my role that I have not felt that it was either appropriate or correct to discuss with you due to the confidential nature of my work within the bound of the Data Protection Act. As a result of this you appear to have taken a very biased and one-sided approach.*
>
> *I find your actions towards me harassing and imposing on my personal privacy and would ask you to withdraw from making any further contact with me either at work or at home.*[108]

This was the last communication (in a personal capacity) between them. To conclude this section, I draw attention to the plurality of views both about Ben's situation, and the way managers and workers view the process of conflict resolution. There is no consensus at all, and it is to this point that I now direct discussion.

5. Discussion

Hearn and Parkin's (1987:126) comments are particularly apt in this case:

> *The truth value of such events is not an issue. As in psychoanalysis and symbolic interactionism, if an event appears real, it is real in its consequences. Gossip, rumour, as well as the telling of scandals, may often tell more about the teller of the gossip or their organisational context than the object of the gossip.*

Each party's construction of the "truth" is oriented towards the maintenance of an existing social network. Every party, at some point, make claims that are inconsistent with Ben's original account – even Ben himself. However, Ben's account was made at the time the events were taking place when all the parties were good friends. This raises substantial questions over the accuracy and authenticity of accounts given later.

5.1 Critical Reflections on the Actors' Accounts

Diane presents her earlier comments about "Ben's admirers" in a way that suggests Ben misinterpreted them. Ben's account, however, was contemporaneous, retold to Andy, and witnessed by Hayley and Brenda. This raises the possibility that Diane had a good reason for reconstructing her original comments to give them a new interpretation. Certainly she has an incentive to do so, because her position within the company requires her to be extremely discrete. As she recognises herself – indiscretion can lead to prosecution under the Data Protection Act, and she may be afraid of such an outcome.

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[108] FileRef: ST-P1, Document 22

Her discretion regarding women's comments towards Ben can be contrasted with her indiscretion regarding Ben's e-mails. These were sent in confidence[109] but were shown to the one person that Ben requested Diane should not show them to. This suggests that the Data Protection Act is not the real reason Diane does not wish to divulge information to Ben, and is being used by her as a 'legitimate' excuse to avoid being 'open and honest'.

There are several ways to interpret this. Firstly, Diane needed to maintain her relationship with Brenda. Her dependence on Brenda (or wish to maintain friendship) is so great that in this context the Data Protection Act is meaningless. Alternatively, we can interpret this incident from the gendered perspective that we are socialised to protect women (Farrell, 1994). Diane behaves in ways that protect women but leave men vulnerable. She gives personal information to women who ask about Ben so that they can decide whether to approach him. At the same time, she will not give Ben similar information so that he can make an informed choice. Lastly, there is the simplest explanation. At the time, Diane was enjoying Ben's attention so much that she did not want it to be diverted elsewhere. Her motivation may have been less to do with the protection of other women than to keep Ben's attention while hiding her feelings for him. Diane's claim that she is always 'open and honest' is misleading. She is selectively open, honest, secretive and dishonest depending on her interpretation of whose interests will prevail, and whose interests she feels she must serve.

Brenda represents Ben's behaviour as "unprofessional" because of the sensitivity of his position and personal circumstances. Despite a series of attempts to arrange intimate meetings with him that could be regarded as "unprofessional" in their own right, she criticises his behaviour while denying motives of personal jealousy or office politics. Had Ben not been so willing to protect her from criticism for so long[110], then the outcomes here might have been quite different. If he had challenged her behaviour when it first occurred the situation may also have unfolded quite differently. Brenda gives no credible account of her motives and simply claims that she had "no choice" but to act on the information given to her by Diane in accordance with Harry's direction. Seeking information

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[109] FileRef: CP2004, Ben to Diane, 19th Jan 2004, para 214. Ben **specifically requests** confidentiality when he says "…can I ask you not to discuss this with Brenda yet.."

[110] FileRef: RV01, Para 184. See particularly RV03, para 124. In Ben's paper on conflict handling Ben states "I still want to protect Brenda until I can communicate a more sympathetic understanding of the nature of sexual harassment and how it might be handled more effectively."

exchanged in confidence, not to mention the way it was passed to Harry and acted upon, not only continues to raise questions about Brenda's motives, but also puts into context her views about moral and "appropriate" behaviour.

Ben offers Harry access to personal correspondence to corroborate his account[111] but Harry chooses to accept Brenda's and Diane's recollections over Ben's contemporaneous letters. Why would Harry do this? There are a number of possible explanations that I review here. Firstly, it is possible that the ramifications and consequences of accepting Ben's account were so alarming that he could not bring himself to investigate properly. Maybe Ben's account of the meeting with Brenda caused Harry such *cognitive dissonance* (Festinger, 1957) that he simply could not accept that women are equally responsible for sexist and sexual behaviour at work.

There are others ways to look at this, however. We can see Harry's behaviour as patriarchal. In all instances (even if he criticises women) he still believes women's accounts and disbelieves men's[112]. His behaviour is underpinned, perhaps, by a desire to protect women in order to win their approval. Ben – in expecting relationships to be based on equal responsibility and accountability - has violated the "deep structure" that both sexes should protect the female (Farrell, 1994). Harry, therefore, may be reacting on the basis of a prejudice about how men should behave towards women, and acts reflexively to protect the women from Ben. This results in him selecting only those comments made by Ben that support his interpretation and also provides an incentive to characterise Ben's behaviour as "inappropriate".

But does this constitute *patriarchy*? I am unconvinced. This claim rests on an assessment that men's interests are being served. Whose interests are served by Harry's dominant behaviour? It is questionable whether Harry's or Ben's long-term interests are being served here[113], and we can regard Harry as serving Brenda's interest more than his own. The speed with which Brenda invoked Harry's support when Ben asked for dialogue – and the way she sought at the earliest opportunity to

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111 FileRef: CP2004, Ben to Harry, 9th Feb 2004. Ben offered access again during the meeting with Harry and Brenda, but Harry declined.

112 FileRef: JN3, para 297. This was true also in the case of "Phil the temp" when he was sacked. An appeal was made to Harry, but Harry backed Brenda and Diane.

113 FileRef: CP2004, Para 1008. Ben says to Harry that he believes Brenda wants to create divisions between them.

check she had Harry's support for her intended course of action – can be seen as an expression of *matriarchal* power. Once Harry had given his support, it was difficult for him to withdraw it without undermining her authority and damaging his relationship with her.

Even as Harry criticises Brenda for her "handling" of the situation, he nevertheless does her bidding and fights her battle for her. This is at *her* instigation not his, and from the conversation between Brenda and Ben, it is clear that she actively sought Harry's intervention. It is, therefore, not clear that this event should be interpreted as an example of patriarchy.

Finally, we can view this as an outcome of the thread/bonding processes described in Section 3. Bonds have been established and built up through repeated patterns of behaviour. The implicit psychological contract (in both cases) is "I will protect you if you are *loyal* to me". Harry, Brenda and Diane all have mutual dependencies if they wish to keep the contract and protect their social positions. Their wish to keep the arrangements drive their decision-making and a version of the "truth" is constructed between them that enables them to marginalize Ben.

The issue here is whether mutual loyalty resulted in distortion of the events that took place and obscured the truth. As Kunda (1992:225) argues, "culture management" techniques create an environment where people are

> *…driven to strategically design an organizational self governed by the standards of corporate profitability and its rewards, such people lack … a moral framework that would enable them to evaluate corporate activities…*

The primacy of mutual loyalty as an organisational value may have undermined the various parties' ability to reflect honestly on their roles. As loyalty replaced honesty as the primary value in the culture, so the capacity of individuals to behave morally begins to collapse and the truth becomes secondary.

Ben's version of the truth can also be challenged. He is seen to act to protect his family and network of friends both *inside* and *outside* the workplace. Because he did not place his loyalties to his departmental colleague above all others, he was rejected by them. His version of the truth was driven by the "protection of principle" – in this case equal treatment – and loyalty was not a value he would keep at any price. Even so, at the time of the dispute, the rebuilding of his marriage and the protection of his family appears to have been particularly important to him, and we should note that he did not pursue these questions when his home life was in disarray. He may have wanted to distance himself from Diane, Brenda and Harry in order to prioritise other relationships.

His account, however, has fewer contradictions than others. Firstly, he knowingly acts against his own social and material interests (particularly when short-term outcomes are considered) and does not appear to seek conflict until Brenda characterises his behaviour as a "serious matter" [114]. Secondly, as Andy recorded much of Ben's account **8-10 months** earlier when the parties were good friends, it remains more credible. This paper is based on Andy's contemporaneous records, not Ben's reconstructed memories. While it might be easy to question Ben's account if it were a recollection, it is harder to question it when many of the conversations and interviews are verbatim accounts that were recorded at the time events took place.

We can, however, still see Ben making minor distortions. He appears to down play the significance of the card to Carol (calling it a 'private note') when Brenda starts to question his behaviour. While he admits an attraction, a drink invitation, and enjoyment at flirting, he may have concealed the extent of his attraction. I pressed him on this later and he commented that:

> *I volunteered a good deal more than I needed to, and did so to help people understand. However, it soon became clear that being open and honest got me more and more criticism. I downplayed the significance of the card, and my sexual attraction to Carol, because I'd seen Phil the temp sacked for complimenting women. I was terrified of the possible outcome if I did not handle things well. The culture of the company is to be open and honest, and I was as open and honest as I felt I could be. I also wanted to explain everything to my wife first - before I gave a full account to my work colleagues. My wife sometimes reacted badly when I received attention at work – even when we were separated - and I did not want to send her back into the arms of her former lover. We'd spent months working through the issues in our marriage and this could have completely ruined everything we'd worked for. These events took place months before our reconciliation. To raise them long afterward – in a completely different context - seemed malicious.* [115]
>
> *Between you and me..... I did find the person I invited out both attractive and interesting. She was being nosey about my work, was suspicious of managers, and sometimes looked at me like she wanted to eat me (or perhaps this was my wish - who knows?) Whatever, it felt that way at the time. You remember my 'single' period, trying to get a handle on things, reorganise my life, choose a new set of friends so I thought "this is someone I don't mind spending time with....". But she did not respond and I didn't push it.* [116]

Ben maintains, therefore, that he simply responded to Carol with an 'open mind' and had no specific agenda or strong interest.

Having examined these dynamics at Custom Products in detail, I now proceed with further verification using a second case.

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[114] FileRef: CP2004, para 1076. Ben states: "I am going through personal as well as professional pain by taking this course of action and would not be prepared to do so unless I had very good reason."

[115] FileRef: OTH, para 30.

[116] FileRef: CP2004, para 3594

Final Authentication – a Second Case

These findings and theoretical ideas were tested in formal interviews and open discussions with members of SoftContact (International) Ltd. A single passage below, in which SoftContact members Pauline and Andy converse about the changing dynamics at work, capture the behaviours in the second case, and illustrate that the dynamics at Custom Products are not unique[117].

Andy: *Gayle came in very upset once after breaking up with her boyfriend. At that time she used to come in at the weekend quite often, sometimes on her own, sometimes when Neil and I worked. She'd been out drinking with an old friend, made a pass at him and he'd rejected her. I felt sorry for her so I wrote a funny poem to cheer her up. But yes, I did like her too.*

Pauline: *There was a lot of banter sometimes.*

Andy: *Yes, particularly early on – Simon used to try to flirt with Gayle a lot, but that seemed to change after she went to London with him. She felt he undermined her - she talked to me afterwards.*

Pauline: *Banter makes the office a pleasant place to be.*

Andy: *What is it about, though?*

Pauline: *It's not always about getting into bed. It makes the workplace tolerable and fun if people are sensible. I do it purely for the sport.*

Andy: *The humour was fine. I remember once that I made a comment about Gayle to Simon and he took real offence. The thing is I only made the comment to try to fit in. He was always making comments about Gayle, but when I did, he thought I shouldn't because I'm the boss. It was alright for him, but not alright for "the boss". What about you (Pauline)? Did you ever feel that Simon was pursuing you?*

Pauline: *I'm not sure. He had a borish attitude. He got on my nerves. There was this nationalism thing and I felt he had a backward attitude towards women, was even a bit racist? It was hypocritical. Gayle wasn't much better. I remember she once walked into the office and complained, "why are there no good looking blokes around here?" You (Andy) quickly interjected "present company excepted". I don't think she realised how offensive she sounded at times.*

Andy: *And she had a boyfriend at the time, I think. Simon was looking for a partner. I think that was why he was so keen to take on Gayle. Initially he used to flirt a lot with her, but she would put him down. She felt in control so I left her to it. Anyway, I think he saw Gayle growing closer to me and got jealous*[118]*. He just gave up and psychologically withdrew. He met Rebecca*[119] *and that was it - he just wanted out.*

Pauline: *Simon talked about you behind your back often. Did [your relationship with Gayle] cause problems in your marriage?*

Andy: *Yes - often, particularly after the company broke up. I think that as long as the company existed [my wife] could believe that it was just a work friendship, but when we carried on communicating after the company break up she felt extremely threatened.*

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[117] FileRef: S0200303. This transcript is reconstructed from contemporaneous notes (taken during the interview) and was checked with the interviewee – it is not verbatim.

[118] Elsewhere in the interview transcripts Neil attributes this to Simon feeling excluded, while Andy attributes it to Simon wanting to keep Gayle out of the management group, so the jealousy was not necessarily sexual.

[119] Simon's future wife.

Pauline: *You know he would take me out of the office for coffee. We were supposed to be having these marketing meetings but he would talk about what was going on in your home life. He divulged a lot of intimate stuff.*

Andy: *He was talking about my marriage?*

Pauline: *Yes, almost from the moment I got there.*

Andy: *That's interesting. In our last interview you mentioned that he did this towards the end of the company, but you are saying that he did this much earlier, back in May/June.*

Pauline: *Yes, he was always bringing this stuff into the meetings. I felt it was very personal, like he had a personal vendetta.*[120]

In an earlier interview, Gayle explained that Simon had tried – using the company's democratic constitution – to organise a vote of no-confidence in Andy's leadership[121].

Andy: *Was he [trying to persuade] everybody?*

Gayle: *Yeah. He was quite open about it, yeah.*

Andy: *With everybody present? Or one at a time?*

Gayle: *A bit of both, really. He didn't seem to pick his moment - it was just at any possible opportunity.*

Andy: *He was perfectly within his rights to ask for a vote of no confidence….*

Gayle: *..but he had to offer an alternative and you know…as an alternative…I don't think anyone would have voted him in really. That's my opinion*

Andy: *Why do you think he was focussing on what was happening to me outside work?*

Gayle: *I think he was trying to make out that he was superior - he was working to further his own position. He was always destabilising things.*

Andy: *How calculating was this?*

Gayle: *Yeah, I think it was calculated. I think he was out to further his own career.*[122]

The use of personal information to undermine a person's social standing is a finding in both cases. If we accept Ben's interpretation that Brenda had both personal (sexual jealousy) and political (equal opportunity policy) motives for disciplining him, then in both cases sexual behaviour underpins conflicts at work that impact directly on social structure and leadership.

The different outcomes, however, are interesting. At Custom Products, there was a strict line-management approach to discipline (a formal hierarchy) with Harry as the final point of appeal. At SoftContact, there were line-management structures for operational management but democratic

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120 FileRef: S-200403, Paras 182-188, 190-208.

121 FileRef: S-200403, Para 54

122 FileRef: S-200403, para 55-60. This is a verbatim transcription from a recorded interview.

structures for director appointments and staff appraisal[123]. At Custom Products – where hierarchy was the norm - the accuser prevailed. At SoftContact – where democratic processes prevailed - the accusation rebounded on the accuser and seriously undermined his position.

We need to be mindful, however, that a woman had made the accusation at Custom Products, while a man made the accusation of impropriety at SoftContact. A comparable case at SoftContact (UK) Ltd – one in which the accusation was made by a *woman* against a man - resulted in the *man's* dismissal[124]. It could be that the gender of the accuser and accused is a more significant factor than organisational structure. If this is the case, then hierarchies of power will be affected. Not only do men appear to be "promoted" rapidly (by women) to the role of protector and conflict handler, they end up in conflict with the accused man rather than the woman who initiates the conflict.

The democratic structures at SoftContact (UK) Ltd, however, did prevent the situation that arose at Custom Products. The conflict had to be resolved through a public and transparent process. The accusation had to be brought to a General Meeting (a forum of all members) to be proposed and seconded before an investigation could be started. The investigation team were elected and their report went to the next General Meeting for a vote on their recommendations. As a result, there were substantial constitutional changes after the conflict, and a consultant was contracted to provide further training on investigating and counselling in harassment cases[125]. For the investigating team, the process changed their views substantially on gender issues and the nature of harassment, but those outside the team were less affected[126].

Even so, these points should not obscure that there were similarities to the case at Custom Products. In both, a man was selected to head the process of conflict resolution after a woman accused a man of inappropriate sexual behaviour. In both cases, despite other substantial cultural differences, the

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123 FileRef: FC-P0, Page 197-209. All staff members, including the CEO, had a 360º appraisal that involved self, subordinate and manager feedback.

124 FileRef: JN1, paras 600-630. Andy describes and reflects on a number of conflicts involving race/gender at SoftContact (UK) Ltd and his own role in investigating and resolving them.

125 FileRef: FC-P0, Page 15. Andy's employment commenced on 14th August 1989 but he signed a new contract containing an updated disciplinary and grievance procedure on 17th August 1993.

126 FileRef: JN1, paras 600-630

woman was released from personal responsibility for resolving the conflict, and the responsibility was passed to the men, resulting in male/male conflict.

There are other interesting points to make about the SoftContact data. Firstly, the freedom with which the participants talk is noteworthy. Secondly, the shifting of affections between people (both inside and outside of work) is apparent. Simon *gives attention* to Gayle, but she responds negatively ("puts him down"). He *withdraws attention* then *increases* his *attention* to someone outside work ("he met Rebecca"). Andy speculates that this is the reason he withdrew from the workplace – with an implicit suggestion that once there were no females he could pursue he had an increased motive to leave. Gayle *gives attention* to a male friend outside work after she breaks up with her boyfriend. But she does not get the attention she wants. So, Andy *gives* her more *attention* inside work, Gayle responds positively and this impacts on Andy's own marriage, particularly when his wife reinterprets the relationship after the company stops trading. Lastly, Andy appears to support a more tolerant culture where managers do not intervene into personal issues unless invited to do so.

The above data provides corroborative evidence for the general framework. I contend that the dynamics between these parties in the second case supports the theory of relationships and social influence. The theory retains its explanatory value when considering dynamics at SoftContact. This concludes the presentation of empirical data and I now turn my attention to final discussion and comments.

6. Theory of Relationship Dimensions and Social Influence

I have identified 81 behaviours grouped under six broad headings. We can think of each of these behaviours as a single thread that joins two people in a relationship. Each thread describes a behaviour that has the potential to increase/decrease intimacy. Two parties giving and getting on all threads will be having a passionate love affair, but this is rare. For the rest of us, workplace relationships develop slowly over time and are carefully constructed as subsets of these threads are formed or broken as a result of changing dependencies and restricted opportunities for personal relationship development.

Groups of threads can be regarded as the "bonds" that keep parties in a relationship. The changing patterns of interaction and thread building/breaking account for changes in behaviour, personality, motivation and job performance over time. Behaviours that lead to intimacy may be adopted for their own sake, because of the intentional behaviour of one party to deepen their relationship with

another. Alternatively, they may be adopted for instrumental reasons, because one party is obliged to assist the other because of a contractual obligation or because a party is seeking instrumental benefits from the use of someone else's skills. The receiving party cannot always tell whether the behaviour has been adopted for its own sake (purely social), or instrumental (oriented towards a goal) leading to ambiguity in social life and potential for misunderstanding.

Conversely, as each party attempts to weave new threads, the other party has to decide whether to accept or break them. When threads are broken (for example, by not returning eye contact, not replying to messages, not meeting etc.) it is sometimes difficult for the initiating party to interpret the behaviour. Is the other party busy, preoccupied, withdrawing, transferring attention to someone else, tired, embarrassed? If one party continues to try to add a thread while the other party keeps breaking it, this can trigger a process of change where behaviours that promote inclusion are replaced by those that promote exclusion (for example touching, looking, smiling, turning behaviours may be replaced with ignoring, withholding, forgetting, withdrawing).

I define behaviour that is oriented towards the building (or breaking) of a relationship as *social rationality*. A person may undertake a task (or adopt behaviours) not because it is economically rational to do so, but because it is *socially rational* to effect changes in a relationship with another party. The relationship may be an end in itself (social), or a means to an end (economic).
The "presentation evening" organised by Custom Products can be viewed in this light. While there is a long-term economic rational for organising it, the direct purpose of the evening is to create shared experiences. It is an attempt to create an environment in which thread and bond building takes place between company members (although it could have negative effects as well). It provides opportunities for a multitude of interactions, behaviours and "talk" that create opportunities for identification (Kelman, 1961), transmission of cultural values (Kotter and Heskett, 1992) and seduction of the employee (Willmott, 1993).

Behaviour oriented towards the fulfilment (or avoidance) of a task is something I define as *economic rationality*. Here, the prioritising of economic goals may impact positively, negatively or not at all, on the social threads/bonds between actors. Clearly, if decisions are taken that are perceived by actors as both *economically and socially rational,* then it is reasonable to expect increases in motivation and productivity. But if *economically rational* decisions are perceived as *socially* ***irrational*** then social conflict becomes more likely, and the impacts will be unpredictable.

Directors at Custom Products conceive their own governance model as a socially and economically rational model that has the support of most employees. However, the evidence here suggests that this assumption may be false – that many employees regard the culture as a game to be played or a con to be tolerated. The general work environment is pleasant and there is a thriving social life, and this provides ample reason for employees to stay. Resistance is mainly through passivity. In a few cases where employees raise inconsistencies, open conflicts occur (particularly if the inconsistencies involve senior staff). When this happens, parties can be caught up in a cycle of defensive and aggressive behaviours that marginalize or exclude the more dependant party. This raises substantial questions over the durability of "shared values" and "community spirit" created by culture management techniques.

6.1 Power

Power, therefore, appears to have two-faces. There is considerable support for Lukes (1974) three-tier construction of power, particularly from the dominance of Harry, his agenda setting throughout the conflict, and his attempt to control and suppress Ben's views. Harry eventually gets Ben to accept the outcome using his social power (French and Raven, 1958). At the same time he controls the investigation process and resolution (agenda setting) and defines what behaviours are "appropriate" (ideological control). As Ben was disciplined more for perceptions about his *intentions* rather than his actions (which are similar towards both men and women) Harry's and Brenda's attitude puts pressure on him to have only "acceptable" *thoughts.*

This is characteristic of attempts to socially engineer workplace cultures (Thompson and Findlay, 1999). On the basis of the evidence here, culture management appears to succeed only until employees gain first hand experience of conflict with senior managers. Thereafter – and particularly over the longer term – pragmatic learning takes precedence over management rhetoric when issues such as equality, mutual respect and support are discussed. Evaluations change, managers fall from grace, and carefully constructed halos rapidly disappear.

The theory here, therefore, suggests that another way to conceive power is the ability to *withstand the social influence of others and retain control over the meanings ascribed to behaviour within a culture*. From this perspective, it is possible to argue that power is not simply how Harry influenced Ben, but *also* how Ben *resisted* Harry and Brenda. The conventional power discourse masks this

alternative discourse that **power is the ability to follow one's own conscience and articulate (or withhold) thoughts and feelings whenever judged necessary**.

From this perspective, Ben exercised power for a long time not so much through coercion as resistance (until he felt that further resistance would bring unacceptable harm to himself or his own social network). Viewed from the other side of the dispute, however, Ben's resistance might well have been perceived by Brenda, Harry and Diane as coercion. This returns us to the probing/responding model discussed earlier, except that during periods of conflict it would be more accurate to talk of pushing and shoving!

Power Changes Over Time

The *theory of social influence* presented in section 4 also offers an intellectual framework that can account for changes in social influence over time by exposing how changing levels of access, information and emotional support influence dependency. For example, a person joining an organisation nominally enters into an exchange relationship – labour skills (physical/intellectual assistance) in exchange for a wage (material assistance). Early in an employment relationship, however, a new employee is dependant on colleagues for *access* to people and resources, and the *information* required to perform their job tasks. This dependency increases the social influence of others, and decreases the social influence of the new recruit.

As the new employee develops their own social network, their dependence on others for *access* decreases. Additionally, as a person acquires *information* they become less dependant on others and require less intellectual assistance. In the fullness of time, the balance changes so that "the company" – in the form of other people inside the organisation – become increasingly dependant on informed and intellectually skilled members of staff with consequent impacts on the patterns of assistance and attention. As patterns change, so do levels of dependency and the desirability of various relationships. The changes impact on the way individuals approach decision-making.

We can see this in the way that Ben waits many months until he feels fully embedded in his team, before he tries to effect changes in his colleagues' attitude to equal opportunity policy. We also saw evidence that his social influence fluctuated with his embededness (Giddens, 1990) - his initial "impact" was replaced by "vulnerability" (when his flirting was questioned) before his confidence returned. Ultimately his influence dissipated completely in one group and was transferred to another.

The other key variable – the desire for intimacy – also changes over time. We saw how Ben's marriage problems increased his desire (and time) for intimacy at work. During this period it was particularly important for Ben to maintain good relationships with his colleagues, hence his anxiety when he thought there was a threat from Brenda. The period of intense bonding between team members ultimately had an unsettling effect, and Ben eventually chose to prioritise relationships outside the workplace (firstly a writer, then his wife) to compensate for changes at work. A more settled period ensued until he raised equal opportunity issues again.

There is a paradox here; the weaving of threads into strong bonds makes relationships stronger because it inclines parties to be more and more open (through personal disclosures). In some cases, relationships may become so strong that they are able to withstand strong disagreements and arguments. This can *promote* communication between the parties but only if both stay for the duration of the argument and do not withdraw. The best examples of this are the marriages of Ben and Harry who both overcome considerable disagreements with their spouses.

At the same time, the stronger a *network* of relationships, the more the parties may wish to protect the network. When strong relationships are threatened by one party (either inside or outside the group), the desire to protect established bonds may incline parties to "close ranks" and inhibit communication between in-group and out-group members. This certainly appears to be the case when Ben challenges Brenda's authority. Diane, Brenda, Harry and John close ranks. While this facilitates communication between them, they appear to construct a questionable version of the "truth" that may leave their network vulnerable in the longer-term.

Certainly, applying the relationship framework provides considerable insight into the way that Groupthink (Janis, 1982) takes hold of a social network, and the invidious impact it can have on corporate governance. Janis contended that:

> *During the group's deliberations, the leader does not deliberately try to get the group to tell him what he wants to hear but is quite sincere in asking for honest opinions. The group members are not transformed into sycophants. They are not afraid to speak their minds. Nevertheless, subtle constraints, which the leader may reinforce inadvertently, prevent a member from fully exercising his critical powers and from openly expressing doubts…*
>
> Janis, cited in Nuwer, 2004:21

This process, he argues, gives groups delusional feelings of invincibility and a sense of conviction that their views are correct. In this case, however, group members' do not subtly change their views and adjust to the will of the leader. Instead, the there is a *two-way* pattern of influence, and Harry

adjusts his views to those of Brenda and Diane. Even as subordinates they appear to be able to influence his views so that he accepts theirs as his own. Groupthink, therefore, may arise more out of the intersubjectivity of the group members than the subjectivity of the group leader.

Consequently, there is strong support for the assumptions of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969) – that our behaviour and interpretations are guided by our intentions towards others. In this paper, personal relationships (particularly loving relationships) emerge as the most meaningful in our lives. Talking about them is the glue that binds together groups of people in close knit social networks at work just as much as at home. In all cases, the parties protect the relationships that are considered most valuable to them. The "truths" constructed are the one's that each party feels will best serve their long-term interests.

This is not to say that all truth claims have equal merit. Social life leaves a trail that Andy was able to find, capture and articulate. Andy's account is not objective - we need to be mindful that Andy also has long-term interests to protect, and his own version of the truth to tell – but his position enables him to bring out contradictions and half-truths to give a fuller (but still incomplete) rendering of events. Better interpretations, and theorisation, are possible as a result of previously hidden accounts entering the public domain.

I conclude that the development of social structures are driven more by our choice of personal relationships than the external agency of the market or contractual relationships. How meaningful are markets or contracts of employment when compared to our most valued personal relationships? Do we get upset over "the market" or our "employment contract" in a way that is comparable to the events described here? Most of us do not. Consideration of them might impinge on some people's consciousness (particularly entrepreneurs), and have marginal impacts in everyday contexts, but compared to the influence of personal relationships at work and home, they are relatively minor issues.

At Custom Products, rules, contracts and laws were invoked as defensive mechanisms to avoid personal and corporate responsibility. This makes disputes harder to resolve, not easier, and raises questions as to whether they inhibit the development of equitable relationships able to withstand and resolve disagreement. Further, it could be argued that ever increasing numbers of laws and rules actually *contribute* to conflict by creating more ways for one party to blame another for "inappropriate" behaviour. This discourages acceptance of joint responsibility and frustrates attempts at resolution.

6.2 Comments on the Gender Literature

Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004) found that proximity (working together) was one of the principle reasons for the development of "intimate" relationships at work[127]. When we consider the model outlined, it is not surprising that they should find this. Behaviours adopted initially for instrumental reasons become catalysts for their continuation for social reasons.

The data does not give unequivocal support for patriarchal theory (Rowbottom, 1973) as there is more evidence of men trying to dominate men, than men trying to dominate women. What is apparent is that both women and men (in both same-sex and opposite-sex relationships) constantly push and probe to see where there are potential threads that can be developed to deepen the bonds. The threads are woven or unravelled, and the bonds developed or broken, quicker if there is sexual interest between two people.

While we can observe seemingly equitable relationships developing between men and women, men *do* head both companies and maintain their control at least partly through the affections of other parties (of both sexes). In both cases, the leading man has a female 'lieutenant' – Harry has Brenda, Andy has Gayle, who controls the administration of the organisation. Instead of men as a group dominating women as a group, there appears to be a carefully woven arrangement between leading men and women on how to control people in the rest of the organisation. The extent to which this can be regarded as patriarchy is questionable as the formal hierarchical relationship masks an equitable division of leadership responsibilities (men in the economic domain, women in the social domain) that mirrors dynamics between men and women found elsewhere in social life. Actions are frequently taken *together* against others, rather than separately.

Hearn and Parkin (1987:56) contend that:

> *Feminism has changed both the understanding of sexuality and the importance given to sexuality in many ways: the making of women's experiences visible, the realisation of both women's and men's power, the theorising of (the control of) sexuality as the central dynamic of patriarchy…*

Feminism *has* made women's experiences more visible. However, it has been less successful at making the full range of men's experiences visible, or making visible the way men and women act in

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[127] In their work they regard "intimate" as either an unconsummated or consummated sexual relationship. However, unlike this paper, they do not regard same-sex relationships (except homosexual ones) as intimate.

concert against other men and women. The data presented here illustrates the way that men's experiences are not straightforward, and can be silenced in similar ways to women's. Secondly, the characterisation of men as sexually aggressive and women as sexually passive does not appear to account for the subtle and tenacious way that women flirt with men.

Farrell's contention that holistic ideals of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed through the desires of men and women for each other (as complete ideal persons, not differentiated behaviours or attributes) appears to have merit. And the assertion that courtship rituals and intimacy are prevalent in the workplace as anywhere elsewhere also appears to have merit. On the basis of the data here, it appears that both men and women routinely and proactively seek closer relationships with each other, and that their behaviours (at least until Ben starts to receive warnings about his flirting) can not be considered harassing. Parties do not press each other in insensitive ways – indeed the initial sensitivity of parties to each other is noteworthy. This is not to say that parties do not feel uncomfortable when they receive unwanted attention – but there are no examples of one party leaving another feeling violated until the relationships start to break up.

The Pervasiveness of Sexuality at Work

Hearn and Parkin (1987:57) also comment that:

> *We have found it necessary to broaden our definition in at least two ways: firstly, to see sexuality as an ordinary and frequent public process rather than an extraordinary and predominately private process; and secondly to see sexuality as an aspect and part of an all-pervasive body politic rather than a separate and discrete set of practices.*

Certainly, the evidence here wholeheartedly supports that view. A great many behaviours described are imbued and interpreted as sexually significant on an everyday basis, and even when men and women engage in the building of "friendships", the behaviours and dynamics appear to operate differently in opposite-sex and same-sex relationships. At the same time, it is important to recognise that these differences are themselves negotiated within a cultural context and will vary in different settings.

We saw evidence that if a person has a relationship with a sexual dimension, even if there is no intention of having a full sexual relationship, then the desire to engage in the workplace becomes stronger and productivity can improve as a result. This supports the findings of Hearn and Parkin (1987) and Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004) although the same double-edged impact of positive effects for those in close relationships versus negative impacts on others is observed.

Evaluating whether there is a nett benefit is difficult, but the apparent correlation of high levels of both sexual and task-oriented energy in mixed-gender settings is, at the very least, worth further investigation.

Dual Standards for Both Sexes

Farrell (2005:162) argues that:

> *The workplace is like every place – filled with unfairness and discrimination. But it occurs for women and against women. And is by both sexes.*

The data supports this contention. The reasons for Brenda's authoritarian style may be more complex than the lack of a "common touch" (suggested by John). It could result from two other concurrent processes. Firstly, her own desire to maintain a close relationship with Harry (which may be nothing to do with gender and everything to do with personal ambition) may predispose her to prioritise attention to Harry's needs and decrease the attention she gives her subordinates[128]. Alternatively, it may be exacerbated by the disapproving behaviours of her (female) subordinates. If she picks up their disapproval (even if nobody expresses this to her directly) then she will feel she is losing influence over them. Brenda's more authoritarian style may be a *reaction* to exclusion by others, and criticism from her subordinates, in which case the data tentatively supports Segal's assertion (1990) of a link between *loss* of influence and authoritarian behaviour.

This is particularly true in her dispute with Ben where feelings of exclusion (both from Ben's relationship with Diane, and Ben's reluctance to engage with her on a one-to-one basis) may have inclined her towards authoritarian behaviour. Indeed, TA theory (see Harris and Harris, 1986) suggests that our need for attention is so great that we disrupt in preference to being ignored. The disruption created by Brenda put her centre stage for a while, but the long-term impact on her career remains less clear. In turn, Ben reacts in a similar way when his views are discounted, and the impact on his career is immediate.

For men, the double-standard is a seemingly inexplicable intolerance to their sexual behaviour. Whereas a woman (Diane) can make light of sexual jokes about "butts" while inducting *new recruits*, a man ("Phil the temp") can be sacked for similar comments to his work colleagues. If we consider

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[128] For an interesting discussion of the corrupting power of patronage on subordinates, see Benn, T (1982), *Arguments for Democracy,* Penguin.

the knock on impact on Ben, the vulnerability he felt as a result, and the reaction of Brenda to Ben's vulnerability and drink invitation to Carol, we can see the operation of a double-standard.

Is the dual-standard against men in general? Is it against just against "senior" men? It is not clear that it is actually to do with either of these. Not all men's sexual behaviour was challenged. For example, Ben's behaviour was initially ignored. John was told by Brenda not to have relationships at work (even those at other sites) while another director was courting his closest colleague[129].

At SoftContact (International) Ltd, Andy's relationship with Gayle drew disapproval from Simon and Neil – but other members of staff either remained oblivious, or were supportive[130]. These findings suggest that the disapproval of men forming relationships may be more to do with sexual jealousy or the ramifications for personal relationships rather than as a result of corporate policy. In other words, there is other (gender and office) politics involved!

What seems to be clear is that *men's* sexual behaviour attracts more scrutiny and condemnation. This is consistent with the findings of Farrell (1994) and Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004). Men appear to be more 'at risk' from accusations of "inappropriate" sexual behaviour and it is reasonable to interpret this as a form of social control originating in feminist discourses. That discourse – on the basis of the evidence here - appears to have had a liberating effect on the sexual behaviour of women. At Custom Products Hayley, Carol, Diane and Brenda all display confidence in their sexual behaviour. Gayle at SoftContact is similarly outspoken about the lack of "good-looking men" and Andy refrains from intervention because she appears to be "in control". The evidence in this paper – based on these two cases - is that women are becoming less inhibited, while men are becoming more inhibited, and that this change is a result of wider societal influences that are imported into the corporate culture.

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129 An interesting anecdote, which is consistent with the theory presented here, is that the director warned against relationships stood down as a registered director in Jan 2004, but the other male director, who formed a relationship with a woman at management level in the same department, was approved at the same board meeting. There is a suggestion therefore, that bonds within the directors' group may be changing, and that this affects the level of tolerance regarding personal relationships.

130 FileRef: S-200403, para 252 – Pauline assures Andy that he has not been harshly judged for his behaviour towards Gayle.

Management Interventions into Intimate Relationships

In the case of Custom Products, subtle interventions – and in two cases major interventions - were made by Diane and Brenda. In one case "Phil the temp" is dismissed. In the other, Ben was disciplined. Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004:117), however, found that "policy based intervention" was not welcomed by the overwhelming majority of survey members:

> *…respondents indicate that they would not offer advice. The reason given is that mature adults should decide for themselves the quality of life they desire to lead without interference from others. Only two percent recommend adopting formal policies and guidelines as the means of minimising …undesired outcomes from work related intimacy…Most feel it has limited impact and also encourages resentment and defensiveness, even amongst those who have not entered into workplace intimacy…The predominant view is that intimacy is a sensitive human issue that cannot, and should not, be prescribed for.*

The culture at Custom Products, therefore, appears to have developed in a way that results in men and women being treated in different ways from societal norms. Interventions are made, and are oriented specifically toward the protection of women. This accords with Farrell's argument (1994), that men are the disposable sex when conflict occurs. However, this is also consistent with the view of early feminists who argued *against* any special protection or privileges for women because it encouraged the view that women should be treated like children (see Hoff Sommers, 1995).

There is also evidence from Custom Products of the "culture management" techniques of intervention into the private and personal lives of members (Kunda, 1992) much as an adult might intervene into the lives of children. At SoftContact, tolerance and non-interference was the norm, suggesting a quite different culture more in keeping with societal norms. However, private disapproval of intimate relationships still took place and appears to have some impacts. Simon's desire to accuse Andy of impropriety, however, gives rise to mixed feelings amongst his colleagues and loses him some support. Kakabadse and Kakabadse (2004:105) comment that:

> *…intimacy can leave either party vulnerable to a harassment complaint but that is not harassment of a sexual nature. Some of the harassment incidents reported are viewed as unjustifiably made. It is considered that in the majority of known harassment cases the parties involved had entered into the relationship willingly, with no evidence of undue pressure made on one person by the other…*

In light of this, what should we make of Brenda cautioning men against "inappropriate behaviour". It is relevant to ask whether such cautions themselves constitute "harassment" given the feelings of vulnerability reported by Ben. Did these warnings create a "hostile environment" for him? Even if the impact of the cautions falls short of the legal definition of harassment, the evidence here suggests

that the construction of sexual behaviour as "inappropriate" is a tool of management control. Once a person believes they may be subject to an accusation, this inhibits their behaviour and makes it harder for them to build and maintain relationships with **both** sexes.

6.3 Some Conclusions

I started this paper by outlining the importance of interpersonal dynamics and the need to bring sexuality out of the cold so that it could be integrated into a framework for understanding relationships at work. As part of the literature review, particular attention was given to contributions from the feminist literature and its more recent critique. A micro-analysis revealed verbal and non-verbal behaviours that are meaningful to people in the process of building relationships.

In sections 3 and 4 empirical data was presented and theoretical development undertaken to build a communitarian framework that understands relationships as integrated processes of getting/giving attention and assistance. The **attention** domain was extended to include social behaviours for gaining **access,** acquiring and using **information,** with consequent impacts on our **emotions**. Those behaviours that were ambiguous with regard to their sexual intent, or which the receiver could misinterpret, were identified.

In the realm of economics, I identified the behaviours through which one party provides another with **assistance**. **Intellectual** assistance involved behaviours that allow us to collect, organise and communicate information in the performance of **physical** tasks for **material** gain. I characterised individual behaviours as threads that constitute the fabric from which bonds are woven and people maintain connections to each other.

Having identified the dimensions and dependencies of relationships, I applied them to build a theory of social influence. This theory explores how the desire (or lack of desire) for intimacy affects our intentional behaviours (and therefore our decision-making). The desire to remain close to a person will incline us to agree with them – if we think that by agreeing, a relationship will be strengthened. But these are mediated by economic dependencies, past experiences, and value systems, which may support or conflict with our social desires.

The theory here offers an alternative explanation for many phenomena because of its implicit recognition that every *instrumental* decision has a *social* dimension. **In many circumstances attribution errors may be known and privately ignored by the parties concerned. If this is the**

case, they cannot be regarded as errors because they are deliberate choices to prioritise *social rationality* over *economic rationality* in a given context.

I have presented social life as a seemingly endless process of probing and searching for satisfying relationships, for the purpose of economic and social gain. It suggests, perhaps, that we are creatures constantly trying to seduce each other for different reasons and that these acts of seduction have more influence on the development of power structures than has previously been realised. This being the case, the findings in this paper invite further study of relationship development in the workplace, and the subtle and enduring ways that this impacts on the development of social networks.

The framework and theory developed here makes it possible to approach these questions in ways that take account of both non-sexual and sexual behaviour. It opens up the possibility that the social processes by which one person comes to admire, help, rely upon, and submit to the authority of another has its roots in a bonding process that evolves over time between two people. Gender impacts on this process, as do economic considerations. The result is a relationship in which both parties submit to the other in different ways at different times. This being the case, theories of hierarchy that derive their inspiration from the market (Williamson, 1975) or contractual relations (Berle and Means, 1932) will need revisiting in order to account for, or accommodate, the social processes discussed here.

I reviewed the behaviours that are typically characterised as *patriarchal* and suggest that their origin may lie in behavioural responses to *matriarchal* power. This supports the alternative gender discourse that **patriarchal and matriarchal value systems co-exist at work and mirror those constructed in the home**. However, while a certain amount of tension between the two value systems is inevitable (because social life is made up of both economic and social considerations) taking up the cause of one or the other obscures the extent to which social norms are created by the fusion and tension between them. Social norms are ultimately worked out in our closest relationships. Out of these, the next generation is born, raised and socialised and the process of negotiation starts again.

On this basis, I argue that work and home life are **inseparable** and that each impacts on the other**.** This being the case, the working out of these tensions stands not only as the centre of our private lives, but needs acknowledgement as a driving force *at work* that contributes to the development of social hierarchies, the division of labour, and ideologies that are projected into economic life.

In each culture there are choices to be made whether male/female roles should be constructed from differentiated masculine and feminine value systems (with women pursuing socially rational objectives, while men pursue those that are economically rational) or whether both sexes should exercise both social and economic rationality simultaneously. **The latter is a substantial challenge, because it requires both that equality is pursued at home and work simultaneously, and also that women and men protect each other in similar, rather than different, ways.** Unless legal and cultural obstacles are tackled both at work *and* at home in a holistic way, equality as a political project – and hopes for an equitable democracy in more spheres of social life - will meet resistance from both sexes.

The argument here is not for quotas or corporate policies enforcing equality, rather the reverse, that such policies are eliminated so that institutional energies divert from enforcement (of rules, behaviours, ideologies) towards mediation and dialogue. Through this process, critical reflection will gradually replace blame and judgement, and rules will be replaced by the development of social rationality to encourage people in close relationships to communicate and reach choices free from corporate, governmental or institutional interference. The result could be substantial and continuing differences in the lifestyles of men and women that may not please politicians or thought-leaders, or we may find that free from institutional interference women and men choose lifestyles that become more equitable. Whichever, behind any apparent discrimination will be choices emanating from an equitable fusion and tension between value systems that are born out of a diverse range of social experiences and expectations. The more social rationality that can be exercised, the better the prospects for social democracy, with economic life based on the aspirations and goals of the many rather than the few.

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