

# MORALE: DEFINITIONS, DIMENSIONS AND MEASUREMENT

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Ben Hardy

Trinity Hall, University of Cambridge

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## **Declaration**

This dissertation is the result of my own work and includes nothing which is the outcome of work done in collaboration except where specifically indicated in the text. It has not been submitted in whole or in part for consideration for any other degree or qualification at this university or any other institute of learning and complies with the Judge Business School's guidelines on length and format.

Ben Hardy

Trinity Hall

## Abstract

Morale is a commonly used term both in business and society but the concept of morale is relatively poorly defined and understood. In a recent paper Liefoghe et al. (2004) expressed surprise that '*...when reviewing the literature, no strong theory to explain morale as such is in evidence, nor are there many empirical studies that offer solid ground to advise organisations...*'(p 1). This thesis aims to provide these theories and this empirical evidence in order to produce a better understanding of morale.

This research identifies a number of deficiencies in the current understanding of morale. These range from elision with other concepts to disagreement about whether it is an individual or group phenomenon. In this study, four principal domains are examined: (i) what morale is; (ii) how it differs from other concepts; (iii) the antecedents of morale and (iv) its consequences.

A mixed methods approach was adopted combining idiographic and nomothetic research. The idiographic phase of the research adopted a Straussian (1998) grounded theory approach, involving data collection from seven different organisations. The data was accrued from a combination of site visits, informal contacts, external research, and 203 semi-structured interviews which were supplemented with psychometric instruments. The data were then coded and analysed.

Morale could be readily differentiated from other concepts and emerged as a phenomenon with three dimensions: affective, future/goal and interpersonal. It was also viewed as a single phenomenon which was generalisable across situations and rooted in the individual although perceived members of the group exerted considerable influence. The antecedents of morale impacted on the three dimensions outlined above. Its consequences were the zeal with which tasks are undertaken, creativity and engagement.

The nomothetic element of the research developed a number of measurement scales, grounded in the qualitative phase. These allowed morale to be differentiated from other phenomena and offered insights into individual and group perceptions of morale and the influence of personality variables. Further quantitative research confirmed the three dimensional structure of the concept.

The results of these two phases were then integrated to provide a picture of the phenomenon of morale, differentiate it from other concepts and elucidate its antecedents and consequences. An appraisal of the limitations of the research is also made. Finally the implications of this research for both academic researchers and practitioners are discussed along with suggestions for future research.

## Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Declaration.....	3
Abstract .....	4
Table of contents .....	5
List of figures.....	9
List of tables .....	9
Chapter 1: Introduction .....	11
Chapter 2: Literature review.....	17
Introduction .....	17
Structure of the review .....	19
A history of the morale concept .....	20
Other constructs and their relation to morale.....	24
Contemporary morale research .....	30
Definitions and dimensions of morale.....	31
Measurement of morale.....	41
Emergent underlying issues in morale specification .....	45
Conclusions of the literature review .....	55
Chapter 3: Research themes and orientation .....	56
Introduction .....	56
What is morale? .....	57
What is morale not? .....	58
What are the antecedents of morale?.....	59
What are the consequences of morale? .....	60
Summary and integration .....	60
Chapter 4: Approach and methodology .....	62
Introduction .....	62
Philosophical foundations.....	63

Methodological precedents .....	70
Methodological approach.....	72
Chapter 5: Qualitative research methods .....	74
Introduction .....	74
Grounded theory .....	75
Data acquisition.....	76
Data analysis.....	89
Limitations of the grounded theory approach .....	92
Summary.....	93
Chapter 6: Qualitative results .....	94
Introduction .....	94
Description of the data.....	95
What morale is not.....	98
What morale is.....	105
Antecedents of morale.....	134
Consequences of morale .....	144
Definition of morale .....	153
Summary and reflection.....	154
Chapter 7: Quantitative research methods.....	156
Introduction .....	156
Hypotheses to be tested .....	157
Hypotheses on the antecedents of morale.....	159
Hypotheses on the consequences of morale.....	160
Summary of morale hypotheses .....	160
Development of morale measures .....	160
Application of quantitative methods .....	178
Chapter 8: Quantitative results .....	180
Introduction .....	180

Differentiating morale from other concepts .....	180
A quantitative examination of morale itself.....	184
Antecedents of morale.....	199
The consequences of morale .....	200
Summary .....	205
Chapter 9: Integration and discussion of results .....	207
What morale is not.....	207
What morale is .....	209
Antecedents of morale.....	218
The consequences of morale .....	222
Critique of the research .....	224
Reflections on the research process .....	225
Implications of the research.....	232
Chapter 10: Summary and conclusions.....	242
Backdrop to the current research.....	242
Findings .....	243
Directions for future research .....	244
Conclusion.....	247
Appendix 1 – Organisational information on qualitative research sites .....	253
Scientific Research Centre (SRC).....	253
Garden Centre Chain (GCC).....	253
High Tech Start Up 1 (HTSU 1).....	254
High Tech Start Up 2 (HTSU 2).....	255
Silicon Chip Manufacturer (SCM).....	255
Fibreglass Roofing Manufacturer (FRM).....	256
Ball Bearing Manufacturer (BBM) .....	257
Appendix 2 - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Quotations .....	258
Overarching Dimension: Affective .....	258

Overarching Dimension: Future/Goals .....	261
Overarching Dimension: Interpersonal .....	265
Appendix 3 – Items in the morale, satisfaction and commitment scales .....	268
Morale scales .....	268
Satisfaction scales .....	268
Commitment scales .....	269
References .....	270



## List of figures

Figure 1 – Outline of dissertation structure.....	14
Figure 2 – High level nomology for the morale construct .....	56
Figure 3 – Single item morale measure of personal morale by organisation.....	97
Figure 4 – Structure of the affective dimension of morale.....	110
Figure 5 – Structure of the future/goal dimension of morale .....	110
Figure 6 – Structure of the interpersonal dimension of morale.....	111
Figure 7 – An individual level model of morale processing.....	133
Figure 8 – Consequences of Morale.....	152
Figure 9 – Demonstration of pairwise comparison test with the two scales correlated.....	175
Figure 10 – Demonstration of pairwise test with the two variables constrained.....	176
Figure 11 – Variation of SIM for individual morale by organisation in the qualitative phase of research.....	190
Figure 12 – Variation in morale score at GCC and BBM by site. ....	191
Figure 13 – Morale modelled as a latent construct from its three dimensions.....	193
Figure 14 – Correlation between latent variable and MIM of morale .....	195
Figure 15 – Loading of all 15 items on a single factor .....	196
Figure 16 – Morale modelled as a latent construct from its three dimensions (Pooled Sample)	198
Figure 17 – Model demonstrating relationship between morale dimensions and turnover intention .....	204
Figure 18 – Differences between morale dimensions and other concepts .....	208
Figure 19 – Hibbert’s dimensions of reflexivity.....	230

## List of tables

Table 1 – Idiographic – nomothetic dimension in scientific enquiry.....	68
Table 2 – Initial questions for semi-structured interview .....	81
Table 3 - Organisations comprising the qualitative phase sample.....	86
Table 4 - Illustration of the variety of dimensions of the sample (+ = low/small - +++++ = high/large).....	87
Table 5 - Demographic information by organisation.....	96
Table 6 - Interview duration by organisation.....	96
Table 7 - Respondents reporting whether they viewed morale as the same different to three other concepts.....	99

Table 8 - Number and percentage of respondents using particular descriptive term for high morale .....	107
Table 9 - Number and percentage of respondents using particular descriptive term for low morale .....	108
Table 10 - Descriptive frequency of terms to describe morale categorised by dimensions and stage of morale .....	112
Table 11 - Typical descriptive words for each category .....	112
Table 12 - Coding of responses by Individual, Group or Individual + Group categories .....	129
Table 13 - Coding references by dimension of morale in response to enquiry about what would raise/lower morale.....	134
Table 14 - Samples employed in the quantitative research phase.....	163
Table 15 - Correlations between morale SIM and MIMs .....	172
Table 16 - Pairwise comparison of the two MIMs of morale with Tepper satisfaction and Escrig-Tena commitment MIMs.....	177
Table 17 - Pairwise comparison of the two MIMs of morale with Agho satisfaction and Balfour commitment MIMs.....	177
Table 18 - Test-retest reliability of the morale measures one month apart.....	178
Table 19 – Comparison of means between SIM of individual morale and other concepts for the development sample.....	182
Table 20 - Correlations between SIMs of individual morale and other concepts in the development sample.....	182
Table 21 – Comparison of means between SIM of individual morale and other concepts for the GCC sample.....	183
Table 22- Correlations between SIMs of individual morale and other concepts in the GCC sample.....	183
Table 23 – Comparison of mean values for SIMs of individual and departmental morale.....	189
Table 24 – Scales measuring the dimensions of morale (US Sample).....	192
Table 25 – Intercorrelation of the three dimensions of morale.....	194
Table 26 – Scales measuring the dimensions of morale (Pooled Sample).....	197
Table 27 – Correlations of employee morale with other measures within the AMC data.....	202
Table 28 – Summary of hypotheses and outcomes .....	205

## Chapter 1: Introduction

Morale is a commonly used term in both the business world and wider society. EBSCO, a business database, lists 7 366 articles citing morale (EBSCO, 2009) and Factiva, a press cuttings service, lists 47 387 mentions of morale in the last year alone (Factiva, 2009). Good (or high) morale is also viewed as an important quality in both individuals and organisations.

It has been examined in areas as diverse as education (Charters, 1965; Coughlan, 1970; Doherty, 1988; Evans, 2001; Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, & Dingle, 2000; Johnsrud, Heck, & Rosser, 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Kerlin & Dunlap, 1993; Phillips-Miller, Pitcher, & Olson, 2000), healthcare (Brown & Rawlinson, 1976; Callaghan, 2003; Cox, 2001; Maddox, 1963; McFadzean & McFadzean, 2005; Stapleton et al., 2007), the military (Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Britt, Stetz, & Bliese, 2004; Harrell & Miller, 1997; MacKenzie, 1992; Manning, 1991; Motowidlo & Borman, 1977, 1978; Ulio, 1941), social policy (Gardner, 1978; Ramsbotham, 2003) and business organisations (Armstrong-Stassen, Wagar, & Cattaneo, 2004; Connell, 2001; Guba, 1958; Liefoghe et al., 2004; Mishra, Spreitzer, & Mishra, 1998; Price, 1963; Rausch, 1971; Roethlisberger, 1945; Vandenberg, Richardson, & Eastman, 1999; Weakliem & Frenkel, 2006; Wofford, 1971; Worthy, 1950a; Zeitz, 1983). The reason for this interest is the widespread belief that morale can have a substantial effect on performance (Bewley, 1999).

Despite the ubiquitous usage of the term morale, the number and diversity of papers produced and the perceived importance of the concept, there is very little empirical research on the subject (Peterson, Park, & Sweeney, 2008), particularly in the sphere of management. The phenomenon of morale is ill defined (Vandenberg et al., 1999) and poorly understood. As Britt et al. comment ‘...review indicates that the definitions and operationalizations of the concept of morale have been at best unfocused and indicate a gap in theoretical understanding of how morale is a unique component of the work environment. There is a clear need for conceptual integration regarding the definition, assessment, predictors, and consequences of morale’ (Britt, Dickinson, Moore, Castro, & Adler, 2007, p 35). The result of this poor specification is that morale is ‘not a well-defined or precisely measured concept’ (Johnsrud et al., 2000, p 34). This frustrates attempts to evaluate the impact of morale on performance and so determine whether its perceived importance is justified.

This gap between the perceived importance of morale and the deficiencies of our understanding has been accounted for by a number of authors who describe it as a ‘folk concept’ (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977, p 177) more of interest to practitioners than researchers (Vandenberg et al., 1999). In spite of this academics continue to use the concept, generally basing their understanding on inference and conjecture rather than empirical data.

This thesis aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of the concept of morale, anchored in the experience of those in the workforce. This will produce a grounded understanding of morale, leading to a definition of the phenomenon and the development of a measurement system.

At this point I should declare my interest in the topic. In my previous employment I experienced what I regarded as both high and low morale states. In one organisation this was particularly noticeable as changing circumstance led to vast changes in both my own and others' morale. High morale felt fantastic. Low morale, by contrast, felt awful. Clearly a high morale environment was preferable and yet there seemed to be little research which dissected the phenomenon. Given how bad low morale felt I was motivated to explore the topic in order to try and provide answers which would help avert low morale situations. This is the chief motivation behind this research.

Morale clearly matters to me but does it matter to others? Herb Kelleher, the founder of Southwest Airlines, stated that '*...there is one key to profitability and stability during either a boom or bust economy: employee morale*' (Sirota, Mischkind, & Meltzer, 2005, p 33). In the current depressed economic climate this seems of particular relevance and echoes a sentiment expressed by Park seventy years ago that '*...the country that first solves these [morale] problems will infallibly outstrip the others in the race for stability, security, and development.*' (Park, 1934, p 355). At a conceptual level, therefore, the study of morale seems to be important.

At a practical level it is also of considerable interest. Sirota and co-workers have shown that the 2004 stock prices of 14 high morale companies increased by 16.3% compared to gains of only 6.1% for companies in the same industry with average morale. The downside is even starker. Six low morale companies only saw 3.4% gains in the same period as compared to 15.6% for a matched group of average morale organisations (Sirota et al., 2005). These data suggest that morale may be of economic importance as high morale stimulates employees to put forth extra effort on behalf of the organisation whereas low morale engenders the reverse.

These economic reasons for the study of morale are supplemented by more utilitarian ones. As high morale is agreeable and low morale unpleasant for the individual there is an argument to be made that morale should be studied to try and promote high morale and diminish low morale. A thorough understanding of the phenomenon is necessary to achieve this.

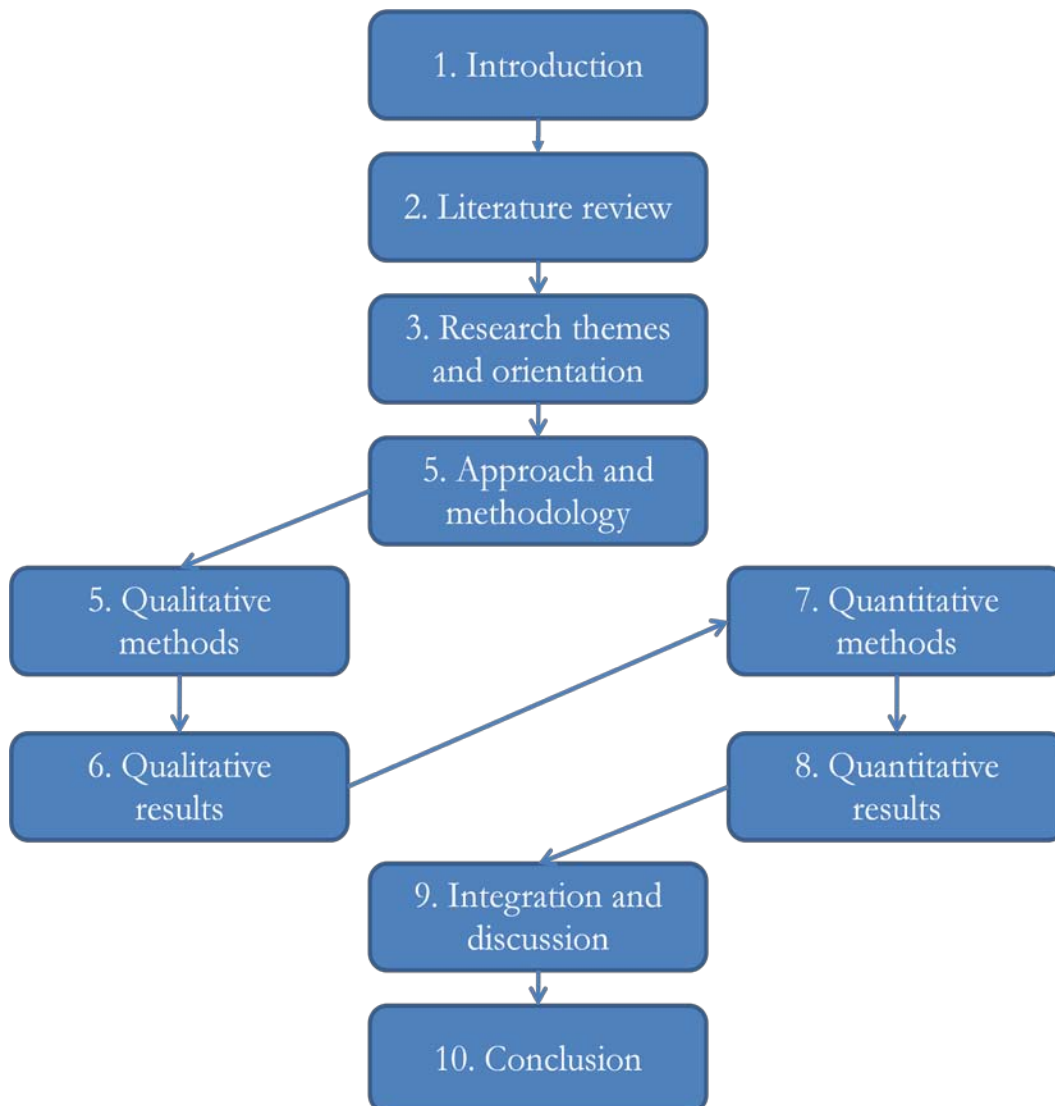
Overall morale appears to be an important concept for both the management and workforce. When this is coupled with the lack of understanding inherent within both the academic and practitioner literature the case for researching morale becomes compelling.

The principal objective of this thesis is to answer the question ‘What is morale?’ Out of this falls the obvious corollary ‘What is morale not?’ Morale itself can then be explored along with the things which influence it – its antecedents and the effects it has, its consequences. Figure 1 illustrates the structure of this thesis.

This thesis begins with a review of the literature. The literature is dispersed across a number of disciplinary fields and is far from coherent. Morale appears to have emerged as a concept from the military sphere and achieved some prominence in the post World War II period. Subsequently, however, interest has declined and I shall argue that the present state of morale research results from an inadequacy of definition coupled with imprecision of usage. I then chart the various definitions and measurement systems used for morale along with examining the various disciplinary areas where it has proved of particular interest.

This overview of the literature and issues of concern surrounding morale informs the development of a number of research questions which fall out of the principal question ‘What is morale?’ The disparate nature of these questions then leads to a discussion of how they might best be investigated.

The section on approach and methodology examines some of the difficulties which attend social research, notably the philosophical problems which emerge from the intangibility of social phenomena. This compels the adoption of a critical realist viewpoint (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2001b; Bhaskar, 1998) which suggests that there is a mind-independent reality but prescribes modesty about the degree to which we can apprehend it.

**Figure 1 – Outline of dissertation structure**

The difficulty of grasping social phenomena leads to a mixed methods approach (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Johnson, Onwuegbuzie, & Turner, 2007) which combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. This combination of methods helps triangulate (Jick, 1979; Lewis, 1999; Scandura & Williams, 2000) on the subject of morale so that the strengths of one approach offset the deficiencies of the other (Brewer & Hunter, 2006). At this point the thesis bifurcates into two paths; one qualitative and the other quantitative.

The qualitative methods section identifies grounded theory as a suitable approach for exploring the concept of morale and adopts the Straussian view (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The grounded theory process is then applied to the data collection phase of the research which draws on site visits, interviews and observations at seven different organisations to explore the phenomenon of morale at different levels and in different contexts. The iterative nature of grounded theory

research means that the understanding of morale gained through this process evolves through constant comparison and theoretical sampling until saturation is reached.

The qualitative results of this process are then presented in a four domain format. The first domain examines whether morale is different from other phenomena. The second explores the nature of morale, its dimensions and the processes by which it is produced. It also examines some topics of concern which emerge from the literature such as the relationship between the individual and group in morale, whether it is a single concept and whether it can be generalised. The third domain concerns morale's precursors or antecedents. These are of interest as they help us to understand how morale might be manipulated. Fourthly I examine the consequences of morale and the effect it has on individual performance.

Having examined qualitative issues of morale we then turn to the quantitative. The quantitative methods section adopts a more modernist (Parker, 1992, 1999) or positivist viewpoint positing a number of hypotheses which emerge from the literature review and the qualitative research. In this section I also describe the development and validation of a number of morale measures.

This then leads to the quantitative results section which employs the various measures of morale in the service of addressing the hypotheses outlined in the previous section. Again the results are organised into four domains of what morale is, what it is not, its antecedents and its consequences.

I then integrate the findings of the qualitative and quantitative research to produce an holistic view of morale and link it to the existing literature following the four domain outline identified above. I also review some of the limitations of the research. Finally I summarise the thesis and extract the key findings as well as identifying directions for future research.

This thesis makes a number of contributions to the field of morale research. The first is establishing through the literature review the reasons for the lack of research into, and understanding of, morale. This historical perspective suggests that a number of the current assumptions in the literature, for example that morale is the same as satisfaction, are erroneous. This is then further examined in the empirical phase of research which demonstrates clearly that morale is different from a number of the other concepts with which it has been conflated. Distinguishing morale from other concepts in this way has not been undertaken before.

The second contribution is the disaggregation of morale from its antecedents and consequences. This novel approach explains some of the confusion which has occurred within the literature.

The third contribution is the development and validation of a number of measurement scales for morale. This is of potential benefit to both academics and practitioners as it provides a validated scale for the measurement of morale grounded in empirical observation.

The fourth contribution is an evaluation of the nature of morale, leading to the development of a three domain model. This model explains how the phenomenon of morale operates.

The fifth contribution is an understanding of the antecedents of morale which are appraised both qualitatively and quantitatively. Finally the use of the measures developed allows an evaluation of the consequences of morale. This is a broad topic but embraces intra- and inter-personal effects as well as elements of individual and organisational performance.

Overall the research helps clarify a number of disputed issues within morale research, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative empirical observation. In doing so I hope to revivify research into morale by offering new techniques and insights which are of benefit to both the academic and practitioner communities.

The study of morale has a long history and in order to situate this research appropriately I shall now examine this disparate body of work.



## Chapter 2: Literature review

### Introduction

Published research on morale dates back almost a century but if one theme emerges from examining the literature it is complaint about the underdeveloped state of the concept of morale. In 1944 Hightower lamented that ‘*An almost complete lack of understanding of the nature of morale retards research in the field.*’ (Hightower, 1944, p 411). Sixty years later Liefoghe et al. expressed surprise that ‘*...when reviewing the literature, no strong theory to explain morale as such is in evidence, nor are there many empirical studies that offer solid ground to advise organisations...*’ (Liefoghe et al., 2004, p 1).

In the intervening period numerous articles have commented on the lack of consensus in either defining morale or understanding its dimensions (Blocker & Richardson, 1963; Coughlan, 1970; Doherty, 1988; Guion, 1958; Johnsrud, 1995, 2002; Johnsrud et al., 2000; McFadzean & McFadzean, 2005; Motowidlo et al., 1976; Motowidlo & Borman, 1977, 1978; Peterson et al., 2008; Roethlisberger, 1945; Webb & Hollander, 1956; Wigley, 2004; Zentner, 1951). The reasons for this are numerous and interlocking. Principal amongst them is the lack of a clear definition of morale. This stems from a lack of empirical observation in which to ground a definition (Britt, 1997, being a notable exception) and a tendency to conflate the feeling, state or sensation of morale with its antecedents and consequences. In many cases authors provide no definition of morale but leave it to be inferred from its antecedents and consequences.

Problems of defining what morale is are accompanied by a lack of understanding of what morale is not. Morale is either elided with other concepts or components of them are incorporated within it. This is hardly surprising as ‘*...OB researchers like proposing new attitudes [but] often we haven't been good at showing how they compare and contrast with each other.*’ (Robbins & Judge, 2009, p 116).

Judge and Church (2000), for example, equate morale with job satisfaction without an explanation of either how the two are similar, or different.

Underlying the problems with definition and delineation are some fundamental disagreements about the underpinnings of morale. There are debates about whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon, whether it is generalisable or context bound, and whether it is an affective or motivational state.

These problems with definition, differentiation and underpinnings have frustrated attempts to measure morale and determine its antecedents and consequences. The lack of clarity hampers measurement as it is difficult to determine what is being measured. As a consequence a vast

array of techniques have been used to try and measure morale ranging from the sociological (e.g. Durant, 1941) to the behavioural (e.g. Motowidlo & Borman, 1977) and survey techniques (e.g. Britt et al., 2007; Scott Jr., 1967). Problems with measurement, in turn, thwart attempts to determine the antecedents of morale as the impact of precursors of morale cannot be appraised. Examination of the consequences of morale are similarly hampered by the problems surrounding definition and also by a view that high morale is an unequivocally 'good thing' without any real thought as to what the boundaries of high or low morale might be<sup>1</sup>.

Despite the problems with the literature on morale much good work has been done. High morale is seen as a desirable organisational attribute and it is doubtless for this reason that there is so much interest in studying it. Conversely low morale is perceived as damaging and its avoidance is also a topic of interest. Certainly personal experience of working in both high and low morale environments would suggest that high morale is both pleasant and desirable.

The sheer diversity of studies and heterogeneity of definitions, dimensions and measurement could, in one way, be seen as an advantage. Tremendous variance has been produced and this means that many issues surrounding the definition, dimensions and measurement have been illustrated even if they have not been explicitly articulated or definitively decided upon.

This variance, however, means that there tend not to be distinct schools of thought as there are, for example, between positive psychology and conventional psychology (Fineman, 2006; Lazarus, 2003) but rather a variety of overlapping and interlocking views. This lack of intellectual fault lines between fields makes some of the more modern approaches to literature reviews problematic.

It is currently fashionable, with the advent of evidence based management (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2006), to undertake literature reviews which are qualitative meta-analyses of the field. These apply a positivist methodological approach to the acquisition of articles which form the foundation of the literature review (Briner & Pillbeam, 2008). This approach is commendable but is rather frustrated by variance in definitions of morale, its use in both academia and wider society, the multiple disciplinary fields which have employed the term and the fact that it is often

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<sup>1</sup> Most authors refer to 'morale'. This could mean one of two things. Strictly speaking it is the label applied to the concept or phenomenon as experienced by an individual or group. Morale is always present to some degree, be it high or low, in the same way that mood, with the exception of certain psychiatric disorders, is always present. Frequently, however, it is a parsing of the term 'high morale'. In the phrase '*The maintenance of morale is recognized in military circles as the most important single factor in war*' (Baynes, 1967, p 2), for example, the author is clearly referring to high morale. For this reason when talking about 'morale' are we are either labelling the concept or talking about high morale. Examples of low morale are usually preceded by some moderating word or phrase to indicate low morale.

used as a throw-away line in a paper such as '*transformational leaders uplift...morale...*' (Bass, 1999, p 9). Some papers (e.g. Hansen & Deimler, 2001; Kohl & Stephens, 1989) mention morale in the title but nowhere else. Accordingly I shall adopt a more conventional approach and aim to chart the various themes in the literature on morale, rather than the more rigid classification of a systematic review.

To acquire substrate for this literature review eight different databases (JSTOR, EBSCO Business Source Complete, Web of Science, ProQuest, Questia, Google Scholar and the University of Cambridge Newton Catalogue) were searched, using 'morale' as the search term. In addition individual searches were made of journals relevant to the management field (Journal of Management Studies, Academy of Management Review/Journal, Journal of Applied Psychology, Human Relations, Journal of Management).

This review aims to examine the present state of the morale literature by exploring the variety of definitions of morale, how it has been differentiated from other concepts, what factors influence it and what its consequences are. It will also attempt to understand the different approaches to some of the conceptual underpinnings of morale, such as whether it is a group or individual concept. The various approaches to measurement will also be investigated as these, in turn, reflexively affect the definitions and dimensions of morale. The aim, by the end of this chapter, is to provide an understanding of what has gone before in morale research, what the deficiencies are and how they might be remedied. This will then form the basis for the rest of the research into morale and also help define, demonstrate and clarify the contribution of this thesis to the body of knowledge.

### **Structure of the review**

Morale has a long history (Manning, 1991). This review grounds its examination of morale in the etymological and historical roots of the concept of morale. This approach enables an overall appreciation of the field of morale research to be gained along with the socio-political backdrop to its development. I will chart the development of the literature on morale from its early military beginnings, its rise to prominence and its subsequent decline and dismemberment into other constructs. These other constructs, and their relation to morale, will then be discussed along with the reasons that they have not supplanted morale in either the management or societal discourse.

Morale research has not entirely disappeared within the organisational and management discourse, indeed recent years have shown the beginnings of a resurgence of interest. Alongside

this there has been a constant stream of morale research in three disciplinary areas: education, healthcare and the military. I shall then examine the recent research into morale and integrate research from these three areas with organisational literature.

This will form the backdrop for an exploration and critique of the various definitions of morale which have been used and the means by which these definitions have been decided upon. This will be followed by an overview of the measurement techniques which have been used to investigate morale and the consequences of these investigations.

This examination of definition, dimensions and measurement raises a number of questions about the underpinnings of morale such as whether it is an individual or group phenomenon; whether it is context bound or can be generalised. Little work has been done in this area and yet a lack of understanding of the problems with the foundations of morale can further frustrate investigation.

Finally the elements of morale which have been discussed in this literature review will be integrated to provide the epistemological basis for the rest of the thesis and also articulate a series of research issues and questions which the empirical portion of the thesis will attempt to address.

## **A history of the morale concept**

In order to understand both the construct of morale and why the literature on it is incoherent it is useful to consider the historical origins of both the word and the concept. By tracing its development we can see how the present lack of clarity has come about and also appraise some paths by which this problem could be remedied.

### **Etymological origins and semantic field**

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) traces the etymological development from the French *moral[e]*<sup>2</sup> which referred to the morality of individuals, groups or of conduct. This usage persisted until the mid-nineteenth century when it was gradually supplanted by a different definition which referred to:

*'The mental or emotional state (with regard to confidence, hope, enthusiasm, etc.) of a person or group engaged in some activity; degree of contentment with one's lot or situation.'*

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<sup>2</sup> Morale was spelt as both *moral* and *morale* at this time as the definitions overlapped. The usage of the feminine form *morale* is thought to have developed to differentiate from *moral* and also to help facilitate pronunciation.

This more modern understanding emerges from military conceptions of morale with the majority of quotations in the OED drawing on this root. They still retain some of the moral or ethical flavour of the original meaning of the word. For instance the quotation *'But the greatest advantage of all, on the side of the people, is the morale. Every soldier knows in his heart...that he was not made to fire upon the citizens.'* (Thompson, 1843, cited in Oxford English Dictionary, 2005) shows the linkage between the morale of the soldier and his not being required to perform an unethical act. It is hard to think of individuals having high morale where they believe their actions to be unethical or illegitimate. Indeed the undermining of the ethical basis for a conflict can swiftly bring about a decline in morale of both combat troops and the civilian population (Creel, 1941; Miller, 1941). This problem of maintaining morale in warfare first piqued interest in the topic.

### Early interest in morale

Morale, in its current definition, existed as a concept as far back Xenophon's discovery that victory in battle depended not on numbers but on *'whichever army goes into battle stronger in soul'* (Richardson and Hunt, 1978, in Manning, 1991, p 453). This sentiment is echoed in Napoleon's oft cited comment that *'in war morale forces are to physical as three is to one'* (Pope, 1941, p 195).

Interest in morale as a topic of research only really began, however, with the onset of World War I (WW I) when the advent of industrial warfare (Smith, 2005) necessitated a shift from small numbers of professional soldiers to vast civilian armies (Camfield, 1977; Gal, 1986; Jones, 2006; Kümmel, 1999; MacKenzie, 1992) who *'demanded more information and no longer blindly followed orders'* (Liefoghe et al., 2004, p 9).

This led to concerns about the willingness of the troops to fight and so specialist units looking at morale such as the Morale Branch of the US Army General Staff were established (Camfield, 1977; Munson & Miller, 1921). Attempts were made to appraise morale, through monitoring letters home (MacKenzie, 1992) and examining battalion sickness rates<sup>3</sup> (Baynes, 1967); and influence it through courses and training (MacKenzie, 1992). Nor was attention solely focussed on the allied troops, however, as the impact of propaganda ('word bullets' in Bruntz' (1938, p 61) interesting conception) and their effect on German morale was also evaluated.

### The inter-war years

Over this period the focus was, understandably, on military morale. With the Armistice in 1918 military interest in morale waned and the first stirrings of interest in civilian, and particularly

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<sup>3</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Scottish Rifles, who had high morale, had a sickness rate of ~ 6 / day, as opposed to other regiments with lower morale that had rates of ~ 20-30 / day (Baynes, 1967, p 96) although the direction of causality is not explored.

commercial morale are seen. Morale was perceived as a critical antidote to the work alienation which was seen in this period (Slichter, 1920) with one author suggesting that *‘The country that first solves these problems will infallibly outstrip the others in the race for stability, security, and development’* (Park, 1934, p 355).

The onset of the depression of the 1930s further stimulated research with several studies examining the benefits of work versus welfare and how morale amongst the unemployed might best be addressed (Chapin & Jahn, 1940; Rundquist & Sletto, 1936). This period also saw the first attempts at quantitative measurement both at an individual level (Chapin & Jahn, 1940; Rundquist & Sletto, 1936) and also an early attempt at network measurement to try and integrate the interpersonal element of morale (Zeleny, 1939)

## World War II

This early work in the non-military sphere was overtaken by the onset of World War II (WW II). Generals such as Slim and Montgomery viewed improving morale within their respective armies as pivotal in turning around the unfavourable geo-strategic positions in which they found themselves (Montgomery of Alamein, 2007; Slim, 1986). Again attempts to link morale to outcomes were made using ‘willingness for combat’ as a rough proxy for morale (Manning, 1991, p 466). These showed a correlation between non-battle casualties and ‘willingness for combat’ in rifle companies ( $r = -0.33$ ) and heavy weapons ( $r = -0.41$ ), suggesting that the higher morale the lower the accident rate (Stouffer, 1949, cited in Manning, 1991).

Morale research during this period was not restricted to the military, however. The advent of the ‘Total War’ concept (Allport & Lepkin, 1943; Calvo-coressi & Wint, 1979) gave rise to concerns for the morale of the civilian population. Not merely were civilians necessary to produce the matériel for industrial warfare but they were also subjected to its consequences through area bombing. As the prosecution of war in a democracy is contingent on the consent of the populace there was great interest in maintaining high morale so that the population did not withdraw consent before victory. This stimulated immense amounts of research – 23 journal articles in 1941 alone and two special issues of journals concerned solely with morale.

These studies examined a variety of different areas. Some investigated the definition and dimensions of morale (Ames, 1941; Angell, 1942; Chein, 1943; Griesser, 1942; Hightower, 1944; Hocking, 1941; Perry, 1941; Washburn, 1941) and used a variety of theoretical viewpoints

ranging from the sociological to the religious to try and understand the concept<sup>4</sup>. Others explored how it might be measured either directly using conventional techniques (Woods, 1944) or indirectly using surrogate outcomes such as the level of strikes, industrial output, purchase of government bonds, drunkenness and property crime to infer the level of societal morale (Durant, 1941; Miller, 1941; Shils, 1941). A large swathe of research concerned itself with the influence of propaganda (Allport & Lepkin, 1943; Creel, 1941; Estorick, 1941; Park, 1941) and rationing (Anderson, 1943) on morale levels, reflecting the issues of keeping civilian opinion behind the war effort.

Much of this research was linked to the prosecution of the war and emerged from the military paradigm. Interestingly not merely did the focus of analysis shift to the civilian sphere but military morale research actually declined somewhat in this period.

### **The industrial post-war period**

The aftermath of WW II saw the exacerbation of the shift in morale research into civilian, and notably organisational, life. There were three main reasons for this. The first is that the close links between industry and the military, fostered in warfare, were perpetuated in the post war period; most memorably in Eisenhower's military-industrial complex. This meant concepts and practices diffused from military into civilian life. The second reason for civilian organisations to embrace morale was its perceived impact. Harnessing the drive which high morale had produced on the battlefield held out the prospect of improved productivity and labour relations in the workplace. Thirdly a cadre of soldiers returning to the workforce brought military precepts and practices with them.

This move chimed with the shift from the Taylorist (Taylor, 1964) practices of the early twentieth century to the human relations movement (Mayo, 1945; Roethlisberger, 1945; Roethlisberger, Dickson, Wright, & Western Electric Company, 1939) which placed greater emphasis on the psychological state and welfare of the individual worker (Barley & Kunda, 1992). It also coincided with the emergence of Management Studies as a discipline and these two factors provided fertile ground for the seeds of morale research to be planted.

This led to a body of research examining morale in a variety of industries and settings such as retail sales (Giese & Ruter, 1949; Worthy, 1950a, 1950b), light industry (Goode & Fowler, 1949), trades unions (Rose, 1950) and utilities (Browne & Neitzel, 1952). These studies used a

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<sup>4</sup> Interestingly the religious view of morale links it closely to the morality of the cause, echoing the original definition of morale.

spectrum of definitions of morale and a number of different measurement practices, making the extraction of generalised lessons problematic. This problem was exacerbated by the use at the time of the term ‘morale ballot’ or ‘morale survey’ (Baehr & Renck, 1958; Campbell & Tyler, 1957; Giese & Ruter, 1949; Gocke, 1945; Goode & Fowler, 1949; Herzberg, 1954; MacRury, 1949; Webb & Hollander, 1956) to describe any kind of survey of employee attitudes or feelings.

### Concept fragmentation and decline

This lack of consensus on the definition of morale, and the varied means of its assessment produced an incoherent literature, which was difficult to add to as there was no sound ground to build on. This coupled with the confusion over ‘morale ballots’ appears to have discouraged researchers, so that since 1960 few articles have examined the topic explicitly. In 1973 the concept ‘died’ when the word was delisted from the *Index of Psychological Abstracts* (Organ, 1997).

What seems to have happened, within the management literature, is that the morale concept was dismembered. The various components of the construct were portioned off and subsumed into terms such as job satisfaction, job involvement, organisational commitment and group cohesion or perceptual terms such as organisational climate. There is some evidence for this. Prior to delisting the term the *Index of Psychological Abstracts* entry for morale instructed the reader to ‘see Job Satisfaction’ (Hershey, 1985).

Morale in the post-1970 period was frequently viewed as synonymous with these other concepts. For example Judge and Church’s (2000) work on job satisfaction begins by talking about morale but then switches to talking about job satisfaction without any comment or distinction between the two concepts. Leavitt (1996) makes a similar elision. The exemplars of this casual usage of the term morale are two papers which, as previously mentioned, have morale in the title but nowhere in the text (see Hansen & Deimler, 2001; Kohl & Stephens, 1989)

### Other constructs and their relation to morale

The disappearance of morale as a topic and the concomitant rise of other concepts raises a number of questions. Firstly why did morale research dwindle; secondly what supplanted it and thirdly how effective have these other concepts been in explaining the space occupied by the phenomenon of morale?

Morale research, as mentioned above, appears to have declined as a result of conceptual incoherence. The term morale was so poorly defined that Motowidlo & Borman (1977) list 12 different papers offering definitions of morale. In addition some of these papers, such as Guion (1958) contain multiple definitions within them. So there are clearly problems of definition.



Alongside these problems of definition there are also problems of terminology such as the term ‘morale ballots’ outlined above (p 24). This problem persists to this day with Subramony et al. (2008) claiming that Campbell & Tyler (1957) ‘defined’ morale as ‘*average feeling of contentment or satisfaction about the major aspects of the work situation*’ (Campbell, 1957, p 91 cited in Subramony et al., 2008, p 780). This is incorrect and unfaithful to the original Campbell and Tyler article which actually is about the construct validity of ‘morale ballots’ or workforce attitude surveys in current parlance rather than morale the concept itself. The conclusions that proceed from such confusion may be rigorous and robust but they are not likely to be valid as they are improperly grounded. This variance in construct specification frustrates research as different papers cannot be compared because they understand and measure different things.

Morale’s decline can be, in part, explained by the rise of other concepts, for example job satisfaction and organisational commitment. These other concepts had three attributes which morale lacked and so had an evolutionary advantage over morale. The first is that these other concepts were better defined and more ‘precise’ (Organ, 1997), facilitating the development of measurement instruments and linkage to performance. The second is a founding piece of research, in the case of organisational commitment it was the work of Mowday, Steers and Porter (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979; Porter & Steers, 1973; Porter, Steers, Mowday, & Boulian, 1974; Steers, 1974; Steers, 1977) which provided a recognised starting point. The third attribute is someone to promulgate the concept. Evangelism about the benefit of using a particular concept to improve business performance encourages others into the field which, in turn, increases the concept’s popularity.

Morale by contrast to these other concepts is poorly defined, has no founding article and lacks evangelists. As a result these other concepts into which portions of morale have been subsumed have an evolutionary advantage over morale and so have prospered as it has declined.

Whatever the reasons underlying the shift morale research declined and other concepts rose to take its place. I shall now turn to these other concepts and examine their explanatory power within the phenomenological space occupied by morale.

### **Job satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is the concept with which morale has most commonly been equated. Numerous studies (e.g. Blocker & Richardson, 1963; Brown & Rawlinson, 1976; Cox, 2001; Fogarty et al., 1999; Griffith, 2001; Jehn, Northcraft, & Neale, 1999; Kennedy, 1995; Paul & Gross, 1981; Price, 1963; Rausch, 1971; Smith, 1955; Subramony et al., 2008; Zeitz, 1983) use the terms

synonymously drawing on articulations of satisfaction for their definition of morale.

Unsurprisingly with many definitions of morale reflecting job satisfaction the measures used to measure morale similarly can contain job satisfaction items such as *'Overall, I am satisfied with my organization as an employer'* (Subramony et al., 2008, p 781). Furthermore job satisfaction has been shown in studies (Harter, Schmidt, & Hayes, 2002; Koys, 2001) and meta-analysis to predict performance (Judge, Thoresen, Bono, & Patton, 2001; Petty, McGee, & Cavender, 1984), although this link has been disputed (Organ, 1977). This chimes with the prevailing social conception that morale influences performance. This begs the question of whether morale and job satisfaction are, in fact, the same thing.

The answer to this depends on the author being read and the definition of job satisfaction employed. As Wanous and Lawler have demonstrated there are numerous definitions and the measures derived from them do not, necessarily, correlate (Wanous & Lawler, 1972).

A number of authors have discussed this difference and suggest that morale and satisfaction are different things. They differentiate the two by finding examples where one might be high and the other low; their relationship to the future or a goal; and their applicability to either the individual or the group. Kanter (cited in Johnsrud et al., 2000; 1993) offers the example of an individual who is satisfied with the content of their job but at the same time suffers low morale as a result of a lack of prospects for advancement. Smith (1976) echoes this, criticising American studies for confusing morale and satisfaction, making the distinction that *'high morale may exist in a situation where many job dissatisfactions exist and are being overcome'* (Smith, 1966, p 166, cited in Evans, 1998).

The relationship to the future and goals is used by a number of authors. Guba (1958) sees satisfaction as the fulfilling of wants or as *'...a function of the degree of congruence between institutional expectations and individual need-dispositions'* (Getzels & Guba, 1957, p 235) whereas morale he sees as combination of communality of goal and 'belongingness'. Evans similarly captures the element of future expectation or goal in her definitions of morale and satisfaction (Evans, 2001). Morale she characterises as an anticipation of satisfaction and job satisfaction as the satisfaction itself (Evans, 2001, p 294), effectively seeing job satisfaction as present orientated and morale as future orientated (Evans, 1999).

Blum and Naylor believe that *'Although morale is related to job satisfaction, it is not the same thing. There is no justification for using the two terms interchangeably'* (Blum & Naylor, 1968, p 391-2). They justify

this view by using morale for the group and satisfaction for the individual, an approach echoed by Zeitz (1983)

Overall these three different approaches are used within the literature to separate morale from satisfaction. Some researchers seek not to separate the two but rather to incorporate definitions of satisfaction into those of morale. This is either achieved by proposing morale as a meta-factor which underlies a number of organisational phenomena (Organ, 1997; Vandenberg et al., 1999) or by viewing morale as a portmanteau concept which covers a number of sub-components which may incorporate satisfaction (Doherty, 1988).

In spite of many authors eliding morale and satisfaction it appears that the two are different although related. They can be distinguished by finding situations where one is low and the other high such as those outlined by Kanter and Smith. Morale also seems to incorporate an element of the future or a goal which satisfaction lacks. In some cases authors reserve morale for the group using satisfaction for the individual. The meta-factor approach appears to be an attempt to account for the similarities between the two concepts whilst recognising that they are different. Whatever approach is used to separate them it seems that morale and satisfaction are different but not wholly incommensurate.

### **Motivation**

Morale is often equated with motivation and the two terms used interchangeably; particularly in conversations with lay people. Often books and articles will talk about motivation and morale in the same sentence (e.g. Scandura & Lankau, 1997) but neither distinguish between the two nor explain their similarities.

Morale interacts with the content theories of motivation (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004) such as the needs theories of Alderfer (1969) and Maslow (1970), emerging as they did at a similar time as much morale research. It does seem to be quite different, however, as high morale on the battlefield would not map tidily onto experience or growth, although the cohesion of a military unit might conceivably bring relatedness. These theories are quite good for supplying reasons for individuals to act (Latham & Pinder, 2005) but are less useful for explaining the affective elements which attend motivation.

The process theories of motivation (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004) are a somewhat closer fit. These theories such as Vroom's VIE (Vroom, 1964) require individuals to establish cognitively that they can perform at the required level, that if they perform they will be rewarded and that if rewarded then the rewards are what they actually want. This has some overlap with the goal

related aspect of morale but expectancy theory does not address the affective state produced during motivation, treating it instead as a mental calculation.

Goal setting (Latham & Locke, 1991; Locke, Latham, & Smith, 1990; Locke, Shaw, Saari, & Latham, 1981; Tubbs, 1986) is perhaps the closest of all the motivational theories to morale as it has some overlap with many of the morale definitions. As the name suggests goal setting is a motivational theory around setting of goals which must be difficult and specific (Locke et al., 1981). The performance effects are moderated by three variables. The first is goal commitment or how important and achievable the goal is to the individual. The second is self-efficacy which is the individual's belief that they can succeed. The third is complexity as more complex tasks are less likely to produce performance increases than simpler ones (Locke & Latham, 2002).

The importance of a goal or objective is a common theme in many morale definitions. Self-efficacy or belief in oneself is also seen in some morale definitions. Where morale appears to differ is that it is an affective state whereas goal setting implies a rational calculus in which affect is a (sometimes unwelcome) by product. Goal setting also fails to account for either interpersonal dynamics, save in the service of the goal. It therefore has overlaps with morale but is not quite the same thing as it lacks the affective and interpersonal components which are present in so many morale definitions.

Although different from morale motivation is undoubtedly linked to morale, indeed some definitions of morale incorporate the word motivation (e.g. Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Motowidlo et al., 1976). If motivation is regarded as the force which enables the individual to attain an objective then it is undoubtedly part of the morale construct. On balance, however, it seems likely that the two are different when the different dimensions and attributes are taken into consideration.

### **Organisational commitment**

The concept of organisational commitment shows similarities with morale as it is a psychological link between the employee and their organization (Allen & Meyer, 1996). Organisational commitment is defined as '*the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization*' (Mowday et al., 1979, p 226). This has been subsequently refined further into various subcomponents of commitment, notably affective, continuance and normative commitment (Allen & John, 1990; Allen & Meyer, 1996; Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; Kacmar, Carlson, & Brymer, 1999). The affective component which describes individuals' affective attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organisation is perhaps closest to

morale. 'This is seen as the internalisation of organisational objectives so that the *'employee's involvement in the organization takes on personal moral overtones and his stake extends beyond the satisfaction of merely personal interest...'* (Lincoln & Kalleberg, 1990, p 22).

Morale can however be differentiated from commitment in a number of ways. The goal related element of morale does not seem to be represented in commitment theories although it may be a precursor for the individual's involvement. Organisational commitment also requires an organisation whereas morale does not seem to. Perhaps the most useful way of differentiating commitment and morale is using the same approach as satisfaction and thinking of situations where one might be high and the other low. When Shell restated their oil reserves employees had low morale but remained committed to the organisation (Chung, 2004). This was not solely as a result of continuance commitment as jobs were available elsewhere but because Shell had a reputation for treating employees well and inspiring commitment.

There is some empirical evidence showing that morale differs from normative commitment. Shirom (1976) presents a cluster analysis of morale and normative commitment. The morale measure was based on an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) instrument measuring 'team spirit' and normative commitment based on a pre-existing scale (DeLamater, Katz, & Kelman, 1969). This clearly shows the two concepts being highly differentiated.

Lincoln and Kalleberg (1990) get round this by describing commitment to the work itself rather than the organisation but the concept of commitment still seems rather static and contractual. High morale implies an objective being worked towards whereas commitment implies a static bond to the organisation. It seems unlikely, therefore, that commitment and morale are the same thing, although they have similarities.

### Summary

There are a number of concepts which appear to occupy a similar conceptual space to morale. What is interesting is that the differentiation of concepts is seldom undertaken. This lack of delineation of concepts means that there is a danger of research sliding into an amorphous space which deals with how people feel about their work. A number of authors (Organ, 1997; Vandenberg et al., 1999) have carried this point to its logical conclusion by viewing morale as an overall factor which embraces a number of sub-concepts rather like the *g* of general intelligence (Gottfredson, 1996, 1997). Still others have tried to deal with this problem by imposing strict definitions of morale and castigating those who do not follow them (see Hershey, 1985). These

issues of definition will be covered at the end of this overview of the history of morale. For the moment, however, I shall return to examine morale in the modern era.

### Contemporary morale research

When we left the history of morale, to examine the other concepts into which it had been dismembered, the term had been used synonymously with job satisfaction in the *Index of Psychological Abstracts* between 1970-72, and then was delisted in 1973.

In 1978, however, it was reintroduced in the *Index* without any reference to job satisfaction. This marked the beginning of the recent literature on morale and was probably in response to two articles by Motowidlo and Borman (1977, 1978).

So why did the study of morale survive? There seem to be three reasons. The first is that the term morale was kept alive in the managerial discourse through frequent usage, however imprecise. The second is that it survived in three non-managemental disciplinary areas: education, healthcare and the military (Liefoghe et al., 2004). The third is the somewhat equifinal argument that if morale could be decomposed into these other factors then it would cease to have any meaning as a concept and would have become superfluous (Hershey, 1985). We would simply look back on morale as an antiquated notion which served a purpose as an umbrella term for a number of other concepts and, now that they have been elucidated, is redundant.

Whatever the reasons for its survival survive it has and recent years have shown the first signs of a resurgence of interest in the concept. There are various reasons for this, the main one being the perceived inability of other concepts to adequately explain or decompose the sensation of morale as experienced by individuals or to evaluate its link with performance.

A number of approaches have been taken when looking at morale and linking it to performance. Some have tried to tabulate morale in a more or less quantitative manner (e.g. Lindsay, Manning, & Petrick, 1992; Zeitz, 1983). Others have examined either morale in redundancy (Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2004; Mishra et al., 1998) intention to leave (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) or holistically in terms of whether poor morale is costly to firms (Straka, 1993). The influence of morale on productivity has also been examined both on a small scale (Abbott, 2003) and in national surveys (Weakliem & Frenkel, 2006) as well as within the pay-performance construct (Kennedy, 1995) and agency model (Stowe, 2009; Stowe, 2004).

Many of these recent articles, however, suffer from the perennial problem of poor domain specification and vague definitions of morale. Indeed one recent study (Subramony et al., 2008) uses a definition of morale (Campbell & Tyler, 1957) which actually is from a paper about morale ballots (see p 24) rather than about morale itself. This problem of linking morale with another term (as in ‘morale ballot’) may be about to repeat itself with the emergent interest in ‘tax morale’, which is the willingness of individuals to pay taxes (Torgler & Schneider, 2009), and has nothing to do with ‘morale’ in the conventional sense.

Recent morale research has tried to rehabilitate the concept but little has been done to address Roethlisberger’s complaint that morale is a vague term (Roethlisberger, 1945). Definitions of morale are still poor and theoretical development minimal. The definition is either selected from a list of existing definitions with little justification for the choice or statistics are used to define the construct (Rossiter, 2005) and the emergent category is labelled ‘morale’. This labelling, it has been suggested, is a political process (Liefoghe et al., 2004) which can result in a partial view of morale. What is certain is that either of these approaches is not satisfactory and does not provide a sound empirical grounding in the societal understanding of morale.

### Summary

The history of the morale concept is, as we have seen, one of much research and report but little coherence and clarity. The perceived importance of morale is sufficient to maintain interest and attempts at elucidation but because the underpinnings of morale remain vague there is still scope for improvement.

### Definitions and dimensions of morale

If you are going to try and understand something you need a way of delineating it from other things. For physical objects this might be quite easy. The boundaries of a table, for example, are reasonably clearly defined at a macro level but when one descends to the micro or molecular level this boundary becomes rather ill defined. How much more so this is for social objects. If they can be defined at all then the boundaries are necessarily fuzzier as they are unobservable. Overlaying these difficulties with the problems of definitional imprecision and any hope of extracting useful information dims.

A definition is not crucial in all cases as demonstrated by Justice Potter Stewart when defining pornography. His opinion stated *I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material.... and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it....* (Brennan, 1964). This

‘elephant test’ (Wedderburn, 2001) works well for retrospective judgement but is not satisfactory for prospective analysis. Some sort of definition is needed.

Baehr and Renck commented, when surveying the literature back in 1958, that *‘morale yields definitions which are as varied as they are numerous’* (Baehr & Renck, 1958, p 158). It is a point well made and entire papers have been devoted to trying to clarify this (e.g. Liefoghe et al., 2004; Manning, 1991; Zeitz, 1983). Some authors have even gone so far as to suggest that the meaning of morale can vary sharply across different contexts (Manning, 1991). In spite of these concerns it is useful to examine the various definitions of morale to try and extract common themes.

### Early definitions of morale

The first definitions of morale were military and tacit such as Xenophon’s belief that it is *‘...not numbers or strength bring victory in war; but whichever army goes into battle stronger in soul, their enemies generally cannot withstand them’* (quoted in Manning, 1991, p 453-454) and Tolstoy’s idea that:

*‘In warfare the force of armies is the product of the mass multiplied by something else, an unknown X...X is the spirit of the army, the greater or less desire to fight and to face dangers on the part of all the men composing the army...’* (Tolstoy, 1961)

Whilst these do not explicitly define morale it seems that that is what both Xenophon and Tolstoy are getting at. These articulations hint at some sort of collective mental state which provides drive and resilience; and which will overcome obstacles.

Baker (1930) augments these articulations by suggesting that morale requires a goal and some sort of group effort towards this goal. This element of cooperation is also seen in Park’s (1934) interpretation of the Hawthorne studies where he believes that a *‘non-logical social code, which regulates relations between persons and their attitudes to one another’* (p 352) is the key factor in sustaining industrial morale. He also believes that workers will find it *‘difficult to persist in action for an end he can but dimly see’* (p 351).

Taking these early definitions together we find the precursors of much subsequent work. Morale appears to be something which is difficult to define, involves drive, resilience and overcoming obstacles. There are also elements of group affiliation and interrelationship as well as goals and objectives which are important. At a more indefinite level the terms ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ are used. Many of these themes are expanded and contested in the definitions which occur after the onset of WW II although application of more ‘scientific’ approaches appears to reduce the usage of terms such as spirit and soul.



### Non-military definitions from the WW II period

WW II, with its emphasis on ‘total war’ (Angell, 1942) led to the concern that the view of the populace might affect the prosecution of the war, or worse that they might withdraw their consent for it. As a result of this there was a significant exfoliation of morale research.

Three particular events stand out in this tranche of research. Two of these are special issues of the American Journal of Sociology (AJS) and Journal of Educational Sociology (JES) in 1941 which dealt with a number of aspects of morale, the third was the publication of Child’s (1941) review of the morale literature.

In the AJS special issue a number of definitions were advanced. Hocking (1941) suggested that *‘Morale is a character of will in reference to a particular undertaking...it is a measure of one’s disposition to give of one’s self to the objective in hand’* (p303). This individualist definition was complemented by other authors who took a more group orientated tack. Durant described morale as *‘...the relationship of a group to a given end’* (p 406) and Landis (1941) as *‘a state of mind, shared by members of a group and moving them to make the fullest use of their strength and skill to attain a given objective.’* (p 331).

The JES special issue begins with Pope’s (1941) expression of the importance of morale. This is tempered by Bateson and Mead (1941) who state that *‘Morale is not a strict scientific abstraction measurable in defined units’* (p 206). They then go on to offer a loose definition that *‘high morale is any positive and energetic attitude toward a goal’* (p 206). The remainder of the articles (Farago, 1941; Ruch, 1941) in this issue tend to talk about influencing or measuring morale without ever defining it other than tacitly through its antecedents or consequences.

These two special issues, therefore, are not immensely helpful in defining morale. Indeed they were criticised by Hightower (1944) because although they were in sociology journals they were not written by sociologists.

Child (1941), in one of the very few review articles on morale, offers three definitions of morale which draw on a conference convened in Cambridge<sup>5</sup> in the fall of 1940. All three definitions require hope and energetic participation in a task, but differ in the view taken as to whether morale was an individual, group or individual-in-group phenomenon.

Individual morale was defined as *‘The term morale refers to a condition of physical and emotional well-being in the individual that makes it possible for him to work and live hopefully and effectively, feeling that he shares the basic purposes of the groups of which he is a member; and that makes it possible*

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<sup>5</sup> He does not specify which Cambridge.

*for him to perform his tasks with energy, enthusiasm, and self-discipline, sustained by a conviction that, in spite of obstacles and conflict, his personal and social ideals are worth pursuing.'*

The group definition stated '*Morale refers to the condition of a group where there are clear and fixed group goals (purposes) that are felt to be important and integrated with individual goals; where there is confidence in the attainment of these goals, and subordinately, confidence in the means of attainment, in the leaders, associates, and finally in oneself; where group actions are integrated and cooperative; and where aggression and hostility are expressed against the forces frustrating the group rather than toward other individuals within the group.'*

The individual-in-group definition was rather briefer '*Given a certain task to be accomplished by the group, morale pertains to all factors in the individual's life that bring about a hopeful and energetic participation on his part so that his efforts enhance the effectiveness of the group in accomplishing the task in hand.'*

Interestingly only the second definition mentions the role of goals in morale with the other two talking about 'task'. Chein (1943) attempts to build on this review by integrating these various views and then extending them using a Freudian analysis. This turns out not to be terribly helpful as it concentrates on ideas such as the id fighting the Germans.

What is notable about definitions of morale from this period is how (unsurprisingly) they are focussed on the war effort, concentrating on civilian morale (both domestic and enemy) and the effects of rationing and so forth. There is very little emphasis on industrial production or the underlying psychological aspects. As the war wore on interest in morale in areas not connected to the war increased (e.g. Gocke, 1945; Woods, 1944), presaging the post-war transfer of interest from the military to industrial morale. The definitions were similar but the subject changed.

The key themes which emerge from this era are that morale definitions contain some sort of goal (be it tacit or explicit), energetic pursuit of that goal and, perhaps most importantly given the circumstances, an element of overcoming difficulty. The interpersonal element of morale is better structured although no better defined. The problems of poor definition and confusion about measurement, however, remain.

### **Post-war morale**

The post war period saw an increased interest in morale in non-military contexts. As mentioned previously much of the usage of the term morale in this period was in the context of the 'morale ballot' or attitude survey. In spite of this there was a significant body of literature exploring morale and its definition.

Baehr and Renck (1958) draw on what would have been contemporary theories to explore morale. They make use of 'needs theories' which are either hierarchies (after Maslow, 1943) or needs themselves (Allport, 1944; McGregor, 1944) as well as Elton Mayo's work. Although they claim that they will define it they never, in fact, do within the article. Instead the reader is left to infer that it is a combination of integration with the organisation, job satisfaction, immediate supervision and friendliness and cooperation of fellow employees (Baehr & Renck, 1958, p 164-165).

This evidence of confusion of concepts is also seen in Guion's (1958) discussion at a symposium on morale. His paper, entitled 'The Problem of Terminology' begins by saying that he is going to focus on the single word and not worry much about the verbal chaos surrounding it. True to his word he reviews seven different definitions of morale which include happiness, cohesion and group goals, amongst other things. He then offers his own definition that '*Morale is the extent to which an individual's needs are satisfied and the extent to which the individual perceives that satisfaction as stemming from his total job situation.*' (Guion, 1958, p 62). A definition which looks awfully like job satisfaction although he goes on to say that he thinks morale is more than job satisfaction.

Guion suspected that his definition would not meet with approval and, if the subsequent papers at the symposium are anything to go by, he was right (Motowidlo et al., 1976). What he did say which was eminently sensible statement that '*the first, and most neglected, step in adequate research is the definition of variables*' (Guion, 1958, p 63) and that this should be based on empirical research.

Guba (1958) uses a definition that '*morale is a predisposition on the part of persons engaged in an enterprise to put forth extra effort in the achievement of group goals or objectives*' (p 198). This concurs with the views of Scott and co-workers (Scott Jr., 1967; Scott Jr. & Rowland, 1970). He suggests that morale has both affective and cognitive components which manifest themselves at work as General Affective Tone and General Arousal. This, he believes, coincides with Child's notions of enthusiasm outlined above.

As would be expected, given the thesis that morale was dismembered into other concepts, there are many fewer papers on morale in the 1970s and 1980s. Zeitz (1983) uses the definition that '*Morale concerns members' affective or emotive responses to the organization-their general sense of well-being and enthusiasm for collective endeavors*' (Zeitz, 1983, p 1089). He also suggests that morale can be combined with job satisfaction to form a concept of 'overall hedonic tone', the relevance of which will be discussed shortly.

### Late morale definitions

The period of late morale research since the 1980s has been marked by some interesting developments and some depressing reminders of previous decades.

Although some authors still use job satisfaction as the individual level and morale for a group summation of job satisfactions scores (e.g. Fogarty et al., 1999; Gresov, Drazin, & Van de Ven, 1989; Jehn et al., 1999; Reed, 2002) there have been two new developments in defining morale.

The first of these is the development of a small literature on economic morale. This generally treats morale as a mechanism which influences production (Kandori, 2003). Morale is improved by some things, such as increased wages, and so production increases (Pemberton, 1985). On the other hand wages don't fall in slumps because management are worried that this will affect morale and harm production (Bewley, 1999). This literature is interesting as it refuses even to deal with the substance of what morale is but rather infers it from some quite remote variables.

The second development stems from Organ's musing that there may be a 'meta factor' underlying a number of concepts such as satisfaction, fairness, organisational commitment and leader consideration (Organ, 1997; Organ & Ryan, 1995). This echoes Zeitz' (1983) idea of 'overall hedonic tone' and Guba's (1958) 'general affective tone' but is rather more sophisticated. Organ and Near (1995) conducted a meta-analysis of organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) and noted that the correlation coefficients for a number of predictor variables were larger than normal and were similar. This led him to speculate that there might be an underlying value, which he calls *m* (in homage to the *g* of general intelligence) which was, in fact, morale.

Vandenberg and co-workers make a similar point and model morale as a latent variable comprising job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover intention (Vandenberg et al., 1999). This is an intriguing notion but rather forces us back to the problem outlined by Rossiter (2005) of statistics defining the construct. Effectively the term morale is a label applied to an unexplained value rather than grounded in any understanding of the concept. Simply labelling something as morale does not make it morale.

In addition to these two developments there have also been some more conventional attempts to define morale. Weakliem and Frenkel (2006) use what they believe is Manning's (1991) definition morale being the feelings about the '*prescribed activities of the group*' (p 337). Britt and Dickinson (2006) use '*a service member's level of motivation and enthusiasm for achieving mission success*' (p 162), suggesting that morale is a motivational construct rather than affective state.

Peterson and co-workers (2008) offer perhaps the most embracing and useful definition that *'morale is a cognitive, emotional, and motivational stance toward the goals and tasks of a group. It subsumes confidence, optimism, enthusiasm, and loyalty as well as a sense of common purpose'* (p 21).

These modern definitions, therefore, offer new views on morale whilst building on what has gone before. The same elements of energy, enthusiasm and goal directedness remain but they are set in a modern context.

Morale's decline and dismemberment was followed by a fallow period until the recent resurgence of late morale. Through this period, however, interest in the topic was kept alive in three areas: education, healthcare and the military. These three fields each had their own understanding of morale which helps further enrich our understanding of morale's definition.

### **Educational morale**

Educational morale definitions are not immune to the problems seen in the management field. Several studies, for example, elide job satisfaction and morale (Coughlan, 1970; Kerlin & Dunlap, 1993; Price, 1971).

When the state of low morale, which seems to be the perennial focus in this literature, is articulated it is described as a state of disinterest, futility, suspicion, dissatisfaction and dissent (Satlow, 1954). High morale by contrast is seen as the energy, enthusiasm, team spirit and pride that teachers experience in their school (Hart, 1994)

The educational literature either attempts to define morale directly or through its antecedents and consequences. Johnsrud regards morale as *'the level of well-being that an individual or group is experiencing in reference to their worklife'* (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002, p 524) whereas Evans proposes that morale is *'a state of mind encompassing all of the feelings determined by the individual's anticipation of the extent of satisfaction of those needs which s/he perceives as significantly affecting his/her total work situation'* (Evans, 1998, p 30)

Often this literature is more focussed on tacit definitions of morale perceived through its antecedents and consequences (Blocker & Richardson, 1963; Coughlan, 1970; Johnsrud, 1995). In most cases the antecedents are of a quite practical and instrumental nature. Educational morale, for example, might be appraised by measuring external factors such as facilities, work load or student interaction (Blocker & Richardson, 1963; Coughlan, 1970) and then deducing morale levels from them.

Doherty avoids definition, proposing that morale is a *portmanteau* construct encompassing anxiety, stability of self-concept, a sense of optimism/pessimism and so forth (Doherty, 1988), presaging Organ and Near's (Organ, 1997; Organ & Ryan, 1995) ideas by a decade.

Definitions of morale in the educational literature are quite concerned with practical matters and are very educationally directed. This raises the question of generalisability of definition to non-teaching areas.

### Healthcare morale

Morale in this area has focussed on two groups; nurses and the elderly and debilitated, and the definitions used are somewhat different to those in the educational sphere. In the elderly morale is seen as being about control, purposiveness, satisfaction, optimism, belonging, identification with some normative order, or self-esteem (Maddox, 1963, p 195).

Definitions of nursing morale are rather different and proceed from quite contextualised and implicit understandings of what morale is. Cox (2001), for example, like many authors in this field talks about 'unit morale' (presumably the nursing unit/ward) without ever defining it.

A notable exception from this is McFadzean & McFadzean's (2005) paper, which reviews some of the morale literature. They draw on a number of sources (e.g. Guba, 1958; McKnight, Ahmad, & Schroeder, 2001; Stewart & Spence, 1997) to propose that:

*Morale is the degree to which an employee exhibits a positive or motivated psychological state. It can manifest itself as pride in the organisation and its goals, faith in its leadership, and a sense of shared purpose with, and loyalty to, others in the organisation'* (McFadzean & McFadzean, 2005 p 320)

The difference in definitions between those used in healthcare and those in education are quite marked and yet both fields do seem to be drawing on contextual experience and labelling it morale.

### Military morale

As the discipline with the longest interest in morale it is hardly surprising that the military field has a sizeable literature on morale. The US Army (Department of the Army, 1983) *Field Manual on Leadership* (FM 22-100) defines it thus:

*Morale is defined as the mental, emotional and spiritual state of the individual. It is how he feels - happy, hopeful, confident, appreciated, worthless, sad, unrecognized or depressed.'* (Department of the Army, 1983, p 228)

This rather all-embracing definition firmly roots morale at the individual level. In many ways it is a very good definition as it pins morale squarely as an affective state, resisting the temptation to define morale by its antecedents or consequences. As a result of keeping the focus solely on morale itself it incorporates the cognitive and affective elements both of which are components of the experience of the phenomenon of morale. Baynes (1967) similarly incorporates both cognitive and affective components.

In avoiding antecedents and consequences, however, the definition overlooks important elements such as goals, the future and interpersonal relationships. Many military definitions place a greater emphasis on these elements such as Manning's (1991) parsing of Baynes' definition to *'Morale is the enthusiasm and persistence with which a member of a group engages in the prescribed activities of the group'* (p 455). He then takes up this theme of group and cohesion citing research which suggests that one of the main reason that soldiers fight is for their friends or group, not the overarching aims of the nation (Gal & Jones, 1995). This echoes the situation in civilian organisations where people work for the sake their colleagues and not for the organisation as a whole.

Blumer's (1943) definition of morale as:

*'the disposition of a group to act together toward a collective goal and that accordingly its strength depends on how the goal is conceived, on the feelings and interests developed around it, and on the mutual support which the members sense in one another'* (p 217 , cited in Kümmel, 1999)

reinforces this element of group cohesion for mutual support and also articulates more clearly than Baynes' definition a goal element of morale.

The 'goal' element of military definitions is conceptualised differently by Slim (1986) who defined morale as a state of mind which acted as an intangible force which impelled groups of men to achieve something without counting the cost to themselves; and also that they felt part of something greater than themselves.

Montgomery (Montgomery of Alamein & Churchill, 1948) provides an interesting view by defining what morale is not, stating *'Morale is a mental rather than a physical quality, a determination to overcome obstacles, an instinct driving a man forwards against his own desires. High morale is not happiness...High morale is not toughness...'* This, again, emphasises that morale, in the military view, has an objective direction towards a goal and is coupled with a determination to get the job done.

Motowidlo and Borman review a number of definitions of morale before offering that morale

*‘...might be defined as a psychological state shared by members of a group that consists of general feelings of satisfaction with conditions that have impact on the group and strong motivation to accomplish group objectives despite obstacles or adversity.’* (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977, p 177)

They see it as more than just satisfaction or just motivation but a complex amalgam of these concepts which is most relevant when individuals or groups are under pressure. Smith (1985) conducted interviews with Australian infantrymen to reach a similar definition as did Gal and Manning (1987) who factor analysed survey data from Israeli and US combat soldiers. They believed that high morale requires *‘a goal, a role, and reasons for self-confidence’* (Manning, 1994, p 7).

Britt et al. (2007) provide an excellent review of morale, drawing together a number of literatures but then proceed to draw rather odd conclusions, defining morale as *‘a service member’s level of motivation and enthusiasm for achieving mission success’*; a definition which sounds more like a managerial than military statement.

Overall the military definitions involve several basic factors: an objective; enthusiasm for achieving that objective and some measure of cohesion within the group. This emphasis on group cohesion doubtless reflects the fact that soldiering is a group activity and, although individuals may operate alone, they do so within a wider context of a unit or army.

## Summary

What is notable in looking for definitions of morale is how few of the works mentioning morale actually proceed from any sort of definition at all. Of the 146 articles on morale in this review only 57 (39%) actually use any sort of definition. Generally morale is viewed as tacitly understood and this is regarded as sufficient for the purposes of research. According to Hershey (1985) one investigator commented that as this problem has been with us for years it doesn’t matter too much which definition is used so long as the researcher informs the reader which frame of reference is being used. Hershey offers a spirited riposte to this by asking:

*‘What group of scholars allows its members to disagree on a definition? [original emphasis] The first step in organizing a body of knowledge is to have a well defined nomenclature. The consequences of not doing so is wonderfully illustrated by the confusion that exists in the studies of morale.’* (Hershey, 1985, p 7)

By conducting this comprehensive look at morale definitions across both time and area several key themes can be extracted. Morale seems to exist in relationship to something and many (40%) of the definitions have some sort of element of goal or objective within them. The



second thing which stands out is that high morale is an active process with 37% of definitions using words of this nature such as activity, energy, enthusiasm. By contrast low morale is seen as listless, apathetic and inert. A third facet which seems common to many of the definitions is some sort support for the individual's self esteem. This takes a number of forms such as pride, belief in the importance of what you are doing (and hence that you are worthwhile), cohesion with a group and so forth and is seen in 28% of definitions. These elements will be discussed later on in this review.

Overall morale is poorly defined and the definitions used tend to be plucked from the air rather than synthesised from any particular empirical foundation<sup>6</sup>. There is considerable scope, therefore, for improving the ground on which morale research is founded.

### **Measurement of morale**

Having examined some of the definitions within the literature I shall now turn to look at some of the measurement systems which have been employed to gauge the level of morale in various situations. What is remarkable is the sheer variety of measurement systems which have been used. Many of the methods of appraising any social phenomenon have been employed in examining morale. There are two principal categories of measurement system; direct and indirect. The indirect measurement systems can be further split into those which examine morale through its antecedents and those which use its consequences.

I shall begin by examining the direct measures of morale and then move to the indirect ones.

#### **Direct single item measurement**

Perhaps the simplest measure of morale is to ask people about it. Single item scales ask respondents to rate statement such as 'My morale is good right now' (Bliese & Britt, 2001, p 430) have been used extensively in morale research (see Britt et al., 2004; Schumm & Bell, 2000). They are useful as they avoid having to define morale, instead tapping into the societal concept of what morale is. This is advantageous for the researcher as it cuts out a lot of confusion about what morale actually is, but dangerous as it shifts the onus of interpretation to the respondent and it may be that what one individual views as morale is not the same as another.

Single item scales are difficult to assess for reliability (Churchill Jr., 1979; Jacoby, 1978) and have been viewed unfavourably within the management literature (Rossiter, 2002). In spite of this

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<sup>6</sup> A notable exception to this is Britt who attempted to define morale by conducting a prototype analysis of morale in soldiers. He reported this at a conference in Italy in 1997 but, when contacted, was unable to locate a copy of the paper (Britt, TW, 2009, pers com.)

there have been recent developments and procedures which suggest that single item scales might be acceptable and the current wedding to the multi-item scale paradigm is unhelpful (Bergkvist & Rossiter, 2007; Rossiter, 2002; Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997).

The one thing that one can be sure of with a single item scale of this nature is that it is measuring what people perceive of as morale. This, however, can be a disadvantage. In an NHS hospital, for example, complaints of poor morale are routine to the point of being *de rigueur*. In these circumstances social conformity bias may cause morale levels to be underestimated.

### Direct multiple item measurement

This has also been a popular approach to morale measurement with a number of different approaches being adopted. The most common is to produce a series of questions and then refine them using exploratory factor analysis (EFA). One or more of the factors emerging is then labelled 'morale' and used either to measure the concept or link it to others. The EFA approach gained popularity in the post-WW II period when these techniques became more widely appreciated and practicable.

These EFA results, subject to them proving internally reliable, were then used as a morale scale (e.g. Baehr & Renck, 1958; Johnsrud, 1995). Doherty (1988) made slightly different use of EFA by advocating administering a number of items in each circumstance, subjecting them to EFA and labelling the principal factor 'morale'. Effectively he assumed that the components EFA would not be stable across populations but that the factors which emerged would, and could be seen as the key facets of morale in that particular organisation.

In recent times this EFA has been combined with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to measure morale and this has also been combined in structural models (see, for example, Britt et al., 2007; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Subramony et al., 2008). This enables morale to be measured directly and also its influence on other factors to be ascertained.

These multiple item scales have the advantage that internal reliability can be appraised using Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and other techniques. The disadvantage, particularly of the factor analytic models, is that the linkage between the scale identified and morale is often unclear. This problem of content validity is seen, for example, in Doherty's (1988) work on morale where a shifting set of factors are subjected to EFA and then the principal factor emerging is labelled as 'morale'. Hart et al. (2000) suggest that in this case Doherty has incorporated some measures of neuroticism in what he labels morale and so is not measuring morale but rather something else. Multiple item measures can potentially offer a number of

disadvantages but care needs to be taken to ensure that it is actually morale that is being measured.

### **Indirect measurement of consequences of morale**

This approach involves inferring the level of morale from factors distal to the concept. This began initially in WW I with appraisals of troop morale levels through assessment of battalion sickness rates which were viewed as a proxy for morale (Baynes, 1967). This was extended in WW II to incorporate other sociological factors which were seen as more objective. These included strikes, convictions for drunkenness and property crime (Durant, 1941). Other authors have taken factors such as employee turnover, absenteeism, sick leave, efficiency, accidents and tardiness as evidence of morale levels (Giese & Ruter, 1949; Powell & Schlacter, 1971; Price, 1963).

Motowidlo and Borman (1977, 1978) made a serious attempt to formalise this process by constructing behaviourally anchored scales for morale which quantified the level of performance of individuals. The correlation of these ratings with self report items (or direct measurement) was around 0.33 ( $p \leq 0.05$ ) suggesting that morale could be measured, in some way, by this indirect appraisal of its consequences.

The economic morale literature adopts a rather different approach. It measures morale from its consequences but in a rather abstract way. Various factors, which are never fully specified, contribute to worker wellbeing and increase productivity (Hibbs Jr & Locking, 2000; Pemberton, 1985). Productivity is then measured and if the outputs are greater than the inputs it is assumed that this combination of factors, dubbed 'morale', is responsible.

Measurement of the consequences of morale has some advantages. Firstly it is unobtrusive and so the act of measurement is not likely to disturb the observed individual or variable in the short run. Secondly it measures the things which people actually care about. An employer, for example, may not care greatly about whether the workers have high morale but will care if there is absenteeism or strikes.

The danger of this approach is that it may not be morale which is actually being measured. Very little research has been conducted into this but it is entirely possible that profitability, for example, may reflect market conditions or industry at least as well as morale levels. For this reason these measures may not be transferable across organisation.

### Indirect measurement of the antecedents of morale

Just as morale levels can be inferred from their consequences they can also be deduced from their antecedents. One approach relies on morale being considered a latent variable within a structural model. An increasing number of studies are employing this technique with the advent of widely available structural modelling programmes.

Morale in this approach is most commonly modelled as a second order construct whereby other factors such as job satisfaction, organisational commitment and turnover intentions are used to predict the latent variable of morale (e.g. Vandenberg et al., 1999). Organ (1997) uses a similar technique to propose the *m* factor of morale.

This approach is popular as it enables numerical values to be attached to the morale construct and also the relationship with other constructs to be well defined. The technique has been used in management (Organ, 1997; Vandenberg et al., 1999), healthcare (Cox, 2001), education (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) and the military (Britt et al., 2007).

The latent variable approach has two advantages. Firstly the author does not have to define morale, but rather can measure it indirectly through other things. Secondly it provides a numerical output and so predictions can be made and links to other factors appraised.

Although there are some obvious advantages there are also disadvantages beyond the standard criticism of a lack of richness in quantitative techniques. The first is that appraisal demands a sizeable sample to ensure validity; this obviously precludes usage in small organisations. The second, and to my mind greater, concern is whether it is actually morale being measured. To be sure something is being measured but whether it is actually morale or has simply been labelled as such is a key issue. Labelling in this way is problematic as it may be influenced by either a lack of understanding of morale or political influences (Liefoghe et al., 2004).

Zeleny (1939) uses an interesting method of tackling morale as a latent variable using a sociogram. Again it is questionable whether this actually measures morale as the questions used to generate the data tend to revolve around whether individuals liked one another or not – which does not seem to fit with most definitions of morale.

Both these indirect approaches assume that morale can be measured through its antecedents or consequences. But is it truly morale which is being measured? Very little work has been done to try and appraise this or link it to other techniques. The closest is probably Motowidlo and

Borman's linking their behaviourally anchored scales to self report measures (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977).

The other problem with these scales is that the measures may not be particularly 'clean' as they tend to mingle in antecedents and consequences with various measures of morale. For example Vandenberg et al.(1999) see turnover intention as an antecedent of morale but Johnsrud and co-workers (2000; 2002) regard it as a consequence of morale.

### **Summary of measurement techniques**

Morale has been measured using a variety of techniques, both qualitative and quantitative. One of the key problems for all the measurement systems, save the single item scales, is that of construct validity. There is little evidence, other than an appeal to reason, that what is labelled morale actually is morale. With indirect measurements this is most commonly an assumption; with direct measurement the statistics are often left to define the construct (Rossiter, 2005). Researchers are certainly measuring something, sometimes with great precision. But whether this is morale or not is often uncertain. Again the problems of differentiating morale from other concepts are seen with none of the studies demonstrating how morale differs from other concepts in the way that, say, Mathieu and Farr have for job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Mathieu & Farr, 1991).

### **Emergent underlying issues in morale specification**

Those writing on morale agree on relatively few things but one of the main things that they do agree on is the regrettable state of our understanding of morale (Guion, 1958; Hightower, 1944; Liefoghe et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008). One of the few other things which most researchers agree on is that morale is a psychological state which cannot readily be apprehended. Whether high morale is an affective state or one of motivation is even disputed (see Britt et al., 2007).

There are a number of facets of the underpinnings of morale which need further exploration such as whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon, whether it is generalisable or context bound and so forth. I shall now examine some of these epistemological inconsistencies and what the literature has to say on them.

### **Objective or subjective**

The issue of whether morale is an objective or subjective phenomenon (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) was first raised by Liefoghe et al. (2004). An objective stance assumes a deterministic and

predictable (Lewis, 1999) view of morale suggesting that it can be measured like a physical parameter.

Some authors have suggested that this is possible with Giese and Ruter (1949) suggesting that there could be an objective view of the concept through its consequence such as lateness and absenteeism. Leaving apart the concerns as to whether it's actually morale which is being measured (see above) this view is not consonant with the rest of the morale literature which tends to take a more subjective view.

A subjective view assumes that morale is a quality perceived by individuals which is contextually generated and can shift with social context (Lewis, 1999). This seems, immediately, a more plausible approach as it fits in with many of the measurement systems and definitions of morale used as well as explaining some of the problems which have been observed in interpreting morale.

Single item morale scales which have been used extensively (see Bliese & Britt, 2001; Britt et al., 2004; Schumm & Bell, 2000) can only depend on the subjective view of either the individual or others. Morale itself cannot be observed and so precludes objective measurement in this instance. Other appraisal methods such as Doherty's (1988) subjective questions or Johnsrud's (1995; 2000) situation based ones still require the individual to make a judgement rather than measuring an objective parameter.

Alongside these measurement issues the fact that morale is difficult to define suggests a subjective phenomenon, particularly given the number of definitions and approaches to the topic. If morale were able to be objectively appraised then it would seem likely that there would be more consensus as to what it is and how to measure it. Morale, therefore, seems best thought of as a subjective phenomenon.

### **Single or portmanteau construct**

This second issue concerns whether morale is a single entity either in and of itself or with a number of fixed dimensions or whether it is a portmanteau construct which covers a shifting set of elements (Doherty, 1988). This latter approach was adopted by Doherty believed that this avoided much of the debate about causality which he deemed 'sterile' (Doherty, 1988, p 67).

Johnsrud adopted a similar approach in her book as she too used factor analysis to determine a number of factors which were labelled morale (Johnsrud, 1995).

Although not explicitly articulated as a portmanteau construct Organ's proposal of an *m* factor, (Organ, 1997) displays portmanteau like properties. He postulated that this *m* factor underlies a number of measured concepts such as satisfaction and commitment and represented morale. In some ways this is a single construct but the fact that the measurement systems used are so variable also gives it some properties of a portmanteau concept.

The idea of morale as a single entity is also plausible. There is clearly some form of societal consensus on the word morale; otherwise it would have no currency linguistically. This suggests, in turn, that morale is a single entity. It is interesting to note that Johnsrud, having initially seen morale as a portmanteau construct, then operationalised it as a single construct in her latter work (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002).

Most of the literature proceeds on the basis that morale is a single entity and that if we could just capture the right elements we would be able to define it. From the earliest research right through to the present day, therefore, researchers have been trying to find out what the components of morale are.

Reviewing the literature it is possible that the factors chosen by researchers are not the appropriate ones. Already within this review I have hinted that some studies have focussed on rather 'instrumental' concepts such as trust or leadership. Perhaps we are being too specific here and what is of importance is the impact that trust or leadership has on the individual. For some individuals leadership may be a critical factor but for others it might be singularly unimportant. Either way the impact of leadership on the psyche of the individual is the key issue rather than the leadership itself, so trying to delve underneath a factor like leadership to get at what is important to the individual seems to be the critical issue.

Overall whether morale is a single entity or a catch all term for a number of sub-concepts is unclear from the literature.

### **Generalisable or context bound**

Whether morale is a generalisable concept or whether it is context bound is, to some extent, an extension of the debate over whether it is a single or portmanteau construct. Generalisable morale research suggests that the concept can be understood in multiple contexts whereas context bound work understands morale within a particular situational milieu. This distinction is put slightly differently by Strauss and Corbin (1998) who echo Glaser and Strauss (1967) distinction between substantive theories and formal theories. Substantive theories appear to be similar to the context bound understanding of morale whereas the formal theories are more

generalisable. For the purposes of this review I shall use the generalisable/context-bound distinction.

The majority of morale research is context bound either explicitly or tacitly. Lawton's Philadelphia Geriatric Morale Scale (Lawton, 2003) is a good example of explicitly bound morale. The question 'Do you feel that as you get older you are less useful?' is clearly targeted at the elderly and would not be very useful with graduate trainees, for example. Educational research is similarly contextual such as Hart's survey item 'The morale in this school is high' (Hart, 1994). Similar examples can be found in military research as combat readiness is not generally a feature of most organisational environments.

As a general rule the more specific the measurement attempt is the more context bound the definition is. A notable exception to this is Doherty's (1988) work which, although published in an educational journal, uses terms which are generalisable across different organisational settings. The difficulty is that the factor structure does not remain stable across samples (in line with Doherty's portmanteau concept) and so although the technique is generalisable the results are context bound.

Generalisable morale research is usually older research, particularly the sociological work of WW II. This research operates at a more societal level and pre-dates the disciplinary segmentation of morale research. It depicts morale as a mental state (be it affective, cognitive or both) which is 'felt' similarly by different people. Some of the appraisal techniques, notably the use of single item scales, facilitate this approach as the societal understanding of morale means that anyone can comment on their morale level in a way that they can't, for example, something specific like school morale.

Although open to the critique of inductive generalisation viewing morale as a generalisable concept is a useful approach as it enables different work environments to be appraised. The morale of the factory floor, for example, can be compared with that of the head office. In the same way morale across organisations can be compared so that a police force can be compared with a brewery. From personal experience I know that low or high morale feels the same working in the pharmaceutical industry or as a PhD student. The contexts are wholly different but the sensation of morale is the same. Viewing morale as a generalisable phenomenon is, therefore, useful. Inevitably there is always a tension between the accuracy which comes from specificity and the utility which comes from generalisability but it seems likely that, on balance,



morale is a generalisable phenomenon even though much of the extant research renders it context bound.

### **A good thing or a bad thing**

High morale is almost universally seen as a good thing and low morale as a bad thing. There are two elements to be disaggregated here. One is the subjective experience of morale which could be pleasurable or not, and the second is the outcomes it engenders. Positive psychology researchers seem to conflate these two things (e.g. Peterson et al., 2008) suggesting that high morale is always desirable.

It seems reasonable to say that, as far as the individual is concerned, good morale is a positive thing. It is seen as a pleasant, enjoyable sensation. Low morale, by contrast, is seen as an unpleasant and disagreeable experience, to be avoided.

The fact that individuals seek pleasure and avoid pain has been appreciated since the time of ancient Greek philosophers such as Democritus (460–370 B.C.) and Aristippus (430–360 B.C.) (Elliot & Thrash, 2002) so the idea that individuals would aim to seek high morale situations and avoid low morale ones is entirely logical. Where this breaks down is when the outcomes of high and low morale are considered.

Extremely high levels of morale might be exhilarating for the individual but could potentially cause problems. It is unlikely that excessively high morale would be viewed as a problem in, for example, a military setting. If high morale drives individuals to pursue objectives no matter what then the army would not see this as a problem. If, however, we consider high morale driving a terrorist to pursue their objectives, no matter what, then high morale could be detrimental societally.

By the same token low morale may be unpleasant for the individual but have societal benefits. Avoidance of the unpleasant sensation of low morale may lead individuals to pursue courses of action which they would not otherwise such as changing jobs. As such low morale may not, necessarily, be a bad thing as it may serve an important regulatory purpose.

This separation of the feelings of the individual and those of the observer is illustrated by Hershey (1985) who uses the example of the Mutiny on the Bounty. The mutineers, he believes, would have high morale whereas Captain Bligh would observe them as having low morale (Hershey, 1985, p 18).

Morale, therefore, like any state with an affective element, sits within a social and moral context. As alluded to earlier it is hard to envisage a situation where an individual has high morale doing something which they believe to be immoral (whether others perceive it as immoral is irrelevant here, save for its reflexive impact on how the individual themselves perceives the morality of the situation). The converse, however, does not seem likely to be true as low morale could be in a context which the individual perceives as either moral or immoral. For sure immoral conduct would preclude high morale but low morale does not signify a perceived immoral situation.

Overall high morale can be perceived externally as a good or bad thing depending on context and viewpoint. For the individual it is a pleasurable sensation no matter what. Conversely low morale is perceived by individuals as unpleasant but may have societal benefits as its avoidance spurs the individual to action. Care needs to be taken, therefore, in describing high or low morale as desirable or undesirable attributes.

### Individual or group phenomenon

Whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon is a recurrent theme in the morale literature. Child (1941) and Hightower (1944) offer a tripartite classification system which seems to capture the principal dimensions of the issue. They divide the various schools of thought into group, individual and individual-in-group.

Earlier studies e.g. Slichter (1920), Guion (1958), Pope (1941), Angell (1942) and Woods (1946), tended to view morale as an individual phenomenon more closely related to character (Hocking, 1941; Liefoghe et al., 2004)<sup>7</sup>. Research in the healthcare field on the debilitated and elderly tends also to focus on the individual e.g. Brown (1976), Maddox (1963), Balkwell (1985), as the individual patient is the usual unit of concern for practitioners. Frequent references to morale in relation to groups, however, suggest that it is unlikely that it is solely an individual phenomenon.

Is morale a group phenomenon? Military research has always tended to view morale as a group attribute (Motowidlo et al., 1976) reflecting the command structure's relative disinterest in the individual soldier. This is a view to which the social sciences came rather later when attention shifted to group processes in the light of the Hawthorne studies. A number of authors regard morale as solely a group phenomenon. Zeitz (1983) believes (and believes that he has proved) that organisational morale is a collective property and it is satisfaction which is an individual trait. Hershey (1985) is even more chauvinistic and castigates any author who perceives morale as anything other than a group phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> Hocking (1941) uses morale for the individual and *esprit de corps* for the group

The economic morale literature clearly pins morale as a group phenomenon, reflecting that discipline's tendency for aggregate analysis. Morale is, as we have seen, regarded as a factor which is found between inputs and outputs in an industrial setting (Kandori, 2003; Pemberton, 1985) or it is something which influences managers to behave suboptimally when cutting staff numbers (Bewley, 1999). It does not tend to be viewed at an individual level of analysis.

This is interesting conceptually but unworkable practically. If morale is a psychological state experienced by individuals then it cannot be a purely group phenomenon. There are also problems around how the group is defined (Motowidlo et al., 1976). Baynes' (1967) report of different regimental sick rates, for example, works if the regiment is regarded as the group; but if the army is the group then it does not. Viewing morale as a group phenomenon is also incompatible with it correlating with individual personality traits such as neuroticism (Wigley, 2004). If it is truly a group phenomenon then individual factors would be irrelevant and the group would be the only factor of importance. Morale seems unlikely, therefore, to be solely a group phenomenon.

The last of Child and Hightower's categories views morale as an 'individual in group' phenomenon. This is by far the most common view within the literature e.g. Satlow (1954), Rausch (1971), Guba (1958), Hart (1994), Wigley (2004) and offers the maximum generality (Stowe, 2009). Guba (1958) adopts a definition that '*morale is a predisposition on the part of persons engaged in an enterprise to put forth extra effort in the achievement of group goals or objectives*' (p 198). The definition of morale here may not be perfect but it does illustrate a view of the relationship between the individual and group within the morale construct. Wigley (2004) goes further suggesting that '*Individual experience within the group endeavour (plan or task) maybe essential to the development of cumulative morale.*' (p 431). Effectively the morale of the individual will be influenced by the group.

By the same token the morale of the group will be influenced, logically, by individuals. A number of studies are predicated on this assumption as they measure group morale by summation of the morale of individuals (e.g. Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002).

Some authors extend this to suggesting that the debate about whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon is unimportant and '*No good purpose is served by approaching morale in such either-or terms*' (Peterson et al., 2008, p 22). They believe that morale is both an individual and group phenomenon and that multi-level analytic strategies mean that both levels can be appraised. This offers the hope of moving beyond the simple averaging of individual morale scores to give group

morale and offering a more sophisticated measure which allows the interplay between group and individual morale to be understood. Qualitative analysis at these two levels will help understand the process of morale production and so shed light on what might be done to influence morale.

A separate question is that of who the individual believes that the group actually is. Is it the organisational unit the researcher is looking at or does it extend more widely? Does a neurologist, for example, see themselves as a member of the hospital, the community of neurologists, or the graduating class of her medical school? There is a lack of clarity here which permeates the literature and which this thesis will try and unpack.

### **Demographic factors and State or Trait morale**

Another notable omission from the morale literature is an understanding of how demographic factors affect morale. The effect of age, sex, organisational tenure has only been explored by Johnsrud (1995) with age also being investigated by Estes and Wilensky (1978). For nearly a hundred years of morale research not to have explored whether it is affected by these demographic factors is highly surprising. At the very least this should be investigated if accurate attempts at measurement are to be made. If morale is affected by gender, for example, then any model or measure of morale is likely to be influenced by the ratio of women to men within the sample.

There is much to be done here in looking at basic demographic factors. These demographic factors are complemented by other innate trait attributes which are also underexplored. In his piece on the future of morale research (Organ, 1997) wonders what the role of personality is in his *m* factor. Given that disposition affects job satisfaction and he believes that job satisfaction is a component of morale then how does disposition affect morale? The only author who explored this in any way was Wigley (2004) who found that morale scores correlated positively with extraversion and negatively with neuroticism and state anxiety.

If a serious attempt to understand morale and its components is to be made then investigating whether innate factors affect morale is going to be important.

### **Different perceptions at different levels**

The idea that morale means the same thing to different people is a critical factor in morale research. What is less explored is whether position in the organisational hierarchy makes any difference to morale levels.

Liefooghe et al. (2004) employ labelling theory (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1997) to suggest that morale levels are affected by political processes within organisations so that people at different levels will perceive morale differently. They cite the lack of exploration of employees' views of morale as evidence that there is a partial political view of morale and suggesting that morale is an exploitative tool of the powerful within the organisations. Superficially this certainly seems to be the case with some of the accounts of the role of cohesion morale which are startlingly similar to Lukes' (1974) third face of power which

*'...prevents people, to whatever degree, from having grievances by shaping their perceptions, cognitions and preferences in such a way that they accept their role in the existing order of things, either because they can see or imagine no alternative to it, or because they see it as natural and unchangeable, or because they value it as divinely ordained and beneficial'* (Lukes, 1974, p24)

This rather dystopian view that workers have been somehow 'hoodwinked' into high morale seems at odds with descriptions of morale within the literature. The idea that it is a tool of oppression is further counterbalanced by the author's personal experience interviewing a company chairman who found that union leaders conjured up concerns about morale, and the effect it would have on performance, as a bargaining chip in negotiations in order to justify concessions. This suggests that morale is not solely a tool of the powerful and provides some support for Giddens' (1979) argument that *'All social actors, no matter how lowly, have some degree of penetration of the social forms that oppress'* (Giddens, 1979, p27, quoted in Hardy, 1994).

These theoretical arguments are interesting but, at best, equivocal. What is clear is that there has been insufficient work to evaluate this area. The arguments of differing morale at different levels cut across some of the issues discussed by Kanter (1993) where she found that women had lower morale levels. This was ascribed to their organisational position in the book but in the absence of any information on the influence of gender on morale levels it is impossible to say whether it was the organisational level of the women which affected morale or their gender.

The literature on morale has something of a hole in this area and further work is needed to examine the influence of social position on morale.

### **Summary of morale specification**

What is notable from the morale literature is the surprising lack of exploration of its underpinnings. These basic factors are likely to have a material impact on the investigation of morale and yet, for many of them, little systematic analysis has been undertaken. Structuring the problem, for example as Child and Hightower (Child, 1941; Hightower, 1944) have with their

classification of the individual/group issue, provides a framework for discussion. For many other issues, such as the subjective/objective and generalisable/context-bound, there has not been any such framework and so there is little debate on these issues; rather there is a melange of activity and opinion with little thought to what is being achieved.

For some of these issues, such as whether morale is generalisable or context bound, an epistemological stance will have to be taken for future research. For other issues, such as the group or individual debate, a firm view can only be formed by exploring the nature of morale itself. Reviewing the literature and reflecting on the issue it seems likely that the only stands which need to be taken prior to field research are on the issue of whether morale is an objective or subjective phenomenon and whether it is generalisable or context bound.

On the basis of the literature it seems likely that morale is a subjective phenomenon which reflects a degree of societal intersubjective agreement. It can only be measured through the perceptions of the individual and so regarding it as an objective phenomenon seems to be inappropriate. Some objective antecedents and consequences of morale can be appreciated, e.g. job turnover, but the phenomenon itself appears to be subjective.

The issue of whether morale is generalisable or context bound does seem to be a matter of taste. As a rule of thumb within the current literature the more accurate the measurement system employed the more context bound the definition. What has clearly been lacking for morale appraisal is some sort of generalisable measure. This would facilitate comparison across individuals and organisations as well as allowing researchers in different disciplines to use the measure.

Context bound views of morale are easier to work with as asking questions about individual circumstances is often easier and more specific than generalised questions. Nonetheless it seems likely that the sensation which individuals experience and society labels as morale is similar across individuals. The idea that what one person feels as morale another feels as disgust seems unlikely and is, in some ways, an extension of Wittgenstein's argument that the notion of private language is incoherent (Wittgenstein, 2001). If completely different sensations are labelled with the same name then any discussion of them is impossible. The converse is not necessarily true as it is possible for there to be more than one name for the same feeling (Russell, 2009); although it could be argued that the reason different names have arisen is to describe different shades of meaning. It is likely that morale is a generalisable phenomenon but that our understanding of it is context bound and so when describing it contextual explanations are used. This suggests that

aiming for a generalisable definition would be desirable but proper note of and sensitivity to context will be important to the extraction of generalisable components.

### Conclusions of the literature review

The literature on morale is vast, dispersed and incoherent. This review has attempted to impose some order on it by delimiting a number of different aspects of morale. I began with the etymological origins of the word morale and then charted its history. An understanding of these two facets enables some of the other elements of morale research to be contextualised. The dismemberment of the concept into others such as job satisfaction has then examined. There is evidence to both combine morale with other concepts and also to differentiate it. Much of the literature is quite casual in its attitude to defining morale. On some occasions this is due to imprecise usage of the term (e.g. Judge & Church, 2000; Kohl & Stephens, 1989) and on others it is due to wilful elision with other concepts such as job satisfaction or cohesion. This olio of definitions is complemented by a variety of measurement systems, none of which seem to have provided a reliable, reusable measurement system. Underlying all of the difficulties of morale definition, differentiation and measurement are a number of theoretical issues which have either been inadequately explored or addressed within the literature.

Unpicking these disparate threads from the tangled skein of the morale construct is useful as it helps identify the dimensions of the problem and also formulate an appropriate research strategy by which to try and address them. This will be discussed further in the methods section. What is clear in reviewing the literature is that the constant complaint by authors of the incoherence of the literature is well justified. What is surprising is that so little has been done to remedy this. As Liefoghe et al. (2004) put it '*It is tempting to assume that during a period of fifty or more years, some systematic research process would have been undertaken, lots of lessons would have been learned, and concepts would have been refined and generalised*' (p 11). This review suggests that this has not happened.

Reviewing the literature helps identify the key issues within the field and determine the questions upon which the rest of this thesis is based. Given the confusion surrounding morale research many of these questions revolve around attempting to understand the nature of morale. I shall now identify the key areas for investigation in this thesis.

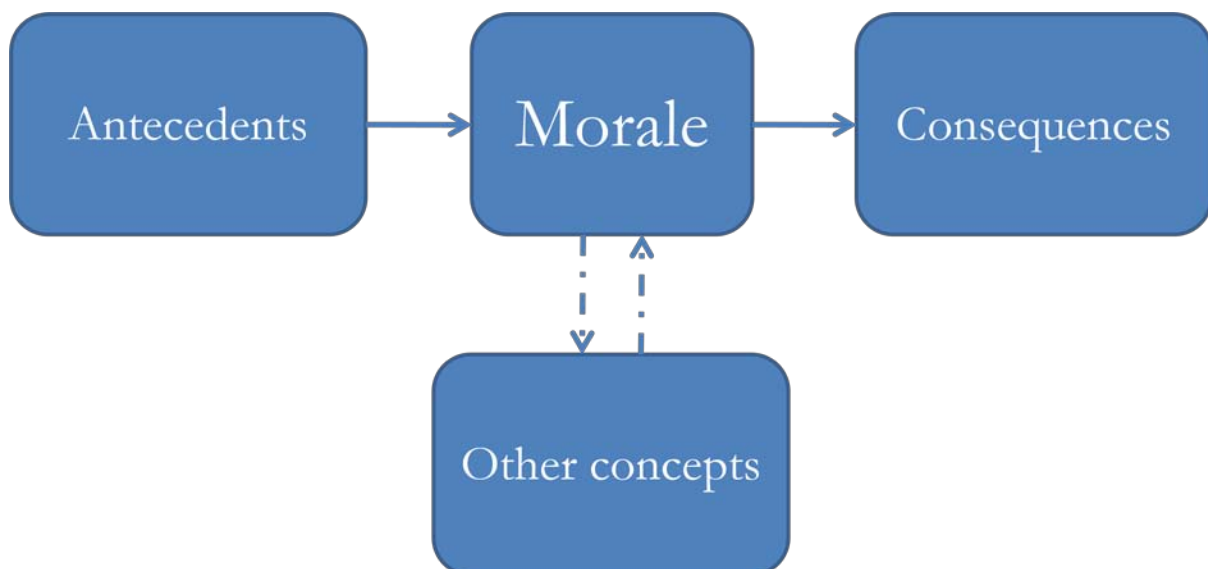
## Chapter 3: Research themes and orientation

### Introduction

This section integrates the introduction and literature review to identify both the approach to the morale concept and key themes within it. This will then inform the selection of method.

The basic nomology of morale is outlined below in Figure 2. From the literature review it emerged that morale is an unobserved concept which is caused by certain factors and, in turn, influences certain factors. As a concept it has properties in and of itself and it can also be differentiated from other concepts.

**Figure 2 – High level nomology for the morale construct**



Much academic research can be viewed in abstract as doing three basic things. The first is describing a particular entity which may, for example, be an object, a process or a concept. The second is defining the boundary of these entities, effectively circumscribing them and differentiating them from other things. The third is then establishing the relationship between the identified and differentiated entity and other identified and differentiated entities. These three activities encompass much of what academics do which is essentially cataloguing the ontological and analytical properties of various entities.

The research themes of this thesis centre on the nomology outlined in Figure 2. An investigation of the definition, dimensions and measurement of morale will require an understanding of the relationship between the elements outlined in this nomology. All of the



tasks outlined above; describing, defining and relating will be undertaken during the course of this thesis.

These tasks will help clarify the principal research question of ‘What is morale?’ This can be further broken down into four main domains. These are describing what morale is, what it is not, what influences it and what its consequences are. Using this model helps structure an understanding of morale and explains some of the confusion surrounding the concept. Each of these areas will now be considered in turn to inform the method section.

### **What is morale?**

The literature review and previous research makes it very clear that there is no agreed upon definition of morale. What there has been very little of is systematic work producing a definition of morale. The only exception to this is Britt’s work using a prototype analysis and asking soldiers what they thought morale (Britt, 1997) which identified key themes of motivation and drive.

What is clear is that there must be some form of intersubjective agreement within society as to what morale is. If there were not this agreement then it would be impossible to talk about morale. The idea of a private language where the meaning of words is unique to the individual is nonsensical (Wittgenstein, 2001). By the same token it is also abundantly apparent that words to have slightly different meanings to different people. Quine’s (1960) provides the example of the native uttering the word ‘gavagai’ on seeing a rabbit to illustrate this. The linguist could translate this as ‘lo, a rabbit’ but it could also mean ‘lo, food’ or, if the native were superstitious, ‘there will be a storm tonight’. His point was that words might be open to misinterpretation.

The point with definitions is that we neither understand one another perfectly nor misunderstand one another perfectly. There must be some sort of common system which allows us to grasp or interpret, albeit imperfectly, the language and schema of others (Davidson, 1973).

So it is with morale. There is obviously some sort of conceptual agreement as to what morale is and this could be potentially exploited to define morale.

Along with defining morale this thesis also seeks to explore what morale is. This covers a number of different issues around the sensation of morale, its dimensions, how it might be measured and how it is influenced by various individual attributes. This last point speaks to a concern mentioned by Organ (1997) that there is little research on the influence of various personality factors on morale.

The question 'What is morale?' precipitates a number of sub-questions:

What is the definition of morale?

What are the dimensions of morale?

How might morale be measured?

What are the influences of age, sex and personality variables on morale?

Is morale a single or portmanteau construct?

Is morale a generalisable phenomenon or is it context bound?

Is morale a group or individual phenomenon?

What are the upper and lower bounds of morale?

The methods section will examine the approaches which will help address these sub-questions.

### **What is morale not?**

The literature review suggests that the differentiation of morale from other concepts is both important and necessary. Morale is frequently equated with other concepts such as satisfaction for a number of reasons. It may be that morale is synonymous with these other concepts or that it is different. It may also be that these other concepts are part of morale or morale is part of them.

Without clarity of morale's relationship with other phenomena it is difficult to be clear that it is morale that we are talking about. This is one of the key problems when reviewing the literature that the lack of differentiation of morale means that authors are frequently talking about another concept when they mean morale. Judge and Church (2000), as previously discussed, start by talking about morale but then slip into talking about job satisfaction. The obvious question is which of the two is it? Even if the answer is both then some sort of explanation seems to be required. Failure to distinguish morale also means that research on it can be easily dismissed as simply being about these other concepts as morale is viewed as synonymous with them.

Differentiating morale from other concepts should be possible using, again, the social understanding of morale and other concepts. If morale is the same as, say, job satisfaction then people should not be able to differentiate the two. If different then hopefully they should be able to articulate the difference. Questions to explore this would include:

Is morale the same as satisfaction and job satisfaction?

Is morale the same as happiness?

Is morale the same as motivation?

Is morale the same as organizational commitment?

Answering these questions will help establish whether morale is synonymous with these other concepts or can be differentiated.

### **What are the antecedents of morale?**

The factors which influence morale are of great interest to both academic and practitioner audiences. Morale levels have long been a concern and so any understanding of the factors which allow them to be manipulated is beneficial. What is clear from the literature is that these antecedents are not well defined.

Although numerous studies have identified antecedents of morale there seems to be no agreed upon set of factors across subject areas. This is likely to reflect the issue identified in the discussion of whether morale is a generalisable or context bound phenomenon. In the literature the more precise and well developed measures of morale tend to focus on instrumental factors such as leadership in the military (e.g. Britt et al., 2007), beds per unit in nursing (e.g. Cox, 2001) and so forth. The antecedents of morale, when viewed at this instrumental level, may well vary from organisation to organisation as the factors listed vary between studies. This view stimulated Doherty (1988) to attempt to side-step the debate on causality and propose a shifting set of items which were allotted into a formative morale construct on the basis of factor analysis. This approach has some merit but seems to be ducking the issue. The literature suggests that there is some sort of morale construct and various factors affect it.

What is possible is that investigations into morale have been occurring at the wrong level. Morale is an individual phenomenon and so all these instrumental factors have some sort of effect on the individual. Leadership might be very important to one person but not to another. The influence of leadership on an individual's morale will therefore be highly contingent on whether leadership matters to that individual. For some individuals this may not matter at all. It is necessary, therefore, to try and 'get behind' what leadership is actually doing to the individual. It may be, for example, that a leader supports self-esteem. In this case it is not the leadership which is important but rather the fact that an effective leader supports the individuals' self-esteem and that this then influences morale.

The problem with antecedents and consequences may be that they have hitherto been looked at at a very functional, instrumental level and what is needed is an understanding of how they impact on the individual.

This stimulates a number of questions around the antecedents of morale:

What are the antecedents of morale?

What is the appropriate level of analysis of these antecedents?

Are there a common set of antecedents which can be drawn out in most cases?

What is the nature of the linkage between these antecedents and morale?

### **What are the consequences of morale?**

The consequences of morale are the key area of interest for practitioners. If morale does not influence outcomes then what is the point of studying it? There is an extensive literature on the consequence of morale but it has a number of distinct problems.

The first, obviously, is whether it is actually morale which is being measured. This is, as we know, far from certain. Something is influencing the outcomes in these papers but whether it is morale is difficult to say.

The second problem is the outcomes themselves. Just as the antecedents of morale are complicated by being somewhat instrumental in many instances so the outcomes or consequences of morale are too. Hard dependent variables are in short supply in management studies and so the generalisability of results is problematic. In spite of this a number of questions about the consequences can be asked.

What are the consequences of morale?

What is the appropriate level of analysis of these consequences?

Are there common consequences which can be drawn out in most cases?

What is the nature of the linkage between morale and its consequences?

### **Summary and integration**

This section of the thesis is intended to help structure the concept of morale and classify some of the research issues which surround it. Like any nomology the four domain structure is deceptively clear and demarcated. This is likely to be an artefact and the actual construct of

morale will not be as clearly circumscribed. Some of the consequences of morale may well feed back into the antecedents. Indeed it is highly probable that there are numerous feedback loops between the various stages of the process of morale.

It also seems likely that the distinction between the various domains is not as clear as Figure 2 suggests. Antecedents may blur into morale itself, personality factors may affect several of the different domains. In some cases it is uncertain how a particular entity might be classified. If, as evidence of high morale, an individual says that they look forward to going to work in the morning is this an attribute of morale or a consequence? The construct is not, then, as neat as the nomology described would suggest.

This does not mean that the nomology is useless. It is helpful to be able to think about the different stages of morale and some authors have explicitly advocated a process based approach (Liefoghe et al., 2004). The separating of morale from its antecedents and consequences as well as other concepts is helpful as it enables a clearer picture of the morale concept itself to be formed. What is needed is a balance between accepting this structure and either believing it to be a pristine truth or using it to pre-judge the forthcoming research.

Having identified a number of research themes and orientations by combining the literature review with previous research I will now turn to exploring the various methods by which these themes might be explored.

## Chapter 4: Approach and methodology

### Introduction

The previous chapters have outlined the terrain of existing morale research and identified a number of key research issues which this thesis will address. This chapter aims to describe the development of the research approach to these issues and also the approach itself.

In the same way that there are few developed theories of morale and little empirical research there are also few methodological precedents. This is both liberating and problematic.

Liberating as there are no established methodological schools to which obeisance must be paid, problematic as much of the work must be done *de novo*.

In titling this chapter ‘Approach and methodology’ I aim to draw upon Melia’s (1997) distinction between methodology and method. Methodology, she regards as the ‘study of method’ and methods as the ‘research procedures actually employed’ (p 27). This chapter will consider the study of methods and ways of apprehending the research issues around morale. The following chapter will then discuss the actual nuts and bolts of the method used.

I shall begin by examining some of the philosophical foundations which underpin social research. These are important as ‘*all theories of organisation are based upon a philosophy of science*’ (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p 1). Having taken a stance on these philosophical issues I shall then develop the methodological approach to morale research. Out of this comes a two pronged mixed methods (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) strategy for investigating the phenomenon of morale. This uses two very different approaches, one interpretivist and qualitative and the other quantitative and more positivist. The interpretivist element uses a grounded theory approach to provide a rich examination of the concept of morale and develop theory around the interplay between individuals, context and events. The positivist element builds on and augments the findings of the interpretivist phase using survey approaches.

This discussion of methodological approach then forms the backdrop for a discussion of the qualitative methods in the following chapter. For the sake of coherence the elaboration of the interpretivist method is followed by the interpretivist results section. This is then followed by the quantitative methods section and quantitative results. The two sets of results will then be synthesised and their integration used to address the research issues.

## Philosophical foundations

### Background – modernism and post-modernism

Philosophy of science is a topic of great interest to social scientists<sup>8</sup>, particularly so in the last thirty years with the challenge that post-modernism has posed to existing research paradigms. This insurgency has encouraged a lively debate about the underpinnings of our knowledge with sharply opposing camps (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2001a).

The first of these encompasses a series of viewpoints and practices which are variously labelled positivist or scientific and posits that the world is a system which we can know and understand and which operates on the basis of mechanisms which are apprehendable through investigation and research. Martin Parker labels this view modernism<sup>9</sup> (Parker, 1992, 1999).

The second view sets itself up against this arguing that this is a form of ‘intellectual imperialism’ (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2001a, p 4) and that the world exists and is understood only through what we say about it. This almost solipsistic view suggests that there is no hard reality out there but rather the world is constructed by language and so there is nothing out there to be discovered, only language to be examined. It eschews grand theories, general explanations, believing that ways of understanding experience are contingent and that there is no absolute truth which does not result from the privileging of one viewpoint over another (Melia, 1997). This view Parker labels post-modernism (Parker, 1992, 1999)

Where the post-modernist critique has proved incredibly valuable is in providing a philosophical *sal volatile* which has challenged modernists and forced them to be more explicit about the deficiencies of their approaches. Underlying the two viewpoints, however, is a fundamental irreconcilable difference as to how the world is constituted – its ontology.

Modernists offer a realist ontology which posits that there is an objective mind-independent reality. Post-modernists, by contrast, suggest that there is no mind-independent reality and that what we perceive is an endless interplay between various linguistic and symbolic elements.

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly philosophy of science is seldom considered by scientists. Their attitude is best illustrated the physicist Richard Feynman’s apocryphal comment that ‘philosophy is about as useful to scientists as ornithology is to birds; philosophy of science, as ornithology, is a civilizing hobby but of no real use to its objects.’ (Pernu, 2008, p 2)

<sup>9</sup> I choose Parker’s label of modernism as it is less stark than positivism, which is applied by a number of authors, notably those of a post-modernist bent, and is seen as a derogatory term in certain quarters; see Giddens, A. 1974. *Positivism and sociology*. Heinemann Educational Publishers.

### Critical realism

A critical realist approach steers between these two viewpoints offering a more nuanced ontological understanding. Critical realism (CR) grew out of the work of Roy Bhaskar (1978, 1998) and offers a middle way for those who *'are critical of the mainstream's positivism but are unpersuaded or disturbed by what they see as...the illogical relativism of poststructuralist epistemology'* (Adler, Forbes, & Willmott, 2007, p 149).

Critical realism makes an explicit differentiation between ontology (how the world is) and epistemology (what we think we can know about it) (Fleetwood, 2005). This distinction is the mechanism by which CR differs from modernist and post-modernist approaches and explains the view which underpins this research project. Where CR differs is that it proposes a layered ontology. The patterns and regularities observed are regarded as an empirical layer under which lies an actual layer, which is bound by both time and space, which contains the mechanisms which produce the empirical observations. Underlying this layer is the layer of the real, termed by Bhaskar as the intransitive domain (Mingers, 2000), which is a set of structures which actually cause the observable events (Adler et al., 2007). This is, in turn, a simplification as each layer rests on other, more fine grained layers, further complicating the apprehension of the intransitive domain.

This whole system could be likened to observing perturbations on the surface of a stream. What we observe is the ripples which are fluid and ephemeral and analogous to empirical observations. These, in turn, are generated by the movements of the water which is contingent on inherent properties in the water (e.g. temperature, viscosity) and also preceding events encoded within the flow such as currents and eddies. This represents the actual layer. Underlying this flow is the stream bed which may contain rocks or depressions which will, in turn, affect the surface of the water; the stream bed is the intransitive real.

Fleetwood (2005) tabulates the ontological credo of critical realism neatly. Firstly he suggests that CR requires that there is a 'hard' reality which exists independently of our individual knowing. Secondly he suggests that the critical portion of the term means that those adopting this approach accept that there is no possibility of any activity, for example observation, description, theory building, being conducted in an impartial and neutral way. In short every human apprehension of the world is mediated by a stock of preconceptions and biases which mould our understanding of the world. Thirdly he offers a classification system for entities which revolves around them having causal efficacy, having an effect on behaviour and making a



difference. He argues that this helps avoid the problems which result from confusion about the effect of material entities versus non-material entities (Fleetwood, 2005, p 199).

Alongside this some authors (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2001a; Mingers, 2000) emphasise that the open systems in which social events occur, coupled with the temporal and reflexive nature of the world mean that the empirical surface layer is not merely being influenced by the deeper layers but also, in turn, influencing them. This circularity has commonalities with Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) where agents are influenced by structures and, reflexively, vice versa. This further complicates any attempt to grasp at the deepest ontological level.

The upshot of this is that critical realism is a call to be ontologically bold and epistemologically modest. Ontologically bold in believing that there is an apprehendable reality but epistemologically modest in recognising that a number of factors thwart our ability to do so. In short the epistemological noise which results from perceptions, biases, linguistic difficulties and so forth, interferes with our ability to pierce through the ontological layers and apprehend the mind-independent external reality; requiring us to be modest and diffident about our claims to knowing. As Osler puts it '*No human being is constituted to know the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth; and even the best of men must be content with fragments, with partial glimpses, never the full fruition*' (Osler & Camac, 1905, p 83)

### **From philosophical underpinnings to methodological choices**

The critical realist philosophical underpinnings of this research are crucial and directly inform methodological choices. The belief that there are real entities underlying our world, both social and physical, acts as a call to try and uncover these entities. At the same time the layered ontology of critical realism makes vivid the difficulties of attaining knowledge of these entities.

For a phenomenon such as morale which is the product of social and societal factors as well as physical ones this philosophical approach helps inform the methodological approach. Much of the extant morale research relies on the idea that there is a hard reality out there, but is less forthcoming on the problems of knowing this reality. Occasional glimmers of the problem are seen such as Doherty's (1988) description of the problem of finding a fixed set of factors which describe morale which led him to give up on attempting to find morale's causal factors. Generally, however, most morale research progresses in a positivist fashion<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> The interpretivist work in the sphere of nursing (e.g. Callaghan, 2003) is a notable exception to this.

The ontological layering described in critical realism, coupled with the acceptance that *'there is no (defensible) theory-neutral observation, description, interpretation, theorization, explanation...no unmediated access to the world'* (Fleetwood, 2005, p 199), suggests that the methodological approach should aim not merely to catalogue the more observable empirical layers but also attempt to penetrate beneath them to apprehend some of the deeper underlying structures and entities. The approach should also attempt to offset the problems of bias inherent within any one approach by employing a number of different methods.

### Triangulation

This use of triangulation has been extensively advocated by a number of researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Jick, 1979; Scandura & Williams, 2000; Van Maanen, 1979). The term originates in the field of surveying (Fineman, 2004) and mimics the idea that observations of an object from two different points will allow its position to be determined. This idea is carried over into the social sciences so that congruent observations from multiple viewpoints are believed to increase the confidence in the results of those observations; effectively if multiple methods say the same thing then it is likely that what is being observed is 'real'.

This position has been argued against by Fineman (2004) who suggests that this view implies a circular logic whereby no one observation can exist independently of another i.e. there is no 'reference' observation by which the others might be calibrated<sup>11</sup>. He also criticises what he sees as triangulation's presupposition of a fixed, objective social reality which can be pinpointed by this approach, and questions what happens when approaches fail to triangulate. As we have seen the critical realist perspective softens some of the assumptions about what can be known through triangulation as well as how entities might be apprehended. Fineman has a valid critique within a modernist paradigm however the more nuanced view of critical realism, whilst not obviating these concerns, nonetheless reduces them.

Triangulation, therefore, offers a means of penetrating the ontological layers of morale from different perspectives which, whilst it may not allow a clear view of the underlying intransitive reality, at least offers a better chance of exposing and describing the layers than a single methodological approach.

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<sup>11</sup> This is a variation of the Duhem-Quine thesis that no hypothesis can be tested without reliance on a number of background assumptions and hypotheses.

### Triangulation and mixed methods

Triangulation requires that phenomena are appraised from different angles in order to gain a better understanding of their true nature. This then leaves the question of what these different angles comprise. At a macro level it is the utilisation of ‘*an arsenal of methods that have non-overlapping weaknesses in addition to their complementary strengths*’ (Brewer & Hunter, 2006, p 4).

This ties in with Quick’s plea for pluralist research in organisational behaviour (Quick, 1997). He believes that organisational behaviour, particularly in North America, has relied too heavily on a natural science<sup>12</sup> (modernist in the typology above) paradigm. Recognising the limitations of a particular paradigm he advocates a multi-paradigmatic approach to research so that ‘*the strengths of one paradigm should shore up the limitations of another and vice versa*’ (Quick, 1997, p 475). He draws on Payne’s (1978) research to suggest that critical scientific enquiry is the way to increase knowledge, refining it with a process of corroboration either on a person by person or fact by fact basis. He then presents a three axis framework with qualitative-quantitative, idiographic-nomothetic and (time) future-past axes.

Again the idea is that overlapping approaches enables multiple perspectives to be used to gain an overall picture of a topic as the table he uses to contrast nomothetic and idiographic approaches shows (Table 1).

This dichotomy is reflected in other classification systems. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) use a qualitative-quantitative classification which incorporates many of the elements of Quick’s nomothetic-idiographic model. Strauss and Corbin (1998) make a similar distinction at the level of theory between formal and substantive theories, a distinction which seems to map onto the quantitative-qualitative approach. Burrell and Morgan (1979) advocate a subjective-objective split which elaborates the opposing poles of ontology, epistemology, human nature and methodology.

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<sup>12</sup> I find this terminology rather odd. What Quick probably means is physical sciences such as physics rather than the biological such as biochemistry or physiology. This distinction is significant as biological scientists routinely deal in precisely the problems of irreproducibility, contingency and contextuality that social scientists claim as their own and are in contrast to the physical sciences which are better able to produce laws and regularities. Most of the time when social scientists describe natural sciences as an archetype they are actually describing physical sciences and thus ignoring the problems (and solutions) reached by those working in equally fluid and contextual environments.

**Table 1 – Idiographic – nomothetic dimension in scientific enquiry**

	Research paradigm	
	Nomothetic	Idiographic
Word definition	Determinate	Indeterminate
Word hypothesis	Mechanism	Contextualism
Core processes	Analysis Integration Reductionism	Synthesis Dispersion Holism
Method	Experimentation	History
Metaphor	The machine	The historical event
Interactions	Cause-effect	Reciprocal-transactional
Knowledge attribute	Positivistic-pragmatic	Hermeneutic-spiritual
Treatment of facts	Exclusive	Inclusive
Key strengths	Breadth Precision Replicability Prediction	Depth Richness Uniqueness Comprehensive
Key limitation	Lack of richness	Lack of precision

(Quick, 1997)

All of these approaches are slightly different. An idiographic approach, for example, differs from a qualitative one in that idiographic research is interpretivist but a qualitative approach could be either modernist or interpretivist. What these dichotomous distinctions are seem to be trying to capture is the idea that there is a modernist, more quantitative approach at one end of the research spectrum and a post-modernist, more qualitative approach at the other – although these paradigm lines are not always clearly drawn (Locke, 2001) and exceptions are relatively common. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2002) extend this dichotomous distinction by mapping research approaches onto two axes which are determined by the epistemological approach (positivist – social constructionist) and the degree of researcher involvement (detached-involved). This enables various research methods to be differentiated and their consonance with other approaches to be appraised.

What seems odd in the management research sphere is the lack of overlap between these two perspectives (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 28). The methodological monotheism of many researchers is, as Peirce puts it, sterile (Peirce, 1998). When applied to other fields this dichotomy quickly becomes absurd – imagine a qualitative approach to surgery, or a quantitative one for that matter. One of the observations which can be made when there are two polar

choices of this nature is that both of them have substantial shortcomings, if they did not then there would be only one way of conducting research.

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie's (2004) excellent manifesto for mixed methods research proceeds from the 'paradigm wars' between these two contrasting approaches and offers a constructive way forward. They are critical of both qualitative and quantitative approaches and advocate a pragmatic view of mixed method research as an alternative. This echoes other authors' work on multi and meta-paradigmatic research (e.g. Gioia & Pitre, 1990; Lewis, 1999) who suggest that as there is no uniquely correct view (Bochner, 1985; cited in Gioia & Pitre, 1990) a pluralist approach combining multiple techniques is necessary to gain an overall picture.

This bridging between paradigms and approaches can be achieved by adopting either a multi-paradigmatic or meta-paradigmatic approach. The multi-paradigmatic approach uses different paradigms but does not attempt to resolve any incongruence between them (Gioia & Pitre, 1990). The meta-paradigmatic approach, by contrast, aims to abstract to a higher level where the differences between paradigms are more readily incorporated into the overall whole (Lewis, 1999).

These approaches suggest that, despite interminable protestations about the incommensurability of various forms of research, integration of methods across paradigms and approaches is not merely possible: it is desirable. To this end Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) propose both a road map for conducting mixed methods research and a typology for classifying it. They also point out the potential downfalls of mixed research. These include the difficulty and time consuming nature of learning, applying and mixing different methods and the problems which can result in interpreting conflicting results. These difficulties continue when presenting the results of mixed methods research as the researcher can be enfiladed from both sides of the methodological divide with neither camp being happy that the other has been given any credence (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In spite of the potential philosophical, practical and societal problems mixed methods research does seem to be the most appropriate approach for investigating morale. The ability of different methods to triangulate on the phenomenon of morale and move beyond the existing literature whilst still exploring the richness of the concept means that a robust view of morale can be formed.

## Methodological precedents

Although there is a considerable quantity of preceding research there are, as discussed above, few traditions of morale research and no dominant approach. As discussed previously this liberates the researcher from a commitment to any one particular point of view but, again, offers little firm territory in which to ground the research. Given the history of morale research and its inadequacies it is worth thinking about where the methodological gaps are.

One of the areas which has been underexplored is, oddly, individuals' views of morale. This formed a component of early measurement systems, for example when troop's letters home were evaluated to appraise morale (MacKenzie, 1992). Liefoghe et al. (2004) suggest that what is needed now are contemporary 'letters from the trenches' (p 31). This, they suggest would take the form of interviews which would provide rich data for theory building and empirical testing. This call for an inductive approach to theory building corresponds to the ideographic approach outlined by Quick (1997).

As we have already seen there is little research on the definition of the morale concept which makes use of the fact that it is a concept understood within society. Using this understanding as a substrate for morale research makes a great deal of sense and is something which may not be possible with other concepts; it is, however, a mixed blessing. On the one hand it means that there is a ready source of information on the topic which can be tapped. On the other hand it means that if the research is to have any credibility it must reflect society's view of morale. This means that identifying a phenomenon and labelling it morale, as has happened in some previous research, is unacceptable as it does not demonstrate appropriate content validity.

Given the poor state of our understanding of morale and lack of foundations much of the exploratory work will be of an inductive nature. This will help develop theory and can be allied with the existing literature to produce an overall picture of morale, its definition and dimensions.

There is some precedent for this in another similarly ill defined concept, empowerment. The opening paragraph of Thomas and Velthouse's (1990) paper on the topic begins with statement:

*'Empowerment has become a widely used word within the organizational sciences...however empowerment has no agreed-upon definition. Rather, the term has been used, often loosely, to capture a family of somewhat related meanings'* (p 666)

If one substitutes the word 'morale' then this quotation would be equally accurate. Subsequently there has been a considerable body of research into empowerment and it has followed three

distinct phases. The first was the concept identification and domain specification phase. With empowerment this was based more on the conjecture of researchers than specific field based investigation given that the term had little societal currency. The second phase was the identification of the key dimensions of empowerment and establishment of the theoretical grounds of the construct. This work drew together previous research in adjacent areas to help specify the construct (Conger & Kanungo, 1988; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). The third phase involved measurement of the construct based on the findings of the previous phases (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996; Spreitzer, Kizilos, & Nason, 1997).

Taking empowerment research as a template for morale research gives a structure to the methodological approach. The first stage of concept identification and domain specification was largely conducted for empowerment by labelling what researchers thought it might be. This was suitable for empowerment as it was a novel concept which was able to be developed and articulated prior to exposure to a wider audience. A similar approach could be used for morale whereby existing definitions are drawn upon and a more narrowly defined and specified conception is produced. This has the appeal of precision and clear delineation and has been tried on a number of occasions within the morale literature (e.g. Guion, 1958; Hershey, 1985). Unfortunately it has not gained much traction, as evidenced by the comments of authors such as Britt (2007), Liefoghe (2004) and Peterson (2008) all of whom discuss the deficiencies of existing approaches. The mismatch here seems to occur between the definition employed by the researcher and the understanding of morale of the consumers of the research.

Although narrower more technical definitions have been used in other societally understood concepts such as happiness or personality it can be argued that this narrowing has occurred in the light of the exploration of the concept, something which has not happened in the case of morale. Even with these narrower definitions when researchers ask individual how happy they are they use more general questions such as 'How happy are you?' (Layard, 2005, p 13).

In exploratory research it makes sense to try and link the academic specification of morale to the societal understanding. The definition could be further narrowed with greater research on the topic but for the present purpose answering Liefoghe et al's (2004, p 31) call for modern day 'letters from the trenches' means that the concept identification and domain specification will map onto those of the consumers of the research. This suggests a programme of field research asking a diverse group of individuals about their perceptions of morale in order to catalogue and understand the concept.

The second stage in empowerment research is theory generation. This involves the synthesis of the existing research into a theoretical model. Again this should be realisable for morale by drawing on the results of the first stage. It is worth noting at this point that the construction of a model will inevitably lead to a loss of richness. All models are a depiction of our understanding and not a faithful replica. The process of theoretical development is no different and is likely to result in information loss and simplification. Whilst this aids our understanding it produces a thinner, starker picture of the morale concept.

The third stage of empowerment research involves its measurement. Drawing on the results of the previous two phases a measurement system was devised and validated. This is the point at which the research moves from being inductive and idiographic to being deductive and nomothetic. The richness and holism of the inductive approach is replaced by a more analytical one. The findings of the previous two phases inform this instrument, ensuring that it is grounded, yet the measurement system permits generalisation and disembedding of the concept from the contextual nature of the earlier phases.

This three stage process within the empowerment literature provides a useful exemplar for morale research and one which helps address and integrate a number of philosophical and methodological issues which are also present within the morale literature.

### **Methodological approach**

The approach to this research requires an integration of the research issues with the philosophical approach, informed by the methodological precedents. To this end what is needed is an approach which enables a rich picture of the phenomenon of morale to be produced, theory to be developed and measurement and testing to be undertaken.

One of the paradoxes of social research is that for all the methodological variety within the literature there are actually very few activities which can be undertaken to explore phenomena. The majority of social research, at some level, involves asking people what they think. This is achieved in two different ways as outlined in the philosophical and mixed methods sections. The first is using a qualitative approach to help explore the concept and inductively build theory. The second complements this and involves using quantitative research to deductively test theory. This combination of idiographic and nomothetic measures will enable a thick, generalisable and valuable picture of morale to be built up.

Combining mixed methods in this way does cause a small structural problem in writing this thesis as the pairing of methods and results becomes disrupted by another methodological



section. In this case this has been addressed by separating out the qualitative and quantitative methods. The qualitative methods section therefore precedes qualitative results; similarly the quantitative methods section precedes the quantitative results. The output from the two results sections will then be synthesised and their integration used to address the research issues.

## Chapter 5: Qualitative research methods

### Introduction

*‘Without a theory they had nothing to pass on except a mass of descriptive material waiting for a theory, or a fire’*  
(Coase, 1984, p 230)

In order to explore the concept of morale and inductively build theory a qualitative approach is most appropriate. This permits the thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the concept and provides the substrate for theory building (Shah & Corley, 2006) in order to address the research issues previously identified. However as Van Maanen (1979) puts it

*‘The label qualitative methods has no precise meaning in any of the social sciences. It is at best an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world. To operate in a qualitative mode is to trade in linguistic symbols and, by so doing, attempt to reduce the distance between indicated and indicator, between theory and data, between context and action.’* (Van Maanen, 1979, p 520)

The techniques which can be used vary from the rigid and formalist approaches of content analysis to the much more interpretivist approaches of phenomenology with its reliance on intuition and insight (Sanders, 1982). For an unstructured, poorly understood and contextual concept such as morale a more interpretivist approach is more useful. It permits the flexibility and inductive leaps necessary to build theory from rich data and also is less bound by issues of context than more structured techniques. The aim of this phase of research is, like Conger and Kanungo’s (1988) exploration of empowerment outlined above, to identify and specify the domain of morale. This process of exploration will encompass a number of areas which can be divided into the four domains outlined in Chapter 3 which are defining and describing what morale is, what it is not, its antecedents and its consequences.

The definition and description of morale will help fuse the societal understanding of the concept with the academic one (see p 71 above). More significantly it will enable a grounded articulation of morale to be developed along with an exploration its dimensions, the interplay between individuals and groups, the role of individual differences (after Organ, 1997) and so forth. Evaluating the difference between morale and other concepts will provide an adjunct to the quantitative phase so that if, say, morale and satisfaction are viewed as different concepts we will know how and why individuals think they differ.

The qualitative exploration of the antecedents of morale will allow the process of morale production to be explored as well as identifying antecedents. This will produce a more nuanced and fine grained understanding of how morale is affected.

Qualitative appraisal of the consequences of morale will permit some of the more complex sequelae of the concept to be explored. Appraising the impact of morale on quality of work or communication, for example, is more readily achieved using this approach although there are, necessarily, caveats about the interviewees providing self-serving responses.

Overall the qualitative phase of the research aims to provide, for the first time, a detailed qualitative analysis of morale grounded in field data. This will permit a more granular understanding of the concept and processes within it. It will allow a theoretical model of morale to be developed. It will then provide substrate for the quantitative phase and ensure that this is grounded in empirical observation.

### Grounded theory

For this research, with its emphasis on description and theory building, a grounded theory approach was adopted. Grounded theory originated in the work of Glaser and Strauss (1967) who drew on symbolic interactionist ideas (Locke, 2001) to articulate a systematic process for gathering, synthesising, analysing and conceptualising qualitative data to construct theory (Charnaz, 2003, p 82). Grounded theory aims to build theory which is, literally, grounded in the evidence by analyzing ‘*the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings*’ (Gephart Jr, 2004, p 457). For this reason grounded theory ‘...is most suited to efforts to understand the process by which actors construct meaning out of intersubjective experience.’ (Suddaby, 2006, p 634) and attempting to understand morale is just such an intersubjective experience. Locke (2001) suggests that grounded theory is particularly useful where the researcher wishes to either produce new theory or revivify old; capture complexity and make links to practice. As this research aims to all these things the grounded theory approach seems particularly suitable.

It is worth noting that the two originators of the theory, Glaser and Strauss, fell out (Melia, 1997) and two different approaches developed<sup>13</sup>. The key difference seems to be that Strauss and Corbin (1998) adopted a more structured, process based framework for data collection and analysis (Heath & Cowley, 2004). Glaser’s approach remained a more gestalt one where

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13 Glaser wrote to Strauss at the time of publication of Basics of Qualitative Research stating ‘I request that you pull the book [Basics of Qualitative Research]. It distorts and misconceives grounded theory, while engaging in a gross neglect of 90% of its important ideas...you wrote a whole different method so why call it “grounded theory”?’ It indicates that you never have grasped what we did, nor studied it to try and carefully extend it’ (Glaser, 1992, p 2)

categories emerged from the data. His view of the difference in the two approaches is best summed up in the title of his book 'Basics of grounded theory analysis : emergence vs. forcing' (Glaser, 1992) which suggested that the Straussian model required categories to be forced together as a result of the process of analysis rather than emerging from the data.

In this study a Straussian approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) was adopted for two reasons. Firstly it was thought to be more suitable for the novice researcher (Heath & Cowley, 2004) and secondly because it produces a 'framework for action' (Annells, 1997, p 121) it is more likely to facilitate the quantitative phase and provide useful recommendations for practitioners. The Straussian approach is susceptible to the critique of formalism and inflexibility (Melia, 1997) but this author prefers that risk to the Glaserian approach with its attendant dangers of lack of coherence and focus (Fendt & Sachs, 2008). These claims of formalism should not be overinterpreted, however, as analysis within the Straussian frame is both science and art and involves '*a constant interplay between the researchers and data*' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 13). Hereinafter when reference is made to grounded theory it is the Straussian approach which is being utilised.

There are two key processes in which occur in any research project: data acquisition and data processing (Shah & Corley, 2006). In grounded theory the two are inextricably linked with the one reflexively influencing the other (Shah & Corley, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This fits with the emergent nature of grounded theory research which is not about theory testing (Suddaby, 2006) but about following the routes and paths of understanding which emerge during the research process. Some of these paths will turn out to be cul-de-sacs, some will join or rejoin other paths and some will lead to new areas. For this reason the process is iterative. The two key processes will now be discussed individually for the sake of clarity but it is important to note that within the grounded approach they are inseparable.

### **Data acquisition**

The approach to the acquisition of data is one of the key elements of the grounded theory process (Suddaby, 2006). A 'theoretical sampling' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach is used whereby the sample from which data is acquired is not determined by the individuals to be sampled but rather by the concepts, properties and dimensions which are being explored (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Effectively there is an iterative process within grounded theory whereby each new piece of information informs and determines the collection of the next.

## Sensitisation

This then raises the question of the departure point for grounded theory research. It is all very well saying that sampling is theory driven but where does the researcher start? Glaser (1992) argues that the researcher should enter the field as a *tabula rasa* with a mind emptied of preconceptions and pre-existing sensitivities (Kelle, 2005), the idea being that these sensitivities could be viewed as prejudicial to the research as it may produce a confirmation bias (Nickerson, 1998). Dey rejects this approach by pointing out that *'there is a difference between an open mind and an empty head. To analyze data we need to use accumulated knowledge, not dispense with it. The issue is not whether to use existing knowledge, but how'* (Dey, 1993, p 63 quoted in Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

Strauss and Corbin (1998), by contrast, make an explicit virtue of past experience suggesting that insights can be gained through the sensitisation that flows from the pre-existing literature. They temper this by encouraging a mindset of objectivity but equally are realistic that this will never be perfectly achieved.

This initial sensitisation, therefore, provides the input for the first sampling frame. The insights emerging from the initial sampling frame then inform subsequent sampling so that the various descriptive, conceptual and theoretical findings can be thoroughly explored so that they become saturated. This issue of saturation will be dealt with a little later on but it is useful, at this juncture, to discuss some of the background in the literature and previous research which informed the theoretical sampling.

## Background sensitisation in this study

The initial sensitisation for this first foray into the field came from a combination of personal experience, previous research and the literature review. This then provided a loose scaffold which determined the initial questions and choice of sample.

Two principal pieces of previous work informed this sensitisation. The first was the MBA Individual Project conducted in 2004 which made use of a small scale literature review and used this as the background to help drive a series of key informant interviews (Kumar, Stern, & Anderson, 1993). This process helped produce a loose definition of morale and explore the topic. In addition the processing and subsequent write up of results served to fulfil some of the analysis and memoing elements which are a key component of the grounded theory process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The next iteration of this process was the MPhil dissertation which drew on the findings of the MBA research and extended it through the use of surveys. The interplay between quantitative

and qualitative data enabled the topic to be illuminated from another angle, exposing new facets of it.

These two previous pieces of work formed part of the sensitising process for this thesis. Although the approach adopted in these previous studies was not explicitly grounded theory the process undertaken did have some similarities in that constant interaction between results and data shaped my understanding of the phenomenon of morale, and hence informed the initial phases of this phase of research.

These early phases involved deciding on who to talk to about morale, what to ask them, how to ask them and what other data might help shed light on the phenomenon. As discussed previously a qualitative approach was adopted to help explore the societal understanding of morale and also to investigate its production, influence and antecedents. A number of approaches were contemplated to solicit this information notably interviews, focus groups and use of corpora.

Focus groups have the advantage of allowing the opinions of a number of individuals to be drawn upon in a single session. Their group nature means that these opinions are also refined through discussion and argument with other members of the group. The danger is that because individuals are thrown into a group setting candour is reduced. Focus groups can also be easily dominated by an individual or group and so skilful chairing is needed. Perhaps the strongest objection to using focus groups that several of the research sites (SRC, SCM and parts of GCC, see p 85) had deep cultures of suspicion and so it was likely that any conversation would have been grossly inhibited in a focus group setting.

The use of corpora was also considered. These are cullings of press and broadcast material which are collated in order to provide a resource of language usage. They permit observation of language-in-use and have the additional benefit of already being transcribed. Their composition is affected by somewhat arbitrary or obscure sampling decisions and so the representativeness is questionable. It is also clearly impossible to ask supplementary questions or follow up probes to clarify points.

Interviews have the advantage of being quite fluid and enable a range of questions to be asked. They also permit privacy and exploration of topics in an environment of mutual trust. The disadvantages are that the interviewer may lead the interviewee and so skew the results. There was also the danger at some of the research sites that the interviewer was viewed as being in league with management and so the individuals were less forthright in their answers.

Overall I felt that interviews were the best way of soliciting the opinions of others as, for all their limitations, within the initial organisation (and, as it turned out some of the subsequent ones) it permitted privacy and allowed individuals to speak freely in a way that focus groups would not. It also permitted in depth probing of responses in a way that the use of corpus data would not.

I shall now turn to the questions which were asked, why they were asked, how they were asked and use this to show how the responses and emerging information drove the data collection procedure.

### **The questions asked**

Grounded theory rests on eliciting information about phenomena from a variety of information sources. In this research the principal source of data were 203 semi-structured interviews with employees at all levels of seven different organisations. This formed the key driver of the grounded theory process and was supplemented with other forms of data (e.g. observational, psychometric and organisational) which will be discussed later.

Semi-structured interviews were selected over unstructured interviews as the research themes identified in the literature review and previous research permitted some loose targeting of the questions. The other choice here would have been to use a more structured interview with open ended questions. This was rejected as the terrain of morale was sufficiently uncertain and the problems of generalisability across levels and fields sufficiently poorly investigated (Organ, 1997) that this more structured approach would constrain a full exploration of the phenomenon. The semi-structured approach also developed during the interview process starting with a more loose and open ended approach and becoming more closely directed as the research progressed in a mirror of the grounded theory approach itself (Orlikowski, 1993; Walsham & Sahay, 1999).

The other key element of the grounded theory process is that of 'constant comparison' between emerging results and the data collection process (Suddaby, 2006). This then informs and drives the theoretical sampling decisions about which data should be collected next (Locke, 2001). This poses a logistical problem for the researcher as full, in-depth analysis of transcribed interviews is not necessarily compatible with a series of interviews in a busy organisation.

This problem was addressed in several ways. Detailed notes about each interviewee were recorded at the end of each interview. In addition to a summary of their views of morale and notes of points of interest which the interview raised comments were made on the individual's own demeanour, their relationship to others in the organisation, the social context they found themselves in and so forth. Particular attention was paid to observations which were at odds

with my current view of morale as these discrepancies are vital for driving the grounded theory process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). These notes were then used to inform the subsequent interviews and sampling.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews and the large sample size mean that there was a tension between a reproducible standardised structure to the interviews, which facilitated processing, and the emergent nature of the grounded theory approach. This tension was managed in this case by having a core series of questions which were then followed up by supplementary probing questions. In this case the core questions remained the same (with one exception) for the entire series of interviews with the probing questions being varied to take account of the emergent findings. These probes became more closely directed as the interviewing phase progressed (see above). This process was further enhanced by the necessity of reporting findings back to the organisations involved, a process of reflection which further enhanced theoretical development. All research deviates from the ideal and the constraints of time are well appreciated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 292) however extensive measures were taken to offset any difficulties that time and access pressures may have produced.

The questions for the semi-structured interviews emerged from a combination of previous research, the literature review and the research issues section as discussed above. They were broadly exploratory in nature but with some focussed questions to address concerns emerging out of previous research. The questions decided upon are outlined in Table 2.



**Table 2 – Initial questions for semi-structured interview**

Question number	Question
1a	Can you give me an example of a time when you had high morale?
1b	Can you give me an example of a time when you had low morale?
2a	What words would you use to describe high morale?
2b	What words would you use to describe low morale?
3a	What effect, if any, do you think high morale has on your performance?
3b	What effect, if any, do you think low morale has on your performance?
4	Do you think morale is an individual or group phenomenon?
5a	Do you think that morale is the same thing as satisfaction?
5b	Do you think that morale is the same thing as motivation?
5c	Do you think that morale is the same thing as happiness?
6a	What would improve your morale?
6b	What would damage your morale?
Other	How would you define morale?

### Critical incidents of high and low morale

Questions 1a and 1b were designed to use the Critical Incident Technique (Flanagan, 1954).

Chell (1998) describes the technique thus:

*‘... a qualitative interview procedure which facilitates the investigation of significant occurrences (events, incidents, processes or issues) identified by the respondent, the way they are managed, and the outcomes in terms of perceived effects. The objective is to gain an understanding of the incident from the perspective of the individual, taking into account cognitive, affective and behavioural elements.’* (Chell, 1998; cited in Chell & Pittaway, 1998, p 56)

The use of questions about good and bad morale incidents formed the basis for an exploration of both morale and also the critical factors surrounding it. Although this technique in Flanagan’s original (1954) conception was seen as highly objective the reality is that it is, of course, subjective and hence eminently suitable for qualitative exploratory idiographic research of this nature; particularly when the results are subjected to qualitative analysis such as grounded theory or content analysis (Chell & Pittaway, 1998).

The actual process of conducting CIT involves six elements (Chell & Pittaway, 1998):

Gaining access to the organisation

Introducing oneself as the researcher and explaining the subject of the research

Explaining and reassuring on confidentiality and ethical matters

Introducing the CIT

Clarifying, probing and questioning the incidents to improve understanding

Concluding the interview

In this case the CIT was also complemented with further questions which used a more conventional semi-structured approach. The benefit of conducting the interview in this way was that respondents felt more comfortable addressing later questions such as performance as the CIT had given them a chance to talk and 'settle in'. Previous experience suggests that providing the opportunity to focus on a story puts the respondent at their ease, enabling more information to be solicited.

### **Describing morale**

Questions 2a and 2b aim to try and define the ideas of high and low morale. Defining words is similar to latent variable modelling where the word being defined is the latent variable.

Essentially a number of other words or ideas are elicited and the variance in these is explained by the word being defined. For example by defining tiresome as 'troublesome, disagreeable, unpleasant; irksome, annoying, vexatious' the lexicographer expects the reader to infer the definition of tiresome as the latent variable which would explain the variance in these other words. These two questions will help provide substrate for a direct measurement of the morale concept.

### **Morale and performance**

3a and 3b concern themselves with the link between morale and performance. This is, of course, highly subjective in this context but there is little information within the literature on the mechanisms by which morale influences performance and so exploration of this linkage will help remedy this.

### **Individual or group?**

The issue of whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon has been debated within the literature for over seventy years with little empirical evidence being brought to bear on the subject. By asking individuals directly for their views and exploring the topic it is possible that this issue might be further illuminated and the mechanisms by which individuals and groups interact be understood. An additional benefit is that this question might help develop an

understanding of how the debate about whether morale is a group or individual phenomenon emerged.

### **Differentiating morale**

Question five reflects an attempt to understand what morale is not. The three concepts listed; satisfaction, motivation and happiness, were picked because they are most likely to be understood by respondents. These three terms all have some societal currency in a way that organisational commitment, for example, does not. Satisfaction also proved difficult to differentiate from morale in previous research and so further clarification is appropriate given the constant elision of the two subjects in the literature.

### **Improving or lowering morale**

The final two questions, 6a and 6b, were to gain an additional perspective on how morale might be improved or diminished. These questions take a slightly different tack on the issue to questions 1a and 1b which use the critical incident technique.

Some respondents were also asked to define morale however it quickly became apparent that most people found this quite difficult and tended to lapse into either a prolonged silence or constant expressions of how difficult it was to define. As a result the question was dropped.

### **Other data sources**

The interview data was part of an overall strategy of data collection which aimed to catalogue environmental and individual data which would help contextualise the interviews and provide insights into some of the organisational processes surrounding morale research.

Notes were kept on the organisational environment such as the buildings and environs. This could prove critical as, for example, a dispersed site could lead to feelings of organisational fragmentation. The background of each organisation was also investigated using websites, press reports and also information gleaned from the interview process to build up a picture of the organisation as a whole and, in the case of larger multi-site organisations, the particular local context. These nontechnical data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) comprised printed reports, field notes which were recorded on site, data from websites and exchanges of correspondence with individuals working within the organisation.

Alongside these qualitative observations use was made of quantitative data to help further inform the grounded theory process. Strauss and Corbin do not make suggestions as to how to incorporate qualitative and quantitative research (unlike, say, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie above),

but they do suggest that making use of quantitative data to inform qualitative research is sensible if it is useful to theorising (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 27-34).

### **Additional psychometric research**

Organ (1997) expressed concern about the lack of research on the influence of personality on morale. In order to appraise this the semi-structured interviews were complemented with a questionnaire. This used two psychometric instruments to explore personality. The first was the 'Big Five' personality inventory (Goldberg, 1993). The five traits - Extraversion, Neuroticism, Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experience - are almost universally accepted as being fundamental to human personality (see Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007, for an excellent discussion). The open source IPIP (Goldberg et al., 2006) was used as this is freely available and correlates well with the original Costa and McCrae (McCrae & Costa, 1987) model (Johnson, 2005).

The second measure was the Positive and Negative Affect Scale (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988). These two states are orthogonally related with positive affect (PA) reflecting the extent to which a person feels enthusiastic, active and alert. Negative Affect (NA), by contrast, is a general dimension of subjective distress covering a variety of negative mood states such as anger, disgust, contempt and fear (Watson et al., 1988). This two dimensional approach has been widely used<sup>14</sup>.

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews could then be appraised in the light of the individuals score on these two measures. This approach does sit somewhat at odds with the use of the Critical Incident Technique which, although it believes that social events arise out of a conjunction of personality and social situation, claims that personality is contextually derived and not an innate trait (Chell & Pittaway, 1998). This critique is noted but not believed to be important as there is a substantial body of literature on the trait elements of personality (Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007; Goldberg, 1992; Goldberg, 1993; Goldberg et al., 2006; McCrae & Costa, 1987) and it seems likely that the comment is an artefact of a particular paradigmatic view.

### **Other quantitative items**

In addition to exploring personality variables the survey also asked individuals to rate ten different factors on a scale of 1-10. These were satisfaction, departmental morale, energy, motivation, organizational commitment, happiness, optimism, morale, enthusiasm and tiredness.

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<sup>14</sup> This measure has over 4 500 citations in Google Scholar.

Alongside these items the age, sex, organisational tenure and position of the interviewees was recorded as well as contextual notes around the interviews.

The psychometric and other quantitative data were used both in their own right and also to help examine the semi-structured interview data. The process by which this was achieved will be discussed below but the combination of these various types of data helps shed light on the role of personality in morale.

### Summary

The sensitisation provided by pre-existing research suggested that a number of different approaches to data collection were necessary. The bulk of information came from semi-structured interviews which used a loose framework of questions to standardise across interviews but with additional supplementary probes which were flexible and permitted the interviewing process to be adapted in the light of emerging understanding. This interview data was augmented and contextualised by evaluating the physical and social environment in each organisation. Alongside these qualitative data quantitative data were collected to assist interview interpretation.

The answers to the questions at each phase helped determine the next phase of research. The critical element here is who gets asked the questions. The next section explores the process by which the theoretical sampling occurred and which organisations were sampled.

### Organisational research into morale - The organisations approached

The initial research site was identified in the light of the sensitisation process resulting from previous research. The scientific research centre (SRC) was approached because I had pre-existing connections there and morale had been described as low by some of the workforce. One of the key informant interviews conducted with an experienced management researcher during the MBA dissertation had suggested examining morale in areas of abundance or deficiency. For this reason the SRC was thought to be a suitable starting point. The results of the interviews at this site then helped inform the selection of other sites. These other sites were selected to offer similarities and contrasts on various emergent dimensions. Sampling in high and low morale organisations, for example, is an obvious contrast. This theoretical sampling procedure (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) is a key component of grounded theory (Suddaby, 2006)

The theoretical sampling process produced the seven organisations listed in Table 3. They covered a variety of industries including manufacturing, high tech, service and research with some of the organisations having cross over and overlap between them, for example the research

engineering element of the Ball Bearing Manufacturer and the research engineering element of the two High Tech Start Ups. Table 4 illustrates the variance across some of the categories which the theoretical sampling procedure produced. The aim of the sampling procedure being to provide a variety of environments and contexts within which to examine morale.

**Table 3 - Organisations comprising the qualitative phase sample**

Name	Abbreviation	Description
Scientific Research Centre	SRC	A scientific research centre specialising in animal health
Garden Centre Chain	GCC	A family owned chain of garden centres
High Tech Start Up 1	HTSU 1	A chip and software start-up specialising in display technologies
High Tech Start Up 2	HTSU 2	A chip and software start-up specialising in wireless connectivity
Silicon Chip Manufacturer	SCM	A silicon chip manufacturer specialising in epitaxy
Fibreglass Roofing Manufacturer	FRM	A company producing roofing and skylight products
Ball Bearing Manufacturer	BBM	A producer of bearings and car parts

The initial contact with each organisation was either through the managing director or the human resources department. They provided background information on the organisation and the current issues which they were concerned about. This information was supplemented with background research into each organisation. Field visits to the research sites also enabled additional contextual information to be gleaned through direct observation of the site, interactions in staff canteens and information discussions with other staff members.

In all cases there was a quid pro quo with each organisation that the results of the interview phase would be fed back, in aggregate and anonymized, along with advice in order to help offer insights into improving the organisation. This process helped codify the research after each organisation had been appraised and served as a focal point for documenting and summarising emerging themes.

**Table 4 - Illustration of the variety of dimensions of the sample (+ = low/small - +++++ = high/large)**

	SRC	GCC	HTSU 1	HTSU 2	SCM	FRM	BBM
Size	+++	+++++	+	+	++	+++	+++++
Multi site	++	+++++	+	+	+++	++	+++++
Morale level	++	+ to +++++	+++++	++	+	+++	++ to +++++
Knowledge based organisation	+++++	+	+++++	+++++	+++	+++	+++
Manufacturing					+++	+++++	+++++
Service	++	+++++	+	+	++	+++	++
White collar	+++++	++	+++++	+++++	+++	+	++

Note: The number of + signs reflects a relative judgement of the degree to which an organisation varies on a particular dimensions. FRM, for example, merits one + for 'White collar' on the basis of the sample mainly being comprised of shop floor workers. BBM, by contrast, merits +++++ for size as it is part of a multi-national organisation. Some multi-site organisations have a range of morale level

The interviewees were carefully chosen. In each organisation individuals were selected from all levels in the hierarchy with care taken to ensure that every level was represented. The other objective in each organisation was to gain an overall view across a number of different departments, again to ensure that a broad contextual picture of the organisation was built up. This approach was selected to address the concern that the voices of the less powerful were marginalised in morale research and that the extant literature solely reflected the views of those in power (Liefoghe et al., 2004). Deciding to sample at all levels and across functions was a conscious choice at the outset and the emergent findings did not suggest that any one group should be focussed on.

The interviews themselves were conducted on site at each organisation by prior arrangement. This was for the convenience of the respondents and so that they were in their normal work surroundings. The interviews were conducted in a private room set aside for the purpose<sup>15</sup> away from other employees to reassure them about confidentiality and so that they could speak freely.

One of the issues in grounded theory is that of saturation. When does one have enough data? In the case of interviews this is a contentious point (Suddaby, 2006). The point at which data

<sup>15</sup> There were three exceptions to this. One interview of a shop floor worker was conducted in a café at one of the GCC, the second with the finance director of HTSU 1 was conducted in a hire car whilst he was returning it to the depot and the third with a shift manager at FRM was conducted over the telephone.

collection ceases is when the theoretical categories are saturated. In the case of this research this was somewhat modified by the desire to gain a large sample so that the sample could be segmented in a meaningful way using the psychometric and demographic criteria outlined above. This research probably continued on beyond the point of saturation, therefore, but primarily in order to gain additional information which would not have been apparent with a smaller (albeit saturated) sample.

### Data processing

The interviews were recorded using a Sony ICD-MX20 digital voice recorder. The files were saved to a PC in Sony's .msv format after each interview. The files were then burned onto CD and sent to a transcription agency. A number of transcription agencies were tried until a satisfactory quality of transcription was obtained. Although some researchers believe that third party transcription deprives the researcher of a full understanding of the nuance of meaning this was not felt to be a relevant concern in this case. Three specific steps were taken to ensure that this concern was mitigated. Firstly the transcriptions requested were 'full' rather than parsed. This meant that every 'um' and 'er' was recorded and so the transcripts reflected the sounds recorded. Secondly the transcripts were reviewed both by a third party at the transcription company and also by me listening to the voice recording. Again this ensured that they reflected what took place as accurately as possible. It is also worth bearing in mind that I was present and conducted all the interviews myself. Finally during the coding process any confusion could be cleared up by reference to the original recording and contemporaneous notes taken during the interview. By taking these steps it seems unlikely that there is a vast discrepancy between what was said and what was transcribed so that the words of the interviewee were faithfully interpreted as accurately as interpersonal communication permits.

The mass of information accrued was not readily tractable to manual handling. Over 3000 pages of transcripts were produced which would have been difficult to physically manipulate and transport. For this reason use was made of Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS). The transcripts were loaded into NVivo 7 (NVivo, 2007) along with the attributes for each case (e.g. Big 5, PANAS, demographics). This had the advantage not merely of rendering the information transportable but also of facilitating data display, which has traditionally been a problem in qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Use of CAQDAS is, however, controversial for two main reasons. The first is that it 'separates' the researcher from the data meaning that the computer interface imposes a distance between the researcher and the primary material (Weitzman, 1999). This concern is thought less



important now with increasing usability of packages and familiarity with them (Barry, 1998). The second concern is that the software, by embedding procedures and routines in its interface and code, contains an implicit bias towards a particular analysis technique. This is an extension of the 'software as frozen organisational discourse' argument (Bowker & Starr, 1994, p 187) and, whilst hard to refute, seems less relevant here; particularly given the involvement of the developers of NVivo in grounded theory approaches (Richards, 2005).

The use of NVivo facilitated the handling of the data but, as numerous authors has pointed out (e.g. Neuman, 2006; Richards, 2005; Weitzman, 1999), it is not an analysis tool. The analysis was conducted within a grounded theory paradigm with NVivo *aiding* the data handling.

### Data analysis

The analysis process in grounded theory cannot be separated from the data acquisition phase and in this study the two informed one another contemporaneously. More formal analysis through coding of transcripts is, as previously discussed, contingent on producing the transcripts and coding them; a task which it may not be possible to accomplish simultaneously with the interview process. In this section I will describe the more formal processing of the interview transcripts along with the coding process which will show how theoretical insights emerged from the qualitative phase.

### Open coding

The grounded theory analysis is, as previously discussed, iterative, contemporaneous and ongoing. The first stage is open coding. Strauss and Corbin (1998) discuss a number of approaches from single word microanalysis through line, sentence and paragraph analysis. In this instance analysis was primarily at the sentence level but there were frequent oscillations between microanalysis, the meso-analysis of the entire document and the macro of the ongoing project. This initial coding phase allows abstracting from the individual text and then the development of categories and subcategories from pools of concepts. This phase of analysis is about exploring the breadth and dimensions of experience and putting some loose structure around it.

The first part of this phase involved reading the transcripts again for each interview. The individual transcripts were then divided up by the questions which initiated that portion of the interview (listed in Table 2 above) in order to make category construction more tractable. This meant that all the sections where the CIT had been used to ask about a time of high morale, for example, were examined together. Fracturing the data in this way both by question and through

individual codes helps the researcher step back from the individual interview and dismembered the information from its context (Locke, 2001). Analysis then proceeds on a line-by-line (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) or sentence by sentence (Glaser, 1978) basis with the aim not being to produce overall themes but rather to produce particularised categories which form the basis for the next phase of analysis, axial coding.

An example of how this phase of the analysis played out can be seen in the following quotation from a respondent describing a high morale incident (Question 1a in Table 2 above)

*‘Um, and we continued that right the way through the year, and it was tremendous sense of feeling of being part of an active body of people, all moving in the same direction and wanting to move in the same direction, even the malingers, the people who still sort of always wanted to play up, they didn’t become angels but they did sort of, they moved with us and they were two steps behind, but because we’ve all moved on, they had moved on with us as well.’ (Manager, SCM)*

This was coded into three subcategories: ‘sense of participation in something greater’, ‘sense of progress’ and ‘teamwork pulling together’. A similar process was repeated for the other questions and interviews. This stage of the analysis yielded over 500 codes across the various interview questions.

### **Axial coding**

Axial coding is a ‘second pass’ through the data (Neuman, 2006). This involves beginning the systematic reassembly of the data which the open coding phase has abstracted by linking subcategories generated in the open coding phase together to form categories. In this phase the emphasis is more on the codes than the underlying data with constant questioning ‘*about causes and consequences, conditions and interactions, strategies and processes...look[ing] for categories or concepts that cluster together?*’ (Neuman, 2006, p 463). The congeries resulting from this process of linking together abstracted concepts produces new formulations and theoretical insights which inform theory development.

At this juncture one of the limitations of NVivo became evident. Whilst the software obviously displays the codes generated during the open coding phase and even has a graphical display interface through the ‘models’ tab of the programme the interface is both slow and static. For this reason the codes produced from six of the questions in the open coding phase were written on 3x5 cards. The six question categories (1a & 1b, 3a & 3b, 6a & 6b – Table 2) were initially processed individually so that the 3x5 cards with the codes on for question 1a (‘Can you give me an example of a time when you had good morale?’) were aggregated, then 1b and so on.

The cards were then laid out and grouped thematically to identify key dimensions. The use of the 3x5 cards facilitated an iterative sorting process which was repeated until clear, saturated (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) categories emerged. An example of this process is the quotation coded above which was open coded into the category 'sense of participation in something greater'. This category was then agglomerated into a more general category of 'Participation and contribution' which contained other codes such as 'ownership', 'legitimacy of goal', 'importance of the work' and 'responsibility'. This process was then repeated for each question.

Out of this a number of axial codes were developed. This process resulted in a considerable reduction in the number of codes. The axial codes developed for questions 1a & b and 6a & b were then further agglomerated to produce meta-codes. This approach was chosen as the a and b questions were about positive and negative morale states. For this reason if low morale is the opposite of high morale it is likely that dimensions of cross-cutting would be identified (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This development of a 'mini-framework' (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 141) helps identify the dimensions of the axial categories developed by the coding process.

An example of this cross-cutting can be seen with the meta-axial code of 'Valued supported'. This contains a number of axial codes such as 'communication support being valued', 'valued taken seriously', 'marginalised and ignored' and 'isolation and ineffectiveness'. These codes bound a space where the individual is valued and taken seriously at one pole and ignored and marginalised at the other. On the orthogonal axis the individual is communicated with at one end of the spectrum and isolated at the other. These meta-axial codes help define the dimensions of the mini-framework (see Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p 141).

### Selective coding

This final pass through the data (Neuman, 2006) is a process of refining and integrating the theoretical insights gained from the previous phases (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). It is an ongoing generative, almost gestalt process which uses these preceding phases as substrate to derive theory, assay it against codes and sources, distil it, assimilate other data, assay again and persist in this vein until the theory is, to the researcher's mind, satisfactorily elaborated.

Strauss and Corbin (1998) advocate identification of a central 'core' category which ties together all the other categories and 'which best captures the whole shebang' (Adele Clark quoted in Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p 14). The central category is then related to the other categories through a process of writing memos which link the categories together. These memos can also be used to develop the storyline of the research. Diagrams are also used to help graphically

represent both similarity and difference between categories. This memoing and writing process helps the researcher keep track of the various categories and thoughts providing further substrate to inform analysis.

This last stage of analysis confirms, extends and sharpens the theoretical framework and ends when improvements become small (Pandit, 1996). The writing element of this phase continues over time often blends into the actual writing of the final report (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

### **Integration of the quantitative psychometric and demographic data**

The psychometric and demographic data obtained alongside the semi-structured interviews was used alongside the conventional coding elements of grounded theory to help explore the data. NVivo facilitates this as cases can be selected on the basis of attributes. For example axial codes could be compared by gender to see if they are different.

In this case a number of queries were set up to cross-cut the data. Generally the highest quartile was compared with the lowest on each parameter to provide the greatest disparity. For example the highest quartile of positive affect could be compared with the lowest quartile for positive affect to see if interviewees from these two quartiles responded differently. This way of cross-cutting the data is facilitated by the use of CAQDAS and provides an additional insight into the data.

### **Limitations of the grounded theory approach**

Grounded theory is one of the most widely used qualitative frameworks in social science (Locke, 2001) and, like any success story, has garnered considerable criticism. These criticisms divide roughly into two groups. The first concerns the method itself and the second how it is usually practiced.

The limitations of grounded theory are well known and range from epistemological critiques of vagueness, irreproducibility and prejudice through to practical ones of generalisability and relevance in other contexts (Perlow, Okhuysen, & Nelson, 2002). The epistemological criticisms have been dealt with previously and are mitigated by the use of a mixed methodology.

The criticism of a lack of generalisability is not merited. Many of the same key points Eisenhardt and Graebner (2007) make concerning the case study method are equally true in grounded theory. They liken multiple cases to multiple experimental results which make the emergent theory more robust as it is replicable across different situations (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). If theory is replicable across contexts then it is more likely to be generalisable, particularly if it

incorporates the extant literature (Eisenhardt, 1989). Practically this is achieved in this case by the use of mixed methods but is also enhanced by the variety of organisations sampled and the degree of abstraction afforded by the coding process which disembeds the codes from their context allowing abstract theory to be generated.

The critiques of how most people conduct grounded theory research are numerous. Often the term is grounded theory is used generically for qualitative research (Rynes, 2006) and this leads to a number of problems. These include researchers conducting the research inappropriately either by attempting to make it semi-quantitative with word counts or content analysis or by using grounded theory for something it wasn't intended for such as theory testing (Suddaby, 2006). Similarly the mechanisms of either the constant comparative method in coding and theoretical sampling may also be ignored (Gephart Jr, 2004).

This study does deviate from strict grounded theory as a result of the difficulty of transcribing and coding simultaneously with interviewing. It also uses a fixed set of initial stimulus questions which could be seen as interfering with the theory development as emergent themes might be constrained by the question template. The use of psychometric and demographic instruments to 'cut' the data could also be seen as antithetical to interpretive research. I believe that these criticisms do not substantially impact on the research and that the adjunct methods put in place such as note writing, supplementary questions mitigate any potential problems.

## Summary

This qualitative methods section has described the Straussian grounded theory approach which was adopted to generate a rich understanding of morale and to help develop theory around what morale is, what it is not, what things influence it and what its consequences are. The interpretivist approach adopted is appropriate for this initial stage of research as it allows the phenomenon of morale to be explored with constant interplay between the data and emerging findings. Now that I have explored the methodological approach and methods adopted I shall turn to the results of this qualitative phase.

## Chapter 6: Qualitative results

### Introduction

The methodology section describes the two pronged approach to the study of morale whereby idiographic qualitative research is combined with nomothetic quantitative work to explore the phenomenon. Each of these approaches will be discussed separately and the results of both then integrated to provide a view of morale where the different strengths of each approach are realised and the non-overlapping weaknesses permit the deficiencies of each approach to be offset.

This qualitative results section applies the methods described in the preceding chapter to the collection and interpretation of data, in the service of answering the questions outlined in the research issues section.

A qualitative/idiographic approach permits a rich, thick (Geertz, 1973) exploration of the phenomenon of morale, which has not been used since early sociological work employed a combination of observation and introspection to examine the phenomenon. Where this work diverges from this tradition is in drawing heavily on individuals' experiences of morale allowing their voices, which have hitherto been largely ignored, to be heard.

The Straussian (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) approach to grounded theory adopted relies on acquiring data from a variety of sources including semi-structured interviews, psychometric, demographic, organisational and contextual data using continuous comparison and theoretical sampling (Locke, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Suddaby, 2006). It also requires that the processes of data acquisition and analysis are intimately linked. As discussed previously, the timings of visits to research sites did not permit full transcription and coding of one set of interviews before the next tranche. The initial analysis of interviews was, therefore, conducted 'on the fly'<sup>16</sup> with notes and observations from the interviews along with contextual information from the research sites being reflected back into the interview process by varying the probing questions used to follow up on the principal semi-structured questions in the next group of interviews.

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<sup>16</sup> The term 'on the fly' is borrowed from computer programming where it is described thus: 'On-the-fly programming (or live coding) is a style of programming in which the programmer augments and modifies the program while it is running, without stopping or restarting' (<http://on-the-fly.cs.princeton.edu/>) This definition quite neatly summarised the flexible adaptive style of the analysis.

The data aggregated through this process were integrated and processed as described in the qualitative methods section in order to analyse the four domains of morale identified in the research themes and orientation section. These domains are: (i) describing what morale is; (ii) differentiating it from other concepts; (iii) exploring its antecedents and (iv) tabulating its consequences. These domains are not absolute, impermeable or discrete but rather are aimed at structuring the exploration of morale. As we shall see there are overlaps and blendings between these domains but they nonetheless provide a useful framework to orientate our understanding of morale.

This chapter reports the outcomes of both the data acquisition process and the emergent findings. I shall begin by describing the information obtained as a result of the application of the Straussian method. This forms the substrate for an exploration of the four domains of the morale concept which will be dealt with in turn. Each domain will be further subdivided so that its individual facets can be investigated. The findings of this phase of research then inform the subsequent quantitative research which tests aspects of the emergent model of morale using nomothetic methods.

### **Description of the data**

The data were drawn from a number of different sources. The principal source was transcripts of the semi-structured interviews conducted with 203 individuals in seven different organisations which was supplemented with psychometric evaluations using the PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) and Big Five (Goldberg, 1992; Goldberg et al., 2006) instruments and demographic data (such as age and sex). Alongside this was a considerable amount of contextual information about the workplace which was accrued through site visits, informal contact with the workforce, company documents and observation of artefacts such as company notice boards.

The theoretical sampling was driven by the results of the preceding research, so that both the organisations sampled and the individuals within them helped explore the issues and saturate the categories which emerged during the research process. Appendix 1 gives a thumbnail sketch of each organisation. The organisations sampled varied considerably from knowledge based start-ups to industrial multi-nationals. Table 4 in the preceding chapter (p 81) lists some of the dimensions on which the organisations varied.

The interviewees varied considerably with an age range of 16-68. About 2/3 of the interviewees overall were male and organisational tenure within the sample varied from 3 months to 41 years. Table 5 shows the demographic profile of the interviewees by organisation.

**Table 5 - Demographic information by organisation**

	SRC	GCC	HTSU 1	HTSU 2	SCM	FRM	BBM	Tot/Ave
Number of employees	36	50	19	20	17	20	41	203
Number male	11	25	13	19	14	14	33	129
% male	31%	50%	68%	95%	82%	70%	80%	64%
Average age	38.5	36.5	36.7	41.1	42.9	39.7	44.5	39.8
Age range	22-59	16-68	25-58	29-53	33-61	19-62	20-65	16-69
SD Age	19.41	13.38	8.20	6.48	7.93	11.99	11.46	11.27
Average tenure (years)	5.1	7.4	1.4	2.0	8.2	6.1	15.3	7.6
Tenure range (years)	.25-22	.5-29	.25-3	.7-5	.2-19	1-16	.8-41	.2-41
SD Tenure	5.39	8.09	0.77	1.15	5.48	4.11	9.49	7.97

The interviews themselves were, on average, 30 mins (s.d. 9 min 40s) long but with considerable variation. Interview length was determined by the respondent. In the shorter interviews the respondents tended to offer brief, perfunctory responses which were resistant to further probes or attempts to elicit fuller responses. The converse was true in the longer interviews where respondents had to be closely managed to ensure their responses were not excessively discursive.

The average interview duration declined during the study reflecting the more tightly directed nature of the interviews as theoretical saturation was approached (Orlikowski, 1993). Table 6 shows the interview durations by organisation.

**Table 6 - Interview duration by organisation**

	Total interview time (hh:mm:ss)	Average interview duration (hh:mm:ss)	Interview duration range (hh:mm:ss)	SD duration
SRC	27:56:30	0:46:34	0:12:10-1:14:50	0:13:53
GCC	27:05:49	0:32:31	0:11:36-1:00:17	0:10:16
HTSU 1	9:37:14	0:32:04	0:17:08-0:49:43	0:09:30
HTSU 2	9:27:56	0:28:24	0:14:27-0:43:40	0:08:04
SCM	8:01:24	0:26:45	0:14:10-0:37:58	0:07:16
FRM	7:30:06	0:22:30	0:14:14-0:40:47	0:07:26
BBM	15:17:43	0:22:23	0:08:33-0:59:31	0:11:13
Tot/Ave	104:56:42	0:30:10	0:08:33-1:14:50	0:09:40

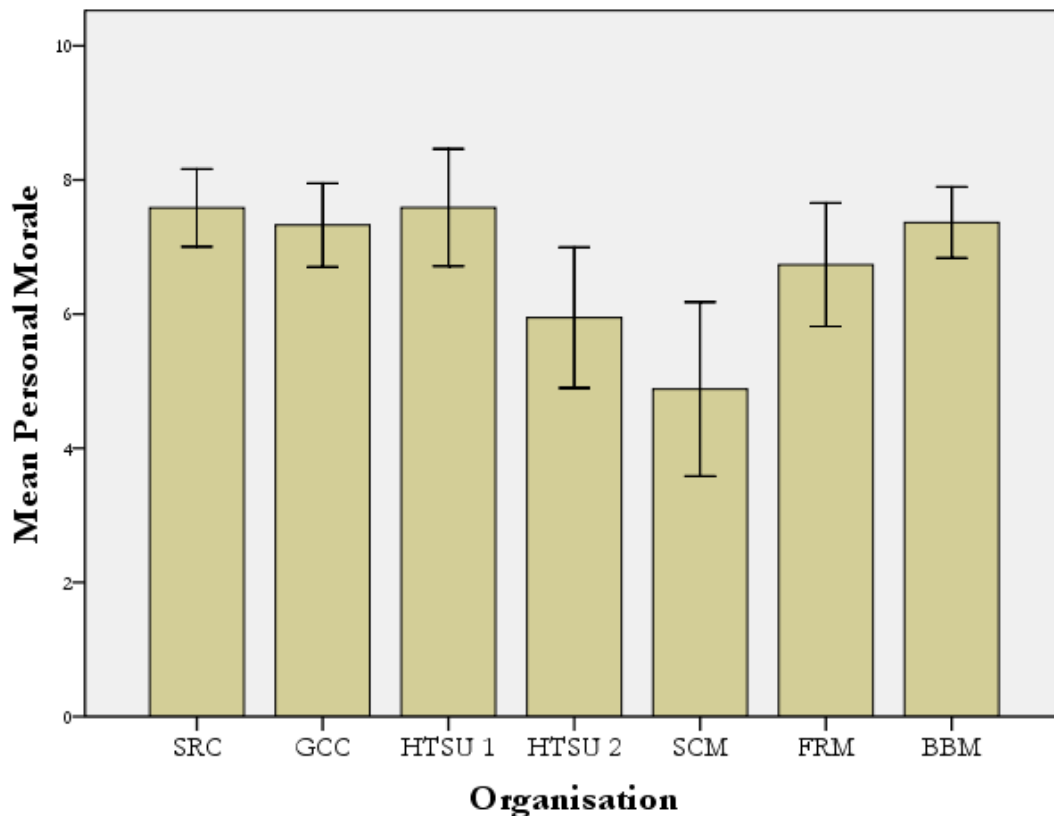
Interviewees varied from chief executives to the most junior employees and across all functions within each organisation. The decision to sample in this way was taken as there appeared to be few differences in the substance of morale at different levels or job function within the



organisations and because I was mindful of Liefoghe et al's critique (2004) that studies of morale concentrated solely on the powerful. As a result it seemed that tightening the sampling frame on a particular group would have yielded no benefit.

The survey data yielded a range of information. Individuals were asked to rate their morale on a scale of one to ten. Morale level differed across the various organisations and Figure 3 shows this variance. Within multi-site organisations variance was also found between sites. At GCC, for example, one centre had good morale, one average and one poor. This helped the exploration of morale as shared organisational factors meant that some influencing factors e.g. HR strategy, could be ruled out as they were common to all centres because HR was a central function.

**Figure 3 – Single item morale measure of personal morale by organisation**



The variation and commonality between individuals, groups and organisations seen in the qualitative data meant that themes could be pursued and comparisons drawn within and between these categories, which helped illuminate the concept of morale.

The discussion of the results of this process will be divided into the four domains outlined above, in order to examine determine what morale is, what it is not, its antecedents and its consequences. The initial departure point will be differentiating morale from other concepts. Having cleared away the other concepts obscuring our view of morale I shall then turn to morale itself. Drawing on the voices of the interviewees I shall describe various aspects of morale including its dimensions and the process by which it is produced. I shall then examine the factors which influence morale and finally its impact and its consequences.

## What morale is not

### Introduction

Beginning a report on an exploration into morale with an examination of what morale is not might seem an odd choice. There are, however, three good reasons for doing so. The first is that morale is frequently elided with other concepts, and so to obviate the critique that it is the same we must differentiate it. The second is that by disposing of these other concepts we can gain a clear and unimpeded view of the morale construct without constantly worrying if it is the same as, say, job satisfaction. Thirdly, an understanding of how morale differs from other concepts gives us important information about morale itself which will inform the subsequent section describing morale.

### Methods

The aim, as outlined in the methods section, was to differentiate morale qualitatively from motivation, satisfaction and happiness. These three concepts were believed to be tractable to the interview approach as they are commonly used in society, as opposed to a concept such as organisational commitment, which is less widely used.

The interviewees were asked whether they thought morale was the same as the three other concepts with the question being carefully worded so as not to 'lead' the respondent anywhere other than towards agreeing that they were the same. The responses were then coded into categories shown in Table 7.

Coding data into categories and then counting these categories has been viewed as inimical to grounded theory and qualitative research. The suspicion is that using numbers leads the researcher into quests for positivist statistical significance, drowning the interpretivist nature of qualitative research. Although sympathetic to this opinion I do not believe that this is necessarily true. Rather I follow Silverman's view that:

*‘Simple counting techniques can offer a means to survey the whole corpus of data ordinarily lost in intensive, qualitative research. Instead of taking the researcher’s word for it, the reader has a chance to gain a sense of the flavour of the data as a whole.’* (Silverman, 1993, p 163)

**Table 7 - Respondents reporting whether they viewed morale as the same different to three other concepts**

	Is morale the same as?					
	Motivation		Satisfaction		Happiness	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Different	83	45%	56	31%	33	20%
Linked Different	46	25%	40	22%	26	16%
Linked Similar	33	18%	55	31%	52	32%
Same	22	12%	27	15%	52	32%
Total	184	100%	178	100%	163	100%

NB not all cases were readily codeable into categories.

### Motivation

Morale is frequently equated with motivation by practitioners and, in some cases by researchers too (e.g. Scandura & Lankau, 1997). Few of the respondents (12%) did so and those that did tended to do so on two grounds. The first was that they co-varied *‘because if you’ve got high morale, then your motivation’s going to be high’* (Section Head, GCC, 44<sup>17</sup>) and so were indistinguishable. The second saw motivation as a subset of morale *‘Motivation to me is part of morale, I suppose motivation is what makes you work...sort of drives you to do the job, whereas morale is like an overall sort of thing’* (Commercial Analyst, BBM, 57). The majority of respondents differentiated the two concepts using a variety of different approaches.

### Differentiation based on emotional content

Generally motivation was viewed as a rather functional phenomenon or *‘a physical thing’* (Senior Applications Engineer, BBM, 186) which enabled inertia to be overcome and outcomes to be effected. This definition ties in with that of Jones who believed that motivation is *‘how behaviour gets started, is energized, is sustained, is directed, is stopped’* (Jones, 1955, cited in McClelland, 1987). The critical word in Jones’ definition is *‘how’* and lies at the heart of motivation’s more instrumental nature.

<sup>17</sup> As a convention I will provide some details of each respondent along with a number. The number corresponds to a particular individual within the sample and is used to maintain confidentiality whilst permitting traceability.

Respondents listed a number of mechanisms which would stimulate motivation. Some of these were positive inducement, as a Project Manager at SCM (50) put it *'you can motivate people regardless of their morale, you just need to chuck enough money at them...or enough incentives...holidays, time in lieu...you'll [have] motivated somebody to do something on a short term basis'*. Other causal factors for motivation were negative. *'A whip is motivation'* (Deputy Night Manager, GCC, 67) or you could be motivated by *'a gun to your head'* (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 31). Neither of these seems likely to give good morale.

### *Differentiation based on contrasts*

These contrast situations where one concept might be high and another low were seen in some of the staff whose level of professionalism or intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985) would not allow their performance to fall, no matter what their morale level, a finding which has overtones of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1979).

*'[The] implication is that in low morale if it affects [performance] negatively, that somehow they're being unprofessional, and I think that what tends to happen is there is a kind of standard...below which people won't drop, and actually they end up, particularly if they have got low morale, expending an enormous amount of energy not dropping below that standard'* (General Manager, BBM, 156).

The corollary of this is that high morale might not motivate. *'Somebody can have high morale and be full of fun and they're enjoying life and enjoying their job, but they're not necessarily motivated to do work'* (Production Manager, FRM, 9).

### *Covariance, process and groups*

In most circumstances workers are not at the extremes of high or low morale, rather they are in a middle ground where the two concepts co-vary and so are difficult to differentiate, as the respondents who saw morale and motivation as the same thing have already expressed. As a result of this a number of the articulations incorporated elements of both concepts in the same way as Motowidlo (1977) does.

Some respondents attempted to try and differentiate the co-varying concepts by examining at which point in a process the concept acted. This was frustrated by a lack of agreement as to which concept applied at which point and the fact that individuals are constantly moving from one activity to another. Process can be used to differentiate the two concepts but not in a reliable manner.

The other means was to use the interaction between individuals, groups and the concepts to try and differentiate morale and motivation. Motivation was seen as an individual attribute and morale as a group one. *'You get someone who's motivated and they come together in a group and then from that, you get morale'* (Pet Department Worker, GCC, 116). This group element of morale echoes some of the sources in the literature review.

### Summary

Morale and motivation were not viewed as the same thing. It was not always easy for respondents to articulate this difference with a number of them stating that the two concepts were different but they didn't know why. In general it seems that morale has a stronger affective component, whereas motivation is more instrumental and concerned with either the seeking of something good or avoidance of something bad. Motivation also appears to cease at the point of goal attainment, whereas morale continues after an objective has been achieved. This persistence raises the question of whether morale and satisfaction are the same thing.

### Satisfaction

The literature review demonstrated that morale is frequently equated with satisfaction and job satisfaction<sup>18</sup>. Sometimes distinctions are made such as satisfaction being used for the individual and morale for the group (e.g. Zeitz, 1983) but on many occasions the two are viewed as synonymous (e.g. Judge & Church, 2000).

As with motivation the majority of respondents did not believe that morale was the same thing as satisfaction (see Table 7). Satisfaction was generally viewed as occurring in the light of a particular event. Finishing a good piece of work, for example, might precipitate satisfaction. This contrasts with morale which seems to be based on a wider set of factors than satisfactory task completion; a distinction which allows differentiation of the two concepts. As one interviewee put it *'even if morale here was generally low, I might still gain some satisfaction from achieving something'* (Fundraiser, SRC, 22). Effectively, in this case there is a transient sense of satisfaction superimposed on a background of low morale. Morale is generally a less labile phenomenon than satisfaction, although morale can vary quickly, particularly downwards (see p 143).

### Differentiation based on point in the process at which the concept acts

In contrast to motivation respondents were much more clear about which point in a process satisfaction was felt. It was described as *'a backward looking thing, because it's about what you have done,*

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<sup>18</sup> It is interesting to note that the distinction between satisfaction and job satisfaction is also often blurred within the literature, the 'job' element often being regarded as redundant.

*it's feeling that you've done it well, you've completed it, it now works'* (Software Engineer, HTSU, 113).

Morale is perceived as something which occurs *ex ante*, whereas satisfaction occurs *ex post*, as one respondent puts it *'Morale, to me is what keeps you going, satisfaction is what you get from it'* (HR, HTSU 1, 120). Both morale and satisfaction appear to be affective but occur at different points within an activity cycle.

Again the problem of covariance was noted as *'good results...results in satisfaction, which leads back into the morale'* (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 111). Conversely *'if you have good morale, you're generally satisfied and if you're generally satisfied, you have good morale.'* (Tester, HTSU 1, 42). This frustrates differentiation as the covariance makes them difficult to separate.

#### *Differentiation based on duration of action*

There seems to be a more transient nature to satisfaction which may well be linked to its post-task nature. The afterglow from a job well done is *'more short term, tangible, here and now'* (Chief Fundraiser, SRC, 6). Satisfaction must be refreshed as the pleasurable sensation of satisfaction ebbs away (Layard, 2005) because *'job satisfaction may wane a bit while you're doing something that's not quite so much fun'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 8). Morale, by contrast, is seen as *'a longer lived and deeper feeling'* (CEO, GCC, 128). An exception to this is when morale drops suddenly in response to bad news. The longevity and speed of change of morale is discussed with the antecedents of morale.

#### *Differentiation based on extremes and opposites*

Searching at the extremes to help this differentiation is useful. One respondent illustrated the difference by commenting that *'pushing it to the extreme, if you are a soldier, you might have good morale, but not be satisfied with being shot.'* (Operations Director, HTSU 1, 117). The outcome has left the soldier dissatisfied but not broken their morale.

Similarly comparing situations where one factor is high and the other low helps illustrate the difference: *'If you do a job and you do it well and you're satisfied with how it's done, that can lead to high morale, but also you could do a job well and if it's not appreciated, then that could lead to low morale'* (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 31).

#### *Differentiation based on individual vs. group*

What was very noticeable was that very few respondents made the distinction seen in the literature of using morale for the group and satisfaction for the individual. This suggests that the academic literature is at odds with societal understanding and that using morale for the group and satisfaction for the individual does not have much societal currency.

### Summary

Morale differs from satisfaction on two main dimensions. The first is the point in process at which it acts with morale being *ex ante*, perfusing the whole process and satisfaction occurring after the process is completed. Morale also seems to be more long-lived phenomenon with satisfaction seeming more transient and in response to events. In spite of their differences the two phenomena influence one another and so cannot be wholly separated. The traditional means of differentiation using morale for the group and satisfaction for the individual received little support from the respondents.

### Happiness

When describing a state of good morale people often talk about feeling ‘happy’ and the majority of respondents thought the two phenomena were more closely related than morale and motivation or satisfaction. This then begs the question of whether they are the same thing.

Many interviewees (32%) believed that they were (see Table 7). This figure is more than twice as much as for the other comparisons with morale. One of the main justifications for their similarity was that they co-varied. Respondents offered various statements such as ‘*I think if you’re happy your morale is high*’ (Union Representative, BBM, 194) or ‘*I think they are exactly the same, because if you haven’t got happiness, then your morale is low, and if you haven’t got morale, you haven’t got happiness*’ (Departmental Manager, GCC, 101).

High morale is a pleasurable sensation, like happiness and, conversely low morale is unpleasant, like sadness. A number of respondents saw them as covarying ‘*Because if your morale is up, you’re happy*’ (Purchasing Controller, SCM, 99) as the affective components of morale and happiness mirror one another.

### Differentiation based on home and work

One of the principal distinctions which people drew was in regarding happiness as a home-based concept which permeated their entire lives and morale as a work based phenomenon. One quarter of respondents made this distinction, which was best summed up by a Supervisor at BBM (202) thus:

*‘I should imagine [that] if I got a happy occasion at home, like the birth of my grandchild...I’m over the moon happy; but if I got big problems at work, my morale might be low in work, although in my mind I’m still happy outside, you know’*

A number of respondents echoed this theme with statements such as *'I suppose morale obviously gets bandied around more when people are talking about the work place. And it's kind of left there. You don't hear it outside when you're talking about your family'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 62) and *'I don't think happiness is the same as morale. I'm personally happy, but I've low morale in my working environment'* (Services Manager, SRC, 102).

#### *Differentiation based on individual vs. group*

Another way of differentiating happiness and morale was seeing happiness as a purely individual phenomenon and morale as having a group component. An individual under this conception could be happy as a result of individual factors but have low morale. These individual factors could be outside work, as in the case of a Section Head at GCC (152), who described a situation where *'you get a phone call, your wife's just had a baby, you could be as happy as a pig in shit. But you might have just walked out there and watched x, x and x collapse round your head, so the morale out there'll be low, but your actual happiness is above anything they can do.'* They could also be from inside work either where happiness resulted from individual traits such as the Group Leader at SRC (7) who scored in the 97<sup>th</sup> percentile for positive affect and stated *'I can be completely cheesed off about this place but still feel very happy with myself and the world in general'*; or from individual activities such as a Software Programmer at HTSU 2 (158) who described a situation where he was quite happy in a low morale organisation *'because I was learning an awful lot and even though all around me, it was all going to pot'*.

#### *Differentiation on duration of effect*

Other respondents suggested that happiness was a more transient phenomenon than morale and so there could be spikes of either increased or decreased happiness within an overall level of morale. As one worker in the Equine section at SRC put it *'we had a point where morale on the yard was at an all time low and everybody was quite... "Oh God!" about everything, but there were still times when we'd be happy and we'd joke, but it didn't lift... overall there was still a cloud over head... But you could still be happy, while things were gloomy'* (78).

Another worker described *'when I used to work in the pub, I used to be really happy in the pub and have a laugh and that, but I hated being there. Morale was really low.'* (Lab Worker, SRC, 47). This again shows a transience of happiness against a backdrop of morale.



### Summary

There are a number of grounds, therefore, on which morale can be distinguished from happiness but also grounds for believing that in some cases it has commonalities. Morale seems a more work-focussed, group-related, longer-duration sensation than happiness.

### Summary of differentiation of morale from other concepts

On the basis of the qualitative research morale seems to differ from motivation, satisfaction and happiness. Respondents did not find this an easy task. Frequently they would state that the concepts were different but exactly how *'it's hard to say'* (Technician, HTSU 1, 43). Matters were further complicated as all the concepts tend to co-vary. This makes them look similar as they move together.

In spite of this distinctions could be made. Morale has an affective component which helps distinguish from the more instrumental motivation. It also appears to be rather more persistent than motivation. Morale operates at a different point in the event cycle to satisfaction and again is more long lasting. It is also more long lasting than happiness, is more connected to the work environment and has more of a group component.

Morale, therefore, shares some commonalities with these other concepts but can be differentiated from them and this process of differentiation not merely gives a clear view of morale but also helps explore and circumscribe its dimensions.

### What morale is

Differentiating morale from other constructs helps, indirectly, to define morale as it both circumscribes morale and forces the identification of the key points of difference. Although defining morale by what it is not can be illuminating, it does not tell us very much about the substance of morale itself. This section explores the concept of morale using the inductive qualitative results of the grounded theory process and the voices of the interviewees to describe its description, dimensions, production and underpinnings.

### Descriptions of morale

There are very few descriptions of morale within the extant literature with most authors presuming a commonality of understanding between themselves and their readers. Morale is either left to be tacitly inferred from its antecedents or consequences or, as we have seen, simply elided with other constructs. To remedy this, the interviewees were asked what words they would use to describe high and low morale.

High morale was described variously as the *'feeling you get...on a Monday morning, and you think great, it's Monday morning and I'm going to work and I'm really going to enjoy myself'* (Commercial Analyst, BBM, 57) or *'coming into work every morning and I know there are going to be challenges, trials and tribulations but...I think it's feeling positive about those challenges and the sense that you can meet and achieve those challenges and objectives'* (Centre Manager, GCC, 107). Those experiencing high morale feel *'enthusiastic, energetic, happy, content'* (General Manager, BBM, 156), *'excited, proud, trusted, secure'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 20), *'happiness, excitement, sort of an eagerness to get in and get started'* (IT Worker, SRC, 51).

Low morale, by contrast, was described as *'a lack of interest in what you're doing'* (Process Technician, SCM, 49); that *'you just feel miserable all the time with low morale. Helpless I suppose as well, in that you feel you can't do anything about it'* (Finance Director, HTSU 2, 63). One respondent regarded it as the *'the worst thing ever...I don't want to be here, I don't want to be alive...I'm not good at anything...I had no confidence whatsoever. I just wanted to lock myself away, not talk to anybody'* (HR Manager, HTSU 1, 120). Low morale feels depressing and miserable but also debilitating where *'you drag yourself out of bed and you drag yourself into work and you just drag yourself from one thing to another'* (Accounts Clerk, FRM, 76). Some respondents even reported feeling *'horrible, I get really physically sick with it. I don't want to come to work and you're forcing yourself and you're getting in the car in the morning and you're going "Oh I'm just really feeling ill, I want to be at home now"'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 158)

The descriptions of high morale centre around positive affective sensations which are associated with energy, excitement, eagerness, security, happiness and cheerfulness along with elements of positive anticipation of work or its challenges. Low morale is a negative affective state characterised by depression, lethargy, impotence and fatigue. Sometimes these feelings are so powerful that they can induce either illness or resentment and anger against the perceived cause. The lassitude described suggests a directionlessness and lack of objective, which fits in with the anticipatory element of positive morale.

Table 8 and Table 9 show the words used to describe high and low morale and their associated frequencies. On initial examination the number and variety of words appears incoherent but closer examination reveals a number of patterns.

Firstly individuals are intermingling morale with its antecedents and consequences. Feelings of pointlessness may, for example, presage poor morale rather than being a description of morale itself, and so be defined as an antecedent. Similarly 'wanting to go to work' could potentially be a consequence of high morale. Although this distinction between morale, its antecedents and

consequences is a useful one to help structure the topic but is hard to follow slavishly as we shall see later in this chapter. Nonetheless it accounts for some of the variety seen in the terms describing morale.

**Table 8 - Number and percentage of respondents using particular descriptive term for high morale**

Respondents using descriptive term		Descriptive term
Number	%	
40	27%	Happy
26	18%	Want to go to work
19	13%	Excited, Confidence
14	9%	Teamwork + Camaraderie, Energy, Buzz
13	9%	Enthusiasm, Contented
12	8%	Satisfaction
11	7%	Valued, Enjoyment, Achieving
10	7%	Motivation
8	5%	It is a good feeling, Eagerness to work
7	5%	Pride, Elation, Able to cope with problems
6	4%	Focus, Feeling good about yourself
5	3%	What you do is worthwhile, Control
4	3%	Recognition, Purposeful, Future expectation, Busy
3	2%	Trusted, Fun
2	1%	Stress free, Positive, Pleased, Interested, Free (liberated), Empowered, Contribution, Calm, Belonging, Alert, Adrenaline
1	1%	Useful, Successful, Stretched, Secure, Relaxed, Rapport, Progression, Patience, Passion, Needed, Happy with self, Good humour, Friendly, Fast moving, Committed, Cheerful, Capable,

Number of cases coded= 148 NB not all responses were readily codeable and some respondents offered a number of words.

The second issue relates to how individuals actually articulate their feelings. We know that respondents find this difficult for emotions (Elfenbein, 2007) (Sandelands, 1988) and that personality type affects it (Riggio & Riggio, 2002). Again this explains some of the variance in description. In spite of this, these descriptions are useful, as they help both to bound the space occupied by morale and to give some insight into its dimensions.

**Table 9 - Number and percentage of respondents using particular descriptive term for low morale**

Respondents using descriptive term		Descriptive term
Number	%	
25	23%	Depressed
21	19%	Unwilling to go to work
10	9%	Lethargy
9	8%	Lack of motivation, Don't want to work
7	6%	Unhappy, Miserableness, Frustrating
6	5%	Tired
5	5%	Stressful, Pointlessness, Monotonous, Lack of progress, Abandoned
4	4%	Low self worth, Lack of confidence, Disinterest, Disappointed, Deflated, In a Cloud or Fog or Mist
3	3%	Upset, Uncooperative, Sad, Resentment, Out of control, No energy, Fed up, Disengagement
2	2%	Uncomfortable, Time passing slowly, Quiet, Powerlessness, A bad thing, Intend to leave, Futile, Failure, Dull, Don't care, Directionlessness, Despairing, Demoralised, Confusion, Anger, Alienation, Bored
1	1%	Worthlessness, Vulnerable, Unreliable, Negativity, Lonely, Insecure, Helpless, Hard work, Can't think clearly, Feeling stupid, Fearful, Dissatisfied, Apathy, Slump

Number of cases coded= 110 NB not all responses were readily codeable and some respondents offered a number of words.

### Dimensions of morale

Any concept is usually made up of a number of dimensions. Empowerment, for example, has the dimensions of meaning, competence, self-determination and impact (see Spreitzer, 1995). Morale similarly appears to have different dimensions which are derived from two principal pieces of evidence. The first was the results of the coding process for Questions 1 a & b and 6 a & b in Table 2 and the second the application of this framework to the words used to describe morale listed above.

The responses to the questions asking interviewees to describe high and low morale events (Question 1a & b) and what would damage or improve their morale (Question 6a & b) were subjected to the open-axial-selective coding process (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) described previously (pages 89-92).

Each question was separately open coded producing a large number of codes. These were then aggregated into 1<sup>st</sup> order categories. These 1<sup>st</sup> order categories were in turn amalgamated to produce 2<sup>nd</sup> order themes. These themes were then grouped to produce the aggregate dimensions of morale. This process was repeated for each of the questions and in each case yielded three dimensions: affective, future/goal and interpersonal. This building of the same outcome from different questions offers a form of qualitative triangulation on the three dimensions.

This building up of the dimensions of morale from the original codes is illustrated in Figure 4, Figure 5 and Figure 6 and mirrors the approach adopted by Nag et al. (2007). Illustrative quotations can be found in Appendix 2 and these then fed into the categories, themes and dimensions outlined.

Examining these figures reveals two things. Firstly that at the 1<sup>st</sup> order categorical level there is some intersection of the categories between dimensions. Being marginalised, for example, will have both affective effects and also reflect interpersonal relations. Secondly there is considerable symmetry between high and low morale categories. This suggests that low morale may be the opposite of high morale in contrast to positive and negative affect, which are seen as orthogonal to one another (Watson et al., 1988).

Figure 4 – Structure of the affective dimension of morale

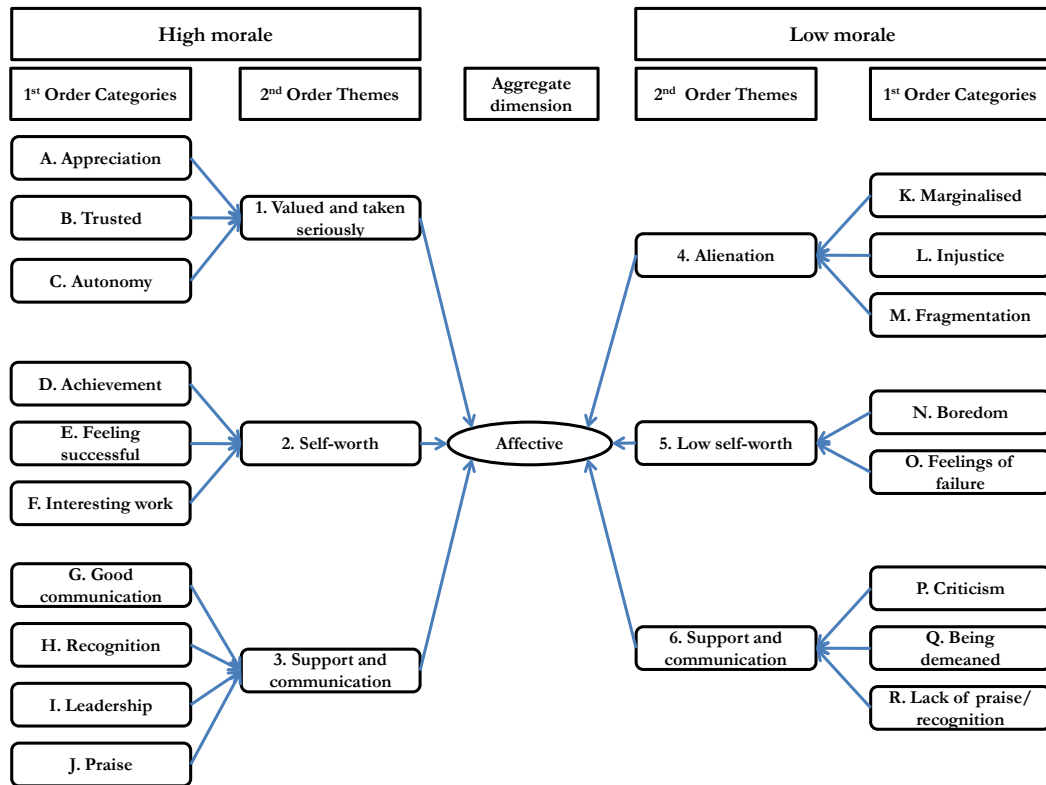


Figure 5 – Structure of the future/goal dimension of morale

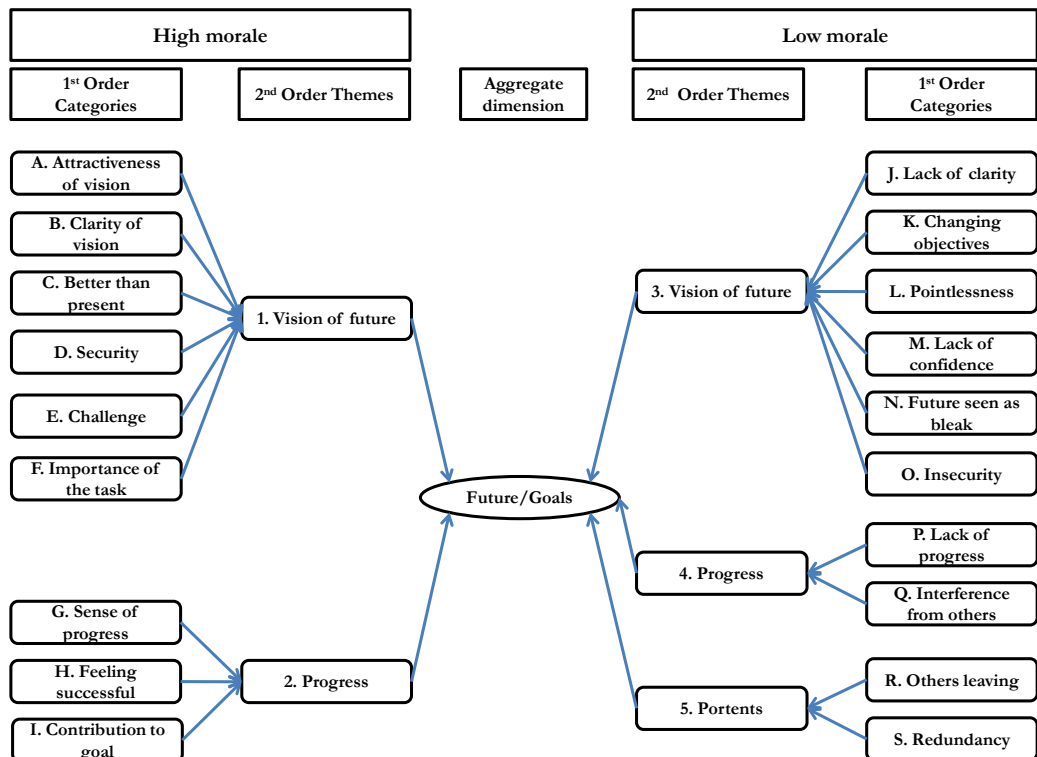
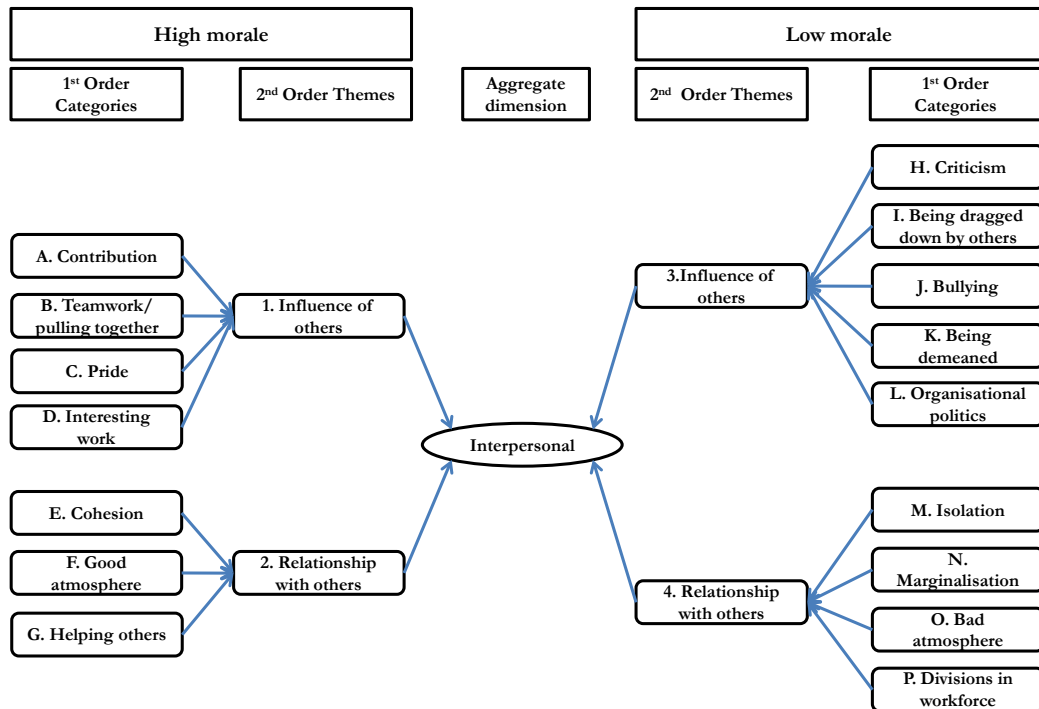


Figure 6 – Structure of the interpersonal dimension of morale



The words describing morale were then classified using the three dimensions outlined above. This classification system proved suitable for this task and the descriptions of morale appeared to aggregate around the same three dimensions which were seen with the questions asking about times of high and low morale (Questions 1 a & b) and what would improve or damage morale (Questions 6 a & b).

Table 10 shows how the various words which can be apportioned into each of the three dimensions. This figure also cross-cuts (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) these dimensions, by disaggregating the domains of morale which respondents tend to intermingle when describing morale.

Table 11 gives examples of typical words for each category in Table 10.

**Table 10 - Descriptive frequency of terms to describe morale categorised by dimensions and stage of morale**

Dimension	Morale itself			Other allied constructs			Antecedents			Consequences			Total
	H	L	C	H	L	C	H	L	C	H	L	C	
Affective	163	120	283	52	0	52	13	10	23	15	3	18	376
Future / goal	6	18	24	10	0	10	12	12	24	34	43	77	135
Interpersonal	3	4	7	0	0	0	33	5	38	1	6	7	52
Total			314			62			85			102	

H = high morale, L = low morale, C = combined

**Table 11 - Typical descriptive words for each category**

Dimension	Morale itself		Other allied constructs		Antecedents		Consequences	
	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low	High	Low
Affective	Excited	Depressed	Happy	N/A	Control	Frustration	Cope with problems	Anger
Future / goal	Focus	Disinterest	Motivation	N/A	Purposeful	Lack of progress	Want to go to work	Unwilling to go to work
Inter-personal	Belonging	Alienation	N/A	N/A	Teamwork	Abandoned	Rapport	Un-cooperation

These tables present rather an abstract view and so it is perhaps useful to illustrate the three elements using the discursive descriptions of the respondents. For example one respondent described high morale thus: *'I guess you feel energised, you're perhaps fairly highly motivated, you're in good humour, um, you've perhaps got a great deal of patience at the time because you'll deal with problems and can take them on board and work through them. Um, I guess there's a good rapport amongst work mates and stuff like that.'* (Production Manager, FRM, 9). Within this we can see affective elements ('you feel energised' and 'you're in good humour'), future objectives and goal elements ('you're perhaps fairly highly motivated') and also interpersonal elements ('I guess there's a good rapport amongst work mates').



The same is true with low morale which one respondent described as *‘Um frustration, dispute, lethargy, confusion, um, and yeah just anger. Built up resentment and we’ve all had it and then what happens is, it leaks out in areas that show... And you start to get short with people, you start to be less tolerant, less patient, less encouraging and it’s just an ever decreasing circle isn’t it?... because people don’t care, they get to a point where they’re like, well why should I care.’* (Designer, GCC, 25). There are elements of all three dimensions here. Affective (‘frustration, dispute, lethargy, confusion’), future/goal related (‘people don’t care’) and interpersonal (‘you start to be less tolerant, less patient, less encouraging’).

The three dimensions seem quite robust as they were produced from different questions and different qualitative analyses. This triangulation, whereby a similar result is produced using different techniques, increases confidence that the emergent findings do not result from apophenia, the phenomenon of seeing patterns where there are none, but rather reflect an underlying order. We shall now discuss to each dimension in turn and explore its impact on morale.

### *The Affective Dimension*

The affective dimension of morale is commonly described not only by respondents but also within the literature. High morale is seen as a positive affective state and low morale as negative (Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Britt et al., 2007; Manning, 1991; Motowidlo & Borman, 1978).

Within this affective dimension, however, there are a number of sub-dimensions which are expressed to a greater or lesser extent by different individuals which are shown in Figure 4.

The events and interactions which underlie these categories impact on the affective dimension when they are processed, either consciously or unconsciously, producing an affective response. Whilst some of the codes, categories and themes can be linked to existing research they do not always mirror existing concepts. Instances of injustice, for example, were mentioned by a large number of respondents as lowering their morale but it is the appraisal of the injustice which affects the affective element of morale, not the injustice itself. At a less cognitively intensive level praise from a colleague might impact on the affective dimension but require less processing and sensemaking.

This degree of cognitive appraisal of afferent stimuli conducted to elicit an emotional response is a contested area (Lazarus, 1982; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Zajonc, 1984, 1998) and will be discussed later on when we examine the process of morale production.

Feeling valued and taken seriously was one of the principal affective themes. Respondents wanted to be regarded as human beings and not merely as biological machines or functionaries.

A technician who offered specialist screening at SRC described how pet owners would make *'two, three hours drives to come to me and I've also got people, and this is one of the things that makes my morale very high...that drive past other places to come to me because they like me better'* (Technician, SRC, 79). People making substantial efforts to visit her rather than someone else made this respondent feel valued and appreciated.

Alienation is the opposite of feeling valued. One of the founders of HTSU 1 who was marginalised described feeling *'...really, really upset because of how much time and effort I'd put into the company as a founder...it was my baby and...I'd invested so much of myself, to feel that actually I was discarded and then there was nothing for me. That nobody wanted me, that nobody was interested in developing my skills or whatever and I was a rock bottom, absolute rock bottom.'* (Facilities Manager, HTSU 1, 118)

Self-worth, or lack thereof, is a related theme to feeling valued but is less reliant on others and more of an internal appraisal and this was another theme which impacted on the affective dimension of morale. Having interesting work was a factor which impacted on this dimension as it built individuals' sense of self-worth and leads to high morale. *'Generally when I have high morale, is when I'm doing something interesting. Right now I'm doing an interesting project I'm trying to develop a little device that'll measure the timing latency between two monitors.'* (Technician, HTSU 1, 43).

Dull boring work lowers morale. A respondent who worked as a cleaner at the University Library described it as *'the lowest morale, I've ever been had...I used to go to work, go and have my cup of tea, be told to disappear until lunchtime, come back, just sit and do nothing all day. Which is why I left there...because I thought this is doing my head in'* (Pet Department Manager, GCC, 101). So self-worth comprises obvious facets such as failure and success but also the interest that the individual has in the work.

The third theme within the affective dimension is that of support and communication. For some factors such as recognition and praise or criticism and being demeaned the affective impact is obvious; for others such good standards of communication or no communication less so. Poor communication can affect morale as *'It's when there's chaos and not good enough communication that things start to get tricky and frustrating and your morale suffers.'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 8).

The support element was also very important with praise being a significant factor in raising morale. A worker at GCC described a situation where he was praised for sorting out a loading area *'The regional manager came down and he looked around and he goes 'Well I've been here five years, it's been an absolute tip and you've got it in perfect position, bloody well done'. You know, he actually really said well done and it made me feel really really good.'* (Section Head, GCC, 183)

That morale has an affective dimension is beyond doubt and helps distinguish it from motivation. It was the most commonly mentioned dimension in the descriptions of morale (see Table 10) and also within the coding of the other questions. This has important implications for the production and influencing of morale which will be discussed later.

### *The Future/Goals Dimension*

The second dimension which came through very clearly from the research pertained to the future or goals. These two have been alloyed together in this instance as they both get at the idea of ‘tomorrow being different from today’. This emerges both from the data and also from the literature. High morale must exist in relationship to something; otherwise it is simply positive affect. Low morale is a more complex problem as it is generally observed when the future is worse than the present or in the absence goals or objectives and this can make it difficult to distinguish from depression.

There are two principal themes within the future/goals dimension of morale. The first is what the future looks like. In high morale the future is important, attractive, better than the present, challenging and clear. This last word, clear, means clarity of task rather than an assured outcome. Security is also a category in this theme and reflected a desire to secure resources so that goals and objectives could be pursued or, in some cases, as a bulwark against insecurity. In low morale the future is uncertain, unclear, worse than the present or irrelevant with insecurity about both the future and the stability of the platform from which it will be pursued.

As an illustration of this one interviewee described working ‘*four or was it five jobs a day, from five in the morning till eleven at night for three months*’ to get money to go travelling and this led to high morale ‘*because...I was working towards something. And that gives you a total high.*’ (Pet Department Manager, GCC, 101). For low morale another interviewee described a point where I think there was a point where ‘*I couldn’t see light at the end of the tunnel... I probably would have been okay [if I could have], but the fact that I couldn’t see things changing...it just felt as though it was just never ending*’ (Customer Relations Manager, FRM, 172).

The other critical factor in the future/goal dimension is some sort of sense of progress towards the goal. A manager at FRM described running his own business which gave him ‘*a clear feeling that I’d got somewhere to go... that the future lay ahead. There was a definite direction...I was making progress, going forward and the business was growing...*’ (Senior Manager, FRM, 145)

This sense of progress prevents the future or its goals being merely aspirational. It suggests to the individual that the future is going to be realised. This cuts both ways. When progress is

being made towards a desirable goal then morale improves. Conversely when progress is being made towards an undesirable goal (or away from a desirable one) then morale falls. One worker charts this decline at SCM, a low morale organisation which was losing money (see Appendix 1).

*‘[The] company’s going into recession, share price’s collapsed, on top of that, the order book is not as good as it needs to be, needs to be profitable. In this site there’s uncertainty about jobs, and has been for a long time.’*

(Senior Process Engineer, SCM, 114). The failure to advance and progressive reversal meant that SCM had very low morale.

With low morale there was an additional element which seemed to impact on the future/goal dimension which I have labelled ‘portents’. These were formed from the interpretations which individuals placed on events within the organisation; the sense they made of them. There were occasional portents for high morale such as a decorating the canteen at one of BBM’s sites being viewed as a good sign because it was felt that the company would not have bothered if they were going to close the site. In general portents were seen with low morale possibly reflecting the fact that individuals pay greater attention to negative stimuli than positive (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001; Peeters, 1992; Peeters, 2002).

These portents took a number of different forms. Redundancies were an obvious example as employees tend to assume that any organisation making redundancies is in dire trouble. Colleagues leaving for another job would have a similar effect as it was presumed that they knew more about what was going on than the interviewee and on the basis of this additional information had concluded that it was not worth staying. On some occasions a number of these portents would be strung together to produce a narrative of organisational decline with consequent impact on morale.

Overall there is a strong future/goal dimension to morale which is primarily the result of cognitive appraisal of the future/goals themselves and progress towards them. The mechanisms by which they influence morale will be discussed later but within the conception of morale itself this future/goal dimension is a key factor in distinguishing morale from the static attribute of happiness.

### *Interpersonal relations*

The third dimension of morale is that concerned with interpersonal relations. Many definitions and descriptions of morale within the literature invoke ideas of group feeling or camaraderie.

Two principal themes emerged within this dimension. One is the influence of others on the respondents and the other the actual relationship between the respondent and others. These two themes cannot be wholly separated as interpersonal relations are frequently based on both interaction and influence but this distinction helps separate the nature of the relationship from the effects of it.

The influence of others on the individual was frequently reflected in the degree of support and assistance between individuals. One respondent described how he felt as *'a lot of this is a team effort at the moment and everyone is helping to chip in, because I think a lot of people do like coming to work and when you're working with a team of people that are all working towards the same thing you do build morale.'* (Software Engineer, HTSU 1, 178).

The influence of others could also be seen in how work was framed, particularly if framed as interesting work. For example one respondent described how *'the head of department, the person you're working with, will enthuse you and involve you in all aspects of work... and then your morale is high and...you're more involved...simply because he's come in or she's come in and said 'Ooh this is a really interesting project'...'* (Laboratory technician, SRC, 153)

In the low morale examples the converse was true. Instead of positive supportive relationships working together towards an objective respondents talked about criticism, being demeaned and organisational politics interfering with the pursuit of goals. One respondent described situation with lots of organisational politics where *'if you weren't prepared to sort of sign up to support somebody, then you were almost cast out and it was quite uncomfortable...so things just sank and people sort of retreated into their corners and started doing things in little groups'* (Central Services Worker, SRC, 22). Poor morale can prove just as infectious as good *'it's outside influences...it's very easy to get dragged down'* (Accountant, HTSU 1, 3).

Although the nature of the interactions which proceeded from the relationships was important, the relationships themselves were also frequently mentioned in relation to morale. Positive, supportive relationships were associated with high morale and divided, isolated relationships or a bad atmosphere were linked to low morale.

This cohesion and positive relations with others were articulated by one respondent who described his working environment thus *'This seems to be a rather laid back atmosphere, but there's a friendly atmosphere, everybody's prepared to help everybody else and answer questions. The way pressure is put on you is not a 'you will do it or else' kind of pressure, it's a 'we've got to meet these deadlines' and it's kind of more*

*if you don't do it you're letting your mates down, rather than disappointing your boss... so you feel that you're part of a family and therefore you want it to do well, so therefore morale's high.* (Engineer HTSU2, 182).

Negative fragmented relations are reflected in the description of low morale which resulted from a civil war at BBM. *'There was a huge conflict between the [Company A] director and the [Company B] commercial manager. And they were supposed to be working together but there was great groups of people who were following the old regimes, and it just became a clash. So...there was a lot of obvious affected people on both sides, because it's quite demoralising really, to see people who are supposed to be leading you are actually fighting each other.'* (Commercial Analyst, BBM, 57)

This demonstrates the demoralising effect of corrosive interpersonal relationships which resulted from a poor integration of two organisations. The 'civil war' which ensued post-merger dropped morale and fragmented the workforce for a number of years. In general this interpersonal dimension is as a result of cognitive appraisal of stimuli but the simmering resentment produced by negative interactions can persist long after the original stimulus has gone, affecting morale through subconscious processes.

#### *Summary of dimensions of morale*

Analysis of the data from the grounded theory phase suggests that morale has three principal dimensions upon which events can impact. As an illustration of this I shall examine an incident at HTSU 2 which occurred one month prior to the interviews. The CEO who was based in Silicon Valley had flown into the UK office, gathered all the staff together, and delivered 'a bollocking' (Clerical Worker, HTSU 2, 89) because the project was falling behind schedule with one component, the radio, being particularly behind.

This impacted peoples' morale in a number of different ways and through a number of different dimensions. For some it was the affective dimension. One of the engineers who worked on the radio described his reaction when a slide was put up showing that the radio was inadequate. *'That really upset me...After that meeting, I had a chat with my manager, I was really upset, and I just said, sunny day, I'm going home. And I don't care whether I get the sack or whether they dock pay or...I just thought I'm going home, I don't want to be here.'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 96). Another engineer described his experience of this event *'I was thinking Jesus, you know, I've done all I can and I'm still getting a caning, so that was awful.'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 158).

There was also an impact on the future/goal dimension of morale as described by another engineer *'it did knock morale, because people were a little bit disillusioned, you know, we're sort of so far behind already and things aren't going well. Christ, that's not looking good for the future and that's not how we want*

*people to be doing things.*' (Engineer, HTSU 2, 157). This event, therefore, impacted on two different dimensions of morale. Its impact on the interpersonal dimension was negligible as the CEO was based in the US '*he hasn't got a very close working relationship with people here*' (Clerical Worker, HTSU 2, 89).

The other thing which is noticeable about this event is that it was perceived very differently by different people in the organisation. An accountant at HTSU 2 described the incident thus '*I think it was pitched at the right level, people realised that they've all got to buck their ideas a bit and hit some deadlines, but he wasn't speaking to them like little children, because they have quite big egos, some of the brains round there. So you have to be careful how you talk to them or they go off and sulk in the corner, you know. But no I think it worked and some of them are working more effectively as well I think*' (Finance Director, HTSU 2, 63). This contrasts with another of the engineers who saw it as '*Yeah, he just you know, made his little one sentence speech that...he was just terribly upset and then he stormed out, like a little child.*' (Engineer, HTSU 2, 200).

What seems to be happening here is that the same event is being appraised in very different ways by different individuals. The responses from the interviewees suggested that the incident had very different effects on their morale depending on how they framed it. This then brings us to the process by which morale is produced.

### **The process of morale production**

Stimuli such as events or interactions are processed either unconsciously or cognitively and consciously. The examples above of processing the CEO's comments at HTSU 2 illustrate both approaches. The engineer who was upset by what was on the slide and decided he was going home no matter what was clearly affected at a personal level and upset by what had been said. Talking to him one did not get the impression that he was consciously processing the information but rather that he felt attacked and criticised and responded reflexively. By contrast the engineer who stated '*Christ, that's not looking good for the future*' (Engineer, HTSU 2, 157) was clearly cognitively processing the impact of delays on his morale.

This distinction between cognitive and unconscious processing was also seen in other environments. A worker at SRC described a difficult supervisor who has volatile moods '*he doesn't even have to speak and you know he's in a filthy rotten mood, because he'll come in out of the office, slamming doors, sort of slam the phone down all the time and he won't look at you, say good morning to you or anything. So you could say when he's like that, at the start of the day, morale in our little group, there's only myself and [a colleague], that immediately flops, you know.*' (Student, SRC, 42). This, again, suggests

an immediate, direct impact on morale rather than a cognitive appraisal. It is possible that this is a conditioned response, of course, but either way the impact seems to be unconscious.

### *A brief note on classification*

This combination of conscious and unconscious processing links in with the extant literature on affect and emotions. Before we examine this, however, it is worth a brief clarification on the subject of affect, mood, feelings and emotions. Ryle commented in 1949 that '*The word 'emotion' is used to designate at least three or four different kinds of things.*' (Ryle, p 81 cited in Russell & Feldman Barrett, 1999) and in the subsequent period there has been only partial clarification (Seo, Barrett, & Bartunek, 2004). The terms affect, emotion and mood are employed inconsistently (Alpert & Rosen, 1990) but Schwarz and Clore (2007) offer a useful clarification. Emotions tend to be intense, short lived experiences in reaction to a stimulus (Elfenbein, 2007) and arise in response to ongoing, implicit appraisals of situations with respect to positive or negative implications for one's goals and concerns (Schwarz & Clore, 2007) leading to a range of possible consequences (Frijda, 1988). Moods are more diffuse experiences which occur over a longer time and with less obvious causes. They can be created by low intensity stimuli and may remain after the initial precipitant is no longer attended to (Schwarz & Clore, 2007). Affect is an umbrella term which encompasses both emotions and moods (Forgas, 1995). For the purposes of this discussion I shall use the term affect which, although it may lose some granularity of description (Lazarus, 2003), avoids us becoming embroiled in a discussion about classification of emotions as affective states. In this conception affect encompasses several '*sentiments, preferences, emotions, moods, and affective traits*' (Rosenberg, 1998, p 247). Where mentions are made of mood or emotion it is in a colloquial sense falling under the umbrella of affect unless stated otherwise.

### *The initiation of morale production*

The stimulus for morale production is provided by any external event, for example a social interaction, changing the layout of a room, a letter of congratulations, or poor first quarter results. The availability of these stimuli is governed to some extent by situation selection which is, in turn, influenced by previous experience. Individuals are able to choose their work environment and so the stimuli to which they are exposed are, at some level, self selected. Particularly aversive stimuli may result in individuals selecting a different work environment; as the interviewee who had been a cleaner at the University Library did by leaving her job.

### *The recognition and appraisal of morale stimuli*

The environment that the individual finds themselves in will produce stimuli. These stimuli then have to be noticed and research suggests negative stimuli are more likely to be noticed than



positive (Baumeister et al., 2001; Peeters, 1992; Peeters, 2002; Smith, Cacioppo, Larsen, & Chartrand, 2003; Smith et al., 2006). What happens next is the subject of some debate with two opposing positions.

Some authors such as Zajonc believe that an affective experience is produced at this juncture and that this allows the organism to assign events to particular categories (Zajonc, 1998). Cast against this view is that of authors such as Lazarus who argue that cognitive processes inform our affective state as information from the environment is scanned for cues to determine our affective responses (Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Schachter & Singer, 1962).

Other authors such as Russell have argue that the situation is confused (Russell, 2009) and proposes a concept of ‘core affect’ which is a form of hedonic tone<sup>19</sup> (Russell, 2003). Core affective states can be either unconnected to events, like a mood, or attributed to a particular cause, like an emotion. These states then precipitate a variety of outcomes which, in turn, influence the core affective state.

This debate is interesting but its exploration is beyond the scope of this thesis. It seems likely that there is both a conscious cognitive component and a more unconscious reflexive element to any response to stimuli. The precise order in which they occur and how they influence one another is not germane to the fact that they do occur.

There seem to be examples of reflexively sudden declines in morale such as the worker at HTSU 2 who had his work on the radio criticised by the CEO. In this case the drop in morale seems to have been sudden and unconscious. There are also examples of more measured, reflective processing which clearly indicates cognitive appraisal. This cognitive element involves an act of sensemaking whereby individuals ‘structure the unknown’ (Waterman, 1990; p 41, quoted in Weick, 1995) in order to try and answer the question ‘What does it mean?’ (Weick, 1995, p 134).

This sensemaking process can be seen in the comments of an IT worker at SRC who saw being sent on a course in America as ‘*a demonstration that the company’s willing to invest in you long term. So it sends out the message that we’ve sent you on x many thousand pounds worth of training and we expect you to be here for the next number of years*’ (IT Manager, SRC, 53). The symbolism of this course impacted on the affective dimension of feeling valued and that of future/goal dimension by giving him something to look forward to.

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly Zeitz describes morale as ‘overall hedonic tone’

This cognitive sensemaking process integrates the three dimensions of morale so that they are combined to produce an overall picture. The precise point at which antecedents become dimensions and dimensions become morale itself is impossible to ascertain as this is all occurring in the individual's head. Nonetheless the evidence from the respondents suggests quite consistently that the three dimensions outlined are responsible for influencing morale.

The outcome of this sensemaking is moderated by coded social norms which Elfenbein (2007) describes as 'feeling rules'. These are socially mediated frames which the individual uses to inform and cue their own feelings. These feeling rules were clearly seen at SRC where morale at the site was always described as 'terrible'. Each individual interviewee described their own morale as good but the rest of the site as poor; a situation which became implausible when every part of the site had been visited. Effectively there was a feeling rule that it was only appropriate to describe morale as poor at this location in a situation analogous to the rituals of complaint observed by Weeks (2004) in a British Bank.

Previous experience will influence this appraisal phase as attention is more likely to be paid to stimuli to which the individual is already sensitised.

### *The experience of morale*

The conscious and unconscious processing of the preceding phase leads to the actual experience of morale. This sensation which originates in the brain as a combination of chemical signals and their precursors can have far reaching impact on the body as a whole impacting on physiological systems so that affective events can leave tangible physical impact on heart rate, cortisol levels and so forth (Hardy, 2008).

At this stage the affective experience might also be modified by experience regulation where the individuals regulate their own affective response. This could be through unconscious processes such as denial, suppression or sublimation or could be a more conscious process such as emotional regulation (Gross, 1998a, 1998b). There is also a feedback loop from the affective experience stage back to the affective registration stage through the individual's appraisal of the situation in the light of their affective experience which will be discussed later.

The results of this phase are the descriptions of morale outlined above where individuals have tried to describe their inner states. In high morale this is an energetic state of excitement, buzz and happiness. For low morale it is characterised by a lethargic depressed state where the individual is unhappy.

### *The display of morale*

The experience of morale leads to display where the hitherto private internal experience is made public through a variety of verbal and non-verbal signals. This serves several purposes such as alerting others to a particular stimulus or attempting to modify their behaviour. Expression of morale at this point is regulated by individual factors and also by the rules of affective display. These rules are contextual and potentially variable such as Rafaeli and Sutton's (1988) observation that convenience store clerks display positive emotions during slower periods and neutral ones when the store is busier.

Some of the interviewees reported moderating their displays of morale. For example one respondent described a previous job thus *'I used to work in the pub, I used to be really happy in the pub and have a laugh and that, but I hated being there. Morale was really low, but you kind, once the management were gone and it was just you, you'd have a laugh with the regulars and that and you'd kind of forget about it... It's almost like putting on a show isn't it? You're always there and you have to be this big personality thing, so I guess that even if you have got really low morale, you don't really let it show.'* (Lab Worker, SRC, 47). This shows the display regulation process and also the difference between morale and happiness. This respondent describes low morale but high happiness.

The physical position of the body and its features is likely to reflect morale levels. An interviewee described appraising morale by *'body language...facial expressions, how they are at work, you know, are they slumped and mournful or are they happy'* (Clinician, SRC, 125). These displays of morale have both intra- and inter- personal effects. For the individual the way in which they display emotion or morale potentially reflexively influence their own affective state as with Strack's showing that physical positioning muscles of the face could affect mood (Strack, Martin, & Stepper, 1988). The interpersonal effects are where morale of an individual influences others through expressive and verbal cues. These efferent consequences of morale will be discussed later on.

Morale production therefore is a process which results from an individual being exposed to a stimulus. This stimulus is then processed either consciously with attendant sensemaking or in a more reflexive or unconscious manner. This then leads to the generation of the sensation of morale the display of which is then modified. This describes a general process but what of the individual factors which may modify this?

### **Influence of individual factors on morale**

The sensemaking literature and process of recognition of stimuli suggests that a variety of individual factors may influence morale. This concurs with Organ's (1997) advocacy of research into the influence of personality factors on morale. The use of NVivo (2007) facilitated this as it permitted segmentation of the respondents and the codes derived from their interviews on the basis of demographic and psychometric attributes.

### *Demographic factors and morale*

The matrix coding function in NVivo allowed the descriptions and dimensions of morale to be segmented on the demographic factors of sex and age.

When describing morale there were some differences between men and women. Men were more likely to describe high morale as a 'buzz' (11 vs. 3)<sup>20</sup>, 'enthusiasm' (11 vs. 2) and 'wanting to go to work' (16 vs. 7). Women, by contrast, were more likely to describe high morale as 'contented' (7 vs. 5) or 'elation' (5 vs. 2).

When describing low morale men were more likely to describe it as 'frustrating' (5 vs. 1), with a 'lack of motivation' (6 vs. 2) which led to their being 'unwilling to go to work' (13 vs. 7).

Women were more likely to experience 'lethargy' (6 vs. 4) and 'don't want to work' (6 vs. 4)

Examining the descriptions by age was relatively unrevealing with no pattern of variation across age groups with one exception. Older workers were more likely to describe low morale as depressing. This effect was both noticeable and consistent across age quartiles with the youngest group only mentioning it 4 times, the lower middle quartile 5 times, the upper middle 7 times and the top quartile 9 times. Turning to the dimensions of morale and cross cutting them by demographic factors did not identify any difference between men and women (in contrast to Kanter, 1993) or any age effects.

Overall there were some differences in the expression of morale on the basis of demographic factors such as gender and age. The precise meaning of these is difficult to understand and, given the variety of words used to express morale and the small numbers coding on each word, for this reason care needs to be taken in interpreting this information as this is not a statistical evaluation and so group sizes vary and the numbers in each group are very small.

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that the numbers illustrate the number of coding references to each word. The numbers are small which is unsurprising as they were free response answers to an open question. The numbers are not to be taken as indicative of any sort of statistical significance but are merely illustrative. It is also worth bearing in mind that there were 130 men who filled in the survey but only 73 women so that the numbers are skewed. I felt that it was useful to present some numerical data to augment the differences shown in the spirit of Silverman's comment of 'giving the reader a chance to sense the flavour of the data as a whole' (see p 98).

These results suggest a possible difference but do not tell us anything about the variance in levels of morale by demographic factors which will be discussed in the quantitative research section.

### *Psychometric factors and morale*

Two psychometric instruments were used, PANAS (Watson et al., 1988) and the Big 5 (Goldberg, 1992). Those respondents scoring in the highest and lowest quartiles for positive (PA) and negative (NA) affect as well as the factors of the Big 5 (neuroticism (N), extraversion (E), openness to experience (O), agreeableness (A) and conscientiousness (C)) were identified and their responses examined. The use of matrix tables within NVivo allowed comparisons to be made within each factor of the psychometric measures. This involved comparing upper quartile respondents (hereinafter 'high') with the lowest quartile ('low') respondents. An example of this would be looking at the differences in words used between high conscientiousness and low conscientiousness respondents.

There were differences in terms used to describe morale on basis of psychometric factors. Taking the most commonly used terms which showed a difference on the Big 5 analysis there were major differences between those scoring highly on neuroticism and the low scorers. The low scorers (i.e. more emotionally stable) were much more likely to describe high morale as 'happy' (13 cases vs. 6), 'want to go to work' (9 vs. 4) and 'confidence' (9 vs. 4) than high N scorers.

High extraversion scorers were more likely to describe high morale as 'excited' than low scorers (10 vs. 3). They were, however, less likely to describe high morale as 'want[ing] to go to work' than low morale scorers (5 vs. 12) and less likely to describe low morale as 'unwilling to go to work' (3 vs. 7). This latter result is difficult to interpret but may be because high extraversion scorers are more likely to be emotionally expressive than low extraversion scorers (Riggio & Riggio, 2002) and hence use terms such as exciting. If low extraversion (i.e. introverts) avoid emotional expression (Riggio & Riggio, 2002) then it seems likely that they may pick a more neutral and functional term such as describing high morale as 'wanting to go to work' and low morale as the converse.

Those scoring highly on openness to experience described morale in terms of confidence and wanting to work with others more frequently than those with a low score. This, again, is unsurprising as one would expect those open to experience to display these behaviours. Similarly those scoring highly on conscientiousness were less likely to describe low morale in

terms of 'unwilling to work' than those who scored low on C. Attending work when feeling low would be characteristic of being conscientious.

Descriptive words when analysed with the PANAS also demonstrated within-factor differences although the responses were less fine grained than those for the Big 5. Those scoring high on PA and NA were less likely to describe high morale as feeling excited than those with low scores for PA and NA. This result is somewhat perplexing as it is at odds with the result for extraversion seen in the Big 5 score and extraversion and positive affect are correlated both in the literature (Watson & Clark, 1992) and within this study ( $r = 0.337, p < 0.01$ ). On the basis of this one might reasonably expect a similar result for those scoring high on PA and extraversion when they describe high morale. This is not the case however. A possible theory is that the intensity of the affective experience of high morale is perceived more strongly by those who experience a narrower affective range (i.e. those scoring low on both PA and NA) as it is out of their normal experience. For this reason they use a strongly positive term 'excited' rather than those who experience considerable affective lability (those with high PA and NA) and so regard the strong affective experience of high morale as normal.

Individuals scoring high on PA and low on NA are more likely to describe morale in terms of happiness and wanting to go to work. For the PANAS sectioned descriptions of low morale those who describe it as 'unwilling to go to work' tend to be high on NA and low on PA. Other than that there is relatively little difference in description of low morale by PANAS score. Equally when the dimensions of morale are segmented using PANAS there little difference between those scoring high or low on either dimension – or in combination.

Examination of these psychometric elements shows some reasonably strong differences in the descriptions of high and low morale. As before this information is interpretive and, even though numbers have been used in its display, it makes no pretence at statistical significance.

What is noticeable is that there is very little variation on psychometric or demographic parameters for to Questions 1a & b and 6a & b which contributed to the dimensions of morale identified earlier. When looking at the results no clear pattern emerges, in contrast to the responses to the descriptions of morale.

There are a number of possible reasons for this. Firstly it may be that the Big 5 and PANAS instruments are insufficiently sensitive to tease out variance but the contrast used, between the top and bottom quartiles, should have presented the most extreme variance within each dimension. Secondly the aggregation of codes may have obliterated any difference as many

codes were refined down to a few themes. Thirdly it may be that although the articulation of morale is different for different personality phenotypes the dimensions of morale do not vary.

### *Summary of individual factors*

Overall it does seem that there is some variance in how morale is articulated on the basis of individual demographic and personality variables. This does not seem, however, to carry through to the dimensions of morale which appear relatively unaffected by these individual factors.

### **Is morale a single phenomenon or portmanteau construct?**

The variance both in words used to describe morale and by personality traits begs the question of whether morale is single phenomenon or a portmanteau construct which can only be apprehended indirectly through conceptual cues (e.g. Doherty, 1988). Portmanteau constructs are terms or phrases which encompass two or more meanings (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009b). Doherty uses morale as a portmanteau term to cover a shifting set of formative elements which are established by factor analysis (Doherty, 1988) and vary from sample to sample. These are then labelled 'morale' and used to define the construct.

On the face of it the descriptions of morale presented so far seem to support this view. The variety of words used to describe morale and the variance produced by personality suggest that Doherty has a point and that perhaps we are talking about a shifting set of elements which we label morale.

There seem to be a number of arguments against this. Firstly the interviewees had a clear idea of what they were talking about and in most cases this seemed to be the same thing. Contrast was provided by an Iraqi Kurd (Team Leader, FRM, 123) who understood morale as 'morality' and so spent much of the interview discussing the ethics of pre-marital sex.

The second reason is that the descriptions given by interviewees were free responses to an open question. To have 27% of respondents using the word 'happy' to describe high morale and 23% using 'depressed' for low suggests a surprising degree of unanimity given the openness of the response format; suggesting that something similar is being tapped into.

The third is that many of the descriptions intermingled morale with its antecedents, consequences and other concepts. It is likely that individuals were using these other terms to try

and describe morale, effectively treating morale as a latent variable which was explained by the variance in these other terms<sup>21</sup>.

The fourth argument is that Doherty is simply labelling a factor which he discovered in a statistical analysis as 'morale'. In doing this he falls into the same trap as Organ (1997) and Vandenberg (1999). They produce a logically flawed argument which states that that morale is a confused concept with numerous descriptions. There is an underlying meta-factor which appears to underpin a lot of organisational phenomena. This is ill defined too. Therefore it is morale. Effectively what is happening here is that the statistics are being allowed to define the construct (Rossiter, 2005).

What seems likely is that the variance in terms used to describe morale results from differences in articulating the concept rather than a lack of unanimity in its understanding. Personality factors (Riggio & Riggio, 2002), sensemaking and lack of distinction between morale, its antecedents and consequences and other concepts suggest that although a variety of word is used to describe morale it is one concept.

#### **Is morale a generalisable phenomenon or context bound?**

Another facet of discussion is whether morale is a contextually bound phenomenon or whether it is generalisable from one situation to another. This problem stems from the literature which tends to treat morale as contextual. In qualitative research this is often because of the disciplinary area in which the research is conducted, for example work on nursing morale will, inevitably, be context bound. With quantitative research the contextual nature usually results from the use of contextual questions to appraise morale, for example *'Teachers take pride in this school'* (Hart et al., 2000). The exception being single item scales or those based on semantic differentials which rely on single or pairs of words to measure the concept. One of the interviewees during the MBA dissertation went further in contextualising morale, suggesting that military morale was completely different to civilian.

The grounded theory approach attempts to extract general theory from particular instances. In this case the coding process fractured the data which was then re-assembled to give the dimensions previously described. It also became clear when comparing the different organisations that morale was a generalisable phenomenon. When asked for examples of high and low morale respondents would frequently offer stories and instances from other organisations. This included former military employees who drew parallels between military life

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<sup>21</sup> As a principle you cannot use the word to be defined in a definition.



and civilian life. This suggests that morale can be generalised from one situation to another as individuals recount specific incidents (via the critical incident approach (Chell, 1998; Flanagan, 1954) in different organisations to illustrate a common phenomenon.

This finding harks back to the discussion of whether morale is a single phenomenon. Morale appears to exist as an abstract entity which is influenced and expressed in terms of contextual factors. What seems likely is that what is actually going on in the individual's head, the neurobiological state which is high or low morale, is similar even in different contexts.

Effectively morale is a subjective experience to which a label has been given. This subjective experience seems to be the same across situations although it may vary in magnitude. Where morale becomes context bound is in its production, articulation and effects.

### Is morale an individual or group phenomenon

This question was first identified in the 1940s (Child, 1941; Hightower, 1944) who offered a tripartite classification with individual, group and individual + group categories. This distinction matters as it has important ramifications for future research as it affects the unit of analysis and also for practitioners as it affects how one attempts to influence morale.

The interviewees were asked whether they thought morale was an individual or group phenomenon. The overwhelming majority replied that they thought it was both. Table 12 shows the breakdown of figures.

**Table 12 - Coding of responses by Individual, Group or Individual + Group categories**

Category	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Individual	18	11%
Group	38	24%
Individual + Group	105	65%
	161	

Analysis of these categories by demographic factors revealed little difference as did cutting the data on the basis of high or low positive and negative affect. A slight difference was noticed using the Big 5 as those scoring low on neuroticism were more likely to see morale as an individual phenomenon and those scoring high on extraversion as a group phenomenon. In these two cases the increase was drawn away from the individual + group category.

The fact that the predominant view is that morale is an individual + group phenomenon is interesting but not very revealing. It seems unlikely that morale is a group phenomenon as,

unless we are prepared to posit a ‘group mind’, it must reside in the individual. At the same time the overwhelming number of respondents mentioning group feelings and the interpersonal dimension of morale suggests that it cannot solely be an individual phenomenon.

So how are the individual and group linked in morale? The respondents were able to give a number of explanations for this which have important implications for practice. The principal insight was that morale was a contagious phenomenon – that it spread from person to person. One respondent, when pressed to describe this contagion, used the example of a brewery she used to work at.

*‘you have your own individual kind of feeling about it [morale] and then when you’re with other people, if they’re feeling higher or lower than you, then that will affect what you feel as well. Because at Greene King, we were all really, really low, but we all just kept pulling each other down and down, because we’d be saying what else had been going on when we weren’t there.’* (Lab Worker, SRC, 47)

The means of contagion is not solely verbal; body language can also deliver its own message as another worker at SRC put it *‘I think I’m greatly affected by the people around me and their morale. And if... and yeah, I think that reflects if people are not feeling bright, then it shows, the body language, and I think that does affect you.’* (Central Services Worker, SRC, 102). This echoes Carnevale and Isen’s finding that visual access was necessary for emotional appraisal (Carnevale & Isen, 1986)

This contagion is not restricted to low morale, high morale can also be contagious as one interviewee explained. *‘I think it operates at both levels honestly. But I think the good thing is, if you’ve got a group, if you’ve got enough people with high morale, it’s contagious. So if you got a majority of people with high morale, it sort of pulls everyone along.’* (Head Office Worker, GCC, 26). In general, however, respondents who gave examples of contagion tended to give low morale examples (26/43 or 60%) with 14/43 (33%) giving examples of both low and high morale.

This idea of morale spreading fits in with the emotional contagion literature (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1993; Neumann & Strack, 2000) and also ties in with the affective dimension of morale. This idea of contagion is interesting but insufficient, as the state being propagated must originate from somewhere. The general opinion of respondents was that their morale level was influenced by colleagues but a number of respondents speculated that certain individuals were more likely to be drivers of this process.

These drivers of morale seemed to have at least one or possibly both of two attributes. Either they had a strong social position, or they felt the mood strongly. Those with strong character

*'can influence a group, depending on how strong a character they are, they can influence a group...we've seen evidence of that.'* (Logistics Manager, BBM, 187). Alternatively *'if you get someone who has got a very strong idea about things, it can influence the rest of the people.'* (Manager, SCM, 16). What was quite clear from the respondents was that organisational position was not enough; it was the individual's character which was the primary reason that they were able to affect the mood of others. In the words of a worker at GCC *'It doesn't have to be people in authority. If they're more influential within the group. Just their personality maybe. But there's people who have... an overbearing influence on the whole department, so when they're low, it kind of brings everyone down.'* (Cashier, GCC, 41)

These findings are somewhat at odds with Barsade's (2002) work on emotional contagion which suggested that neither valence of emotion (positive or negative) nor magnitude of expression affected contagion. There are two possible explanations for this discrepancy. Firstly that morale is more complex than an emotional state and that other dimensions e.g. future/goal alter the result. Secondly that Barsade's work, which is experimental, does not reflect what happens in the field. Given research suggesting that individuals pay increased attention to negative emotions (Baumeister et al., 2001; Peeters, 2002) it is possible that in Barsade's experimental task the negative affect display was not congruent with the situation, as it would be in a naturalistic setting, and so less plausible and hence less likely to influence. Whatever the reason the results here are not wholly concordant with the literature.

Another facet of this individual vs. group debate emerged during an interview with a former Chair of Railtrack as part of the MBA research into morale. Morale in this organisation was poor after a series of high profile accidents such as Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield. As he put it *'even in the bad days of Railtrack, you did get the odd person whose morale was high, despite everything...it was often specialists who were able to isolate themselves in terms of their own objectives, you know, they could see themselves doing a great job . The company secretary was a superb guy, a lawyer by background...and he'd been around for a long time, he was very highly motivated by managing to hold this lot together, despite everything, if you know what I mean.'*

These islands of high morale in seas of low morale, or vice versa, are at odds with the emotional contagion hypothesis and so merit further examination as the processes by which they occur may offer insights in to how morale levels might be manipulated. There appear to be two key factors in insulating these individuals from contagion. The first is a belief in separation from the rest of the group. The specialist rail engineers in the example above could see themselves as different to the rest of Railtrack. In the interviews one of the respondents who worked in a video tape factory which had low morale saw himself as different to the other workers because *'At the time I*

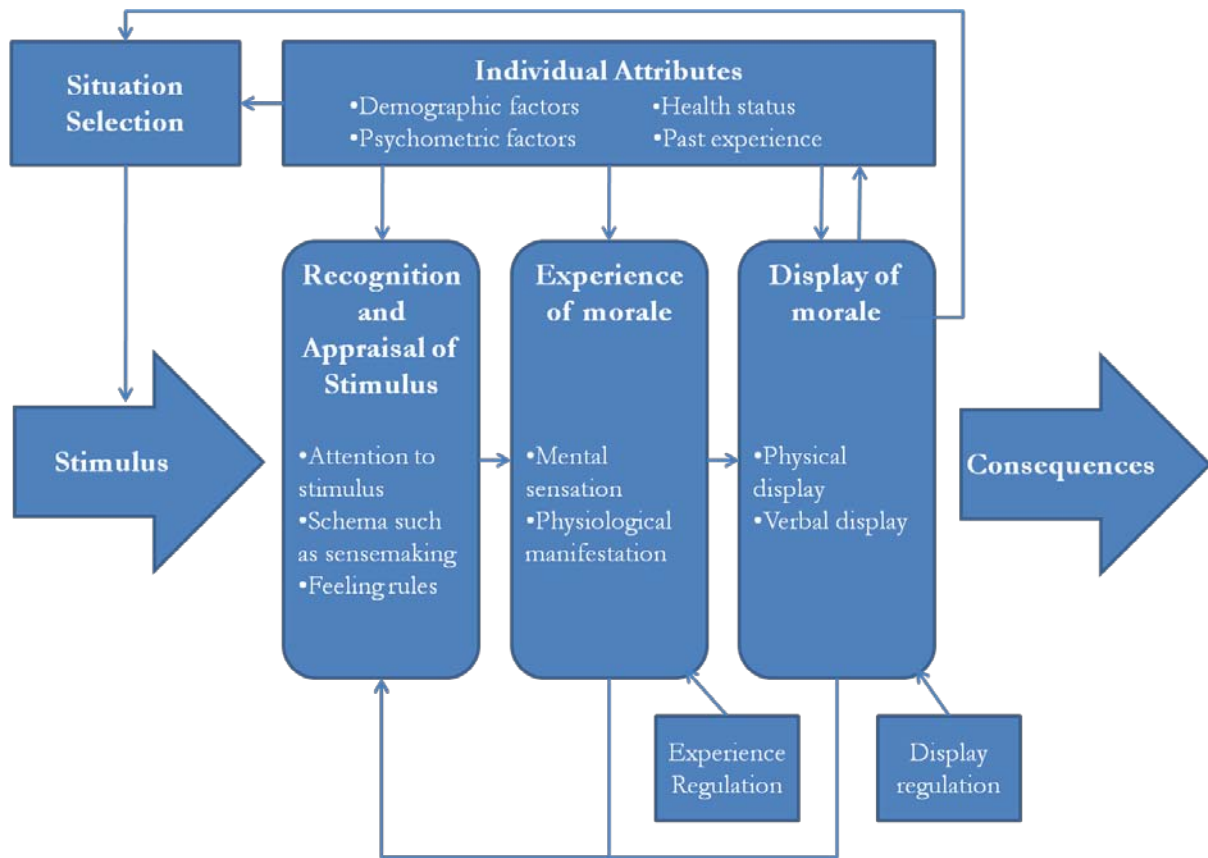
*saw myself as somebody who was not ultimately going to be working in a video tape factory. Whereas the people I was working with at the time, were ultimately going to be working in a video tape factory. So to me that was the difference.* (Technician, HTSU 1, 43). Another respondent emphasised this separation, and its protective nature, thus *'I have a little dotted line round me, and that I can reinforce when I need to, because external environment is not quite as optimal as it might be, and I can relax it when external environment is much more favourable'* (Researcher, SRC, 129).

The second element of this is the comparison with other people who are outside the immediate environment. We can speculate that the company secretary at Railtrack was comparing himself against other company secretaries who were not faced with such difficulties. Some of the interviewees provided evidence to support this. One IT worker at SRC reported having high morale when all around had low because of redundancies. His department was working flat out reallocating PCs from those who had been made redundant to those without PCs and, in his opinion, doing a good job. As he put it *'I was generally comparing myself to colleagues that I've worked with previously that are doing similar roles in a multitude of companies.'*(IT Manager, SRC, 53). Here then is evidence that by picking a group outside the low morale environment and making a favourable comparison this individual was able to maintain high morale amidst a sea of low.

The interplay between individual and group are a fundamental issue in the understanding of morale. What seems to emerge here is that morale is a phenomenon which is produced and experienced within the individual. This does not happen in isolation, however, and others influence morale both through emotional contagion and also explicit framing of situations. The influence of others is conditional and depends on whether they are perceived as part of the group or not and, to some extent, individuals choose their own group. Morale in this conception results from a co-production between individuals and others; it is neither an individual phenomenon nor a group one.

### Summary

This section of the qualitative results has explored how individuals describe the phenomenon of morale in both its high and low manifestations. Using this, the critical incidents of high and low morale and individuals' opinions of what would raise and lower their morale I have built up a picture of the three principal dimensions of morale linking together the words of the interviewees to the final model of morale's dimensions. This description of the dimensions of morale incorporates three components – affective, future/goal and interpersonal.

**Figure 7 – An individual level model of morale processing**

(After Elfenbein, 2007)

The process by which morale is produced was then explored. Figure 7 illustrates the stages in this by adapting Elfenbein's Integrated Intrapersonal Process Framework for Emotion in Organizations (Elfenbein, 2007, p 318) to show the various stages in morale production.

The variety of descriptions of morale has raised the question of whether it is a single phenomenon and arguments have been made to suggest that it is. Similarly the question of whether it is generalisable or context bound has been addressed. Finally the debate over whether morale is a group or individual phenomenon has been addressed concluding that morale is an individual phenomenon with elements of emotional contagion.

Having explored what morale is; its description, dimensions, the processes by which it is integrated and the influence of demographic, personality and group factors I shall now extend the afferent element of morale by turning to examine its antecedents.

### Antecedents of morale

Having explored what morale is, and is not, we shall now turn to the factors which influence morale, its antecedents. The antecedents were explored using Questions 6a and b which asked what would improve or damage the interviewees' morale. The responses were coded as described previously and the key themes extracted.

What emerged was that the antecedents of morale mapped onto the dimensions discussed in the previous section with one notable exception, that of pay. The codes into each of the dimensions can be seen in Table 13.

**Table 13 - Coding references by dimension of morale in response to enquiry about what would raise/lower morale**

Dimension	High morale	Low morale	Total
Affective	177*	109	286
Future/Goal	108	165	273
Interpersonal	41	39	80
			639

\* This figure does not include the 53 mentions of 'pay + holiday' which in some circumstances affected the affective dimension

As pay appears to be a special case in that it was both a common comment and also impacts on different dimensions it will be discussed separately. This discussion of pay will be followed by an exploration of the antecedents of morale on a dimension by dimension basis.

### Pay as an antecedent of morale

The principal responses from most of the interviewees when asked 'What would improve your morale?' was to suggest material rewards such as pay or winning the lottery. This was an almost reflex response and the reasons underlying it were complex.

For some poorly paid workers a pay rise was not a luxury but a necessity. As one respondent at GCC put it '*Jesus Christ, if they paid me enough to actually own my own house, it would be nice.*' (Section Head, GCC, 155). Pay in this instance is the difference between existing and living. Quite a number of the respondents in lower paying jobs fell into this category whereby extra pay would enable them to pay bills and have some money left over at the end of the week. This would improve their morale through the removal of worry rather than those who were better

remunerated for whom pay was seen as symbolic of praise. For these latter workers additional pay or bonus is material reward which acts as a proxy for psychological one.

This immediate response of ‘pay’ is an interesting one and at odds with the respondents’ descriptions of times when they had high morale. Only three (1.5%) of the interviewees mentioned their level of remuneration when describing the critical incidents of high morale. This poses an interesting conundrum as it suggests that pay may not actually influence morale but rather is a default response which people lapse into when asked. The fungibility of pay means that even if it is not what the respondent wants it has the potential to be converted into something desirable. This concurs with Herzberg’s ideas which, although currently unfashionable (Kilduff, M, pers. com. 2008), suggest that pay is a hygiene factor such that inadequate pay can demotivate, or in this instance lower morale whereas raising pay will not increase morale.

### **Affective antecedents of morale**

#### *Affective antecedents of high morale*

Morale’s affective antecedents were seen as the most important for the generation of high morale. After pay the most common suggestion for improving morale was recognition by either the organisation or its management. In many of the organisations visited praise seemed to be in very short supply and individuals felt that they were just viewed almost as biological robots who were there to do a job but did not require praise or encouragement. This very instrumental view of the workforce was expressed by one of the managers at SCM who stated *‘at the end of the day, you don’t want to thank the people to do their job everyday...clearly they are paid to do the job, and if they are doing the job that they should, the thanks is the payment at the end of the month.’* In spite of this he believed that recognition was important *‘...recognition is something which is important in terms of your morale and you know, to be recognised for the thought you are putting in, um, is an important thing at all levels.’* (Manager, SCM, 16).

What was also notable, particularly at GCC, was that praise was universally cited as something in short supply in the organisation at all levels from the family member who owned the firm right down to the shop floor. Interestingly the middle management at GCC complained of a lack of praise and recognition and yet did nothing to provide that praise or recognition to those below them. This lack of praise seemed endemic within GCC’s culture. As a family firm this raised the possibility that the organisation’s culture and practices mimicked the family’s. This is very difficult to prove but during an informal interview with the family member responsible for the

firm he volunteered that his father had never praised him and that there was not a culture of praise within the family.

Praise, recognition, good feedback and communication were all seen as factors which would improve morale, impacting as they do on the affective dimension. The mere functional form of praise was not sufficient. A mechanical 'well done' was better than nothing but sincerity and particularly valuing the individual makes the praise more valuable. A worker at FRM explained it thus '*my supervisor will come up to me and say, well done that was great, you know. You've really done a good job, thanks for today, I mean that goes a long way... and when they say it genuinely as well, rather than just saying it as a thank-you I think it does make a difference.*' (Assembler, FRM, 46).

### *Affective antecedents of low morale*

Affective factors seemed less important in the production of low morale with criticism being the most potent reducer of morale. Criticism of performance can drop morale, particularly when augmented with a sense of injustice. For example a worker at GCC stated '*I think the main thing that damages morale is when a member of staff has worked really hard on something and either isn't given the praise or has been told it's not good enough.*' (Pet Department Worker, GCC, 17). This combination of criticism and injustice is heightened when the criticism is seen as unfair such as '*being told I'm doing something wrong, when I've actually been doing it right?*' (Shop Worker, GCC, 68).

Criticism of the individual rather than their performance seems to have a rather stronger effect as it attacks the sense of identity and there is no escape from it. The individual can relatively easily change what they do but it is much harder for them to change themselves. As an accountant at GCC put it '*I think if I ever felt that people didn't think that I was capable and competent and doing a good job, that would really do me in.*' (Head Office Worker, GCC, 26). The effects of personal criticism can be further enhanced by criticising the individual in front of others. This compounds the effect by combining a sense of shame and loss of social standing with the negative effect of the criticism of identity.

The absence of praise is a more passive process than criticism but still impacts on the affective dimension as it represents a failure to recognise the individual's value or contribution. An engineer at HTSU 1 described it thus '*if I don't get good feedback, if I don't feel like my contribution is being recognised, low self worth type situations, then that's going to impact my morale.*' (Engineer, HTSU 1, 27).

A sense of injustice can similarly drop morale. A worker at SCM described an incident which gives an interesting insight into how injustice affects morale.



*'every year the supervisors have an annual pay review and there's five of us who work in that building over there and...basically we all do a very similar job. Two years ago, we were all on exactly the same money and then this year the pay review come round and three or four got massive pay rises and I was one of the people that didn't get any pay rise at all and...as soon as I found out that, it just sent it right to the bottom, I hated the place, I really did. Not for the fact I didn't get it or anything, but the fact that this company's always tried to keep things very secretive, so they'll do things for one person and no-one else, instead of bringing everybody together and [explaining why]. If they was to get us in room with five supervisors and say right, your section's outstanding this year, so you're going to get one. Um, your section's not too bad, but unfortunately Stephen<sup>22</sup>, yours is not doing too well, then I think we would be big enough and brave enough to accept that. But the way they do it round here, it's very sly and underhanded and backbanded.'* (Production supervisor, FRM, 176)

This respondent was not upset about the lack of bonus (although to be sure he would have welcomed it) but rather the unfairness of the situation which was compounded by an attack on his self esteem. The respondent in this case was friends with a number of the other supervisors and so after *'five hours on the drink and whatever else, then things do come out and management seem to think that that will never happen. And obviously when it does, then it just makes you feel even worse.'* (Production supervisor, FRM, 176). The mechanism in this case seems to be that the respondent feels that management think sufficiently little of him that they can 'play him for a fool'. This interpretation then impacts on his sense of identity and self, lowering his morale as he infers that he is neither valued materially as much as his colleagues nor is his intellect respected.

### Summary

Antecedents of the affective component of morale seem to be able to act directly or through cognitive appraisal of the antecedents. Praise or criticism of an individual will have a direct affective influence on their morale but also will be cognitively integrated with a variety of other pieces of information to influence the affective dimension. Effectively there are two channels affecting morale; one direct and immediate and one cognitive and slower. Overall the influence of affective antecedents of morale is quite clear.

### Future/goal antecedents of morale

#### *Future/goal antecedents of high morale*

The belief that tomorrow will be better than today is a critical factor in improving morale. There appear to be two components to this. The first is an objective which could be abstract or concrete. Job security was an objective that weighed heavy on the minds of workers at BBM as

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<sup>22</sup> Name changed.

the plant had been threatened with closure five years previously. Achieving job security was a major objective as one worker put it *'if somebody said you have security to sixty five, then I'll be skipping round the factory.'* (Logistics Manager, BBM, 187)

These abstract concepts of future security can be contrasted with the more tangible aspirations of producing a product. A worker at HTSU 2 described having *'very, very high morale [because] we've got a very clear target that we're working towards... It's one of the key milestones that we have to meet in order to be able to sell things'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 80)

Having a goal is not sufficient as the goal must have legitimacy in the individual's eyes. One engineer (Engineer, HTSU 1, 74) mentioned that he would not work in the weapons industry thus consciously avoiding having to work towards what he perceived as illegitimate goals. Conversely another of the engineers had worked for an organisation which aimed to provide cheap computing for the third world, as he put it *'...it's morale building or sustaining to know in the back of your mind that...what we do is in some small sense contributing to that, you know, so there's that broader sense of the goal, being something that fits in with your values.'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 38). This idea of goal legitimacy for the individual has been relatively underexplored within the goal setting literature although there has been some mention (e.g. Erez, 1986). Nonetheless as an antecedent of morale the future goals or objectives must be seen as legitimate otherwise they will not increase morale. This hints that morale has not entirely escaped the moral overtones of its etymological origins. It is hard to envisage an individual having high morale in relation to a goal which she felt was illegitimate and immoral.

The second crucial part of the future/goals dimension is a sense of progress towards the goal. If there is no sense of progress then there can be little confidence that the objective will be achieved. A sensation of heading in the right direction is, therefore, critical *'morale is not money, morale is not time off, morale is not nice toys and the kitchen, free chocolate, free coffee and all that sort of stuff, that's pretty much expected and par for the course, these days... probably the thing that keeps me happiest, or keeps morale up at the moment, is the fact that I feel as though we're still getting somewhere.'* (IT Manager, HTSU 2, 108).

A machine operator at BBM talked about the importance of *'Progression, going forwards. I think if you can see things getting better...things are getting done, however slowly...however painstaking it may be, I think as long as you're going forward and not backwards'* (Machine Operator, BBM, 112).

A combination of goal and a sense of progress towards that goal will help build morale through the future/goal dimension.

### *Future/goal antecedents of low morale*

The future/goal dimension was a key antecedent of low morale and covered a number of factors which were both material and symbolic. The principal material antecedent of low morale was redundancy. This was a particular concern in organisations where there had previously been redundancies, notably SRC, HTSU 2 and SCM. As a worker at SRC put it *'the old timers would probably be rocked by more redundancies, because they've lived through things before...people are averse to seeing history repeated.'* (Researcher, SRC, 129).

The effects of this would be felt throughout the organisation according to an engineer at FRM *'I think the only thing that would damage the morale from that point of view, is if a department or something was moved, and there was layoffs and thing like that, but that kind of ripple through the company I would think as poor morale'* (Mechanical Engineer, FRM, 189). The mechanism by which redundancy damages morale is through the future/goal dimension for the remaining employees as redundancies are viewed as a portent of things not going well. For those actually made redundant it is through both the future/goal and the affective dimensions as not just does redundancy damage the future but is also perceived as an explicit repudiation of the individual and their work.

More abstract portents of the future seem equally corrosive to morale. A feeling that there is no progression or failure to reach targets also has a significant negative impact on morale. A senior manager at SRC described it thus *'I think to think that there was, as I said earlier, that there was no way forward, there was no easy way forward, that would be very damaging.'* (Scientific Director, SRC, 58). The effect of this on morale was described as *'the feeling that it's just going through a death by a thousand cuts, I think that's the biggest thing that would kill it, that the end is inevitable I think that's the worst thing you know, because...it's difficult to describe, it comes back to the no future thing'* (Project Manager, SCM, 50). Many respondents described a lack of progress or feeling of decline as a significant factor in dropping morale and they constructed narratives of decline and fall on the basis of events within the organisation. A member of staff leaving, for example, can be turned into a sign that they don't think the organisation is worth staying with, or that they know something that the remaining person does not.

These comments all hint at a lack of progression but there is also the question of direction. One worker at HTSU 1 linked the two succinctly *'if we stop making progress towards the goal, if the goal becomes fuzzy or shifts too much or too often, that damages morale, I think'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 38). A lack of objective or changing objectives can damage morale as there is never any sense of closure. FRM seemed particularly to suffer from this problem *'certain senior directors keep changing their minds and their opinions quite regularly, it's not so much their priorities change, because we always want to do the other*

*things, but it just seems to swing about a lot and we don't focus and get things finished off and I think the more we do that, the more demoralising it can be' (Production Manager, FRM, 9).*

### Summary

The prospect of the future is a pivotal factor which can affect morale significantly. There are two components to this. The first is an objective which to raise morale must be clear, plausible and legitimate and the second a sense of progress towards the objective. Low morale can be produced by providing unstructured uncertainty with no progress or mechanisms to reassure or frame events.

### Interpersonal antecedents of morale

#### *Interpersonal antecedents of high morale*

Improving interpersonal relations was seen as an antecedent of high morale. Respondents wanted to either improve their relationships with those they already interacted with or to expand their networks in, and knowledge of, their organisation. Alongside this was a general inchoate aspiration for 'working together' and 'teamwork' although the mechanism through which this might be achieved was seldom articulated.

Improving existing relationships was a strong theme for those who had difficult relations with either superiors or co-workers. Changing the nature of an unproductive relationship with a superior was seen by a number of workers as a factor which would improve morale. This could be through greater support and recognition as a worker at BBM described how her morale and that of her team would be improved by *'the feeling that you're getting the support from above...because I think it does cascade down if the person above you is [disinterested] then you're going to be [disinterested] you know at my level I've got management above me, obviously I've got the team below me...where I'm going 'not interested – talk to them' so they're going to think well if she isn't interested, why should I be bothered.'* (Sector Leader, BBM, 29).

Respondents wanted different things from relationships with superiors to those with co-workers and subordinates. The provision of support and recognition of individuality was the major role of the superior and calling employees by their own name was viewed as significant factor in this. As a worker at FRM put it *'I think when you see the MD walking around and he'll say, good morning George, good morning Roger, good morning Tim, that's alright, that is, you know, it's not just eyes straight in front of him and tunnel vision and walking straight through you. He's there and he's prepared to speak to you. I think that is a booster.'* (Fork Lift Driver, FRM, 166). Again the recognition of the individuality of

the worker and the fact that the manager is prepared to talk to him significantly influences morale.

Relations with co-workers, by contrast, are more based on reciprocity and harmony. One worker who had to work with a confrontational colleague with whom he had to work closely believed his morale would be improved by *'having colleagues I can interact with. I mean in my particular instance...I have to work with a chap that I find less than nice to work with...So from my personal perspective, it would be very nice if there was somebody I could bounce ideas and have an interaction with, without having to worry about oh god, am I going to upset this man?'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 200). Co-workers in this context are expected to provide assistance and task support. When this support is absent then restoring it is seen as a driver of morale.

A number of respondents hoped for more of a community feeling in their organisations and believed that this would improve morale. These aspirations tended to be expressed in rather abstract terms such as *'better interaction with people you work with. And more of a closeness, more of a bond'* (Shop worker, GCC, 188) or *'having good relationships with your colleagues'* (Researcher, SRC, 173). Similarly the means of achieving them were rather vague with suggestions such as *'maybe if they just sort of did something like a staff barbeque'* (Clerk, GCC, 28) and *'team building days would be brilliant'* (Groom, SRC, 78). In spite of this abstraction the desire for harmonious relations both at a binary level between individuals and more widely within the group was notable, particularly where these relations were disrupted. This suggests that interpersonal relations can have a strong positive influence on morale.

#### *Interpersonal antecedents of low morale*

The interpersonal antecedents of low morale followed a similar form. Specific relationships could reduce morale through a process of emotional contagion. One worker at FRM described a colleague who he used to give a lift to work to. *'Every Monday morning we used to pick him up, hello Bob how did the football go? And he used to say, 'Oh not there again I can't stand it', every Monday morning, and I'm not being funny, he used to bring you down with him. You know, you used to be okay when you picked him up, but by the time you got there, you're thinking oh, he's right, why have I got to come here?'* (Assembler, FRM, 46). In this instance the other person is acting as a conduit for affective and interpersonal elements as well.

The actual quality of interpersonal relations was also a factor affecting morale levels although this was usually expressed in quite abstract terms. At a one-to-one individual-individual level a worker at BBM explained her morale would drop *'If I was working with somebody who was who was*

*somebody that I didn't like really.*' (Data Collection Clerk, BBM, 85). Alternatively it could be at a one-to-many level where the individual didn't like their co-workers *'If I didn't get on with the people I worked with, I'd say that would be the main factor.'* (Cashier, GCC, 41).

These examples are of actively poor relations. Passively poor relations are also possible where the individual is marginalised and isolated. A worker at HTSU 1 described it thus *'Feeling undervalued, feeling that I'm not being put in the place where I think I can make the best use of my skills and contribute. Um, feeling not engaged with, not part of a team, not heading in the right direction...'* (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 111). At its most extreme it is not merely the individual who is isolated but everyone in the entire organisation. This fragmentation of interpersonal relations within the organisation was also thought to lower morale. This feeling that *'the different parts of the company were disconnected from each other'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 113) was thought to lower morale.

### Summary

The interpersonal dimension is an important antecedent of morale. Other people provide a mirror in which we can check our identity and assumptions (Dutton & Dukerich, 1994). The interpersonal dimension affects both what gets reflected back but also whether it gets reflected back. A positive image and positive relations can build morale whereas a negative image and fractured or absent relations can lower it. This then ties back to the individual and group issue discussed previously where the interplay between the individual and others influences the individual's morale.

### Framing of antecedents

The way in which these antecedents of morale affect morale is complicated by issues of perception. Events and interactions can and are interpreted differently by different individuals. With the example outlined above of the CEO of HTSU 2 admonishing the workforce there were different frames placed upon this even by different actors. The engineer who was responsible for radio felt denigrated and demeaned. The accountant who felt that certain sections of the organisation had not been pulling their weight felt gratified that the problem was being addressed.

This sensemaking was discussed in the section on the process of morale production and involves the individual asking two questions. Firstly they ask *what's the story here?* (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p 410) an understanding of this then precipitates the question *'now what should I do?'* (Weick et al., 2005, p 410) which serves to solidify the experience and also prepare a script for action. The process of sensemaking is constant, cognitive and involves a complex interplay

between the internal and external environment of the individual. The internal environment involves personality factors, prejudices, experience, affective states and so forth. The external environment is both material and social. The complicated and unobservable nature of this interplay means that the same event may be perceived very differently by different individuals.

An example of this was the management of BBM giving some of the workforce a bottle of wine as a 'thank you' for dealing with a number of ongoing problems related to SAP implementation. One worker was pleased as he saw it as a symbol that their efforts were appreciated '[they gave us a] *bottle of wine...it was only about £2 a bottle...but it wasn't the £2 a bottle, it was the recognition.*' (Warehouse, BBM, 168). Another worker described the bottle of wine thus '*And give us the bottle of wine for all the trouble we've been through...It's like, are you having a laugh?*' (Sector Leader, BBM, 29).

These two completely different interpretations of the same event demonstrates the sensemaking process in action whereby a particular set of stimuli is integrated with other information to reach a conclusion. The feedback mechanisms which shape this interpretation will be discussed in the section examining the consequences of morale.

### Speed of change

Morale appears to change at different speeds depending on the valence. Raising morale is seems to be a slow process which takes a long time. A respondent at HTSU 1 commented that '*Morale is something that almost, it has a high inertia to it, it's like my morale can build slowly*' (Engineer, HTSU 1, 38). Lowering morale is, by contrast, quite quick with a single comment or incident sufficing to drop it almost immediately. A number of the respondents note this. '*If people are up, I think it tends to be longer to get the other people dragged up with them, if it's going that way* [hand gesture indicating morale going down] *it's like a sinking ship everybody goes down so quickly but, the build up I think is a lot slower and a lot more progressive.*' (Sector Leader, BBM, 29).

This asymmetry is hard to explain but may possibly link to the greater impact of negative stimuli than positive (Baumeister et al., 2001; Peeters, 1992; Peeters, 2002; Smith et al., 2003; Smith et al., 2006). In evolutionary terms a negative stimulus is likely to harm the organism and deserves greater weight than a positive one which, whilst desirable, can be lived without (Nesse, 2001).

### Summary of the antecedents of morale

The antecedents of high and low morale appear to map quite closely onto the dimensions of morale outlined in the previous section. High morale seems to emerge from antecedents which act on the affective dimension such as praise, recognition and an emphasis on the intrinsic value of the individual. The prospects for the future and particularly progress towards the future are

also important and impact on the future/goal dimension of morale but are somewhat less important than the affective antecedents. Interpersonal antecedents are also important but of the three they seem to be least significant for high morale.

Pay and material reward are a difficult stimulus to interpret as they appear to impact either through the removal of a source of worry for the low paid or a form of praise and recognition for those whose resources are already sufficient.

The key antecedent of low morale seems to be damage to the prospect of the future. A negative or uncertain outlook will quickly cause morale to fall – not least because negative stimuli seem to have a stronger and more immediate effect than positive. The affective dimension is also important with criticism, particularly unjust criticism of the individual in public lowering morale quickly. Poor interpersonal relations can be detrimental to morale but seem to be less so than for the other dimensions although individuals working with particularly antagonistic co-workers were felt the impact of this dimension more keenly.

Morale seems to be lowered much more quickly than it is raised up, possibly as a result of greater attention being paid to negative stimuli than positive. The framing of the antecedents, however, is crucial and influenced by climate in which they are perceived. This, in turn, is affected by current morale states through a number of feedback loops which will be discussed in the next section as we turn to the consequences of morale.

### **Consequences of morale**

This section evaluates the impact of morale. In the previous section morale was viewed as a dependent variable; now we will evaluate it as an independent variable which influences other factors. Questions 3 a & b in the interview process asked individuals whether they thought either high or low morale had any effect on their performance. The responses were transcribed, coded and classified as described previously.

The consequences of morale can be divided into two categories. The first category is its influence on morale itself and the processing of events and interactions. The second category is on other variables such as performance, turnover, communication and so forth. I shall begin with the feedback consequences of morale and then discuss the effect on other factors.

### **Feedback consequences of morale**

Morale influences morale. This happens through two routes one intrapersonal and the other interpersonal. The intrapersonal route takes the form of an internal feedback loop which



modifies the processing of afferent events or interactions. The processing of antecedents is shaped by existing morale levels which modify and regulate the framing and perception of afferent stimuli.

In high morale this feedback loop seems to produce a resilience to the influence of some of the factors which might ordinarily be expected to lower morale. We have already seen how conflict, criticism and negative interaction can lower morale yet this quotation from an engineer at HTSU 1 suggests that in high morale states these negative stimuli can be framed positively, insulating the individual from their negative impact.

*'I would think when morale is high, there's probably more resilience to those discussions, in that if people feel they're a team, they're working together and there's a generally...strong morale, I think if you have a meeting and you know, there's some combative words...I would say that people are probably more resilient in that...they're less likely to end in a bad kind of conflict, in a kind of unresolved conflict and people taking the hump and walking off'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 38).

Low morale does not seem to produce the opposite of resilience i.e. sensitivity but rather a different type of resilience; resilience to positive stimuli. *'I think if the morale isn't there then you're not going to be open to new ideas...your mind's not going to be as open to more lateral thinking'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 62). The reasons for this are not wholly clear but it seems likely that low morale causes negative events to be fitted into a narrative of decline and any stimuli which may raise morale are discounted. Either way this feedback loop seems to act as a form of confirmation bias (see Nickerson, 1998) whereby information which confirms the prevailing morale state is selected and that which refutes it rejected.

This loop whereby present affective or emotional states shape appraisal of future states (Loewenstein & Lerner, 2003) ensures a degree of perpetuation of the existing state. The role of affect in shaping preferences has been demonstrated in numerous studies (Mayer & Hanson, 1995; Schwarz & Clore, 1983). Johnson and Tversky asked individuals to read happy or sad newspaper articles and found that the 'happy' condition subjects made more optimistic judgements about risk than the 'sad' (Johnson & Tversky, 1983).

The interpersonal route encompasses the transmission of morale between individuals. This clearly has links to morale's status as an individual or group phenomenon where the linkage appears to be through the phenomenon of emotional contagion (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 1993). This contagion is mediated through a variety of routes such as verbal, physiognomic, postural (Barsade, 2002) and even pheromonal (Weller, 1998) so that *'If there's more than one of you*

*and everybody's doing the same, then I think each person feeds of the other ones at the beginning. Each person feeds off what the other person's doing and what the other person's feeling.*'(Production Supervisor, FRM, 176).

There are two principal routes which seem to be important here. One is tacit and based on observation of body language and demeanour. This can disseminate both high and low morale without the need for vocalisation '*...if people around you seem to be happy and productive, then you think yeah, it's all going well, you have a productive team and if everyone else around you is on a bit of a downer then you think well, you know, maybe I've misread it, maybe there's something awful going on and I haven't really got to grips with it and I ought to.*' (Engineer, HTSU 1, 113). Tacit observation of others lead this engineer to reflect on the future and hence shaped his interpretation of events.

Sometimes simple mirroring of the affective state of the other person affects the morale without extensive cognitive interpretation. A worker at SRC described this neatly '*I think I'm greatly affected by the people around me and their morale. And if... and yeah, I think that reflects if people are not feeling bright, then it shows, the body language, and I think that does affect you.*' (Central Services Worker, SRC, 102).

The second route is more explicit whereby an individual articulating their morale state influences others. This could be either through their remarks or more indirectly by shaping their perception of afferent events. A worker at GCC demonstrates this by describing how other's morale affected her '*you will get dragged into it, whether somebody's sat here saying to you, oh you know, I've had the worst day of my life...and you think to yourself 'Oh god, yeah that's true actually''* (Pet Department Manager, GCC, 101). Her perception of events is now being framed by the comments of the other individual.

These two routes mean that although morale is an individual phenomenon it is influenced by others. This is, of course, reflexive and ongoing as the morale of person A influences person B, this in turn is reflected back with person B influencing person A and so on.

### *Flywheel effect*

Together the intra- and inter-personal feedback loops produce a sort of flywheel effect. This is an analogy taken from engineering where flywheels use their inertial mass to resist changes in their rotational speed and also, through gyroscopic effects, direction. This seems an apposite analogy for morale as once morale is heading in a particular direction it is difficult to change it without a significant effort. Furthermore the resistance is proportional to the mass of the

flywheel just as morale seems to be more labile in small groups than larger ones where the damping effects are greater.

This flywheel effect has particular resonance with the military literature which assumes that high morale groups are more likely to prevail than low morale ones in the face of obstacles and hardship (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977, 1978). Coupled with the framing effects identified in the section on morale's antecedents it provides an explanation as to why high morale can persist in the face of adversity.

### *Trigger events*

The nature of the trigger events which negate this flywheel effect are difficult to understand. For either raising or lowering morale it seems most likely that information about the future is of key importance. Uncertainty, for example, can drop morale quickly as a worker at GCC recalled when talking about a change of manager. *'There's little concerns with the change of control at the top...about what's potentially going to happen. And then you start sort of adding little bits of the story that are not being widely spoken about...of course what people automatically do, is fill in the gaps and there has been quite a bit of this in the last few weeks, of all these stories building up. And I think you do get wrapped up in that and I think I did for a while, thinking oh my God, what's happening. Is it time I left?' (Buyer, GCC, 30).*

Information about a more positive future is unlikely to raise morale immediately but is taken as a sign of improvement and then supporting information is sought. For example at BBM one of the plants was in trouble and management took steps to remedy this. Firstly they invited all the employees to undertake an NVQ so that if it didn't work then they had a qualification to fall back on. Then they introduced quality improvement measures. Finally the plant appeared to have turned around at the time of interview as production lines were coming back from Eastern Europe. This slow process did not result in an abrupt change of morale but rather a stop in decline followed by a gradual rise as the future came to be realised and the plan appeared to work.

These inter- and intra-personal feedback loops are an important consequence of morale as they affect how readily it changes. The damping effect of the processes on morale level gives it qualities which make it more like a mood than an emotion – as moods vary more slowly and the causal factors are less obvious than emotions (Elfenbein, 2007; Schwarz & Clore, 2007).

### Communication with others

The interpersonal effects discussed so far centre on the actual message communicated or the framing of events. Morale also appears to affect the bandwidth of communication with high morale increasing the tendency to communicate and low morale decreasing it.

An engineer at HTSU 1 described the effect of high morale thus *'there's probably more communication...more interaction and you stop work to have dinner...and you're having pizzas brought into the office with your colleagues and actually you discuss other stuff that you would never have talked about.'*

(Engineer, HTSU 1, 154). Communication with customers for those in a service role was also felt to be improved. *'If I'm particularly upbeat and morale is high as a result of that, I'm much more willing to talk to customers. You know and spend time with them. Whereas if you are a bit down morale wise, you want to get rid of them as quick as possible.'* (Shop Manager GCC, 52).

Low morale produces withdrawal and a severing of communications. *'I think one does become a little bit more introverted in those times as well, you're probably a little bit more extroverted in times of high morale and you feel more self confident and those kind of things as well. And that obviously can affect work performance...So yeah communication's key'* (Fundraiser, SRC, 6).

### Influence of morale on productivity

A large number of respondents felt that their morale levels affected their productivity. This was achieved in a number of different ways. Some people felt that they got more done, others that their work was of better quality. Underlying all of these was a notion of 'energy' and the energetic pursuit of objectives.

#### Energy

Individuals with high morale feel energised and vigorous *'It feels like my brain is really awake'* (Salesman, BBM, 105) and able to do more. An IT specialist at SRC used an electrical analogy to distinguish the effects of low and high morale. [With low morale] *'You're doing a job almost in a serial, everything's in a queue, one after the other, rather than attempting things in parallel and doing several things at once.'* [as you would with high morale] (IT Manager, SRC, 53).

*'If your morale's low, you have low energy, you can't be bothered and tend to do jobs to a minimum level.'* (Process Engineer, FRM, 4). This lack of energy makes everything hard work *'so you kind of keep yourself busy, but you do all the fairly low key, easy stuff and when deep down you know that, actually, some of the harder things here, you really should be tackling.'* (Fundraiser, SRC, 6). This level of energy has implications for both quantity and quality of work.

### Productivity

With high morale individuals and their managers thought that they produced a greater volume of work. This information needs to be taken with a measure of circumspection as it is self-report data and so liable to a qualitative form of common method bias (viz. Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003b). Nonetheless workers described how with high morale they would *'do things really well, get things done, do them really fast to move onto the next thing'* (Pet Department, GCC, 15) and *'kick out a much higher level and quantity of work'* (Accountant, HTSU 1, 3). This effect was noticed by managers. For example at SCM one manager described how *'someone who is feeling low one day will not burn as many [silicon] wafers as the day he's feeling high.'* (Manager, SCM, 16).

Low morale seemed to have the opposite effect on productivity. A worker at GCC thought that low morale was reflected *'probably in the amount of work I actually achieve, the jobs I actually get completed and finished...when my morale's a bit low, I mean I probably spend more time organising the work load than actually doing the work.'* (Section Head, GCC, 48). *'With low morale you're just floating around, doing as little as possible.'* (Outdoor Worker, GCC, 184) *'Because for a start you can't be bothered, so you're not going to give a hundred percent to what you're going to do.'* (Thermo-forming, FRM, 190).

### Quality

For quality of work the results were similar. High morale was thought to improve quality because *'it makes people want to strive to do a better than average job'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 154). One engineer at HTSU 1 believed that this was because *'quality is a function of concentration, attention to all the details, making sure everything's done rather than just, yeah, it'll happen. So when there's generally high morale, for me, I'll put that much more brain space into it'* (Engineer, HTSU 1, 74).

Low morale could have potentially damaging effects on quality. An engineer at HTSU 2 described the impact of low morale on quality thus *'a large part of my job would be verification, you know, checking that things are working properly and doing what they're supposed to be doing. Um, and particularly with say, verification work, you'd kind of go, well that's probably fine, fuck it, you know.'* (Engineer, HTSU 2, 20). A worker at BBM described a very similar mechanism *'you might be making parts out there and they might be off size or they might be taller... I'm not saying you wouldn't really let bad work go, it would be...if it was out of tolerance you'd have to pull them out, if they were tight whereas in the past you'd pull them out, then you'd say oh bollocks let them go, because they'd probably be ok anyway, they might not, then they'd come back'* (Machine Worker, BBM, 194).

### Turnover intention

One element which was unique to the low morale group was that the experience of low morale could drive them to want to leave the organisation. For example at SCM where morale was low a number of workers had found a similar factory which paid similar wages and so a percentage of the workforce were trying to get jobs there. Similarly at SRC a number of employees had left during the particularly low morale period of the previous year. A worker at GCC commented that low morale *'just makes you think oh I want to leave, I need another job, something better'* (Pet Department, GCC, 15). This fits with the work on teachers with morale level predicting turnover intention (e.g. Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002).

### Null or inverse effects on performance

A small but significant number of respondents felt that morale, either high or low, had no effect on performance. High morale was not thought to affect performance in these workers because *'you always try and do your best anyway'* (Toolmaker, BBM, 122). This effect was not particularly marked, however. For low morale the picture was rather different as explanations of why low morale would not affect performance hinged on factors such as personal standards and professionalism. *'I don't think that um, morale um, morale should affect your performance, if you're really, truly a professional manager, or a professional engineer, you should not allow morale to... your own personal morale to dip too much, you have to keep it inside, a lot of it inside, you know.'* (Engineering Manager, BBM, 21). Examination of these responses by the conscientiousness element of the Big 5 revealed no pattern, so it does not seem as if this view is caused by a particular personality trait as one might predict.

What did come through strongly in the interviews was that fighting the individuals who fought to maintain output and standards during periods of low morale did so at significant psychological cost to themselves. A lab worker at SRC described it thus *'[with low morale] everything's dreary and it's like oh, what's the point, so does it matter if I pipette this into this pot or the next pot? And you know...in lab work, you've got to pay attention to what you're doing, because if you do pipette the wrong thing into the wrong pot, that can have dire consequences for the patient.'* (Lab Worker, SRC, 191).

In addition to those who did not believe that their performance was affected by morale was a small group who believed that high morale might be detrimental to performance. This seemed to be because those with high morale were 'high', almost giddy. This meant that they either would be over confident or not finish tasks because they couldn't concentrate or felt (erroneously) that everything was just fine. Although only three respondents fell into this

category it does provide an interesting antidote to the idea that morale is a universally good thing.

### Other effects

Some other effects were reported to be engendered by morale. These did not fit into any of the categories above but rather served as interesting food for thought and possible future experiment.

High morale was thought to stimulate creativity by a small number of respondents because *‘I would have said more of the high morale, um, encourages creativity and moving forward by and large, I would say. Because I think it’s about investing time and energy in things, isn’t it?’* (Scientific Director, SRC, 58). It is possible that the increased energy reported in high morale situations might also mean that any creative ideas were more likely to be pursued – leading to innovation.

Low morale was seen as producing a narrowing of horizons and thought. *‘You can be very blinkered when morale is low, you can’t see the wood for the trees. You sort of, you’re looking and you thinking and you’re very tunnelled in your outlook.’* (IT Manager, SRC, 53). This in turn has effects on creativity *‘You’re not really going to be very creative if you don’t have high morale.’* (Accountant, HTSU 1, 59).

These two other effect of low morale were noted in only two or three respondents and so not widespread. It is possible that both these comments reflect the effect of morale on communication and hence this is the mediating factor in any effect which morale has on creativity or its lack. It is also possible that morale has effects on creativity – a result which would concord with Amabile’s research which suggests that positive mood increases creativity (Amabile, Barsade, Mueller, & Staw, 2005).

### Summary of the consequences of morale

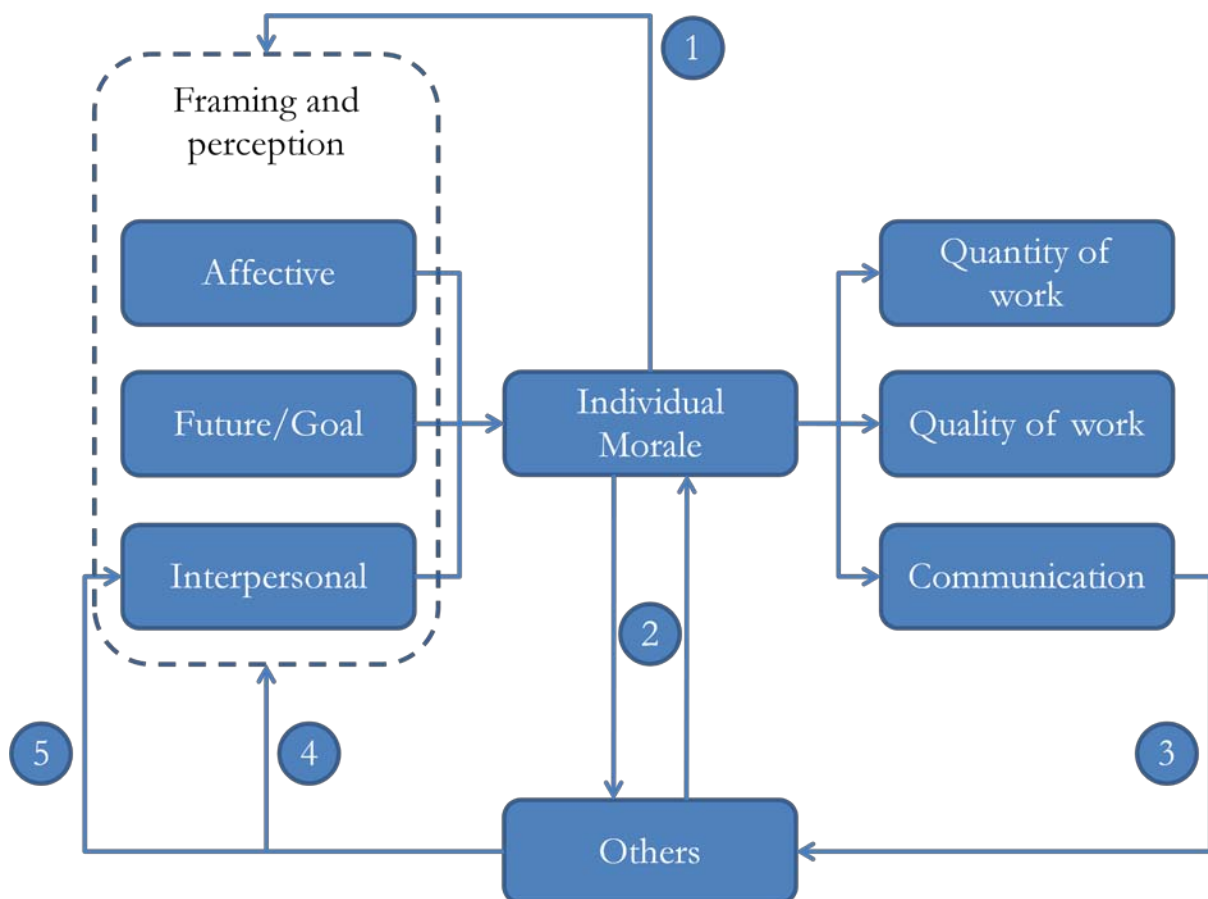
Overall the data suggest that morale has a clear influence on a number of factors. The principal one is on itself, where inter- and intrapersonal feedback loops ensure that any particular level of morale is perpetuated. Figure 8 shows these feedback loops with a simplified version of the other person. Intrapersonal feedback (labelled 1 in the diagram) affects how events are perceived and framed. In high morale this produces a resilience to negative antecedents as they are framed in a positive light. In low morale this is a resilience to positive information which is discounted and ignored.

The interpersonal feedback loop has a number of different pathways. One is through emotional contagion where one individual’s high or low morale will spread to others. This loop, which may

be unconscious (viz Barsade, 2002; Neumann & Strack, 2000), is labelled 2 in the centre of the diagram. Morale levels in other people are either influenced by tacit or explicit verbal communication. Arrow 3 in Figure 8 shows this pathway from the individual to the other person.

Now that the other person's morale has been influenced by the individual there is a return path whereby the morale of the other person influences the original initiator. This could be through verbal or tacit shaping of perception (marked 4 in Figure 8) as illustrated by the engineer above who commented '*...if everyone else around you is on a bit of a downer then you think well, you know, maybe I've misread it, maybe there's something awful going on...*' (Engineer, HTSU 1, 113). The route whereby perceptions are shaped is labelled 3. Finally the more conventional route whereby the behaviour of others and interaction with them influence morale through the interpersonal dimension is represented by arrow 5 in the diagram.

**Figure 8 – Consequences of Morale**



These various paths shed further light on and differentiate the individual and group aspects of morale. All the processing and feeling of morale is going on within the individual. The



individual is constantly taking inputs from the environment. The source of these inputs may be environmental cues or other people. The interpersonal feedback loops mean that the behaviour of, and interaction with, others can influence morale levels.

Others can also affect the way these afferent inputs are framed by the individual. This is a form of sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007; Weick et al., 2005) whereby the individual's processing of events is guided by others. The process of sensemaking will also be influenced by these feedback loops as affective state affects how events are perceived.

In addition to these feedback loops there is also the effect that morale has on the quality and quantity of work. The energy that high morale states engender leads to greater work output as the employee runs a number of tasks in parallel, using a spare five minutes to get a little extra done. In low morale those five minutes seem to drag and the torpor accompanying this state means that output falls.

Similarly quality of work seems to be affected by morale level. Individuals with high morale have the enthusiasm to chase down mistakes and prevent errors. Low morale individuals often don't worry too much about doing a high quality job but rather a 'good enough' one. This effect is not universal and some employees will perform no matter what their morale level. Similarly high morale levels can render some individuals overexcited or 'high', with concomitant effects on quality and quantity.

Overall, therefore, it seems that the consequences of morale are that it perpetuates itself both within the individual and through others and that it has effects on communication, quality of work and quantity of work.

### Definition of morale

One of the initial questions used in the semi-structured interviews asked respondents to define morale. This was abandoned as the grounded theory process went on as it became clear that respondents either could not define morale (*'I really haven't got a clue how to define morale'* (Groom, SRC, 78)) or offered chaotic and uninterpretable suggestions.

If morale is a single entity, and it seems reasonable to believe it is then its definition can be understood through its usage. The compilers of dictionaries do exactly this by collecting examples of word usage to determine its meaning. These are then distilled into a single sentence which encapsulates the definition (Oxford English Dictionary, 2009a). The Oxford English Dictionary definition of *'The mental or emotional state (with regard to confidence, hope, enthusiasm, etc.) of a*

*person or group engaged in some activity; degree of contentment with one's lot or situation* (Oxford English Dictionary, 2005) does precisely this and yet, as previously discussed, does not elaborate on a number of elements of the concept.

The interviews suggest that this definition of morale does not fully capture the dimensions of morale, its production, its antecedents or consequences. Often morale is understood through the impact it has on other variables. As previously discussed this is analogous to the latent variable in structural equation modelling which explains the variance in the independent variables without itself being observed. Accordingly many of the descriptions of morale incorporate its antecedents and consequences in addition to trying to define the word itself. This is a useful template for a definition of morale. On the basis, therefore, of the preceding work we can define morale thus:

'Morale is an affective mental state which has three dimensions: affective, future/goal and interpersonal. High morale is perceived as pleasurable with elements of energy, happiness, excitement, enthusiasm, camaraderie and elation. Low morale, by contrast, is seen as unpleasant with feelings of lethargy, depression, torpor and isolation. Personality factors affect the exact descriptions used. Morale is contagious between individuals on the basis of social status and perceived group membership. High morale is stimulated by things which engender positive affect when these are combined with progress towards a desirable future coupled with agreeable social interactions. It can contribute to productivity, work quality and communication. Low morale results from the stimulation of negative affect, a lack of goal or progress towards that goal and aversive or non-existent social interactions. Low morale can result in reduced quality and quantity of output and communication, depending on the character of the individual. Morale is not the same thing as satisfaction, happiness or motivation but shares some qualities with each. Its production involves both conscious cognitions and unconscious processes engender the state of morale which, in turn, feeds back into the generative process.'

This definition is more detailed than the OED version and also notably more abstract as a result of the insights gained through the qualitative research process. I shall now summarise and reflect back on the process of generating qualitative results and examine the effectiveness of the grounded theory process.

### **Summary and reflection**

These qualitative results emerged from using a Straussian grounded theory process to examine what morale is, what it is not, its antecedents and consequences. The grounded theory process

was conducted iteratively and brought together data from site visits, interviews, surveys and observation enabling a rich picture of morale has been built up drawing on the voices of those experiencing differing morale states in their environmental context.

What emerges clearly is that morale is a thing in and of itself. It is different to satisfaction, happiness and motivation and is a phenomenon which almost all native English speakers understand, although they may articulate it differently. Morale has three principal dimensions; affective, future/goal and interpersonal. It is influenced by events which impact on these dimensions both jointly and severally. In turn it impacts on itself reflexively and others through a process of emotional contagion. It also has affects both the quantity and quality of work produced as well as other factors such as communication and creativity.

This qualitative phase has clarified a number of issues around morale and developed a model of the phenomenon. Grounded theory is suitable for theory generation and not theory testing (Suddaby, 2006) and so the qualitative findings of this phase will now be examined quantitatively.

## Chapter 7: Quantitative research methods

### Introduction

In keeping with the mixed methods approach of this thesis (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) the qualitative phase of research was complemented by quantitative research. This both informed the qualitative phase by acting as a data source for the Straussian grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and drew upon its results.

Despite suggestions that the idiographic and nomothetic paradigms are incommensurable (e.g. Guba, 1987)<sup>23</sup> the use and integration of quantitative techniques with qualitative ones has a number of benefits. The use of complementary approaches aims to illuminate a phenomenon from different angles in order to gain a more complete understanding of it (Denzin, 1970) and use the strengths of one method to enhance the deficiencies of another (Morgan, 1998).

Quantitative research relies on the categorisation of phenomena into 'bins' so that they can be counted and subject to statistical examination. This categorisation process has the possibility to introduce significant error and also to obscure the origins of the observation behind the bland façade of numbers. Awareness of and sensitivity to this is crucial in any quantitative approach. The sociologist R H Tawney commented that '*Sociology, like history, is department of knowledge which requires that facts should be counted and weighed, but which, if it omits to make allowance for the imponderables, is unlikely to weigh or even count them right?*' (Tawney, 1971, p 147). This same sentiment is true for quantitative data as the danger is that the imponderables are not allowed for.

Having categorised the data there are two basic sorts of analyses which are undertaken. One is to establish the difference between entities and the other the relationship among these different entities. The first category will be used to identify the morale concept and examine whether it differs from other concepts. The second approach will be used to examine the relationship between morale and these other concepts.

This chapter will concentrate on preparing the ground for these analyses. To this end I shall begin by outlining the various hypotheses to be tested. I shall then move from this the development and appraisal of the various instruments to measure morale. This will then serve as a backdrop for the quantitative results section which will discuss the application of the various

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<sup>23</sup> Guba rather startlingly states 'the one [paradigm] precludes the other just as surely belief in a round world precludes belief in a flat one' (p 31) which seems to ignore the fact that on an individual scale the world does appear flat and it is only when a particular perspective is taken that its roundness is revealed.

methods to understand the nature of morale, differentiate it from other concepts and examine its antecedents and consequences.

### **Hypotheses to be tested**

This quantitative research works within a more scientific (modernist, Parker, 1992, 1999) paradigm. In accordance with the conventions of this approach a number of hypotheses will be laid out which will be tested and the results reported in the quantitative results section. The hypotheses are grouped into four domains which map onto the framework of differentiating morale from other concepts, understanding morale itself, evaluating its antecedents and its consequences.

### **Hypotheses concerning differentiating morale from other concepts**

As discussed previously one of the key aims of this research is to differentiate morale from other concepts. Qualitatively this has already been shown as morale appears to be distinct from motivation, satisfaction and happiness. Quantitative support for this would strengthen the case that morale is different.

**Hypothesis 1a: Morale is not the same as satisfaction**

**Hypothesis 1b: Morale is not the same as motivation**

**Hypothesis 1c: Morale is not the same as organisational commitment**

**Hypothesis 1d: Morale is not the same as happiness**

The results of testing these hypotheses will be presented in the quantitative results section.

### **Hypotheses on the nature of morale itself**

There is little research on the impact of demographic, psychometric, national and social factors on morale. The qualitative data is relatively inconclusive and so quantitative evaluation of these effects may shed more light.

#### *The impact of demographic factors on morale*

There is little information on how demographic factors such as age or gender affect morale. For age the literature on morale in the elderly suggests that morale might decline with age. In addition the qualitative data suggest that older people are more likely to describe morale as depressing. This then suggests that morale might decline with age leading to the hypothesis

**Hypothesis 2a: Morale is negatively correlated with age**

There is virtually no research on sex differences in morale although Kanter (1993) suggests that men may have higher morale than women, leading to the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 2b: Men have higher morale than women**

Organisational tenure is another factor which has not been appraised. There are two competing issues here. One is that organisational tenure correlates with age and so morale is likely to decline with tenure. The other is a population ecology argument that if morale drives employee turnover – and there is some suggestion it does (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) – then those with low morale will be leave organisations therefore those with the longest tenure are more likely to have high morale. As a result the hypothesis will be set neutrally.

**Hypothesis 2c: Organisational tenure is not correlated with morale**

#### *The impact of psychometric factors on morale*

There is no work examining the impact of personality on morale. Psychometric instruments are used to measure various personality factors and so provide a means of evaluating the relationship between personality factors and morale.

Already in the qualitative phase we have seen that differing personality types describe morale in different ways although it made no difference to the model of morale outlined. Research in the job satisfaction area (Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002) using the Big 5 measure of personality suggests that personality does affect job satisfaction, correlating positively with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness; negatively with neuroticism and demonstrating no correlation with openness to experience. The hypotheses in this case have been worded the same way.

**Hypothesis 3a: Morale is negatively correlated with neuroticism**

**Hypothesis 3b: Morale is positively correlated with extraversion**

**Hypothesis 3c: Morale is unrelated to openness to experience**

**Hypothesis 3d: Morale is positively correlated with agreeableness**

**Hypothesis 3e: Morale is positively correlated with conscientiousness**

Positive and negative affect have also been described as personality factors (Watson et al., 1988) and so are also appropriate for examination. Again research on job satisfaction suggests that it

correlates positively with positive affect and negatively with negative (Connolly & Viswesvaran, 2000). For our hypotheses we will again assume neutrality.

**Hypothesis 4a: Morale is positively correlated with positive affect**

**Hypothesis 4b: Morale is negatively correlated with negative affect**

#### *The impact of national factors on morale*

There is no information on cross-national comparisons of morale. Arguments can be made for and against a difference but in the absence of information it makes sense to set the hypothesis as null.

**Hypothesis 5: Morale levels do not differ in different countries**

#### *The impact of interpersonal factors on morale*

Interpersonal relations are a key facet of morale. This has been clear from the qualitative research. What is less clear is how individuals' perceive one another's morale. Given the emotional contagion which seems to occur with morale it seems likely that the morale of individuals should become harmonised with the group and hence individual should perceive their own morale as the same as others. This is not wholly clear cut as certain individuals perceive themselves as belonging to a different group to others, for example the IT worker at SRC discussed in the qualitative results section (p 132). Overall it seems likely that, in aggregate, individuals will perceive their morale as the same as that of their work group.

**Hypothesis 6: Individuals perceive their own morale as being the same as others**

Again the examination of these hypotheses will be presented in the quantitative results section.

#### **Hypotheses on the antecedents of morale**

The qualitative phase of this research proposed a model of morale which delineated three antecedents. The first antecedent was affective and concerned the individual's self image. The second antecedent was future/goal and reflected in the belief that tomorrow would be better than today. The third component was good interpersonal relations. Putting these three components together gives

**Hypothesis 7: Morale is a function of affective, future/goal and interpersonal antecedents**

## Hypotheses on the consequences of morale

The qualitative phase demonstrated that morale affects performance. Interviewees described effects on communication and performance as well as feedback effect. This chimes with the literature review which suggests that morale affects performance (Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2004; Baynes, 1967; Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002; Motowidlo & Borman, 1978; Weakliem & Frenkel, 2006). Morale's effect on performance is the key object of interest to most organisations and so the communication and feedback components will not be appraised. Performance is a poorly defined term but includes specific factors such as productivity and staff turnover rates as well as more global ones such as overall appraisals of performance in staff performance reviews. Given the perceived effect of morale on performance Hypothesis 8 is worded thus.

### **Hypothesis 8: Morale is positively correlated with performance**

## Summary of morale hypotheses

The various hypotheses delineated above help ground the concept of morale by establishing it as different from other concepts. They then allow some of morale's underpinnings to be explored such as its linkages with demographic, psychometric and social factors.

Having cleared the ground for morale the hypotheses then drive an evaluation of morale's antecedents so that the phenomenon can be modelled. Finally there is a quantitative appraisal of morale's influence on performance.

In order to examine these hypotheses quantitatively some sort of measurement system for morale needs to be used. I shall now describe the development of three measures of morale.

## Development of morale measures

The variety of possible measurement systems for morale is potentially extremely large. In order to render the problem more tractable I shall concentrate on three: single item measures (SIMs), multiple item measures (MIMs) and a subset of MIMs, semantic differential scales (SDS). The development and validation of these three measures will help us explore morale, differentiate it from other concepts and examine its antecedents and consequences.

I shall start by describing the development of the MIMs, following this with an examination of the SDS scale and finally the SIMs. This order is chosen deliberately as the development of MIMs is the technically demanding piece of work which can then be replicated in the SDS. The SIMs require little development as they are, after all, simply an invitation to the respondent to



rate their level of morale but their validity and use as a cross check for the other measures is invaluable.

## **Development of multiple item measures (MIMs) of morale**

### *Introduction*

Multiple item measures of constructs are widely used in management research. They depend on asking a series of questions about a particular topic in order to reflect the underlying construct. A number of authors have described processes for scale development (e.g. DeVellis, 2003; Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007; Hinkin, 1995; Hinkin, 1998) and it is these processes which will inform the development of MIMs.

### *Background to item development*

In the case of morale there is a conscious decision to be made as to whether to reflect the dimensions of morale outlined in the previous chapter or the actual sensation of morale itself. A decision was made to concentrate on the sensation of morale for two reasons. Firstly this appears to be reasonably constant across individuals and organisations. Although individuals may use slightly different words to actually articulate the sensation of morale they all appear to be capturing the same sentiment. The second reason is to do with model specification. The dimensions of morale (affective, future/goal and interpersonal) are linked to the factors which affect morale itself. If the MIM is defined by its dimensions which are closely correlated with its antecedents then it seems likely that the model which emerges will be less useful as both the antecedents of morale and morale itself will be very similar. For this reason I chose to use the descriptions of the affective sensations of morale to develop the model. Prior to scale development I also decided to aim for a short, parsimonious scale which did not obviously mention morale itself (unlike Hart, 1994).

### *Item development*

This is a crucial and much undervalued stage of scale development which is often only given passing attention. Researchers 'throw together' or 'dredge up' items which they think are appropriate (DeVellis, 2003, p 11) without pausing to think about their provenance. In this case as a result of the interview stage there was an abundance of data to draw on. To develop the items the results of the question 'What words would you use to describe high/low morale?' along with respondents descriptions of high and low morale experiences (Questions 2a & b and 1a & b in Table 2). The various descriptions of morale were then converted into short statements (Hinkin, 1998) and divided into two morale scales, one for high and one for low, each

development scale had nine items. The reason for dividing into two scales was to produce high and low morale scales which could be used independently or together. The aim was to provide researchers in future with two options for examining morale depending on the organisation they were working with as well as allowing examination of whether high morale and low morale are opposites or orthogonal. With the aspiration of the final scale having between four and six items<sup>24</sup> this gives a ratio of approximately twice as many initial items as that hoped for in the final scale (Hinkin, 1998).

The items were discussed with a number of colleagues to assess comprehensibility. Homogeneity of comprehension is potentially a significant issue in survey research (Hardy & Ford, 2009) and the use of cognitive interview techniques (Beatty & Willis, 2007; Presser et al., 2004) helps reduce the possibility of item miscomprehension. The statements were also developed to avoid the well established problems of double barrelled items, leading questions, jargon, colloquialisms etc which undermine construct validity (Ford & Scandura, 2007; Hinkin, 1998).

This inductive approach to item development has been advocated for exploratory research when it is difficult to generate items which represent an abstract construct (Hinkin, 1998). The danger with inductive approaches is that the factors produced may not measure the same construct (Cortina, 1993). This was offset in this case by developing items directly from the statements of respondents to the qualitative part of this research.

#### *A brief note on samples in this research*

The quantitative phase of this research makes use of 8 different surveys. These were collected over the course of the research period and reflect my developing understanding of morale and its attendant antecedents and consequences. Earlier samples (numbers 1 – 3) tended to use SIMs of morale as they preceded the completion of the qualitative phase of the research. Later surveys (4 – 6) either developed and deployed MIMs or developed measures of the dimensions of morale. In addition to this two (samples 7 & 8) large publicly available datasets were used which contained SIMs of morale. Table 14 lists the samples used in this research along with a brief description of the sample and measures employed.

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<sup>24</sup> Kenny describes the number of indicators in multivariate analysis thus. ‘Two *might* be fine, three is better, four is best, and anything more is gravy’ (quoted in Kline, 2005, p 314)

**Table 14 - Samples employed in the quantitative research phase**

Sample number	Sample name	Size	Notes
1	Nokia data	400	Senior managers in the UK (200) and the US (200). SIM of morale and other measures <sup>†</sup>
2	GCC Sample	626	A survey conducted at all GCC's 13 stores. SIMs of morale, satisfaction etc. The MIMs were not developed at the time this survey was administered
3	Qualitative phase sample	198	Survey of the respondents of the qualitative phase incorporating SIMs of morale and other factors, PANAS and Big 5.
4	Development Sample	186	This sample comprised respondents from a mobile phone infrastructure company and a snowball sample from a scientific research institute
5	Pooled sample	157	Employees of an advertising agency (73) and a chain of veterinary practices (84). Included dimensions of morale, turnover intention and MIMs of morale
6	US sample	403	A balanced sample supplied by Qualtrics of US employees from a number of organisations. SIMs and MIMs of morale included along with measures of the dimensions of morale, positive affect and turnover intention <sup>†</sup>
7	AMC data	1289	Survey of manufacturing firms in Australia (962) and New Zealand (379). SIM of morale with measures of productivity, customer satisfaction, cashflow, defect rates, warranty costs, cost of quality, % in full on time delivery <sup>†</sup>
8	Armstrong Stassen dataset	232	A survey of managers employed in a Canadian government department undergoing significant downsizing in 1996 <sup>†</sup>
9	FPW survey	1848	The Survey of the Future of Professional Work (FPW) was collected from professionals in both the UK (931) and Germany (917) in 2000-2001 and incorporated SIMs of morale and satisfaction <sup>†</sup>

<sup>†</sup>NB the respondent being based in these countries does not necessarily mean that they are a native of these countries

### *Item administration*

The statements were then used in a development survey which was administered using Qualtrics survey software (Qualtrics, 2007) initially to employees of a mobile phone infrastructure company. This organisation believed that they could provide a sample of over 200 respondents. In the event they managed to provide 98 suitable responses before an internal reorganisation mandated by the US parent mandated termination of the survey. As a result there were

insufficient respondents to conduct a satisfactory factor analysis. To resolve this a further 88 respondents were recruited using snowball sampling of a scientific research centre. There was little statistical difference between the samples and so this amalgamation of samples, named 'Development survey' (see Table 14) was deemed appropriate for this stage of development given the exploratory nature of this research and the ubiquitous nature of the morale concept.

The respondents used an eight point scale which comprised a seven point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, somewhat disagree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat agree, agree, strongly agree) and an eighth column 'Unsure what this question means or it has more than one meaning'.

### *Results of the initial survey*

The eighteen items presented were well understood by the respondents and so none needed to be eliminated for this reason. The items were also examined for variance (Kline, 2000) and showed an acceptable range of response with no item demonstrating a range of <6 and the average range being 6.94.

The suitability of data for factor analysis was then evaluated. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficients were calculated to assess inter-item correlation. Examination of the inter-item correlation revealed no variable correlated at the level of less than 0.4 with all other variables and so all items were retained (Kim & Mueller, 1978; O'Leary-Kelly & J. Vokurka, 1998). The number of participants was below that recommended by Kline who recommends > 200 (Kline, 1986) but at 10:1 more than exceeded the levels advocated by Cattell and others (Cattell, 1978; MacCallum, Widaman, Preacher, & Hong, 2001; MacCallum, Widaman, Zhang, & Hong, 1999; Velicer & Fava, 1998).

### *Exploratory Factor Analysis*

The two pools of items were subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using SPSS 16.0 (SPSS, 2007). The default analysis setting for SPSS is to use Principal Component Analysis which mixes common, specific and random error variances, for this reason a common factor method such as Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) is recommended (Ford, MacCallum, & Tait, 1986; Hinkin, 1998). Accordingly this approach was adopted.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.86 and 0.91 for the high and low morale samples respectively and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 864.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$  and  $\chi^2 = 772.48$ ,  $p < 0.01$  respectively) confirming that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974).

The results of the EFA revealed a unidimensional structure in each case suggesting that for both high and low morale there was a single factor. This single factor explained 48% of the variance in high morale and 49% in low. As the factors were unidimensional they were not rotated. All items loaded on the factor at a level  $> 0.4$  which is commonly accepted as a method of judging factor loadings to be meaningful (Ford et al., 1986). Although the level of variance explained is lower than might be hoped for it still compares favourably with other scale development studies (e.g. Gill & Hodgkinson, 2007).

This EFA gave a pool of nine items each for the high and low morale scales and these were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis.

### *Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

As Hinkin (1998) points out the above steps are likely to produce scales which are both internally consistent and possess content validity (p 114). The weakness of this approach is, however, that it does not permit the goodness of fit of the emergent factor structure to be appraised.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) allows the match between the proposed structure and the data to be evaluated and makes for a stricter interpretation of unidimensionality than EFA (Hinkin, 1998).

CFA traditionally requires larger samples than EFA (Hinkin, 1998) with a minimum sample size of 200 respondents being recommended (Hoelter, 1983). Although falling somewhat below this threshold it was decided to proceed with an initial evaluation of the 186 respondents from the development survey.

The CFA was conducted on both scales using AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2008). In both cases the nine items which emerged from the EFA process demonstrated relatively poor fit as is often the case in initial CFA models (Kline, 2005). For this reason the model was respecified and a parsimonious scale which demonstrated good fit was produced.

For the high morale scale this process produced five items:

Item	Factor loading
I look forward to going to work	0.85
I am cheerful at work	0.56
I feel in control at work	0.57
My job is interesting	0.72
I feel lots of energy at work	0.82

These items produced a model with  $\chi^2 = 6.539$ ,  $df = 5$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being non-significant ( $p = 0.257$ ) suggesting that differences between the model-implied variance and covariance and the observed variance and covariance are small enough to be due to sampling fluctuation (Hinkin, 1998). The model fitted data well. The CMIN/df = 1.308 which is below the suggested criterion of 2-3 (Kline, 2005). The RMSEA = 0.041 indicating good fit (Byrne, 2001; Kline, 2005). NFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.991 and CFI = 0.995 were all greater than 0.95 indicating superior fit (Hu & Bentler, 1999) and SRMR = 0.0265 which is less than the 0.05 indicating good fit (Garson, 2009). There is some debate about which fit indices to report but Williams, Vandenberg and Edwards (2009) recommend that priority be given to CFI, RMSEA and SRMR. The results here suggest that the scale produced fitted the underlying data well. In addition none of the items correlated with one another at a level of  $> 0.85$  suggesting that none of them were equivalent to one another and could thus be eliminated (DeVellis, 2003).

These five items produced a scale with a Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) of 0.83 with a lower 95% confidence bound of 0.80 (this latter calculated in Intercooled STATA 10 (Statacorp, 2007)). Scale alphas are a frequently used measure of reliability (DeVellis, 2003) which are the subject of some controversy. A level of 0.70 is generally accepted as the minimum for exploratory scale development but at over 0.80 the developed scale more than exceeds this.

Replication is a key element in scale development and so the CFA was repeated using a sample of 403 American respondents (US sample in Table 14). This sample was supplied by Qualtrics and balanced to incorporate a mix of ages, organisational tenure, occupations and both genders.

Results for this group were similar to those in the development sample.  $\chi^2 = 9.626$ ,  $df = 5$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being non-significant ( $p = 0.087$ ). CMIN/df = 1.925, RMSEA = 0.048, NFI = 0.992, TLI = 0.992 and CFI = 0.996, SRMR = 0.0136 suggesting good fit between the model and the data. Again none of the items intercorrelated at  $\geq 0.85$ . Cronbach's alpha = 0.90 with a

95% lower bound of 0.89. Replication of the results with the development sample suggests that the scale is robust across different samples and that the items hang together.

CFA on the low morale scale was initially similar in that there was poor fit – although less poor than with the high morale scale. Subsequent respecification yielded another five item scale:

Item	Factor loading
I feel directionless at work	0.69
I don't look forward to going to work	0.76
My job is pointless	0.67
I am miserable at work	0.88
I feel depressed at work	0.82

These items produced a model with  $\chi^2 = 5.256$ ,  $df = 5$  with the  $\chi^2$  value again being non-significant ( $p = 0.385$ ).  $CMIN/df = 1.051$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.017$ ,  $NFI = 0.988$ ,  $TLI = 0.999$  and  $CFI = 0.999$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0175$  suggesting a very good fit between the model and the data. None of the items intercorrelated at 0.85 or greater suggesting that they were all necessary to the model.

Reliability testing gave a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84 with a lower 95% confidence interval of 0.80; again this suggests a reliable scale.

Repeating the CFA with the US sample gave similar results.  $\chi^2 = 8.805$ ,  $df = 4$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being non-significant ( $p = 0.066$ ).  $CMIN/df = 2.201$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.055$ ,  $NFI = 0.994$ ,  $TLI = 0.992$  and  $CFI = 0.997$   $SRMR = 0.0135$  suggesting a good fit between the model and the data. Again none of the items intercorrelated at  $\geq 0.85$ . Cronbach's alpha = 0.91 with a 95% lower bound of 0.90.

The two scales correlated well ( $r = -0.89$ ) suggesting that morale is a unidimensional construct unlike positive and negative affect which appear to be orthogonal (Watson et al., 1988). This means that the two scales can be collapsed into one measure.

The ten items from the high and low morale scales formed a single factor on EFA, again suggesting the unidimensionality of the construct. CFA of the two scales produced a poorly fitting scale and so, in the same way as for the high and low morale scales, data reduction was necessary to produce an appropriately fitting scale.

This then produced a six item scale which consisted of the high morale items with the addition of one low morale item ('I am miserable at work?'). This scale performed well on CFA with  $\chi^2$

=13.55,  $df = 9$  with the  $\chi^2$  value again being non-significant ( $p = 0.139$ ). CMIN/df = 1.506, RMSEA = 0.052, NFI = 0.971, TLI = 0.999 and CFI = 0.983, SRMR = 0.0292. None of the items intercorrelated  $> 0.85$  and Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 with a 95% lower bound of 0.83.

The CFA was repeated with the US sample giving similar results.  $\chi^2 = 21.231$ ,  $df = 9$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p = 0.019$ ). Although non-significance of the  $\chi^2$  is desirable it is likely that in overidentified models a significant result may be produced but this may be discounted if other fit measures indicate good fit (Garson, 2009). CMIN/df = 2.359 which is within the threshold of 2-3 advocated by (Kline, 2005), RMSEA = 0.058, NFI = 0.986, TLI = 0.986 and CFI = 0.983, SRMR = 0.0189. Item intercorrelation was below 0.85 and the alpha value was 0.91 with a lower bound of 0.89.

### Summary

This scale development process have faithfully followed the outline of Hinkin's (1998) tutorial on scale development. Using the qualitative data from the interview phase of this research to ground the item development I have focused on the actual sensation of morale as described by respondents. Using these descriptions I have developed two MIMs for morale; one each for high and low morale which I have refined using a combination of EFA and CFA. The scales fitted the data well and have good internal reliability. Correlation of the two scales suggested that morale is a unidimensional construct and so the two scales were reduced into a single measure which also demonstrated good fit on CFA. Having developed this MIM I shall now turn to the SDS.

### Development of semantic differential scales of morale

Semantic differential scales (SDS) can be developed in a similar fashion to the multiple item measures. Although they have not been used extensively to measure the morale construct, Scott and Rowland (Scott Jr., 1967; Scott Jr. & Rowland, 1970) developed an extensive semantic differential measure. This was winnowed down somewhat by Armstrong-Stassen and colleagues into a seven item measure (Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2004). They took Scott and Rowland's work and used a sample from a US communications company undergoing downsizing to refine the final seven items. This they tested in two federal government departments (Armstrong-Stassen, pers com, 2009) and used in their paper (Armstrong-Stassen et al., 2004). I am greatly indebted to Professor Armstrong-Stassen who kindly passed on the data relevant to the development of the SDS allowing me to subject it to EFA and CFA as well as to replicate it using the development sample.



*Examining the Armstrong-Stassen data*

The Armstrong-Stassen dataset (ASD) took seven items from the 'Me at work' scale of Scott's (Scott Jr., 1967) original article and offered a five point scale between the two words anchoring each pole of the scale. The responses showed good variance with all seven items having a full five points of response. Pearson product moment correlation coefficients revealed that no item had an inter-item correlation coefficient of  $< 0.4$ . In addition the number of respondents at 232 exceeded the requirements of Kline, Cattell and others (Cattell, 1978; Kline, 2005; MacCallum et al., 2001; MacCallum et al., 1999; Velicer & Fava, 1998). Accordingly I proceeded with EFA.

*Exploratory Factor Analysis*

Using the same approach already described for the MIMs I subjected the data to Principal Axis Factoring (PAF). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.89 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant ( $\chi^2 = 817.40$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) confirming that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis (Dziuban & Shirkey, 1974).

Again a single factor emerged which accounted for 53% of the variance. All items loaded on the factor at a level  $> 0.4$  (Ford et al., 1986) and as a single factor was identified rotation was unnecessary. The seven items from this stage were then subjected to CFA.

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

CFA was performed in the same fashion as for the MIMs using AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2008). The seven items produced a reasonably well fitting model. The fit of the model was somewhat improved when the error terms for items 1, 3 and 4 were correlated. This was deemed appropriate as these three items (enthusiastic:indifferent, encouraged:discouraged, pessimistic:optimistic) are all related to levels of energy and future in a way that some of the other items e.g. unproductive:productive were not.

The final model comprised seven items:

Item	Factor loading
Enthusiastic Indifferent	0.80
Unproductive Productive	0.50
Encouraged Discouraged	0.70
Pessimistic Optimistic	0.66
Motivated Frustrated	0.84
Dejected Cheerful	0.84
Supportive Hostile	0.63

These items produced a model with  $\chi^2 = 12.402$ ,  $df = 12$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being non-significant ( $p = 0.414$ ).  $CMIN/df = 1.034$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.012$ ,  $NFI = 0.985$ ,  $TLI = 0.999$  and  $CFI = 1.00$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0194$  suggesting a very good fit between the model and the data. Again none of the items intercorrelated at 0.85 or greater suggesting that they were all necessary to the model.

This scale had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.88 with a 95% confidence lower bound of 0.86.

#### *Re-evaluation of the scale using the development sample*

The scale used in the ASD was re-evaluated using the development sample outlined for the MIMs above. In this case the space between the two words was measured on a 10 point scale rather than a five point one as in the ASD. All items had a good range of response of  $\geq 9$  with an average of 8.86. Evaluation of inter-item correlation revealed that no item had an inter-item correlation coefficient of  $< 0.4$ .

EFA using PAF gave a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy of 0.891 and a significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ( $\chi^2 = 673.750$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) again suggesting that the sample was appropriate for factor analysis. Again a single factor was extracted which accounted for 54% of the variance with all items loading at  $> 0.4$  level.

CFA was repeated as above with the model.  $\chi^2 = 16.100$ ,  $df = 12$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being non-significant ( $p = 0.187$ ).  $CMIN/df = 1.342$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.043$ ,  $NFI = 0.977$ ,  $TLI = 0.989$  and  $CFI = 0.994$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0262$  suggesting a very good fit between the model and the data. Again none of the items intercorrelated at 0.85 or greater suggesting that they were all necessary to the model.

Again Cronbach's alpha was appraised and found to be the same as for the ASD sample at 0.88 with a 95% confidence lower bound of 0.86.

A similar although slightly less well fitting result was obtained using the US sample.  $\chi^2 = 23.047$ ,  $df = 11$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p = 0.017$ ) which can be seen in large samples (Garson, 2009; Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006). CMIN/df = 2.095, RMSEA = 0.052, NFI = 0.989, TLI = 0.989 and CFI = 0.994, SRMR = 0.0159 suggesting a good fit overall between the model and the data. Again none of the items intercorrelated at  $\geq 0.85$ . Cronbach's alpha = 0.93.

### *SDS development summary*

The Armstrong-Stassen data provides a useful start point for the development of the SDS scale. Evaluation of her scale in a different population suggests that it performs well given its replicability in different samples. The reduction from 70+ items from the initial Scott scale to the 7 in the current scale is welcome as it reduces survey space occupied by the scale, permitting the testing of other factors.

### **Single item measurement (SIM) of morale**

Developing a SIM for morale is relatively straightforward in terms of the question as one simply asks the respondent to either rate their own morale or that of others. There is some variation in response format which can be either a visual analogue scale rating from 1-10 or some form of modified Likert scale e.g. very low, low, medium, high, very high (e.g. Lane, Wilkinson, & Burchell, 2006).

What is more problematic with SIMs is the issue of reliability. A single item does not permit reliability testing using conventional techniques such as Cronbach's alpha. Confidence in a single item measure is likely to be increased if it can be shown to correlate well with existing multiple item measures. Wanous and co-workers (1997) present a technique based on the correction for attenuation formula from Nunnally and Bernstein (1994). In this section I shall seek to establish the validity and reliability of SIMs to measure morale.

### *Correlation of SIM with other measures*

The dataset used to examine the correlation of the SIM with other measures was the same one used to develop the MIM and to replicate the Armstrong-Stassen work developing the SDS. Using AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2008) the two multiple item measures were correlated with a single item measure of morale which simply asked individuals to rate their morale on a scale of 1-10.

The result was a model which fitted well although fit was improved when the error terms two items in the high and low morale scales concerned with whether the respondent looked forward to going to work or not were correlated. The resulting model fitted well  $\chi^2 = 127.402$ ,  $df = 71$

with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant (Garson, 2009). The CMIN/df = 1.794 (Kline, 2005). RMSEA = 0.066 which suggests adequate fit (Garson, 2009). NFI = 0.921 which was originally acceptable as a fit statistic although this has since been revised upwards to 0.95 (Byrne, 2001). TLI = 0.953 and CFI = 0.963, SRMR = 0.0408. For a sample of < 250 respondents with between 12 and 30 variables this is deemed a good fit (Hair et al., 2006, p 753).

In all the model fits the data adequately for the purpose of evaluating the relationship between the four measures. In addition the relationship variables were not greatly affected by the fit of the model and so it is reasonable to go ahead and examine the correlations between the four measures of morale using this framework. Table 15 shows the correlations between the various measures of morale.

**Table 15 - Correlations between morale SIM and MIMs**

	Morale MIM	Morale SDS	Individual Morale SIM
Morale MIM	<u>0.85</u>		
Morale SDS	0.87	<u>0.88</u>	
Individual Morale SIM	0.77	0.81	N/A

NB Cronbach's alpha (1951) is presented on the diagonal

The MIM and SDS morale scales correlate well with the SIM of morale. To some extent this increases the confidence that the SIM of morale reflects a similar set of factors as the MIM and SDS measures which are grounded in the interview data in the case of the MIMs and lexical precedent in the case of the SDS (see Watson et al., 1988).

#### *Reliability of the SIM*

The difficulty of appraising the reliability of SIM has been a concern and acted as a barrier to their wider usage (Wanous et al., 1997). Wanous and co-workers propose an innovative solution to this problem based on Nunnally and Bernstein's correction for attenuation formula.

$$\hat{r}_{xy} = \frac{r_{xy}}{\sqrt{r_{xx} * r_{yy}}}$$

(Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994, p 240-241)

Where:  $r_{xy}$  = the observed correlation between variables  $x$  and  $y$

$r_{xx}$  = the reliability of variable  $x$

$r_{yy}$  = the reliability of variable  $y$

and  $\hat{r}_{xy}$  = the presumed true underlying correlation between  $x$  and  $y$  if they could both be measured perfectly (Wanous & Hudy, 2001; Wanous & Scholarios, 2009).

Working on the assumption that the two measures could be measured perfectly allows us to set  $\hat{r}_{xy} = 1$ . Treating  $x$  as the SIM and  $y$  as the MIM produces an equation where

$$1 = \frac{r_{(SIM \text{ and } MIM)}}{\sqrt{\alpha \text{ of } SIM} * \sqrt{\alpha \text{ of } MIM}}$$

Rearranging this equation gives allows us to calculate the  $\alpha$  of the SIM thus

$$\sqrt{\alpha \text{ of } SIM} = \frac{r_{(MIM \text{ and } SIM)}}{\sqrt{\alpha \text{ of } MIM}}$$

$$\alpha \text{ of } SIM = \left( \frac{r_{(MIM \text{ and } SIM)}}{\sqrt{\alpha \text{ of } MIM}} \right)^2$$

Using the correlations and alphas for the MIM and SDS from Table 15 above a range of estimations of ‘pseudo-alphas’ (Wanous & Scholarios, 2009) can be produced for the SIM of morale.

For the Morale MIM

$$\left( \frac{0.77}{\sqrt{0.85}} \right)^2 = 0.69$$

For the SDS morale measure

$$\left( \frac{0.81}{\sqrt{0.88}} \right)^2 = 0.76$$

This gives us two ‘pseudo-alphas’ of 0.69 and 0.76. These compare favourably with Wanous et al.’s appraisals of SIMs for job satisfaction (Wanous et al., 1997) which range from 0.45 to 0.69. In addition the pseudo-alpha is the minimum reliability for the SIM (Wanous et al., 1997) and that the actual reliability is likely to be higher (Wanous & Scholarios, 2009).

### *SIM appraisal summary*

The data suggest that SIMs of morale are an acceptable way to measure the concept of morale. They correlate well with the MIM- and SDS and also demonstrate acceptable reliability inasmuch as this can be tested for SIMs.

### Convergent and discriminant validity of the scales produced

One of the key factors in scale development is ensuring that the scales produced measure what they are supposed to measure and do not measure other concepts. Convergent validity is ‘*the extent to which indicators of a specific construct converge or share a high proportion of variance in common*’ (Hair et al., 2006, p 771). This is shown in Table 15 above where the intercorrelations of the various morale measures are presented. The MIMs all demonstrate intercorrelations of ~0.85 which suggests that they are likely to be tapping into the same concept (Kline, 2005).

Convergent validity can also be examined by appraising the average variance extracted (AVE). AVE is calculated as

$$AVE = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i^2}{n}$$

(Hair et al., 2006)

Where  $\lambda$  is the standardised factor loading,  $i$  is the number of items. So for  $n$  items AVE is computed as the total of all squared standardised factor loadings divided by the number of items (Hair et al., 2006, p 777). As a rule of thumb all scales should have an AVE of greater than 0.5 and preferably  $> 0.7$  (Hair et al., 2006). The two scales have an AVE of greater than 0.5. Construct reliability was also assessed using an SEM measure defined by Hair et al. (2006).

$$CR = \frac{(\sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i)^2}{(\sum_{i=1}^n \lambda_i)^2 + (\sum_{i=1}^n \delta_i)}$$

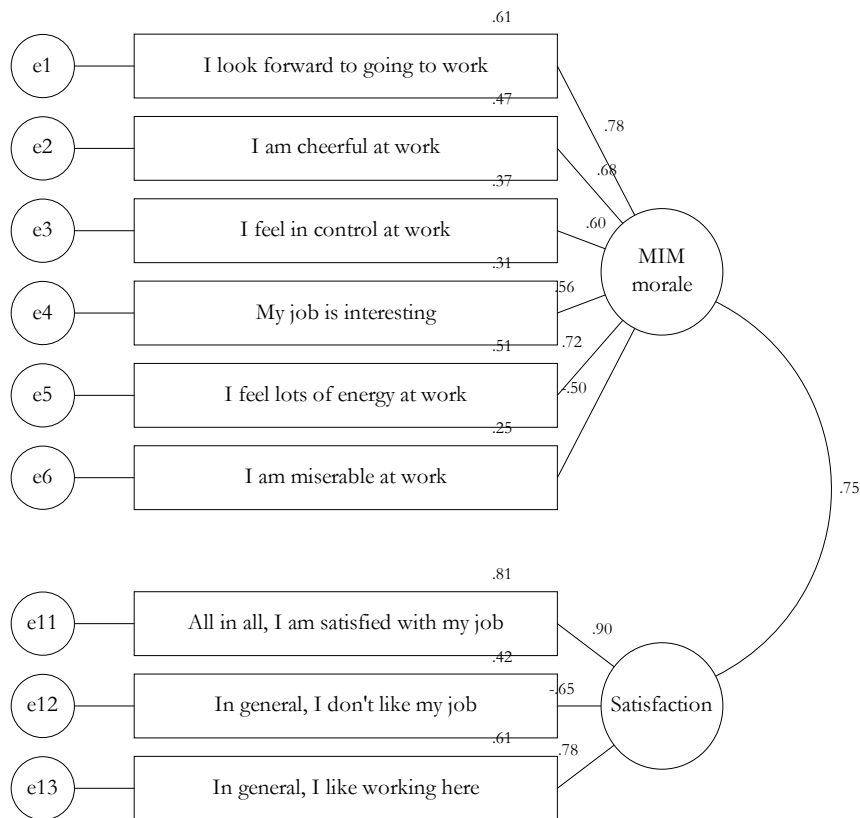
This is computed from the squared sum of the factor loadings  $\lambda_i$  for each construct and the sum of the error variance terms  $(1 - \lambda^2)$ . Estimates of  $> 0.7$  indicate good reliability and both scales had CR of  $> 0.7$ .

Discriminant validity is ‘*the extent to which a construct is truly distinct from other construct*.’ (Hair et al., 2006, p 771). This was appraised using a pooled sample of 157 respondents from two different organisations. One was an advertising agency and the other a chain of veterinary practices (see Table 14). This sample had MIMs of job satisfaction (Tepper, 2000) and commitment (Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005) along with the three MIMs of morale developed above. These scales are listed in Appendix 3.

If two measures are different then they should neither correlate well nor load on the same factor. To test the discriminant validity of the two morale scales I conducted a pairwise test (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982) of the morale scales against the satisfaction and commitment scales. This test

examines whether a CFA model with two latent variables (i.e. an unconstrained model with, say, low morale and satisfaction scales) fits the data significantly better than a model where all items constrained by being linked to a single latent variable. If the  $\chi^2$  value for each model is significantly different then the hypothesis that the two models are the same can be rejected suggesting acceptable discriminant validity. Figure 9 shows the low morale and satisfaction scales being unconstrained and free to correlate and Figure 10 shows them constrained onto a single variable.

**Figure 9 – Demonstration of pairwise comparison test with the two scales correlated**



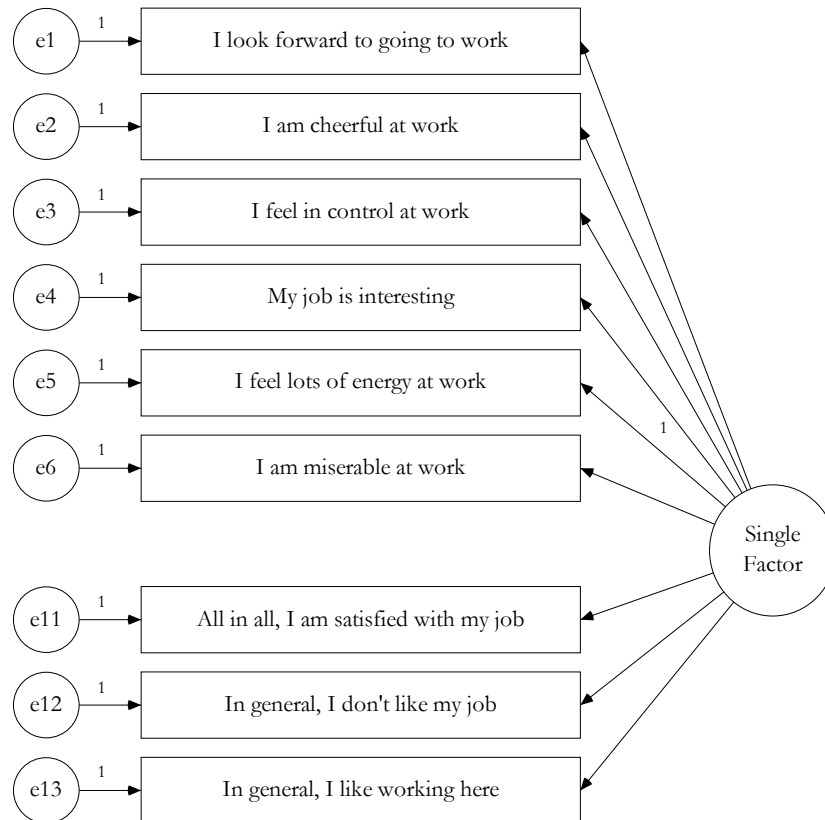
**Figure 10 – Demonstration of pairwise test with the two variables constrained**

Table 16 shows the results of this analysis using the pooled sample. The first two columns are the  $\chi^2$  and df for the constrained model where all items are loaded on a single factor. The second two are the  $\chi^2$  and df for the two factor model. The correlation between the two variables is then presented and the difference in  $\chi^2$ . As the degrees of freedom in each case is 1 then the probability of the two models being different can be concluded using the critical values for  $\chi^2$ .



**Table 16 - Pairwise comparison of the two MIMs of morale with Tepper satisfaction and Escrig-Tena commitment MIMs**

Morale scale		Constrained		Unconstrained		Correlation	$\chi^2$ difference	p value
		$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2$	df			
MIM morale	Satisfaction	131.3	27	82.3	26	0.75	49	<0.001
	Commitment	159.6	35	60.0	34	0.37	99.6	<0.001
SDS morale	Satisfaction	219.5	35	135.4	34	0.69	84.1	<0.001
	Commitment	254.9	44	154.9	43	0.38	100	<0.001

This pairwise analysis was replicated using the US sample (as described in Table 14). This used two different scales to appraise satisfaction (Agho, Price, & Mueller, 1992) and commitment (Balfour & Wechsler, 1996; Kacmar et al., 1999). Again these scales are shown in Appendix 3 and the results are shown in Table 17.

**Table 17 - Pairwise comparison of the two MIMs of morale with Agho satisfaction and Balfour commitment MIMs**

Morale scale		Constrained		Unconstrained		Correlation	$\chi^2$ difference	p value
		$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2$	df			
MIM morale	Agho Satisfaction	471.5	44	307.4	53	0.88	164.14	<0.001
	Identity Commitment	299.3	27	132.5	26	0.76	166.8	<0.001
	Affiliative Commitment	455.5	27	118.6	26	0.71	336.9	<0.001
	Exchange Commitment	408.8	27	119.6	26	0.70	289.2	<0.001
SDS morale	Agho Satisfaction	972.2	65	186.6	64	0.67	785.6	<0.001
	Identity Commitment	355.7	35	100.2	34	0.61	255.5	<0.001
	Affiliative Commitment	489.2	35	93.5	34	0.63	395.7	<0.001
	Exchange Commitment	424.3	35	88.1	34	0.64	336.2	<0.001

These data suggest that the three morale scales are significantly different to either of the satisfaction or commitment scales. Although differentiable on these tests the scales for commitment and satisfaction correlate with morale. This is to be expected. The qualitative

phase suggested that morale and other concepts were likely to co-vary in some cases even though they differed. This combination of covariance and separation fits with the qualitative data.

### Test-retest reliability of the scales

Test-retest reliability was undertaken using respondents from the chain of veterinary clinics in the pooled sample. In the initial sample there were 70 respondents. 41 of them responded to the readministration of the two MIMs and SIM one month after the initial sampling. The results for the scales are shown in Table 18.

**Table 18 - Test-retest reliability of the morale measures one month apart**

	Correlation between T1 and T2
MIM morale	0.84
SDS morale	0.56
SIM morale	0.68

All correlations significant ( $p < 0.01$ )

The results show excellent reliability for the MIM scale, reasonable reliability for the SIM of morale and moderate reliability for the SDS measure. In spite of the lower score for the SDS measure it is still comfortably above the levels reported in the literature. Motowidlo, for example, reports test-retest reliabilities ranging from 0.41 – 0.79 in ratings of job satisfaction.

### Summary of scale development

The development and appraisal of four different measures of morale offers a considerable battery of tools to the researcher. The scales developed represent a first step, however, as scale validation is an ongoing iterative process (Scandura, 2005) then further work is needed.

### Application of quantitative methods

The scales developed facilitate the quantitative examination of morale. Whilst qualitative judgements on morale provide a valuable understanding of the topic there are certain attributes of morale which are better examined using quantitative approaches. An example of this would be morale's variation with age which is more readily apprehended using numerical approaches.

The three measurement systems developed enable us to understand more about morale itself, how it might be differentiated from other concepts, what its antecedents are and its consequences. Quantitative appraisal of these areas is a useful adjunct and supplement to the

qualitative phase. I shall now outline the various propositions to be tested through the application of quantitative methods.

## Chapter 8: Quantitative results

### Introduction

This section uses the measures developed and appraised in the previous section to explore various facets of morale. The chapter is structured in a similar way to the qualitative results chapter in that it first seeks to differentiate morale from other concepts. Having clarified morale as an entity in its own right I shall then turn to explore the concept of morale itself including the influence of demographic and psychometric factors along with other aspects such as the relationship between individuals and groups. This is then followed by an evaluation of the antecedents of morale and finally morale's consequences.

To examine these aspects I shall draw upon a variety of datasets which use SIMs, MIM-, SDS and combinations of all of these.

### Differentiating morale from other concepts

Numerical differentiation of morale from other factors can be achieved in a number of ways. Perhaps the simplest is to compare SIMs for morale and these other concepts. If morale is viewed as the same as other concepts then, allowing for sampling variations, it should score the same as these other concepts on a SIM. Achieving this hinges on a number of things. Principal among them is that the other concept must be understood widely by the respondents. There is no point, for example, in asking respondents to rate their level of self-efficacy as the majority of respondents will not understand the term. For certain widely understood concepts such as satisfaction, happiness, motivation and commitment to the organisation it is possible ask and receive meaningful results.

### Differentiating on the basis of single item measures (SIMs)

Respondents in a number of different samples were asked to rate a number concepts on a 10 point visual analogue scale. In accordance with Locke's assertion that you should examine the items of any scale or measure rather than just the results (Locke, 2009) the stimulus questions are written below.

I would rate my overall level of satisfaction at work as

I would rate my level of motivation as

I would rate my level of commitment to [organisation] as

I would rate my overall level of happiness as

I would rate my level of morale as

Comparison between the last question ‘I would rate my level of morale as’ and the preceding four allowed morale to be compared with satisfaction, motivation, commitment and happiness. If the scores for morale and, say, satisfaction are significantly different then the two concepts cannot be regarded as the same (as if they were then they should have scored the same).

Two samples of respondents were used in this analysis. The first is the group used to develop the measure of morale outlined in the previous section. The second was a survey of 626 employees from the same garden centre chain (GCC) described in the qualitative section (see Table 14 for details of both samples).

The responses to the items above were compared using two different techniques. The first was a paired t-test to compare the single item morale measure with the other concepts. The second was a cross-check using the Wilcoxon Signed Ranks test for non-parametric data to give increased confidence that any slight deviancy from normality did not affect the results. This analysis was undertaken using SPSS 16.0 (SPSS, 2007). Significant results are not the same as meaningful ones (Field, 2005). As a result it is recommended that effect sizes be calculated (American Psychological Association., 2001) in order to see whether a difference is both significant *and* meaningful. Field (2005) advocates using a formula from Rosnow and Rosenthal (2005) to calculate an  $r$  value.

$$r = \sqrt{\frac{t^2}{t^2 + df}}$$

Where  $r$  is the effect size,  $t$  is the  $t$  value and  $df$  the degrees of freedom. Using this approach Cohen (1992) defines a small effect size as  $\sim 0.1$ , a medium effect size of  $\sim 0.3$  and a large effect size of  $\sim 0.5$ .

A significant difference between the two measures with a reasonable effect size demonstrates that the two variables are perceived differently by respondents on average. This does not

preclude some individuals perceiving them as the same but on average they are perceived as different. A significant difference will not tell us how they are different but merely that they are.

The results of this comparison of means are shown for the development group in Table 19 and for GCC in Table 21.

**Table 19 – Comparison of means between SIM of individual morale and other concepts for the development sample.**

I would rate my level of morale as (n=185, mean = 5.96, s.e. 0.169)									
	n	mean	s.e.	mean difference	df	t	sig. (2 tailed)	effect size (r)	sig. (Wilcoxon)
I would rate my overall level of satisfaction at work as	186	6.29	0.151	0.33	184	2.70	<0.01	0.20	<0.01
I would rate my level of motivation as	186	6.38	0.154	0.42	184	3.76	<0.01	0.27	<0.01
I would rate my level of commitment to [organisation] as	186	6.87	0.164	0.91	184	6.25	<0.01	0.42	<0.01
I would rate my overall level of happiness as	186	6.49	0.147	0.53	184	4.57	<0.01	0.32	<0.01

**Table 20 - Correlations between SIMs of individual morale and other concepts in the development sample**

	Correlation	Significance	n
I would rate my overall level of satisfaction at work as	0.637	<0.001	185
I would rate my level of motivation as	0.629	<0.001	185
I would rate my level of commitment to [organisation] as	0.748	<0.001	185
I would rate my overall level of happiness as	0.689	<0.001	185

**Table 21 – Comparison of means between SIM of individual morale and other concepts for the GCC sample.**

I would rate my level of morale as (n=627, mean = 7.16, s.e. 0.81)									
	n	mean	s.e.	mean difference	df	t	sig. (2 tailed)	effect size (r)	sig. (Wilcoxon)
I would rate my overall level of satisfaction at work as	627	6.74	0.083	-0.42	626	-6.55	<0.01	0.25	<0.01
I would rate my level of motivation as	627	7.05	0.085	-0.11	626	-1.79	0.07	0.07	0.122
I would rate my level of commitment to [organisation] as	627	7.4	0.089	0.24	626	2.86	<0.01	0.11	<0.01
I would rate my overall level of happiness as	627	7.43	0.082	0.27	626	4.85	<0.01	0.19	<0.01

**Table 22- Correlations between SIMs of individual morale and other concepts in the GCC sample**

I would rate my level of morale as			
	Correlation	Significance	n
I would rate my overall level of satisfaction at work as	0.683	<0.001	627
I would rate my level of motivation as	0.719	<0.001	627
I would rate my level of commitment to [organisation] as	0.52	<0.001	627
I would rate my overall level of happiness as	0.764	<0.001	627

These results suggest that overall morale is viewed as significantly different from satisfaction, commitment and happiness when individuals are asked to rate these different concepts. The effect sizes are variable with the results for the GCC sample being somewhat lower reflecting the greater size of the sample. Even so within the GCC sample the difference between morale and satisfaction is .25 which is a medium effect size (Cohen, 1992). The picture for motivation is more mixed. The development sample suggests a clear distinction between the two whereas the GCC sample does not.

Failure to reject  $H_0$  does not mean that there is no difference between morale and motivation. Whilst a significant difference is evidence of difference the converse, that lack of difference

means that the concepts are the same, is not true. It is entirely possible for the two concepts to be different but simply attract the same score out of ten. For example an individual may score their pain on a visual analogue scale as five out of ten and also score the hospital food as five out of ten. This does not mean that hospital food and pain are the same thing, it just means that this particular test cannot distinguish them.

The usage of SIMs in this manner raises possibility that the measures tap into exactly the same concept but at different levels. For example if satisfaction were a ‘stronger’ form of morale it might be that the two measures were readily separable using Student’s t test yet perfectly correlated. Table 20 and Table 22 show these correlations and demonstrates that although the measures are distinct they are correlated. This is consistent with the findings of the qualitative phase that morale was readily differentiable from other concepts and yet covaried with them.

### **Differentiating on the basis of MIM comparisons**

On page 174 of the quantitative methods section the pairwise test for discriminant validity (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982) demonstrated that the MIM morale measures are different from two different measures of job satisfaction and various measures of organisational commitment. Again this result suggests that morale is not the same as these concepts.

### **Summary of differentiating morale from other factors**

This thesis has already made qualitative distinctions among morale, satisfaction, happiness, motivation and other organisational constructs. This quantitative research supports these distinctions. Morale does not appear to be the same as satisfaction, happiness, commitment or motivation. The distinction between morale and these other concepts is significant and the effect sizes for the difference suggest that it is appreciable. The significant difference in the pairwise tests for satisfaction and commitment using MIMs adds further weight to this evidence. Returning to the hypotheses outlined in the quantitative research methods section we cannot reject Hypothesis 1a, 1b, 1c and 1d.

Overall the quantitative data strongly support the qualitative argument that morale can be distinguished from other factors.

### **A quantitative examination of morale itself**

Having established morale as a separate entity to these other factors I shall now turn to a quantitative exploration of morale itself. This will involve examining the impact of demographic,



psychometric, national and social factors on morale. I shall also show how morale level differs across various organisations.

### **The influence of demographic factors on morale**

Very little, if any, research has been undertaken as to the impact of demographic factors on morale. A notable exception to this is the healthcare literature's focus on the morale of the elderly. Other than this clinical literature we know very little about how morale varies by age, gender or organisational tenure.

#### *The impact of age on morale*

To appraise the impact of age on morale a three different datasets were used. The development dataset did not ask demographic questions as the participating company did not want to identify individuals with this data. Three other datasets were used. The GCC survey contained a SIM for morale (as above) and also asked respondents for their age. The Survey of the Future of Professional Work (FPW) (Lane et al., 2006) collected from professionals in both the UK and Germany in 2000-2001 (see Table 14) contains a SIM asking individuals to rate their morale on a five point scale as well as an age question. Finally the survey information collected during the qualitative phase of research had both a SIM and demographic questions.

Analysis of the GCC data suggests that age and morale are significantly correlated ( $r = 0.119$ ,  $p = 0.03$ ). The effect size is very small, however, explaining only 1.25% of the variance in morale. The FPW dataset suggests no correlation between the two variables nor does the data from the qualitative phase of the survey.

Age has little effect on morale and when a significant result is detected it is not particularly important as it explains very little of the variance. This leads us to reject Hypothesis 2a that morale is negatively correlated with age as morale appears to show very little correlation with age and when it does it tends to increase with age albeit with very little effect.

#### *The impact of gender on morale*

The same three datasets were used to assess the impact of gender on morale. In each case an independent t-test was run. There was no significant difference in any of the samples. This suggests that there is no gender effect on morale meaning that Hypothesis 2b that morale higher in men than women can be rejected.

### *The impact of organisational tenure*

Whether morale varies by organisational tenure is also an issue which has not been explored. In order to examine this the same three datasets and same technique was used as in the evaluation of the impact of age on morale.

Organisational tenure did not correlate with morale in either the GCC or qualitative phase surveys. In the FPW dataset morale and organisational tenure were significantly correlated ( $r = -0.120$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but the effect size was again very small, only explaining 1.40% of the variance. The measurement of tenure in this sample was not organisational tenure but rather how long the professional had worked within that profession. For GCC and the qualitative phase data the measure of tenure was length of time with the organisation.

As with age this suggests that organisational tenure has little effect on morale and that when it does its impact is small. This leads us to not reject Hypothesis 2c that organisational tenure is not correlated with morale.

### **The influence of psychometric factors on morale**

Organ (1997) suggested that research ought to be taken into the impact of personality factors on morale. Already we have explored the impact of psychometric measures of personality on morale qualitatively, I shall now do so quantitatively.

During the surveys which accompanied the qualitative phase of this research respondents were asked to complete two psychometric instruments: the Big 5 (Goldberg, 1992; Goldberg, 1993) and PANAS (Watson et al., 1988). The correlation between the SIM of morale used in this survey and these measures was examined using Pearson's product-moment correlation.

The SIM of morale correlates positively with Extraversion ( $r = 0.202$ ,  $p = 0.004$ ), Agreeableness ( $r = 0.353$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Conscientiousness ( $r = 0.284$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). There is no correlation between Openness to Experience and the SIM of morale but there is a negative correlation between morale and Neuroticism ( $r = -0.357$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

These results are very similar in sign to those for satisfaction noted by Judge, Heller and Mount (2002). They mean that we cannot reject Hypotheses 3a, 3b, 3c, 3d and 3e that morale is negatively correlated with neuroticism, positively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness and shows no correlation with openness to experience.

For PANAS the picture is similar with morale positively correlating with Positive Affect (PA) ( $r = 0.525$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and Negative Affect (NA) ( $r = -0.300$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

As a cross check of this a shorter scale for assessing positive and negative affect was used in the GCC survey. This scale has three items each for PA and NA and has been used by Iverson and co-workers (Iverson, Olekalns, & Erwin, 1998). The results were similar to those for the full 20 item PANAS measure (Watson et al., 1988) with the SIM of morale positively correlating with PA ( $r = 0.351$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and negatively with NA ( $r = -0.305$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

The two psychometric factors measured clearly correlate with morale, again reflecting the findings for job satisfaction observed by Connolly and Viswasvaran (2000) showing a positive relationship between satisfaction and positive affect and a negative relationship between satisfaction and negative affect. This means that we cannot reject either Hypotheses 4 a or b.

### **The impact of national factors on morale**

Comparing across nations is always a hazardous activity even when the same language is spoken. Using SIMs a comparison can be made across national boundaries. Two sets of data were used to make these comparisons. The first was conducted for Nokia and consisted of 400 senior managers, half in the UK and half in the US (see Table 14). This used the SIM of morale which was scored on a 10 point scale. The use of a heterogeneous group of senior managers from different organisations should eliminate firm effects but will not eliminate either national characteristics or the effects of prevailing mood in each nation.

An independent t-test was conducted. US respondents rated their morale higher than higher (mean = 7.95, s.e. = 0.115) than those in the UK (mean = 7.17, s.e. = 0.142,  $t(389) = -4.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.21$ , equal variances not assumed).

To try and understand this result better two further analyses were performed. Firstly the difference across nations between other variables in the dataset was examined. This revealed a consistent pattern of US respondents scoring more highly than UK ones. This pattern was repeated across all self-report subjective variables.

The second analysis examined the response to the question 'How would you rate your morale compared to your competitors?' (responses on a Much worse, Worse, The same as others, Better, Much better scale). 47% of the UK respondents rated their morale as better or much better than their competitors but 66% of US respondents did so.

These two analyses suggest either that US respondents had higher morale or that other factors were elevated through common method bias. The other alternative is that US respondents are more upbeat when answering surveys than their UK counterparts. One might predict that half

the population would believe their organisation's morale to be better than their competitors and half worse. There is some bias in this perception but the US response to this question suggests a more optimistic interpretation than the UK one.

Another trans-national comparison was possible between the UK and Germany using the FPW dataset (see Table 14). Comparing the scores for the five point scaled SIM of morale German professionals had significantly higher morale (mean = 3.82, s.e. = 0.0318) than the British respondents (mean = 3.35, s.e. = 0.0366,  $t(1846) = -9.73$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.22$ , equal variances not assumed). Again this clearly shows that the UK scores are lower than the German ones.

The precise reasons for difference is not clear and as the remit of this thesis is to explore morale rather than intercultural issues the difference across nations is noted and raises a caveat in undertaking international research on morale. The data from these two samples causes us to reject Hypothesis 5 that morale does not differ in different countries.

### **The impact of social factors on morale**

Quantitative data does not lend itself readily to the examination of social interaction. The tools of correlation and regression work well in populations but not for understanding the minutiae of interpersonal interaction. What can be examined, however, is how individuals perceive the morale of others relative to themselves. Using SIMs this can be examined by simply asking individuals to rate their own morale and also to rate that of others. By comparing the two an appreciation of whether individuals perceive their morale as the same as others can be gained.

Respondents were asked to rate their morale on a scale of 1-10 (as above) and also to rate the morale of their department on the same scale. The data were subjected to a paired t-test to compare the two scales. This analysis was carried out over a number of survey samples with remarkably stable results which can be seen in Table 23.

**Table 23 – Comparison of mean values for SIMs of individual and departmental morale**

		Individual morale		Departmental morale						
Sample	n	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean difference	df	t	sig. (2 tailed)	effect size ( $r$ )
Qualitative phase survey	198	7.01	0.149	6.34	0.149	-0.66	197	-5.88	<0.01	0.39
Development survey	184	5.96	0.169	5.42	0.171	-0.54	183	-4.77	<0.01	0.33
GCC sample	627	7.16	0.081	6.90	0.084	-0.26	626	-3.63	<0.01	0.14
Nokia	406	7.78	0.092	7.192	0.105	-0.58	405	-6.59	<0.01	0.31
		Individual morale		Morale of profession						
Sample	n	mean	s.e.	mean	s.e.	mean difference	df	t	sig. (2 tailed)	effect size ( $r$ )
FPW dataset	1674	3.557	0.026	2.829	0.021	0.729	1673	30.45	<0.01	0.60

A similar result is observed using FPW dataset (Lane et al., 2006). This asked individuals how they would describe their 'morale as a professional' and the morale of '[Their profession] in general', with the answers being rated on a five point scale from very low to very high as previously described. The results are shown in the lower portion of Table 23.

Individuals perceive their morale as higher than that of others. This result is stable across surveys and populations. It is also interesting to note that distance appears to play a role. In the Nokia sample individuals were asked to rate their morale, their departmental morale and their company's morale. Individuals rated their own morale > departmental morale > company morale. The results for each group were significantly different  $F(2,1215) = 13.60, p < 0.5, \omega = 0.14$ . Planned contrasts showed that departmental and individual morale were significantly different from company morale  $t(675) = 4.46, p < 0.05$  (one tailed)  $r = 0.16$  and that individual morale was significantly different from departmental morale, as before  $t(801) = 2.60, p < 0.05$  (one tailed)  $r = 0.09$ .

These results were for the population on average. When those scoring in the bottom quartile for personal morale rating were examined in the GCC sample the difference was reversed and departmental morale (mean = 5.08, s.e. = 0.146) was viewed as being higher than individual morale (mean = 4.54, s.e. = 0.116,  $t(177) = 4.09, p < 0.001, r = 0.29$ ). This effect was only seen in the GCC sample. In the others departmental morale did not rise above individual morale but

rather the difference between the two became insignificant. The implications of these findings will be discussed in the discussion section. Overall individuals perceive their own morale as being different from other peoples and so Hypothesis 6 is rejected.

### How morale differs across organisations

The development of morale measurement instruments allows morale to be compared across organisations. This is, after all, the point of measurement. The SIM for individual morale was administered to all the interviewees in the qualitative phase of the research at the end of each interview.

**Figure 11 – Variation of SIM for individual morale by organisation in the qualitative phase of research**

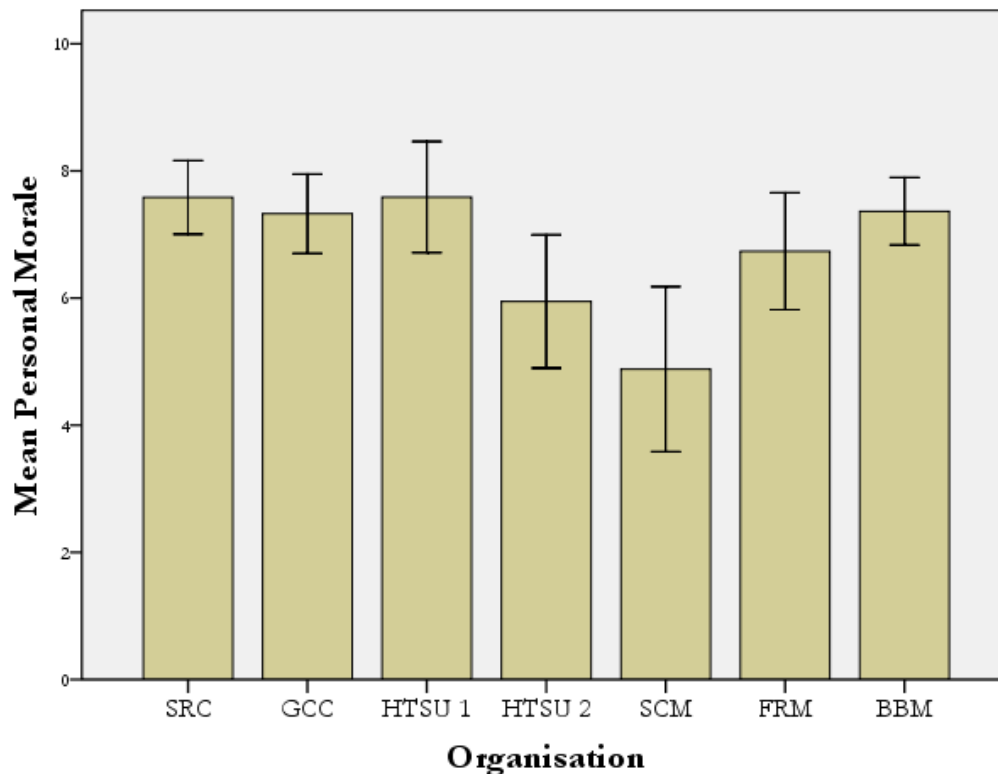


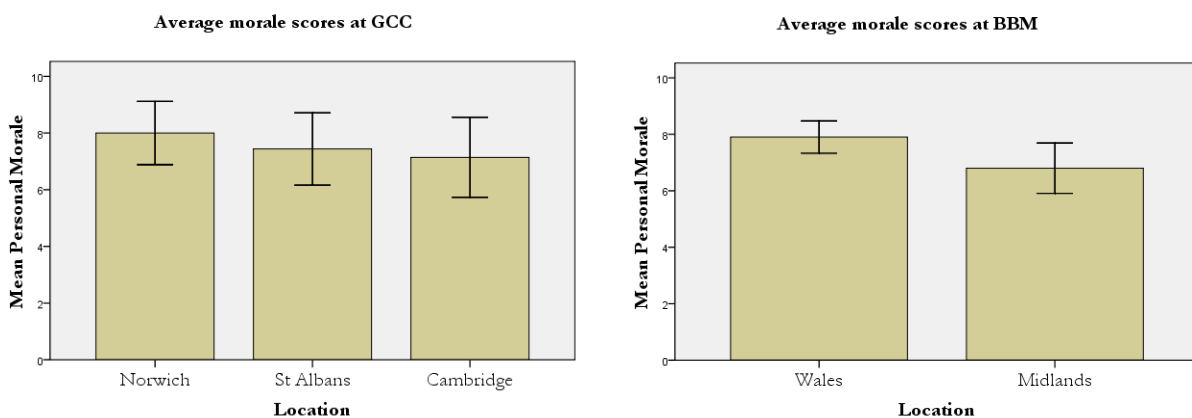
Figure 11 shows that there is variation on the basis of the SIM between organisations. In some cases (SCM) this is quite substantial. These results accord with the subjective experience of the qualitative phase. SCM was notable for its low morale as a result of a downturn in the chip industry. Similarly HTSU 2 had low morale as a result of uncertainty about the radio product. By contrast at HTSU 1 the interviewees had high morale as a result of the prospect of a

successful product launch. Parts of BBM had high morale as they had turned around a failing business. Appendix 1 contains thumbnail sketches of each organisation.

Breaking down these results at an intra-firm level (where possible) we see significant variation between sites. For GCC the three sites sampled were chosen *ex ante* by the HR director because they represented high, medium and low morale. Figure 12 shows the results of the morale SIM across the three stores (Stores 1, 2 and 3) which mapped onto her prediction (although the difference is not statistically significant). A similar picture was seen at BBM which had two sites. The manufacturing site in Wales was believed to have good morale as a result of having turned its performance around and the main site in the Midlands to have lower morale as a result of problems with SAP. Again these evaluations were made before any measurement took place. Figure 12 shows the results for BBM with the difference being significant ( $t(29) = 2.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $r = 0.331$ ).

These data and their correspondence with the perceived level of morale by informed observers increase confidence that the SIM is measuring what it purports to measure and also that it is useful in discriminating between morale levels.

**Figure 12 – Variation in morale score at GCC and BBM by site.**



### Dimensions of morale

The qualitative phase of this research suggested that there were three principal dimensions to morale and that these were affective, future/goal and interpersonal. In order to test this quantitatively a survey was undertaken.

The survey was administered to the US sample described in the quantitative methods section contained items designed to measure these three constructs. An exhaustive search of the literature failed to find any items which represented either the affective or future/goal dimensions. The interpersonal interaction dimension could be measured using a five item cohesion measure (DeCotiis & Koys, 1980).

The scales were subjected to CFA and fitted the data reasonably well and within the boundaries outlined by Hair et al (2006). The results of the analysis can be seen in Table 24.

**Table 24 – Scales measuring the dimensions of morale (US Sample)**

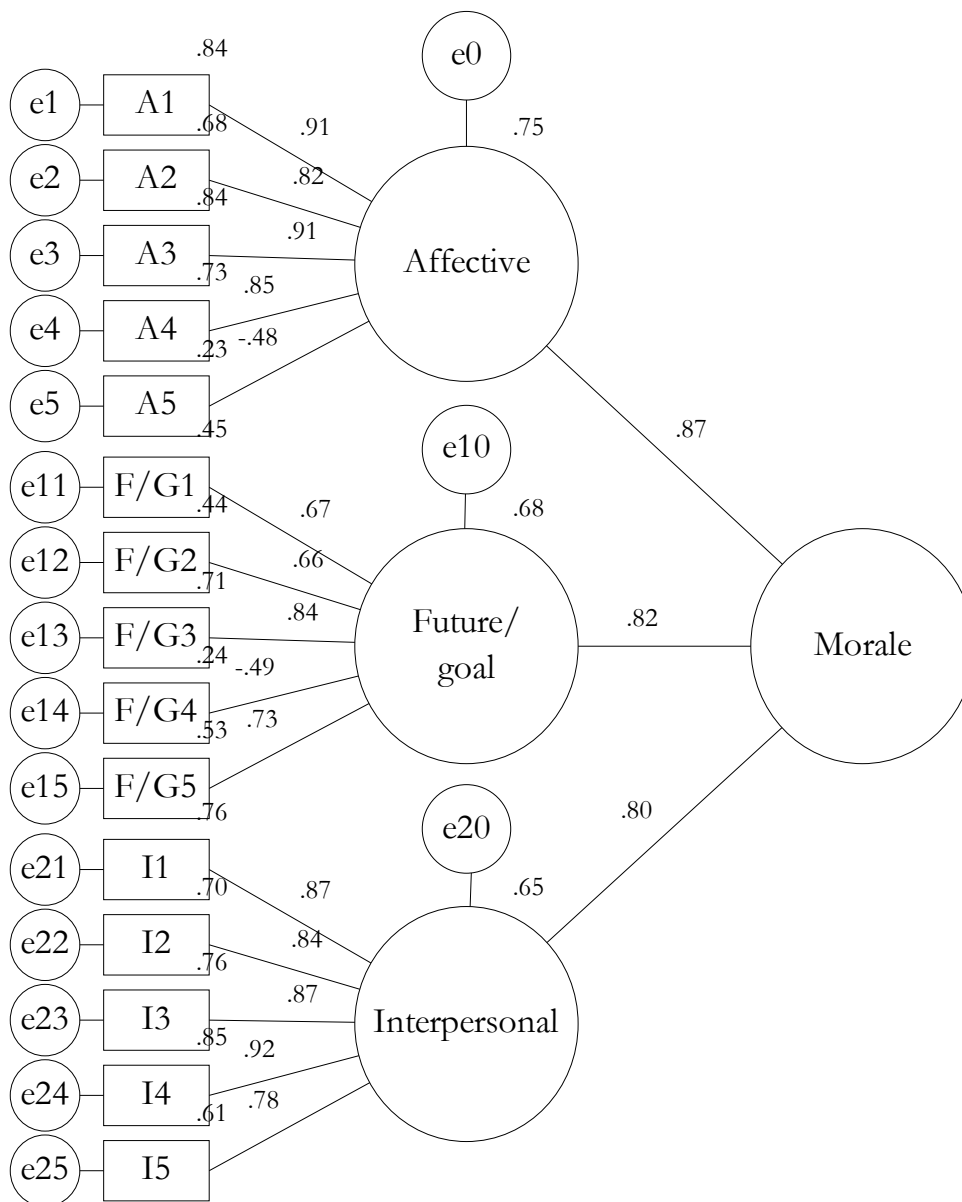
Scale	Affective	Future/Goal	Interpersonal
Items	A1. I am given positive feedback at work	F/G1. I believe that what I am doing is useful	I1. At my organization people pitch in to help each other out
	A2. I am rewarded sufficiently for my contribution at work	F/G2. I understand the goals and objectives of my job	I2. At my organization people tend to get along with each other
	A3. I am appreciated at work	F/G3. I believe that I am making progress towards my goals	I3. At my organization people take a personal interest in one another
	A4. I am treated fairly at work	F/G4. I think the future looks bleak	I4. There is a lot of 'team spirit' among people at my organization
	A5. I am inappropriately blamed for things at work	F/G5. Overall I am closer to my goals than I was in the past	I5. I feel like I have a lot in common with the people at my organization that I know
$\chi^2$	3.722	6.391	8.128
df	3	4	4
$p(\chi^2)$	0.289	0.172	0.087
$\chi^2/df$	1.252	1.589	2.032
RMSEA	0.025	0.039	0.051
NFI	0.997	0.99	0.995
TLI	0.998	0.991	0.994
CFI	0.999	0.996	0.997
SRMR	0.0091	0.021	0.011
$\alpha$	0.89	0.80	0.93

An EFA was performed on the three scales using Principal Axis Factoring and Varimax rotation. All three factors separated cleanly suggesting that they were tapping into different constructs. A



model was then constructed using AMOS 16.0 (Arbuckle, 2008) which used the three scales to build a latent morale variable. Figure 13 shows the model as implemented in AMOS along with standardised regression weights. The indicator variables (A1, A2...F/G1, F/G2...I1, I2...etc) are outlined in Table 24 above.

**Figure 13 – Morale modelled as a latent construct from its three dimensions**



The model fitted well.  $\chi^2 = 251.628$ ,  $df = 87$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). CMIN/df = 2.892, RMSEA = 0.069, NFI = 0.943, TLI = 0.954 and CFI = 0.962, SRMR = 0.0430. The standardised regression weights suggest that the latent variable labelled morale is strongly influenced by the three other variables, affective, future/goal and

interpersonal. The three dimensions intercorrelated (Table 25) but not at excessive levels (Kline, 2005).

**Table 25 – Intercorrelation of the three dimensions of morale**

	Affective	Future/goal	Interpersonal	Morale
Affective	1			
Future/goal	0.714	1		
Interpersonal	0.697	0.663	1	
Morale	0.866	0.823	0.805	1

The question now is whether the latent variable is, in fact, measuring morale. In order to appraise this the latent variable was correlated with the MIMs for morale. The latent variable correlated well with the morale scales. Figure 14 shows this using the morale MIM.

The three dimensional model proposed fits the data well and the dimensions appear to reflect morale well. The next question is whether some other factor could account for this finding. Given that morale correlates with positive affective states it is important to address whether we are simply measuring positive affect. A similar correlation exercise was undertaken as for the morale MIMs using a measure of positive affect from Iverson et al (1998). This consists of three items ('For me life is a great adventure', 'I live a very interesting life', 'I usually find ways to liven up my day') with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. This correlated with the latent variable labelled morale ( $r = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) but markedly less strongly than the MIM which correlates much more strongly ( $r = 0.85$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) than PA. This fits in with the previous finding that morale correlates with positive affect but differs from it.

The next issue is whether there need to be three dimensions or whether they are unidimensional antecedents. Kacmar and colleagues examined issues of dimensionality in a number of measures of organisational commitment (Kacmar et al., 1999). They used a similar technique to that employed in the pairwise comparison of loading all the dimensions on a single factor (Figure 15) and comparing the fit of this model with that of the multi-dimensional one. This single factor model was a substantially worse fit ( $\chi^2 610$ ,  $df = 90$ ) than the three factor one. A  $\chi^2$  difference test confirmed that the difference was highly significant ( $\chi^2_{diff}(3) = 358.4$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) suggesting that the three antecedents of morale were a more appropriate model.

Figure 14 – Correlation between latent variable and MIM of morale

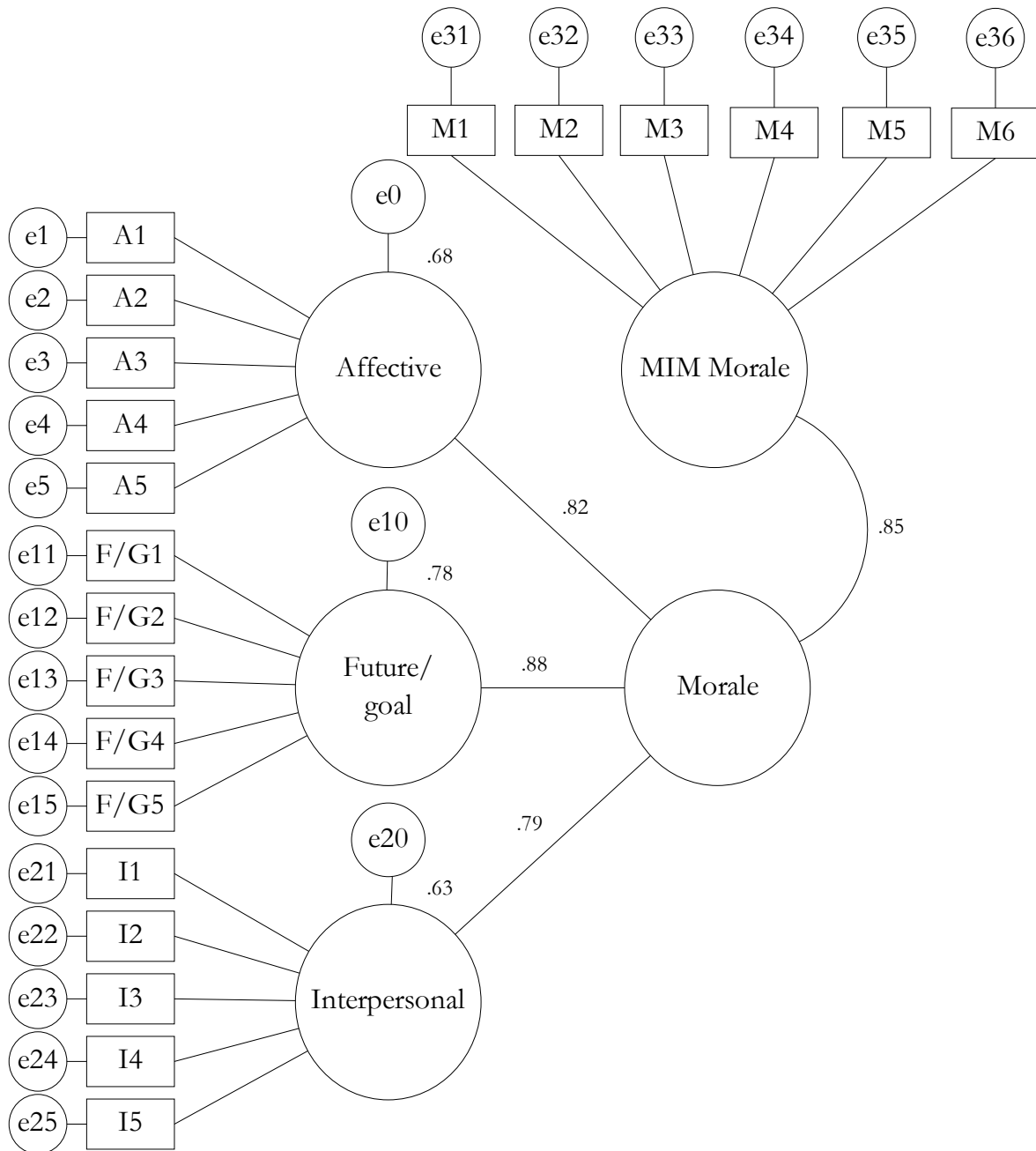
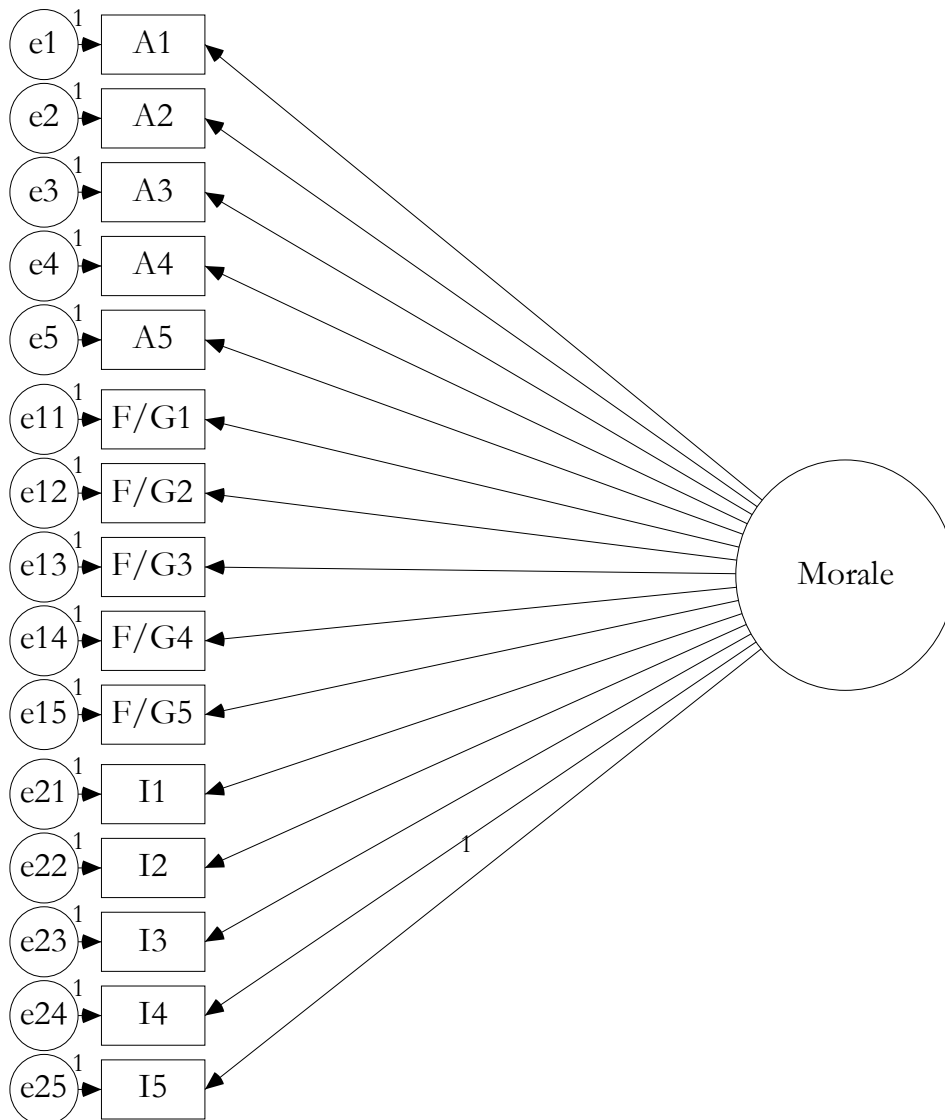


Figure 15 – Loading of all 15 items on a single factor

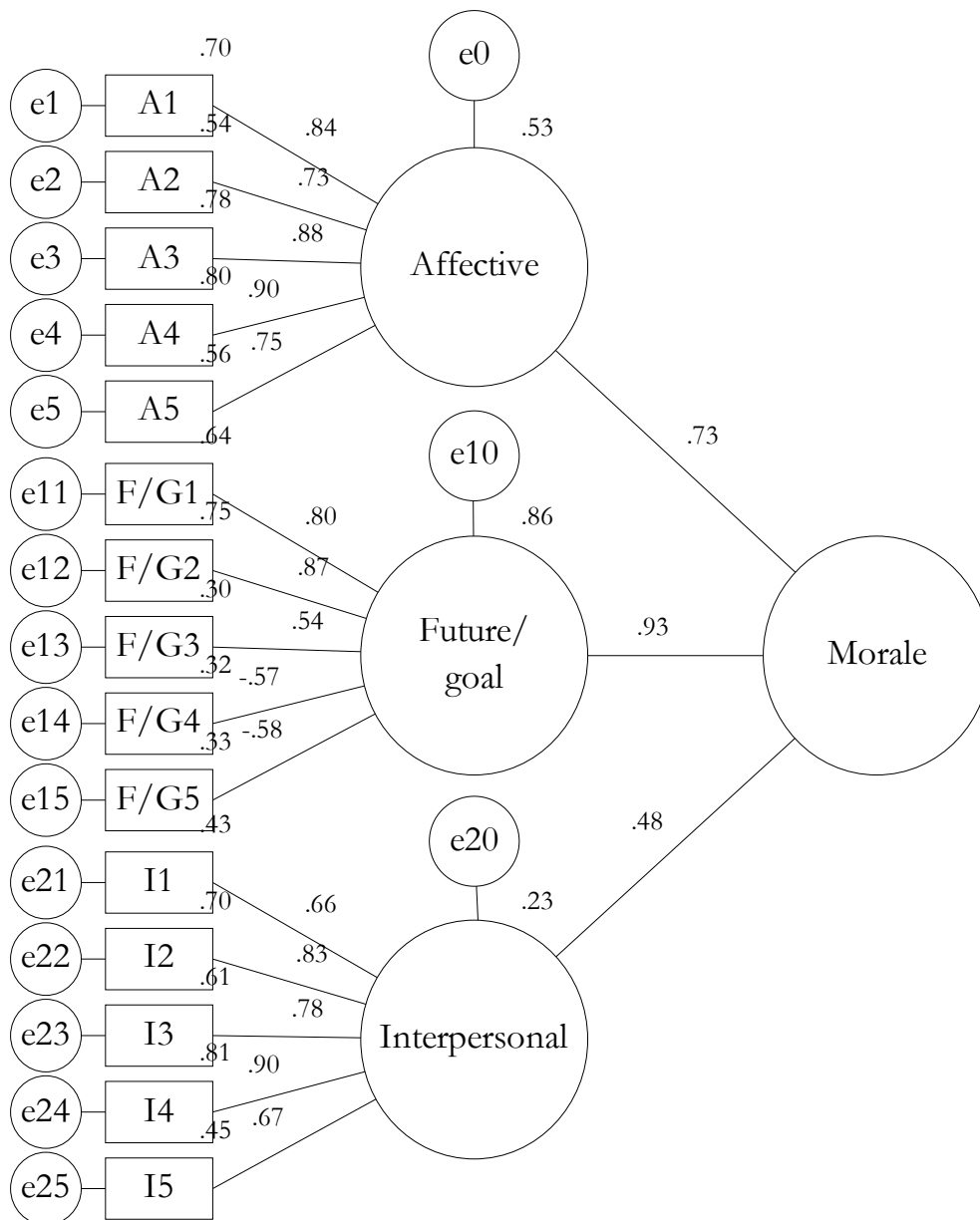


This result was replicated using the pooled sample (PS). Slightly different measures of the affective and future/goal dimensions were used although these correlated strongly (affective  $r = 0.96$ ,  $p < 0.01$ , future/goal  $r = 0.91$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) with the measures in the US sample outlined above. Table 26 shows the fit statistics for these scales and Figure 16 the model.

**Table 26 – Scales measuring the dimensions of morale (Pooled Sample)**

Scale	Affective	Future/goal	Interpersonal
Items	A1. I am recognised sufficiently for my contribution at work	F/G1. I believe that I am making progress towards my goals	I1. At my organization people pitch in to help each other out.
	A2. I am rewarded sufficiently for my contribution at work	F/G2. I am optimistic about the future	I2. At my organization people tend to get along with each other.
	A3. I am appreciated at work	F/G3. I understand the goals and objectives of my job	I3. At my organization people take a personal interest in one another.
	A4. I am given positive feedback at work	F/G4. I am uncertain about the future	I4. 'There is a lot of 'team spirit' among people at my organization
	A5. I am treated fairly at work	F/G5. I think the future looks bleak	I5. I feel like I have a lot in common with the people at my organization that I know.
$\chi^2$	8.105	3.1	10.359
df	5	3	3
$p(\chi^2)$	0.151	0.376	0.066
$\chi^2/df$	1.621	1.033	2.072
RMSEA	0.063	0.015	0.083
NFI	0.985	0.988	0.975
TLI	0.988	0.999	0.974
CFI	0.994	1.000	0.987
SRMR	0.02	0.026	0.034
$\alpha$	0.91	0.79	0.88

**Figure 16 – Morale modelled as a latent construct from its three dimensions (Pooled Sample)**



The model fitted rather less well than for the US sample but fit was still acceptable ( $\chi^2 = 158.385$ ,  $df = 87$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).  $CMIN/df = 1.821$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.073$ ,  $NFI = 0.889$ ,  $TLI = 0.935$  and  $CFI = 0.946$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0556$ ). The results are broadly similar although the weighting for the interpersonal dimension measured by the cohesion measure has fallen quite substantially. It is difficult to say what the reason for this is, whether it is important or an idiosyncrasy of the sample. Overall, however, the results are broadly similar to those of the US survey and add support to the idea that morale has three dimensions. This

then leads us to not reject Hypothesis 7 that morale has three dimensions; affective, future/goal and interpersonal.

### **Summary**

The quantitative results exploring morale suggest that demographic factors are relatively unimportant in morale. Of greater significance are personality factors which appear moderately correlated with SIMs of morale.

There is clearly evidence of trans-national variation in the data as there is for a difference in perception by individuals of their own morale and then that of those around them. This will be addressed in the discussions section.

The SIMs of morale were evaluated using the qualitative research sample. The data suggest that SIMs can differentiate between levels of morale at both an organisational and divisional level. This suggests that the SIMs have some face validity.

Finally the three dimension structure of morale outlined in the qualitative phase of the research was tested using a survey approach. The data provide strong support for this three factor structure. Having examined morale itself I shall now turn to its antecedents.

### **Antecedents of morale**

#### **At an individual level**

The difficulty of clearly delineating a dimension from an antecedent has already been alluded to. Attempting to model the two throws this into much starker relief. At what point does an antecedent become a dimension and at what point does a dimension become a concept? The qualitative phase of this research identified three dimensions of morale and found that the antecedents impacted on these dimensions. The quantitative research has found strong support for this three dimensional structure.

Quantitative appraisal of the antecedents involves examining the individual items and their influence on morale. By looking at the items in the affective, future/goal and interpersonal scales outlined in Table 24 and Table 26 we get some idea of the sorts of factors which influence morale. The fact that the three dimensional model fits the data and is replicable gives confidence that these factors are significant and if they can be influenced the morale can.

Taking the affective dimension, for example, the item 'I am appreciated at work' suggests that praise and appreciation will improve morale. Similarly the item 'I believe that I am making

progress towards my goals' suggests that if a sense of progress towards goals can be induced that morale will improve. The quantitative data, therefore, provides support for the findings of the qualitative phase of the research.

### At a macro level

At a macro level some data can be gained from a mail survey of manufacturing site managers that was conducted in 1994 by the Australian Manufacturing Council (AMC) in conjunction with the Australian Bureau of Statistics, and the Manufacturing Advisory Group (MAG) New Zealand. The respondents were from a stratified random sample of manufacturing sites employing more than 20 people in Australia ( $n = 3000$ ) and New Zealand ( $n = 1000$ ). In all 1289 responses were achieved which represented a 32% and 38% response rate respectively<sup>25</sup>. The survey was primarily concerned with quality practices in manufacturing but also asked a SIM of plant morale 'Please indicate your site's current performance level for: Employee morale' which was scored on a five point scale from very low to very high.

The survey asked a wide variety of questions but of principal interest to us are those concerned with previous organisational performance. The respondents were asked about sales, export sales and employee numbers over the preceding three years. This allowed the impact of these on organisational morale to be assessed. Sales and export growth had no effect on morale levels. Growth in employee numbers was related to morale but the effect size was small only accounting for 1.2% of the variance in morale ( $p = 0.009$ ). This suggests that in this sample good financial performance and employee numbers growth had little impact on morale levels at these plants.

### The consequences of morale

The qualitative research suggests that morale has a significant effect on performance. Interviewees suggested that they would work harder, do a better job and communicate with one another more. The link between morale and performance is one which is generally taken as a given. High morale leads to high performance. This link was examined in a number of ways.

### The relationship of morale to appraisal data

The first was using the mobile phone infrastructure portion of the development survey. Prior to the restructuring in this organisation 98 responses were obtained. The HR department was able to provide appraisal data for 73 of these respondents (74%). The appraisal system had two

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<sup>25</sup> Only one survey was sent to each site and so this survey represents an individual's view of the prevailing situation at each site



different sorts of measures. One was a numerical total appraisal score which could be decomposed into performance, learning and competency scores. The other was a categorical scale ranging from Key Contributor, Quality Plus Contributor, Quality Contributor, Contribution Below Expectations, Contribution Needs Improvement and Unsatisfactory Contributor. These categorical variables were ranked to facilitate analysis.

Comparison of the three measures of morale previous elaborated (morale MIM, SDS MIM and SIM for individual morale) revealed no correlation between morale level and any of the appraisal measures.

In addition to the most recent results there were also results available for previous years. Again there was no correlation between appraisal and morale suggesting that appraisal performance does not predict morale.

### **The relationship of morale to productivity data**

The second examination of the link between morale and performance comes from the AMC data. This measured morale as described above and also a subjective rating of productivity on a five point scale (decreasing, static, moderate improvement, consistently improving, and major and significant gains), customer satisfaction which rated the degree to which the respondent believed that they met customer expectations, and cashflow (negative, neutral, marginally positive, positive, extremely positive). These comparators were selected as they fit in with the qualitative phase of results which suggested that individuals worked harder in high morale states and were more likely to take time over customers.

There were also some more objective ratings of defects as a percentage of production volume, warranty claims (as % total sales), cost of quality (rework, scrap etc. as % total sales) and percentage on time delivery. Again the selection of these variables was informed by the qualitative phase where respondents suggested that they were more likely to do a better quality job when they had high morale – and conversely a lower quality one in low morale.

The various measures were compared using Pearson's product moment correlation and the results are presented in Table 27.

**Table 27 – Correlations of employee morale with other measures within the AMC data**

	Employee morale	Productivity	Customer satisfaction	Cash-flow	Defect rates	Warranty costs	Cost of quality	% in full on time
Employee morale	1							
Productivity	.416**	1						
Customer satisfaction	.350**	.294**	1					
Cashflow	.247**	.288**	.171**	1				
Defect rates	.208**	.115**	.258**	0.033	1			
Warranty costs	.104**	.070**	.200**	.089**	.373**	1		
Cost of quality	.192**	.101**	.179**	.073**	.472**	.275**	1	
% in full on time	.205**	.184**	.410**	.173**	.208**	.197**	.182**	1

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

These results suggest a strong correlation between productivity and employee morale and a slightly weaker one for customer satisfaction and cashflow. This suggests a linkage between productivity and morale although as this was a cross sectional survey and correlational it tells us nothing about causality. There is also the possibility of common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003a) whereby factors such as the halo-effect inflate all estimations causing spurious correlations. Mood is cited as a particularly likely cause of this and as we are dealing with morale the possibility is that the correlation is due to CMB.

In order to appraise the impact of CMB I adopted Lindell's (2000; 2001) approach of using an unrelated variable as a marker for CMB. By correlating this with the morale measure an idea of the level of CMB can be gained. In this case I chose as a marker variable the statement 'Environmental ("green") protection issues are proactively managed at this site' as this is unrelated to morale. This correlated with the morale measure ( $r = 0.121$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) with the productivity measure ( $r = 0.159$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), customer satisfaction ( $r = 0.070$ ,  $p = 0.015$ ) and cash flow ( $r = 0.149$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) suggesting some inflation. Taking this into account morale still seems to be positively correlated with productivity and customer satisfaction. The result for cash flow is rather more questionable.

For the more objective measures morale correlates with defect rates, warranty costs, cost of quality and % on time delivery. These correlations are rather less but as the criteria are more objective i.e. measurable it seems less likely that they are subject to CMB. Repeating Lindell's procedure finds no correlation between the reported variables and the marker variable with the exception of % on time delivery ( $r = 0.088$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that these measures are less affected by CMB. As a result the correlation of morale with defect rates, warranty costs, cost of quality and % on time delivery is likely to be a real one. Although the correlations are at a lower level here within the context of a manufacturing operation the impact of these small effects could be significant. Again the problem of causality does not mean that we cannot tell whether high morale causes improved quality or improved quality raises morale.

### The relationship to turnover intention

A number of respondents during the qualitative phase, such as the cleaner at the University Library, mentioned how low morale had encouraged them to leave a particular organisation. Turnover intention (TI) has been used within the educational morale literature (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002) and represents one of the strongest indicators of actual intention to leave (Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999). The surveys administered to the US sample and pooled samples incorporated a measure of turnover. This consisted of three items ('I have my own way, I will be working for my current company one year from now', 'I frequently think of quitting my job', 'I am planning to search for a new job during the next 12 months') from Colarelli (1984). Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.78 in the US sample and 0.85 in the pooled sample.

Figure 17 shows the model for the pooled sample. The model fitted the data moderately well ( $\chi^2 = 233.353$ ,  $df = 131$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).  $CMIN/df = 1.718$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.071$ ,  $NFI = 0.874$ ,  $TLI = 0.929$  and  $CFI = 0.940$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0645^{26}$ ). What is clearly noticeable is the strong weighting between morale and turnover intention ( $r = -0.79$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This finding accords with the qualitative data and was replicated in the US sample which also found that morale was related to turnover intention ( $r = -0.74$ ,  $p < 0.001$ )<sup>27</sup>.

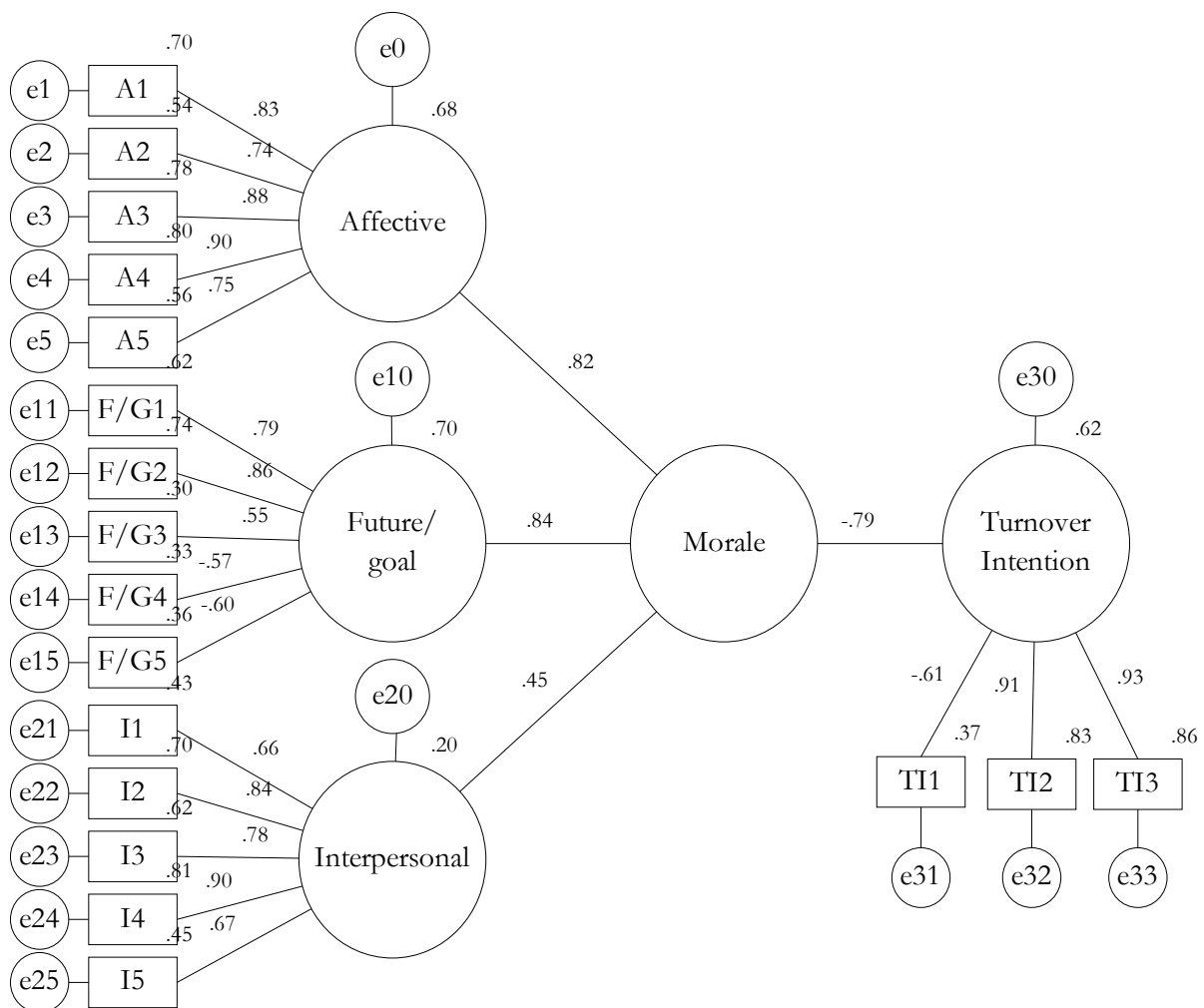
As a cross check to examine whether this was simply as a result of PA influencing turnover intention (i.e. that TI could be simply explained by PA) a correlation between the TI measure

<sup>26</sup> Garson (2009) suggests that an SRMR of  $< 0.8$  indicates adequate fit as does an RMSEA of  $< 0.8$ . These data suggest that the model fits modestly.

<sup>27</sup> This fitted somewhat better although it was necessary to correlate two indicator variables ( $\chi^2 = 355.719$ ,  $df = 128$  with the  $\chi^2$  value being significant ( $p < 0.01$ ).  $CMIN/df = 2.779$ ,  $RMSEA = 0.067$ ,  $NFI = 0.938$ ,  $TLI = 0.951$  and  $CFI = 0.959$ ,  $SRMR = 0.0492$ )

and PA was conducted for both samples. In each case the correlation between PA and TI was relatively small compared to that between morale and TI. For the pooled sample it was both negligible and non-significant ( $r = -0.95, p = 0.238$ ) and for the US sample significant but relatively small ( $r = -0.254, p < 0.001$ ). This suggests that the results for TI illustrated in Figure 17 were not simply as a result of PA determining TI.

**Figure 17 – Model demonstrating relationship between morale dimensions and turnover intention**



Overall the measurable consequences of morale suggest that it is related to productivity and customer satisfaction as well as intention to leave. There doesn't appear to be any relationship with the appraisal data in the small sample examined. This means that Hypothesis 8, that morale is correlated with performance can be partially rejected as the appraisal data stands in the way of non-rejection.

## Summary

Overall the quantitative phase of this research proposed a number of hypotheses which it has proceeded to test. Table 28 summarises these hypotheses and the outcomes.

**Table 28 – Summary of hypotheses and outcomes**

Hypothesis number	Hypothesis	Status	Finding
1a	Morale is not the same as satisfaction	Not rejected	Morale and satisfaction differ
1b	Morale is not the same as motivation	Not rejected	Morale and motivation differ
1c	Morale is not the same as organisational commitment	Not rejected	Morale and organisational commitment differ
1d	Morale is not the same as happiness	Not rejected	Morale and happiness differ
2a	Morale is negatively correlated with age	Rejected	Age has little effect on morale
2b	Men have higher morale than women	Rejected	There is no difference in morale between men and women
2c	Organisational tenure is not correlated with morale	Not rejected	No correlation between tenure and morale
3a	Morale is negatively correlated with neuroticism	Not rejected	Morale is negatively correlated with neuroticism
3b	Morale is positively correlated with extraversion	Not rejected	Morale is positively correlated with extraversion
3c	Morale is unrelated to openness to experience	Not rejected	Morale does not correlate with openness to experience
3d	Morale is positively correlated with agreeableness	Not rejected	Morale is positively correlated with agreeableness
3e	Morale is positively correlated with conscientiousness	Not rejected	Morale is positively correlated with conscientiousness
4a	Morale is positively correlated with positive affect	Not rejected	Morale is positively correlated with positive affect
4b	Morale is negatively correlated with negative affect	Not rejected	Morale is negatively correlated with negative affect
5	Morale does not differ by nation	Rejected	Morale differs by nation (UK lower than USA and Germany)
6	Individuals perceive their own morale as being the same as others	Rejected	Individuals generally view others' morale as lower than their own
7	Morale is a function of affective, future/goal and interpersonal antecedents	Not rejected	Morale has three dimensions: affective, future/goal and interpersonal
8	Morale is correlated with performance	Partially rejected	Positive correlation with productivity, negative with turnover intention and no relationship to appraisal score

The quantitative approach has permitted the examination of some issues which are hard to evaluate using purely qualitative means. It has also provided strong support for the dimensional structure of morale outlined in the qualitative research.

As this thesis is built on a mixed methods approach I shall now integrate the qualitative and quantitative phases of research.

## Chapter 9: Integration and discussion of results

This thesis has adopted mixed methods combining qualitative interpretivist techniques with quantitative nomothetic ones. In the previous chapters I have discussed the findings of each approach and now will integrate the two in order to build an overall picture of morale, establish linkages to the existing literature. Following this I will critique the research and discuss both its academic and practical implications.

This section will be structured by the now familiar four domain format which seeks to describe what morale is, what it is not, its antecedents and its consequences. This will be supplemented by a section discussing the feedback loops between these domains.

### What morale is not

This thesis is an attempt to revivify the investigation of morale. One of the key objections to this is the idea that morale is the same as other concepts. This then is used as a reason to not research the topic as the case is believed to be closed. In general researchers do not spend a great deal of time establishing how concepts differ (Robbins & Judge, 2009). This thesis has attempted to address this by differentiating morale from other concepts and showing that it is a topic in and of itself. The results of the two phases of research suggest that morale is wholly different from satisfaction and happiness and, with the exception of one of the SIM samples, different from motivation.

Qualitatively the majority of respondents believed that morale differed from these other concepts. Those which did not tended to cite the covariation of morale with the other concept as evidence of similarity. This was echoed with the quantitative research which suggested that morale was significantly different to other concepts in most cases but that they correlated at a reasonable level too.

Morale was viewed as differing from motivation on the basis of affective valence. Individuals described being unhappy but highly motivated but they did not describe being unhappy and having high morale. Motivation also does not appear to have an interpersonal dimension (see p 100). Morale can be discriminated from satisfaction as morale is future related whereas satisfaction is experienced *ex post* (see p 101). It similarly does not appear to have an interpersonal dimension. Morale can be distinguished from happiness as this too lacks either interpersonal or future/goal dimensions (see p 104). Commitment and morale differ as commitment, which can have an affective component, lacks a future/goal dimensions.

**Figure 18 – Differences between morale dimensions and other concepts**

	Affective	Future/goal	Interpersonal
Morale			
Motivation			
Satisfaction			
Happiness			
Commitment			

Differentiating concepts on the basis of scale scores offers a complement to this qualitative research. The SIMs showed that morale was significantly different from satisfaction and happiness and in most cases from motivation. With the MIMs the pairwise comparison approach has been used by a number of authors to differentiate concepts (Bagozzi & Phillips, 1982; Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005; Kacmar et al., 1999). Again this provides support for the qualitative data, suggesting that morale differs from these other concepts. The fact that various approaches produce a similar result suggests that triangulation has been successful and that morale is different to other factors.

The idea of morale as a meta-factor (Organ, 1997; Vandenberg et al., 1999) arises from an attempt to label the unexplained variance in levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and fairness. This approach is seductive but falls into the common error in the literature of finding some factor, be it from a factor analysis or meta-analysis, and labelling it morale. This might work with a novel construct where you can pick a label and attach it to one of these factors as with organisational citizenship behaviour, for example. It is less appropriate with a factor such as morale as this term already has currency to label a particular set of attributes. If the meta-factor and these attributes do not map onto one another and yet are labelled as the same thing then confusion results. There is no empirical evidence in either of the two studies which propose morale as a meta-factor to link this latent meta-factor to people's perceptions of morale and so it is impossible to say whether morale is a meta-factor or not.

What is clear is that in either eliding morale with other concepts or proposing it as a meta-concept researchers are potentially doing both themselves and the consumers of their research a disservice. This imprecision damages both the quality of the research itself and the implementation of its findings by confusing the consumers of the research.



In all the findings of this research suggest that morale is different to other concepts and that care must be taken when specifying concepts as casual usage of terminology will lead to confusion.

### **What morale is**

Having established that morale is an entity in its own right we now turn to the issue of morale itself. The combination of qualitative and quantitative work here gave information on differing aspects of the morale concept. The quantitative research was useful for examining well defined general principles such as whether morale varied by gender and in gaining an understanding of its dimensions. It was relatively little use, however, in understanding its texture, the mechanisms by which it is generated or the nature of interpersonal interactions. The qualitative results furnished much of this understanding of detailed interaction but were less useful in understanding fine grained variance across groups.

The two approaches complemented one another in this case and helped to produce a richer understanding of morale. In this section I will integrate the two approaches to try and produce this overall picture.

### **Understanding the underlying**

The quantitative work helped establish a bedrock for morale by ruling out a number of demographic factors which may affect its interpretation. The finding that morale does not vary by gender and that age and organisational tenure have very little impact suggests that these factors can be ruled out as interfering with the interpretation of the qualitative data. They should also give confidence to students conducting future research they do not have to control for these variables. The finding that morale differs between nations suggests that researchers ought to be circumspect when conducting cross-national morale work. A discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis but the comparison was made to help further understand some of the underpinnings of morale.

What is more interesting is the impact of psychometric factors on morale. The data suggest that morale is positively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and positive affect (PA), and negatively correlated with neuroticism and negative affect (NA). This effect was seen in the qualitative results where individuals scoring highly on positive measures, particularly extraversion or PA used different words to describe high morale than those with low scores, a similar effect was noticed for negative characteristic such as neuroticism and NA.

These different words did not seem to affect the rest of the coding structure very much. The same dimensions of morale were seen irrespective of how the individual scored on personality

factors. There are a number of possible explanations for this. One is that the individual's personality affects the terms they use to describe morale and their level of morale but not the dimensions and factors involved. This argument has some merit as it squares the personality effects with the observation that the structure of morale differs little between individuals.

Another possibility is that the aggregation of codes which occurs during the grounded theory approach means that any distinctions are blurred away. This is also possible given that over 11 500 items were coded. In aggregating these into three dimensions it is likely that much detail will be lost, obliterating the influence of personality variables.

Finally it may be that there is an interaction effect between the words used to describe morale and the words used in the psychometric instruments. Although humans are capable of expressing many shades of meaning there are only so many words which can be used to describe affective states and as morale has an affective component and so do some of the words in the psychometric instruments it may be that this shows as a correlation with the words describing morale and morale level but not with the processes involved in the dimensions of morale or its production.

Overall the results of examining the influence of psychometric factors on morale do little to clarify the issue. They suggest that there may be some effect but do not point clearly in any one direction. This limitation of the research will be discussed later on.

### **The dimensions of morale**

The three dimensions of morale outlined in the qualitative results section resulted from the grounded theory process which built them up through theoretical sampling of different populations until saturation was reached. Although grounded theory is not suitable for theory testing (Suddaby, 2006) the fact that the three dimensions were common to the critical incidents of high and low morale, the descriptions of high and low morale and the examples of what would improve or reduce morale suggests that they are relatively robust. The three descriptions also tie back to the literature on morale. McFadzean and McFadzean, for example, define morale as *'the degree to which an employee exhibits a positive or motivated psychological state. It can manifest itself as pride in the organisation and its goals, faith in its leadership, and a sense of shared purpose with, and loyalty to, others in the organisation'* (McFadzean & McFadzean, 2005 p 320). This definition contains affective, future/goal and interpersonal elements.

Quantitative research is eminently suitable for testing theory and the results from two different surveys confirm a) a three dimensional structure, b) that the latent variable is closely correlated with morale and c) that this is not simply the result of PA or mood.

The quantitative models suggest that all three components are significant and significantly correlated with morale. In the pooled sample there is slightly less emphasis on the interpersonal dimension but nonetheless it is significant.

The precise point at which an antecedent becomes a dimension is a blurred one. In measuring the dimensions of morale one inevitably measures antecedents as well. For this reason much of the discussion of each dimension of morale will be conducted in the integration of the antecedents of morale. Where an understanding of the dimensions is useful is that it helps us, again, see how morale differs from other concepts.

The affective dimension helps differentiate morale from motivation. Although motivation has an affective component; as we have seen it is quite an instrumental concept which can have both positive and negative affective states associated with it. At no point did anyone ever describe a situation where high morale had a negative affective state associated with it.

The future/goal dimension of morale is common to various motivational theories as well as some aspects of organisational commitment, culture and climate. Other concepts such as job satisfaction do not have a future orientation component. Similarly the interpersonal relations dimension is also implicit within cohesion, some types of organisational commitment and yet not within job satisfaction or motivation.

Although the three dimensions are broad categories it is the combination of them that differentiates morale from other concepts. Other concepts have elements of morale but only morale appears to have this set of dimensions.

### **The nature of morale**

Morale is undoubtedly characterised as an affective state. The words used to describe morale are typically affective. What sort of affective state is a rather harder question to answer. Most commonly morale is a low intensity feeling state which may not have a clear antecedent. These are the characteristics of a mood (Forgas, 1992). On the other hand morale levels can change quickly as witnessed in the individual whose morale dropped suddenly when the CEO presented the slide showing that his area had fallen behind. This form of *'ongoing, implicit appraisals of situations with respect to positive or negative implications for one's goals and concerns'* (Schwarz & Clore,

2007,) has the characteristics of an emotion. The fact that much morale involves a judgement about events, goals and others likens it to an attitude. Attitudes are defined as ‘*a predisposition to evaluate some object in a favorable or unfavorable manner*’ (Schwarz, 2001, p 905).

The problem here is that morale has elements of all three affective states. At one level this doesn’t matter all these classifications can be brought under the umbrella of ‘*subjective feeling states*’ (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1995; Kelly & Barsade, 2001) as has been done earlier in this thesis. At another level the distinction between emotion, mood and attitude offers some interesting insights into the production of morale, which we will now discuss.

### **The production of morale**

The mechanism by which morale appears to be produced is similar to that outlined by Elfenbein (2007). Afferent stimuli, the availability of which is determined to some extent by prior affective states, are processed consciously and unconsciously in the brain.

The unconscious processing appears to occur when events precipitate a sudden, almost immediate fall in morale. These sudden changes seem to be associated with a drop in morale rather than a rise, possibly as a result of greater sensitivity to negative stimuli (Baumeister et al., 2001). The stimuli for these drops also seem to be affective attacks on the individual’s identity which fits with the idea that individuals attend to negative stimuli as they pose a threat to survival (Nesse, 1990). This does not need to be a conscious process (Pratto & John, 1991) although the necessity of conscious cognitive processing is a source of disagreement within the literature (Damasio, 1995; Lazarus, 1982, 1991; Schachter & Singer, 1962; Zajonc, 1998). These sudden drops, therefore, seem to impinge on the affective dimension have the characteristics of an emotion.

The same event will also receive cognitive processing which will appraise the stimulus drawing upon additional resources such as previous experience. This is where the sensemaking process occurs as the individual integrates the three dimensions of morale in order to answer the question ‘what’s going on here?’ (Weick et al., 2005, p 412). This process produces various affective sensations.

These sensations have several effects. Firstly they add to the individual’s stock of information about a particular issue and the individual can work out what they ‘think’ about a particular issue. This then links to the idea of an attitude (Schwarz, 2001) and the affective categorisation of events (Zajonc, 1998).

The second effect of relevance here is the persistence of the affective state. The feedback loops where the individual's state of morale feeds back into the processing of other events partly explains this. The second portion of this perpetuation is the interchange between the individual and others. The process of contagion between individuals does occur – subject to the other being visible (Carnevale & Isen, 1986) and perceived as part of the same group. These others, who are undergoing their own morale production process, may act as an affective reservoir which reflects back the morale state to the original individual. These two processes, intra- and interpersonal, help perpetuate the existing morale state giving it a quality of a mood.

A more all embracing approach to affective states is taken by Russell (2003; Russell, 2009; 1999) with his concept of core affect. He argues that past experience, language, culture and many other factors which prevent us properly investigating affective states (Russell, 2009). He proposes core affect as a meta-factor which underpins all affective episodes be they emotions, moods or attitudes. Core affect has two axes: pleasure and displeasure is one indicating the valence and activation-deactivation indicating the level of arousal (Russell, 1980, 2003; Russell, 2009).

By adopting core affect as a concept Russell aims to expand the domain of understanding of how people feel. He argues that when *'emotion is treated as the folk concept that it is, without authority to determine scientific boundaries, then more real and important events become more visible and present themselves to be explained...let us be open to a wider range of events. Feeling good that the sun is shining or feeling bad that the weather is turning too warm may not qualify as emotions, but they are frequent events, influence other behaviours, and require explanation.'* (Russell, 2009).

This forms a more suitable cue for integrating morale with the literature. Morale doesn't fit neatly into an emotion, mood or attitude as it has attributes of all three. It has unconscious reflexive elements, particularly for low morale, as well as more conscious appraisals of situations. In short it falls between a number of stools. Russell's principles provide a useful home for morale as high morale appears to be a pleasant activated state and low morale an unpleasant deactivated state. Morale is not core affect but rather maps onto the circumplex outlined by Russell (1980). In using this approach we avoid getting bogged down in debates about where exactly morale belongs and can accept that morale is a real experience for individuals and one which is tractable to description, albeit imperfect, and one which has a real impact on peoples' lives.

### The individual and the group

The expression of morale, its afferent pathway, affects others. This process of emotional contagion explains the linkage between the individual and group aspects of morale. Effectively Person A's afferent morale display affects Person B, whilst at the same time Person B's morale is affecting Person A. This process of co-production is at the heart of the question of whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon which has been a recurrent theme within the literature.

The qualitative research clearly suggests that morale is experienced and produced by the individual but under the influence of others. The influence of these others is not uniform, however, as some individuals have more influence. Individuals with strong characters or who are presenting a particularly plausible and aversive point of view may have stronger influence on the individual's morale. They must also be perceived as belonging to a group relevant to the individual.

The finding that individuals choose their comparison group is an interesting one. This ties in with the social comparison theory literature (Festinger, 1954) which suggests that individuals compare themselves with others. More recent research (Brewer & Weber, 1994) suggests that the choice of other people or other groups has an effect on self assessment. Certainly in the case of the IT worker or the Railtrack company secretary the choice of people outside their organisation as comparators seemed significant. This finding needs further testing but has considerable implications for managers trying to raise morale in low morale groups. By separating from the surroundings – effectively making us different from them – it is then permissible for a group to have a different level of morale and so an island of high morale can be built in a sea of low.

The quantitative research clearly suggests that, in aggregate, individuals rate their morale as higher than that of their department. In the Nokia sample where individuals were asked about their company's morale as well there was a clear and significant hierarchy with individual morale being seen as higher than departmental morale which was, in turn, higher than company morale.

It is difficult to know the precise cause of this but there are two principal candidates. The first and most likely is that social distance mediates the perception of morale. Individuals will have intimate knowledge of how they themselves are feeling. They will have less perfect knowledge of how others are feeling and less still of how the bulk of the organisation is feeling. This model would explain the differences in morale levels reported. The second theory which would explain

the phenomenon relates to co-workers offloading negative emotions. The respondent's co-workers are likely to complain about things in order to offload their negative feelings. In doing so they may feel better but the respondent is left with the perception that the co-worker is unhappy and has lower morale. Accordingly they rate departmental morale lower than their own. This second theory does not account for the company morale result seen in the Nokia example.

There is a difference here between the measurement system which compares, in aggregate, the perception of morale at the individual and group level, and the process by which the individual and group interact. By putting these quantitative findings together with the information on emotional contagion and interesting conundrum is produced. Emotional contagion is clearly a significant factor both in the interviews and the literature (Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 1993; Neumann & Strack, 2000; Verbeke, 1997) yet on average individuals see their morale as higher than that of other people. Obviously this would be true if the rest of the work group had low morale and was signalling low morale to a high morale individual. But what of the low morale individuals? Do they perceive the morale of others as higher? In general they do not with the exception of the GCC sample. If emotional contagion was utterly effective then it might be expected that individuals in the bottom quartile would consistently rate the morale of others as higher as a result of the visual and verbal cues provided. The fact that this does not seem to be the case suggests that perhaps the processes of social distance and emotional contagion need to be disaggregated from one another in an evaluation of the interaction between individuals and groups with respect to their morale.

Some care is needed in determining group morale. In this instance it is an aggregation of individual morale but this may not be an appropriate approach, particularly given the strong influence of certain individuals and the problems of defining the group. These factors may mean that a more sophisticated measurement strategy is needed such as the multi-level analytic ones advocated by Peterson et al. (2008). Qualitatively this research has made some progress in this area but further work, supplemented by quantitative assessment is necessary to help better understand this picture.

Morale appears to be on the basis of the results observed an individual phenomenon which is influenced strongly by the group. The choice of comparison group and the influence of particular individuals within these groups means when coupled with emotional contagion means that the process is complex and continuously evolving. Morale can be understood at an individual level but cannot be disembedded from the group.

### Measurement of morale

This then brings us to the question of how best to measure morale. An ideal measure would actually capture what is going on in the individual's brain. This would then allow us to examine factors such as emotional regulation and so forth by examining the gap between what was going on in the individual's brain and their espoused opinion. Unfortunately our understanding of the brain is not yet at the point where this is a viable option.

There are several ways of trying to measure morale. Morale can be directly appraised by asking people about their morale or the affective words which appear to attend it. Morale could also be inferred from its consequences or its antecedents. The problem with these latter two approaches is that there are no established means of measuring morale and so whether the antecedents or consequences are actually those of morale is difficult to determine.

This thesis has developed and validated three different measurement instruments for morale. The first were the MIM of high and low morale. The items for these were generated from the words supplied by the interviewees in the qualitative phase of the survey. These two scales were highly correlated suggesting that morale was a unidimensional construct. As a result of this they were collapsed into a single measure.

The focus of these MIMs was on the experience of morale itself rather than factors which may be antecedents or dimensions. This was to try and get around the problem that different things may influence morale for different people which emerged in the qualitative research. Attempting to access the sensation of morale directly using the words that individuals use to describe morale was therefore chosen as the best route.

Armstrong-Stassen's modification to Scott's SDS offered a different way of appraising morale which removed some of the verbal cues which might 'lead' the respondent in the direction of social desirability bias.

All three scales showed good fit on CFA and high Cronbach's alpha scores suggesting good reliability. The scales also correlated well with one another but could be separated from other scales such as commitment and motivation using pairwise comparisons (see above) and so demonstrate both convergent and discriminant validity.

This then brings us to the SIM of morale. SIMs have had an unfairly bad reputation within the management literature largely as a result of the difficulty of undertaking reliability testing and the idea that MIMs give more finely graduated variation as a result of combining a number of



different individual measurements. The calculation of the pseudo-alphas suggests that reliability quite good for SIMs. MIMs have the problem of tapping into other unwanted constructs. For example asking someone if they are satisfied with their job for the time being is a component of Agho, Price and Meuller's job satisfaction scale (Agho et al., 1992). Unfortunately it taps into turnover intention as well (Hardy & Ford, 2009). Although this scale is reliable and widely used it is quite a dirty measure. SIMs do away with some of this baggage as they ask directly about the concept itself. It is important that the concept be understood otherwise respondents will struggle to answer the question. Overall SIMs offer quite a good measure for certain ill defined concepts such as morale.

The various measurement techniques are not perfect but do offer ways of apprehending morale and augmenting simple observation. Further development is needed to validate the scales and also to better model the individual within group issues identified earlier. Nonetheless the availability of measures which can be used across a wide variety of organisations represents a substantial advance in our ability to examine morale.

### **Differences across organisations**

There was both qualitative and quantitative evidence that morale levels varied across organisations. The two types of data also appear to marry up quite well in many cases. At GCC, for example, three stores were chosen for the qualitative phase which were thought to have high, medium and low morale. This appeared to be the case during the interview process and was confirmed by the subsequent analysis of the SIM of morale from each store.

What is interesting are the situations where observation and measurement diverge. SRC was a good example of this as there were three sorts of information; SIM of morale, the interviews themselves and the opinion of the workforce on morale levels. The first two pieces of information produced a similar result – that morale was quite good in this organisation. These were, however, at odds with the workforce's espoused opinion of morale which was that it was low. This is an analogous situation to that described by Weeks (2004) who described a ritual of complaint within a British bank. The bank was performing well and profitable and yet there was consistent complaint about the organisation. During the course of his ethnography Weeks realised that this complaint actually served as a cohesive mechanism and a ritual to socialise people to the culture. Too much complaint was seen as whingeing whereas too little was seen as being on the side of the senior management. A similar mechanism may well have been occurring at SRC.

SCM had the lowest morale of any group judged on both the interviews and quantitative results. This was not surprising as the management appeared weak and capricious which impacted on the affective and future/goal dimensions. The weakness of the management was confirmed when the results were presented to them and rather than attempting to address the issues they simply complained about how difficult the market was.

Overall the measures of morale helped provide quantitative support for qualitative observation. In a consulting situation it would be appropriate to use both techniques in order to supplement the bald numbers with richer qualitative data in order to understand the contextual issues which are impacting on the levels of morale.

### **Antecedents of morale**

This brings us to the antecedents of morale. If morale is an important factor in organisational performance, and many people think it is, then the ability to influence it and manipulate its level is of critical importance.

The qualitative research suggested that the antecedents of morale linked into the three dimensions previously outlined. This is entirely appropriate given that explanations of what would improve/reduce morale were incorporated into the process of building up the dimensions of morale. The blurred nature of the point at which a dimension becomes an affective sensation has already been discussed. The transition from antecedent to dimension is similarly vague. Where dimensions are useful is in unwedding us from the more instrumental factors which can link antecedents to the concept itself.

In the literature the antecedents of morale vary widely. Johnsrud (2000) uses a broad mixture incorporating salary, work life, and career support. Britt uses more abstract entities such as task significance, military pride and challenge at work (Britt et al., 2007). Rosen and Levy use perceptions of organisational politics (Rosen, Levy, & Hall, 2006). Some of these antecedents have the advantage that they are relatively concrete. An individual knows how much they are paid or whether there is a lot of organisational politics. Others are more abstract such as task significance.

In examining the antecedents of morale I deliberately attempted to understand the more abstract antecedents. Compiling a list of the concrete factors which individuals believe influence their morale would be a relatively straightforward but unhelpful exercise. Leadership, for example, might be important to one person but not another. Many of the professional workers at SRC and HTSU1 and 2 viewed leadership as relatively unimportant to their jobs. The antecedents

outlined are an attempt to understand how it is that leadership is important to the person rather than simply stating that it is.

### **Affective antecedents**

The affective antecedents relate to the individual and their sense of identity and self worth and map onto the affective dimension. Praise impacts on this dimension as it reaffirms the individual's sense of self worth. Criticism conversely diminishes it. The recent expenses affair in parliament is a good example here. Many MPs who were not guilty of expenses fraud have had their morale impacted on as they are tarred with the actions of others. The critique that 'all MPs are the same' impacts on their sense of identity as good people who are trying to do a good job, thus lowering their morale.

Individuals often construct their sense of identity through its reflection from others (Tice & Wallace, 2005). If the self that is reflected back is not congruent with their expectations then a dissonant state is produced in which the individual can either reject the observation or reduce their self worth in order to narrow the gap between perception and belief (Festinger, 1957). By the same token positive affirmation of the individual through praise will either, again be rejected or it will confirm or increase the individual's self worth, enhancing their identity and raising morale.

These are the obvious examples but the cognitive processes which attend the interpretation of events can convert seemingly innocuous events into identity related information. At BBM, for example, £1 was deducted from a sections pay for poor quality. This symbolic amount was negligible in the context of overall pay but viewed as highly significant by the union representative who saw it as a lack of recognition by management of the strides that the plant had made in quality. Effectively management were not recognising and valuing the individual appropriately.

Pay, when not a hygiene factor, also impacted on this dimension. Extra pay was seen as a form of praise rather than as a factor in its own right. Effectively a bonus is a way of saying well done and it is the well done which is important, not the material reward.

When trying to raise morale practitioners should concentrate on trying to support the individual's sense of identity and self worth. It is important to note that this does not mean lying about bad news or glossing over a poor situation. Rather it means treating the workforce as the sentient responsible beings that the organisation presumed that they were when hiring them. There is frequently an inconsistency between the skills which organisations expect workers to

apply to their jobs, such as adjudging evidence and making critical decisions, and the skills they expect them to employ in interpreting internal corporate communications.

The same is true when trying to prevent a fall of morale during redundancies. Candour, honesty and 'doing exactly what you say you will do' appear to offset some of the detrimental psychological effects of redundancy. These measures are in line with Mishra, Spreitzer and Mishra's recommendations (Mishra et al., 1998). When interacting with the workforce managers should be conscious of the potential impact on the individual's sense of self worth and identity that their actions may have.

### **Future/goal antecedents**

One of the key themes which emerged when examining the antecedents of morale was that individuals feel a sense of progress towards a better future. Even when the situation is poor and the environment unfavourable a sense that tomorrow will be better than today helps improve morale. The converse is equally true. Even in a stable organisation, where the worker has a good job which they like, clouds on the perceptual horizon can lower morale by damaging the image of the future. The prospect of redundancy, for example, would act in this way.

Within the qualitative interviews two themes were identified. The first pertained to the objective itself which in order to engender high morale should be legitimate, attractive and accepted. This ties in with goal setting theory (Latham & Pinder, 2005; Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke et al., 1981) in motivation which posits a similar set of attributes for goals. It also fits in with various other motivational theories such as Vroom's VIE (Vroom, 1964) in that the expectancy, instrumentality and valence of outcomes is appraised.

The second component is a sense of progress towards these goals. This is, again, congruent with the goal setting theory of Locke and Latham who describe this as 'feedback' (Locke & Latham, 2002, p 708). The combination of goal with feedback increases performance (e.g. Becker, 1978) in that it provides a check of how things are progressing.

These two elements, the goal and the feedback, are similar to goal setting theory. Where they differ is that the goals setting theory is rather bloodless and devoid of affective content. Although affect can be involved it tends to be seen as a component of a regulatory process and a governing mechanism rather than a pivotal component (Locke, 1996).

This then harks back to the distinction between motivation and morale. Motivation is seen as this rather mechanistic process which drives behaviour in an affect-free way. Where affect does

occur in motivation it is regarded as an irrelevant unfortunate by-product. Morale differs in the emphasis it places on the affective component. Goals and the progress towards them matter, but so does how they make the individual feel.

### **Interpersonal antecedents**

This interpersonal nature of morale and its antecedents is a complicated area. As we have seen the nature of how morale is passed between the individual and others, and back again, confuses the issue as to whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon.

The relationship between the individual and others appears to be an important factor in maintaining morale. Often in their descriptions of critical incidents of high morale individuals would mention that they got on well with the group and enjoyed their company. Similarly in low morale the respondents would point to fractured social relationships, particularly with their superiors.

The qualitative phase identified two principal components of interpersonal relations. The first was the nature of the information conveyed by others and the second the nature of the relationship itself. The quantitative phase supported these findings and the measure used (DeCotiis & Koys, 1980, cohesion) has elements of both components.

Overall the affective, future/goal and interpersonal antecedents have a significant impact on their associated dimensions of morale and hence on morale. This can be clearly seen in both the qualitative and quantitative phases. By influencing these dimensions morale can itself be influenced.

### **Framing and speed of change**

The framing of events greatly affects how they are perceived. The incident where the CEO at HTSU 2 administered a dressing down (p 118) shows that the framing of a particular issue is crucial in its impact on morale. This here is perhaps the role of the leader in shaping the perceptions of others so that events are perceived in the most appropriate light. Effectively framing in this context is a form of guided sensemaking or sensegiving (Maitlis & Lawrence, 2007) whereby the individual's sensemaking process is influenced in order to produce a particular outcome.

The qualitative interviews suggested that morale could drop quickly but only rise slowly. This is an interesting finding and one which requires further investigation given its potential significance to managers. This may reflect the greater impact of negative stimuli than positive ones

(Baumeister et al., 2001; Peeters, 2002) which is reflected in a other social spheres such as stock markets (Veldkamp, 2005) but investigating this asymmetry may help shed new insights into the production of morale.

## The consequences of morale

### Feedback

Morale has a number of different consequences. The qualitative phase of the research revealed an unexpected finding that morale influenced morale. The degree to which a positive morale state affected processing of subsequent events was quite marked. Morale fed back on itself and induced a resilience to attempts to alter its level. This effect was augmented by the interpersonal effects of morale. In this case the morale of Person A affected Person B through a process of emotional contagion. When Person A then attempts to change their morale level the reverse contagion from Person B damps down this variation. One of the consequences of morale seems to be to perpetuate the existing state of morale.

That affective states influence perceptions is undisputed. The precise means by which they do so is more complicated. Affect may assist in the categorisation of events and the retrieval of those categories (Zajonc, 1998). It may also operate in a more abstract manner by affecting the processing of afferent information. This ties in with Forgas' Affect Infusion Model (Forgas, 1995) which argues that the perception of certain types of events, particularly the novel, are more likely to be infused with affect, altering the perception.

To some extent the precise method by which this loop operates is less important than the fact that it does. Understanding the mechanism is useful but ensuring that the qualitative observation is correct would be the more useful first port of call. This is difficult to test for but, nonetheless, represents a suitable topic for future research.

### Performance

The influence of morale on performance is a difficult to tackle partly because of the difficulties of defining morale but also because of the significant difficulties in defining performance. What constitutes performance is a topic of some debate. In the qualitative research respondents were asked what sort of effect they thought morale had on performance, leaving them to define both the morale and the performance. This was in keeping with the idiographic nature of this phase.

The respondents believed that morale was positively correlated with both quantity of work and quality. The energy and enthusiasm of high morale led them to do more work and to pay more

attention to detail – because it was important. This was a relatively consistent finding across a number of respondents.

The quantitative phase offered mixed support for this. Morale correlated positively in the AMC survey with productivity. This could be ascribed to common method bias but using Lindell's (2000; 2001) approach of a marker variable suggested that the effect was large enough that a proportion of it must be true variance. This survey also linked morale to customer satisfaction and other variables. Of course correlational data of this nature does not imply causality. It is possible that the improved productivity caused high morale just as that high morale improved the productivity. Nonetheless there does seem to be a relationship here between morale and various measures of performance.

Morale did not seem to be correlated with appraisal performance. There was no relationship between the two in the data from the mobile phone infrastructure company. Given the qualitative descriptions of morale improving both quantity and quality of work one would expect a relationship between the two as a productive worker doing high quality work should get a higher appraisal rating. There are a number of reasons for not finding a correlation. The first is that there is no correlation, that morale has no effect on performance which is a result that some of the interviewees suggested. This is possible but rather at odds with the other data and the literature. Other explanations include the moderating effect of ability and the possibility that the appraisal system doesn't actually measure performance very well.

Qualitative morale was thought to affect staff turnover. Respondents described quitting low morale jobs because they found the experience highly uncomfortable. This result was strongly supported by the quantitative data which echoed findings of research in the teaching field (Johnsrud et al., 2000; Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). Turnover intention is the best predictor of actual turnover (Griffeth, Hom, & Gaertner, 2000; Vandenberg & Nelson, 1999) and so finding that morale strongly affects turnover intention suggests that it will strongly affect turnover.

Overall evidence of the effect of morale on performance is mixed. There seems to be some definite effects but the picture is not wholly consistent. By producing scales to measure morale the quantitative assessment of its consequences is made rather easier. Future research should concentrate on longitudinal appraisal of the impact of morale on variables which are measured independently of the respondent.

## Critique of the research

Undertaking exploratory research of the nature of this thesis inevitably means that a trade off has to be made between breadth and depth. Given the poorly structured nature of our understanding of morale (Hightower, 1944; Liefoghe et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008; Vandenberg et al., 1999) the imperative seemed to be to try and clarify the phenomenon.

The mixed methods approach worked well with the qualitative and quantitative techniques complementing one another. There was less commonality between the two approaches than expected and the quantitative work tended to be used to clarify issues which the qualitative work was not able easily to address. Also noticeable was the relatively small contribution that the quantitative research was able to make to understanding the processes of morale itself rather than its antecedents, consequences and other concepts. The actual intra-organismic processes of morale production were more readily tractable to the qualitative approach.

The continuous sampling yielded a vast store of information which allowed theoretical saturation to be achieved. The main critique here would be that too many people were sampled and that the same result could be achieved with fewer interviews. This is undoubtedly true but the reason for the large number of interviews was to try and yield additional useful information from cutting the codes by demographic and psychometric factors. In the end this proved to be rather disappointing as, with the exception of the findings on the words used to describe morale, there was little evidence that these factors greatly affected perceptions of morale. Even in discussions of parenthood, which one might have expected to be a more salient feature for women than men, there was little evidence of any sex difference.

The grounded theory process worked well although the interviews could have been more widely spaced to permit greater in depth coding of the preceding interviews. This was not too much of a problem as the data collected addressed and explored the majority of the questions raised. The exception here was the actual intrapersonal process of morale production which would have benefited from more close questioning.

The quantitative phase of the research was a similarly evolving process with the development of the morale measures coming rather late in the process. This meant a considerable reliance on the SIMs. The three morale scales developed were solely for the actual sensation of morale and so work needs to be undertaken to further develop the scales based on the dimensions of morale.



The scales developed demonstrated good reliability and convergent validity. The differentiation of morale from other constructs on the basis of SIMs was also successful and demonstrated that the concepts are different. This research could be further enhanced by using approaches such as cluster or correspondence analysis to map the difference between the concepts.

The evaluation of morale itself was rather more limited quantitatively. It was possible to establish that age, sex and organisational tenure had little effect on the concept and that morale appeared to vary between nations. The quantitative phase also confirmed the three dimensional structure of morale. Where it was less successful is in determining how morale was produced. Similarly the finding that individuals in general viewed their morale as better than that of their colleagues was an interesting finding but requires further examination.

The appraisal of morale's consequences produced mixed results. Qualitatively there was much rich information but only a small portion of this was testable quantitatively. The appraisal data showed no correlation with morale. It is tempting to believe, and possibly true, that the appraisal system used in the organisation is a flawed measure. It is also possible that morale has no effect on performance. Where morale does seem to have an effect it seems to be in self report measures be they qualitative or quantitative. This then leads to the concern that common method bias is responsible. This would mean that any effect of morale on performance would solely be as a result of positive affective states inflating all ratings. Just as morale ratings would go up so would any ratings of performance. Whilst approaches such as using marker variables have some use the only way to remove this concern is to have independent measures of performance. This is a concern but some researchers e.g. Vandenberg (2007) have suggested that CMB is overrated and probably has less effect than is imagined.

Like any research this work has limitations but the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches has helped offset some of these concerns. Future research, which will be discussed in the next chapter, should concentrate on addressing some of the concerns outlined here.

## **Reflections on the research process**

### **Introduction**

The preceding section critiqued the present research. This section aims to explore some of the subtler issues inherent within any thesis through reflection on the research and examination of the tensions, choices and conciliations which attend the completion of such a project.

Reflection at one level simply requires that these issues are mirrored back by the researcher and exposed to scrutiny. This has been advocated as a way of allowing the reader of the research to examine the biases of the researcher (Hardy, Phillips, & Clegg, 2001) although the ability of this process to achieve this objective has been questioned by authors such as Linstead (1994) who suggest that the elimination of bias is impossible as complete self knowledge is unachievable and attempts to gain the confidence of the reader through disclosure give the illusion of objectivity without the reality.

What is more useful is not simply to reflect back on these issues but to examine their recursive impact. Reflection involves contemplation of the research whereas recursion is where the reflective process brings about iterative change in the researcher. This distinction between reflection and recursion (see Hibbert, Coupland, & MacIntosh, 2008, for a clear exposition) allows a better insight into the research process and also helps identify areas requiring further exploration or attention.

All research exists at the nexus of a series of competing interests which the researcher must balance. Perhaps the most fundamental level is that discussed by Hardy and co-workers (2001) who use Actor Network Theory to explore their own previously published research on refugees. They explicitly discuss the problems of translation inherent in being at the interface between the interviewees and the academic journals; notably those of trying to appropriately interact with these two different audiences. This problem was frequently encountered in this research in a number of different forms and at a number of different levels.

### **Reflections on the origins of the research**

The principal motivation for this research was my own experience of differing morale situations in previous employment. As discussed in the introduction I found that the level of what I labelled morale had a dramatic effect not merely on my own personal mental state but also the volume and quality of my work. For me, therefore, the desire to try and capture the nebulous nature of morale had a personal significance and also a wider one as the ability to structure the concept might render it more tractable to manipulation and hence the working lives of others might be improved.

The danger of any research motivated in this fashion is that the researcher is driven by a personal agenda which is separate from the research itself and undisclosed to others. Skynner and Cleese use the example of psychiatrists suffering psychiatric problems themselves, wanting to obtain treatment, but electing to enter through the door marked 'staff' (Skynner & Cleese, 1989). In

this case the desire to explore the topic of morale was driven out of personal interest and so I was acutely aware of the possibility of imposing my own agenda on the research and its outcomes.

The easy route would have been to have not attempted the research at all. Morale is a poorly circumscribed topic (Britt et al., 2007; Liefoghe et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008) which tends to be dismissed by academics as a 'folk concept' (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977). This means that any research will have to simultaneously chart the topic and also put it on an academic footing in a way that research into motivation, for example, would not.

The use of the term 'folk concept' could be construed as rather patronising, suggesting that the lay person's understanding is primitive, superstitious and lacking the knowledge and wisdom that the academic possesses. To adopt this standpoint is to marginalise the experience of workers who frequently talk of morale.

In the light of this I sought to alloy both the social view of morale and a more academic articulation in an attempt to link together these two differing communities. There did not appear to be any successful template for this in existing morale research. The definitions of morale used by most researchers seemed either to take a particularly partial view of morale, such as Subramony et al (2008) relying on a flawed interpretation of Campbell and Tyler's (1957) research, or were not about morale at all e.g. Judge and Church (2000). The various options for overcoming this have been reviewed in the methodology and methods section (see p 70). The difficulty was in linking personal experience to an academic concept.

I contemplated drawing on the existing definitions in the literature and proceeding with a more modernist research agenda consisting primarily of survey and other quantitative data. This fitted well with my previous training as a scientist but was, I felt, impossible given the present understanding of morale. My concern was that I would simply be confirming my own views of morale or that the research would not chime with individuals' wider experience. The other approach was to be purely qualitative and try and write a heavily interpretivist study. I felt unable to do this as it seemed that this was purely narrative and again would simply reflect my own prejudices. This then brought me to the kernel of the problem that research cannot exist without the researcher and, no matter how they try; individuals cannot make value neutral observations.

This problem is, in essence, one of degree. If we adopt the position of total subjectivity then there seems to be little point in research, all we do is simply catalogue and impose our own

prejudices. On the other hand we cannot have unmediated access to a mind independent reality. For this reason I explored the concept of critical realism in the methodology chapter and adopted a mixed methods approach in an attempt to offset some of my own subjective views.

### Reflections on classification

One of the key issues in this thesis is that of classification. How does a concept become an academic concept as opposed to a 'folk' one? What are the criteria by which the transition is made? Do the criteria remain stable or are they more tightly drawn as understanding of the concept develops? The qualitative research reflected an attempt to unite the societal concept with an academic one and, at the same time, to explore the various processes by which morale is produced and its impact on individuals and their performance. To do this I needed to be able to delineate morale from other concepts as otherwise the research would simply be dismissed as really being about other concepts, such as job satisfaction, for example.

Separating out morale from other concepts became a key issue within the research in order to forestall the criticism that this was not a thesis about morale but other concepts. This attempt at separation raised questions not merely about how words are understood and differentiated from one another but also about how words are labelled and contested. For example the concept of morale could be viewed as contested between the 'folk' definition understood by those in society and one of the academic interpretations of it being the same as job satisfaction. I clearly sided with the societal definition in this thesis as it seemed unclear to me on what basis some management academics had chosen to elide morale and job satisfaction. It could be argued that I should have adopted the standpoint of those who have researched the topic in depth but I chose not to as their definitions and delineation of the concept seemed to take second place to their desire to operationalise it.

This problem of classification was also evident within the distinction of morale itself from its antecedents and consequences. This distinction was useful to help try structure the concept of morale but it also produced inconsistencies and difficulties of its own. Some of the consequences of morale might become antecedents, for example.

The differentiation of an antecedent from a dimension is not clear either. If precedents are examined, such as Spreitzer's work on empowerment (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996) then there is little articulation of this difficulty. Similarly the problem of what is a dimension of morale and what is the sensation of morale is also problematic. I attempted to untangle some of these issues within the research but clear delineation was not possible. As a result it is difficult to say precisely how

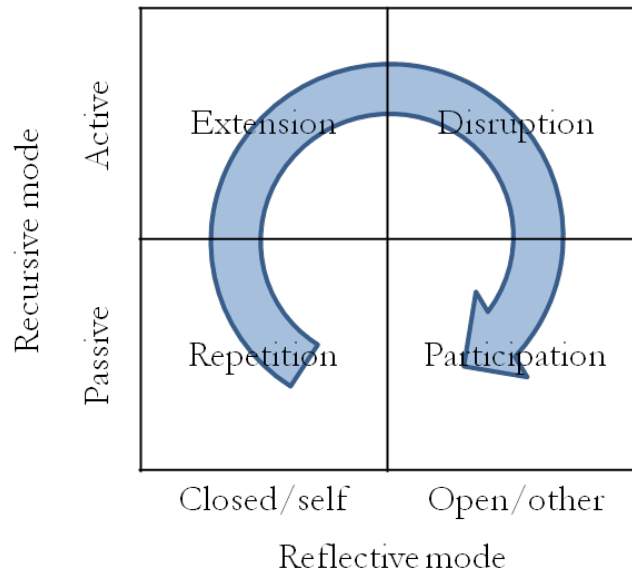
an antecedent differs from a dimension and how these differ from either the concept itself or the sensation which attends it. Again I faced a dilemma of how to articulate these problems without dismissing the whole research project as unworkable or glossing over them entirely.

### **Reflections on utility**

In trying to explore morale a third problem became apparent (which emerged in the first round of interviews at SRC). Hitherto I had believed that I would be able to extract key instrumental variables from the interviews, such as leadership or trust, and then test these using a survey methodology. What became clear was that to do so would not reflect the individuals' experience of morale. The interviews suggested a melange of factors which influenced morale and so a reappraisal of assumptions was necessary. In the end I believed I was trying to be too specific in my approach and that a better understanding of the principles involved in morale could be gained at a higher level of abstraction. This would also facilitate a cross-situational understanding so that the same theories could be explored in a garden centre as a silicon chip manufacturer. This came at the price of making the research more readily applicable. In presenting the results of research to managers it seems that they want specific advice e.g. communicate better through newsletters or town-hall meetings rather than the more abstract advice to support individuals' self esteem. In essence comparability between organisations came at the price of being able to make specific prescriptions to management.

### **A typology of reflection, recursion and reflexivity**

This then leads back to the dilemma of trying to satisfy the needs of the researched, researcher and the consumers of the research. Hibbert and co-authors (2008) offer a typology of reflexivity which incorporates dimensions of reflection and recursion (see Figure 19) which progresses from repetition, through extension, disruption and participation back to repetition. Applying this to the present reflection we begin in the 'repetition' category. At this point the researcher reflects in a detached manner on the research and the insights obtained are used to refine the research rather than impact on the researcher. In the present morale research the attempts to eliminate biases from the statistical results would fall into this category.

**Figure 19 – Hibbert’s dimensions of reflexivity**

The second category of extension is where the individual’s reflective process impacts on the individual causing them to be changed by the process. In this research the finding that the responses of the interviewees did not permit the use of simple categories seemed to fall into this category.

The third category, ‘disruption’ is more outward looking and involves the influence of others on the research process. This can potentially be destabilising (Hibbert et al., 2008) as the input is from others yet the impact through recursion is felt by the individual. An example in this research would be presenting the findings of the research back to managers and the response being unfavourable. Another example would be the PhD viva or reviews attending publication.

The final stage of participation is where interaction with a research community shapes the research so that it is congruent with the discourse and expectations of the group. Hibbert et al suggest that this does not mean surrender to the group but rather more that the research conversations proceed on similar lines. I do not believe that this stage has occurred in this research.

### Personal outcomes

Reflecting on the research process helps to illustrate some of the dilemmas and tensions between which I have tried to navigate and the way in which they have altered and shaped the research process. Inevitably a reflection cannot capture the complexity and depth of five years of research. I have tried to highlight some of the principal dilemmas I faced undertaking this

research and the conflict between personal motives and the needs of the research participants and the examiners.

Given the personal reasons for pursuing the research it seems reasonable to ask what I feel I have learned. To some extent this is reflected in the thesis but the personal impact of the findings deserves articulation.

I firmly believe that I have found something here which I did not know hitherto. The three dimensions of morale seem to capture the principal elements of morale. I am concerned that they may be too vague and that events impact on more than one dimension, but overall as a template for the things that affect morale they seem to stand up well. Similarly the findings in relation to the consequences of morale chime with personal experience. The fact that everything seems to tie together quite neatly raises the suspicion that personal biases have conspired to make it so. This worried me too. I have tried during the research process to disprove my findings. For example at one point I became convinced that there was no interpersonal dimension to morale and spent a great deal of time trying to write it out of the thesis. This proved impossible and so it was re-instated. Accordingly I feel that I have not found simply what I wanted to.

The next question is about the operationalisation of the concept. Given what I know have I been able to influence either the morale of myself or others? The picture here is more mixed. Certainly I have experience times of low morale during the research process. Often it took a while for me to actually start thinking about how I could apply the findings of my research to myself. Whether it made any difference is hard to say. Perhaps the low morale would have passed anyway. A colleague whom I advised on the basis of my findings reported it helped but this may simply be kindness.

### Summary

This reflection has attempted to write me back into the thesis. The principal motivation for this body of research was my own personal interest in morale and the perceived importance of the topic sustained me through the thesis. I have tried to highlight some of the difficulties and dilemmas faced whilst conducting the research and the personal impact of its findings. Putting together the findings of the research with its critique and this reflection enables its consequences to be appraised and the next section explores the implications of this research for different audiences.

### **Implications of the research**

The findings of this thesis have a number of implications for both academic researchers and practitioners. These will be discussed under broad themes and will, when combined with the two previous sections permit suggestions to be made for future research. The directions for future research will be discussed in the following chapter.

### **The importance of morale**

This thesis adds to the body of evidence that morale is a significant factor for individuals within organisations and that it impacts on their performance. The qualitative evidence clearly shows that morale affects both the quantity and quality of work. There is evidence too to suggest that it may also influence communication and possibly creativity. The quantitative data provide some support for this, albeit correlational and limited. They suggest that morale is linked to various measures of productivity and quality as well as turnover intention. Taken together, this accords with the modest existing literature which suggests that business leaders perceive it to be an important issue (Sirota et al., 2005) with significant impact on performance (Bewley, 1999).

Alongside this the interviews reveal that morale is a pervasive concept which is appreciated by individuals at all levels of the organisation, including academics themselves (Johnsrud & Rosser, 2002). Respondents described low morale as a singularly unpleasant sensation and high morale as a more pleasurable one.

Putting these two factors together suggests that morale is a topic deserving further attention from the academic community both because of its probable impact on performance and also on eleemosynary grounds.

One of the key implications of this research, therefore, is to make the case for further morale research. Given the relative neglect of the topic hitherto (Britt & Dickinson, 2006; Liefoghe et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008) this is no idle call of the type made by any researcher for their own ends. Rather the findings, particularly the descriptions of the desperation of low morale, make a persuasive case for academic research into the topic. They also suggest that practitioners should attend to morale in order not merely to improve the welfare of their workforce but also for sound commercial reasons.

### **The status of existing research**

There are a number of different approaches to addressing morale as a concept within the academic literature. One of the principal strands is to elide with other concepts, particularly job



satisfaction (e.g. Judge & Church, 2000). This thesis is very clear that morale is not the same as these other concepts and has brought forth both qualitative and quantitative evidence to support this conclusion. This is in marked contrast to those who seek to intermingle the two concepts who offer no reason for doing so. The implication of this is that the approach of equating morale with other concepts is unacceptable and so this particular approach, adopted by a number of authors, is inappropriate and the research flowing from it questionable.

Another approach is to dismiss morale as a 'folk concept' (Motowidlo & Borman, 1977) which is not a legitimate topic for academic research but belongs in the realm of the lay person. In addition to glossing over existing morale research this approach fails to articulate the point at which a concept passes from being a 'folk' one to an academic one. By adopting a rigorous mixed method approach which triangulates both qualitative and quantitative data this research demonstrates that morale is tractable to academic investigation. In doing so it refutes the 'folk concept' argument and grounds an academic understanding in the wider societal one. This benefits academics as it acts as a resource for researchers wishing to understand the societal view of morale and helps them to link their findings to this view.

A third approach is to simply ignore the concept of morale. This is, as we have discussed above, unsatisfactory given its potential impact on individuals and organisations.

What research there is on morale does not use instruments grounded in an understanding of what morale is. DeVellis decries researchers who 'throw together' or 'dredge up' items which they think are appropriate (DeVellis, 2003, p 11) and yet this is precisely what seems to have happened for many of the existing measures of morale.

This thesis demonstrates that many of the existing approaches to morale are inadequate. Confusing it with other concepts, dismissing it as a 'folk concept' or using poorly grounded, designed and validated measures is unlikely to produce a sensible elucidation of the concept. This thesis has highlighted the problems with each of these approaches and suggested some standards against which the extant literature may be judged.

This research has, therefore, demonstrated that morale is an important topic and that existing approaches to it are insufficient to explicate the concept. We will now turn to discuss the implications of the findings on morale itself.

### What morale is

Having cleared away some of the conceptual confusion surrounding morale it is sensible to appraise whether the foundations of the concept are stable. The quantitative research suggests that there is no difference in morale levels between males and females, and that age and organisational tenure have little impact. This was confirmed in the qualitative results although the words used to describe morale varied with gender and, in one instance, with age. These findings may seem relatively unimportant but they are of considerable significance for those wishing to undertake quantitative research. If morale levels varied with gender, for example, then any conclusions reached in a mixed sample would be questionable if gender were not allowed for. There is very little research which examines the impact of demographic factors on morale and so the data presented here has some novelty.

This invariance is also important for practitioners as it dispels some of the myths around morale varying by demographic factors. For example managers should not use age as an explanation if they find older workers with low morale but rather they should investigate the causes.

The finding that morale levels vary in trans-national comparison is an interesting one. Morale in the UK when measured on a single item scale is significantly lower than either the US or Germany. It is hard to know what this result means and discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis. It suggests that researchers making trans-national comparisons should be cautious and that managers attempting to compare different parts of a multi-national organisation might be thwarted in doing so accurately by national differences.

### *The articulation of morale*

The rich description of morale and its production produced by the qualitative research phase represents the first description of morale grounded in the voices of those in civilian organisations experiencing the phenomenon<sup>28</sup>. In addition to providing a grounded description of the phenomenon the rich data presented also acts as a resource for other researchers to illustrate the concept. Those researchers who wish to take a narrower definition of morale may find it particularly useful to help them understand how the concept is perceived more generally and how their findings relate to wider society's expectations.

The finding that morale is a single generalisable entity is also of importance. It suggests that morale in one sphere of endeavour is the same as in another. One respondent in earlier research

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<sup>28</sup> Britt's (1997) conference paper represents the only academic source drawing on qualitative data from military respondents.

suggested that military morale was not the same as civilian. This is comprehensively refuted by the workers in civilian organisations with military backgrounds who intermingle explorations of their civilian morale with those of the military without any distinction between the two.

This generalisable approach to morale means that it can be studied across organisations and compared in a meaningful way although this approach is not without its difficulties (see p 229). This is important for both academics researching the topic as it suggests that school morale can be compared with morale in the military or retail sectors, for example. This cross organisational comparison is also useful for practitioners and multidivisional organisations which can compare, say, morale in R&D with that in their sales force.

### *The dimensions of morale*

Morale is frequently treated as a single entity with little exploration of its internal structure. The grounded theory approach in the qualitative phase identified a three dimensional structure of morale which revolved around affective, future/goal and interpersonal dimensions. This qualitative structure was confirmed by quantitative research.

Although some existing research has hinted at some of the dimensions of morale this is the first explicit articulation of three distinct dimensions. The three dimensions enable the distinctions between morale and other concepts to be better delineated and also help suggest directions for future research based on the dimensions.

The idea of a concept having dimensions has an academic provenance in empowerment, (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996; Spreitzer et al., 1997), justice (Colquitt, 2001; Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001) and commitment (Iverson & Buttigieg, 1999; Kacmar et al., 1999) research. Breaking down a concept into a number of facets renders it more tractable to research and enables links to be more easily made to the existing organisational literature.

Tsoukas and Vladimirou(2001) argue that knowledge is the ability to make finer distinctions between entities and use Polyani's example of a student inspecting a thoracic radiograph to illustrate this point.

*'At first the student is completely puzzled. For he can see in the X-ray picture of a chest only the shadows of the heart and the ribs, with a few spidery blotches between them...Then as he goes on...looking carefully at ever new pictures of different cases, a tentative understanding will dawn on him; he will gradually forget about the ribs and begin to see the lungs. And eventually...a rich panorama of significant details will be revealed to him: of*

*physiological variations and pathological changes, of scars, of chronic infections and signs of acute disease.'*

(Polanyi, 1962, p 101, cited in Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001, p 977)

The dimensional structure of morale proposed enables a more finely grained appreciation of the concept which, it is to be hoped, permits a more sophisticated exploration of it. Instead of simply treating morale as a simple entity the articulation of a dimensional structure enables researchers to understand the components of morale and their interaction.

The articulation of three dimensions also provides a framework for practitioners to evaluate their organisation's morale status. This may be for both improving morale when it is poor and for anticipating the morale impact of future events. In a merger, for example, attention should be paid to each dimension (see Mishra et al., 1998) and the structure outlined provides a template to help practitioners achieve this.

### *The measurement of morale*

One of the key contributions of this thesis is to develop a grounded measurement system for morale, validate existing approaches and compare the various measurement systems. Existing measurement systems have tended either to use single item scales (e.g. Bliese & Britt, 2001; Schumm & Bell, 2000) or ungrounded instruments based on items which researchers seem to have thrown together (DeVellis, 2003). This thesis heeds Hinkin's (1998) call for properly grounded measures and adopts an inductive approach to developing them. The scales are developed and validated across a number of samples, in the process demonstrating that high and low morale are opposites of one another, and not orthogonally related as positive and negative affect are. In addition to developing a morale scale the thesis also tests and validates the Armstrong-Stassen morale scale and explores the reliability of a SIM of morale. The scales demonstrate both convergent and discriminant validity along with good test-retest reliability.

The development of validated morale scales is of importance to both academics and practitioners investigating the topic. Well validated scales with good psychometric properties are essential both to morale research and linking the concept to other factors. The lack of measures has frustrated this (Liefoghe et al., 2004). At the same time the development and interrelation of several different measures offers researchers a variety of options when they come to including morale measures within their research.

The validation of various scales will help practitioners include morale measures in their research. As many practitioner surveys attempt to cover multiple factors then 'real estate' within the survey instrument is at a premium. Even if space is not at a premium then often cost is. The Ohio

State University charges \$80 per item per sample so a 20 item measure administered to staff, students and faculty would cost \$4 800 (Wanous & Scholarios, 2009). The demonstration of the reliability of SIMs of morale in this research means that morale can be simply appraised in a single question.

The use of SIMs in this manner means that morale measures can be readily added to academic surveys as well. Indeed some authors have suggested that it makes more sense to ask a SIM than a tautologous MIM (Rossiter, 2002, 2005).

This research shows that SIMs are an acceptable method to measure organisational phenomena. They have certain problems, not least that they are difficult to use in SEM, but they can meaningfully be used to measure morale levels both within and between organisations. In addition they provide a useful cross-check for MIM development.

The use of the SDS scale is also unusual. SDS scales are routinely used in marketing but less commonly in other aspects of organisational research. They provide an interesting way of isolating a particular phenomenon which does not lead the respondent. Demonstrating that these scales can be used to measure social phenomena and that they correlate well with MIMs and SIMs suggests that they should be more widely used in organisational research.

The development of validated measurement instruments and cross validation of a number of different approaches is a significant contribution of this thesis and helps facilitate further research in the field.

### *Individuals and groups*

Whether morale is an individual or group phenomenon has been a subject of debate for over sixty years. Three categories have been proposed of morale being either an individual, group or individual + group phenomenon (see Child, 1941; Hightower, 1944). This thesis informs this debate with empirical evidence from the field. The data suggest that morale is an individual phenomenon which is contagious between individuals. This has not been suggested before and links with the existing literature on emotional contagion (e.g. Barsade, 2002; Hatfield et al., 1993; Kelly & Barsade, 2001; Neumann & Strack, 2000). Where this research differs is in finding that the degree of contagion is affected either by the intensity of morale or the social position of the other person.

This individual + contagion conception offers a new understanding of the interplay between the individual and the group in morale production as it offers an explanation of how the two are

linked. This is also important for practitioners as it allows the possible means of morale contagion to be appraised. If, for example, an individual with particularly low morale is socially salient within the group then it is likely that the degree of contagion is greater.

Another important understanding of the relationship between the individual and group emerged from the question of how the group was defined. The examples of the company secretary at Railtrack and the IT worker at SRC suggest that it is possible to create islands of high morale in seas of low. This is significant for practitioners trying to raise morale as it suggests that group definition is an important element in permitting individuals to have differing morale levels to those around them. For example a departmental manager in a low morale organisation might emphasise that department's individual identity in order to create a boundary between that department and the rest of the organisation. This would then permit individuals within her department to have a different morale level to the rest of the organisation. This approach to altering morale level could be written larger by a more senior manager who could use the same approach to separate her organisation from its competitors and so build intraorganisational morale.

The findings on contagion are tempered by the finding that individuals rate their morale higher than their department or organisation. This suggests that contagion is far from complete and that social distance causes individuals to perceive the morale of others as lower than their own. Again this observation has not been recorded in the literature and it offers a start point for further research into the individual and group interaction. Although contagion seems to occur there is clearly a countervailing tendency for others to be perceived as having lower morale than the individual. This finding is interesting for practitioners as it may be that reducing interpersonal distance may help improve morale subject to the morale of the organisation being good. This finding links the individual/group aspect of morale to its antecedents.

### *Antecedents of morale*

The qualitative research suggests that the antecedents of morale impact on the three dimensions outlined in the morale structure. The point at which an antecedent becomes a dimension is not an obvious one and this difficulty has been little discussed within the literature. Spreitzer, for example, when discussing the antecedents of empowerment rather glosses this issue (Spreitzer, 1995, 1996).

The affective antecedents of morale have not been greatly attended to within the literature, no doubt as a consequence of the general neglect of the role of affect within organisational studies

(Briner & Kiefer, 2005; Fisher & Ashkanasy, 2000). One of the implications of this research is to link morale to this burgeoning literature (Ashkanasy, 2003) in the management sphere.

In the managerial sphere the emergence of the importance of positive feedback which supports the individual's sense of self is one which could be readily addressed. In the qualitative research it became clear that many managers never thank their staff for their efforts nor recognise their individual contribution. This is quite easily remedied by better provision of positive feedback and support. This may seem glib, obvious even, but the fact that it is not happening suggest that either it is not obvious to the managers involved or that they are unaware of its importance. This was vividly illustrated by the individual at SCM who believed that he did not need to praise employees as being paid was their 'well done' (see p 135) whilst at the same time complaining that he was not praised. If managers are capable of this lack of self awareness then pointing out the seemingly obvious, if it will improve performance, must surely have a place.

The identification and description of the future/goal dimension is also important. The existing literature if it alludes to this tends only to focus on the goal itself and not on the sense of progress towards it. Both appear to be important as even a realistic achievable goal will not improve morale if there is a sense of stasis. Both the goal and a sense of progress towards it are, therefore, equally important elements of this dimension and both should be investigated when the impact of this dimension is being appraised.

The implication for practitioners is equally clear. It is not enough to simply set up an objective – some sort of sense or progress toward the objective should be monitored and, crucially, articulated in order to improve morale. This links morale with goal setting theory (see Locke & Latham, 2002; Locke et al., 1981) and is, of course, subject to the provisos of that theory such as goal legitimacy. What was, again, notable was how frequently the respondents in the interviews did not understand the direction the organisation was taking. For this reason clarification of aims and objectives of the organisation, along with the reasons behind them, is both desirable and strongly supported by this research.

The interpersonal dimension has been discussed in part already. The distinction between the individual's own group and outsiders is important. Disharmony with outside groups is tolerable if it does not impact on the affective or future/goal dimensions. Disharmony within the in group is not as it saps morale. This is important for managers as it encourages them to attend to interpersonal relations within the group if they want to improve morale.

The importance of framing and perception of events and stimuli is another salient finding of this research. Often actions and events are simply presented to the workforce as a bald statement of facts with little thought as to how they might be perceived. The reprimand from the CEO at HTSU 2, for example, was processed in different ways by different people (see p 118). Stimuli are appraised against a complex backdrop of past events, present social structures and perceived future direction. A simple comment will be perceived differently if it is from the individual's line manager or the CEO of the company. Practitioners need to pay particular attention to how events will impact the workforce and there is substantial evidence within the qualitative research that they do not.

### *Speed of change and type of change*

The findings on speed of change of morale have important implications for managers. Morale seems to be slow to build and quick to destroy. This seems to be due to greater attention being paid to negative stimuli than positive. Some resilience to change in either direction is seen through a 'flywheel effect' whereby interpersonal contagion maintains the individual's morale level in some harmony with the group. Events which target the whole group are more likely, therefore, to impact on morale than events which just target a few individuals, as this flywheel effect is negated.

The implication for managers is clear. Negative stimuli need to be countered with a greater weight of positive stimuli if morale is to be maintained. Also if it is possible to have the negative stimuli only affect a percentage of a group rather than the whole group then the likelihood of morale being maintained is increased.

This description of a 'flywheel effect' is new and may offer useful insights for researchers into affective resilience both to positive and negative stimuli. This possibility will be discussed in the directions for future research section.

### *Summary of implications*

This research has a number of important implications. Firstly it suggests that morale is an important concept which is worthy of further and deeper investigation. Secondly it demonstrates that many of the existing approaches are unsatisfactory. Thirdly it offers an exposition of morale grounded in social experience and verified through quantitative research to act as a resource for both practitioners and academics interested in the topic. The identification of the three dimensions facilitates future research and also allows morale issues to be appraised in a more sophisticated way. Fifthly the development and validation of new and existing



measures of morale along with their interrelation helps advance the measurement and understanding of concept and allied factors. The discussion of the role of individuals and groups offers a new understanding of this element of morale so that the interaction between the two is better clarified. The exploration of the antecedents of morale offers suggestions for how morale might be manipulated and the importance of framing. Finally the evaluation of changing morale offers further insights into how these changes might be better effected.

## Chapter 10: Summary and conclusions

This final section takes stock of where we have come from, where we are, and where we are going. I will begin with a brief summary of what was known about morale prior to this research. This will then be followed by a recap of what the research has established. This will suggest directions for future research which might be followed to replicate, confirm and extend some of the tools and approaches outlined and developed in this thesis. Finally I shall recap the key contributions of this thesis, some of the lessons learned for future research and link the research to the personal motivations discussed in the introduction.

### Backdrop to the current research

This thesis was motivated out of personal experience of differing morale states in organisations. Exploring the literature revealed that the concept was contested and incoherent. Morale grew out of the military sphere but around the time of WW II the increased attention to workers fostered by the human relations movement ensured that the concept transferred to other organisations. There then followed a period of investigation which signally failed to define or measure the concept. As a result the term morale was used to embrace any sort of work related attitude.

Simultaneously with this a number of allied concepts were developed which attempted to capture some of the domain occupied by morale. As a result of the lack of definition of measurement morale research waned with only three disciplinary areas (education, healthcare and the military) maintaining a research programme into the topic.

What little research there was in the management arena tended to either elide morale with other concepts, notably job satisfaction (e.g. Judge & Church, 2000), or use the term to label an unspecified meta-factor which is believed to explain a number of statistical results (Organ, 1997; Vandenberg et al., 1999).

The academic view of morale may be disjointed but the same cannot be said for the wider community. Morale is a term frequently used in society in general and of genuine concern to people at all levels of all manner of organisations. It is believed to be a crucial factor in performance which many managers believe must be preserved at all costs (Bewley, 1999).

This research attempts to address this situation using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to establish what morale is, what it is not, what factors influence it and what its consequences are. The qualitative research used a grounded theory process to

sample a range of organisations and individuals in the service of answering the research questions. This process also provided substrate for the quantitative phase of the research which used numerical approaches to elucidate the same questions.

## Findings

Morale is clearly different from other concepts such as satisfaction, motivation and happiness. This finding was replicated in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research. This should give pause to researchers who casually conflate morale with other concepts. Devices such as employing satisfaction for the individual and morale for the group are clearly unacceptable in the light of this as are amalgamations of concepts which are then labelled as morale.

Morale appears to be an entity in its own right which is clearly distinct from these other concepts. This may seem like a pedantic belabouring of the point but the volume of literature which suffers from this imprecision demands that morale be separated from other concepts. Robbins and Judge's point that '*...OB researchers like proposing new attitudes [but] often we haven't been good at showing how they compare and contrast with each other.*' (Robbins & Judge, 2009, p 116) is well made. This research addresses precisely this point and suggests that the distinction is important.

Establishing what morale is not throws into starker relief the question of what morale actually is. Descriptions of the experience of morale tend to intermingle morale itself with its antecedents, consequences, and other concepts. Nonetheless at the words used all appear to be describing a similar sensation which is manifest through three dimensions: affective, future/goal and interpersonal. These three dimensions are mirrored in the analysis of other portions of the interview data.

The affective dimension pertains to how the individual feels. This is a function of the afferent stimuli that the individual is exposed to. These then, through a combination of conscious and unconscious processes generate an affective sensation. Stimuli which are processed as favourable may produce positive affect and the unfavourable negative. The impact of these stimuli on the image of the self seems to have a particularly strong influence. Stimuli which either damage or diminish the self image tend to produce negative affect whereas those which validate or enhance it produce positive affect.

Morale seems to have a component which relates to the future and progress towards it. This future/goal dimension results from the conscious cognitive processing of afferent stimuli. Individuals often seem to check whether events or interactions are positive for their future or

negative. In order to do this there has to be some sort of objective toward which they are heading. This is complemented with an ongoing appraisal process whereby the proximity of the goal is constantly evaluated.

The third dimension involves relations with others. Individuals often articulate morale in terms of their relationship with others. The feelings of being part of a team and cohesive unit were mentioned by a number of individual when they described high and low morale situations. The way in which relations with others affects morale is rather disputed, with considerable disagreement as to whether morale is an individual or group concept.

The majority of respondents saw morale as an individual + group phenomenon. The explanation that this thesis puts forward is that morale is an individual phenomenon but that emotional contagion between individuals means that individuals influence one another's morale levels. This may be a tacit influence dependent on non-verbal cues or a more explicit influence through words and deeds. This process of emotional contagion means that that morale related information shuttles between individuals constantly producing a sensation of group affect. In this conception morale is an individual phenomenon but one which is closely synchronised with the group. This process is dependent on both who the individual perceives as being in their group and also the esteem in which they hold the other person/people.

Morale is related to performance, although not in all circumstances. Morale is associated with productivity and turnover intention but does not seem to correlate with appraisal data. Workers with high morale believe that they work harder, longer and communicate with one another better. Low morale is likely to produce the reverse although not in all circumstances as the individual's sense of professionalism may force them to maintain certain levels of performance irrespective of how they feel.

Morale is, therefore, a mental state which can be distinguished from other phenomena. It is influenced by stimuli which impact the individual's affective state and sense of the future either directly or through moderation by others. It affects performance although not in all cases and is believed to be an important factor for individuals and in organisations.

### **Directions for future research**

This thesis presents exploratory research into morale. . There are three distinct classes of activity which would form the basis of a future research programme. The first is to confirm the findings of this initial research. The most obvious starting place is to further validate the measures of morale. Validation is an iterative process which requires multiple samples and

multiple time frames (Scandura, 2005). Further validation will increase confidence in the properties of the instruments in addition to bringing them to wider attention.

The model of morale developed also requires replication to ensure that it is not an erroneous result however such replication is rarely undertaken in management research (Hubbard & Armstrong, 1994; Hubbard & Vetter, 1996; Hubbard, Vetter, & Eldon, 1998). It may also be beneficial to use different measures of the affective, future/goal and interpersonal dimensions to see whether the model is robust to variations of these antecedents.

The findings that age, gender and organisational tenure have little effect should also be checked with further samples to ensure that these are not sample-specific effects as should the discovery of trans-national differences.

The second class of activity involves further clarification of some of the equivocal or less well proven findings of this research. Perhaps the most pressing of these is to examine the impact of morale on performance. Whilst this has been conducted to a limited extent within this work further evaluation, preferably of a longitudinal nature, would help establish whether morale affects performance. Having the morale measure is only half of the issue – the performance measure must also be chosen. Ideally this should be determined independently of the individual's self-report of morale in order to eliminate common method bias. Suitable candidates would include actual staff turnover, appraisal ratings or ratings of performance by a supervisor and measures of quality where this can be attributed to a particular individual.

Another approach to this would be the use of quasi-experimental techniques where attempts are made to manipulate one group's morale levels and then compared with another. Although this approach is less rigorous than stricter experimental approaches the longer periodicity of morale fluctuations may preclude the use of laboratory approaches. Careful design, for example using switching replication approaches (Trochim & Donnelly, 2007), would help allay some of these concerns. When combined with longitudinal research outlined above quasi-experimental approaches could provide convergent evidence for the impact of morale on performance.

The impact of personality variables on morale was far from clear in this research. Although attempts were made to understand this the results do not provide a coherent picture. Further research in the vein of Organ's (1997) call should be conducted. The finding that psychometric variables alter how individuals describe morale but not its dimensions needs unpacking as does the finding that morale level varies with PA, neuroticism and other variables.

The three dimensions of morale discussed are rather abstract and high level. This was, in part, to produce generalisable dimensions which would work across different organisations. As discussed in the reflection section there is a danger that these high level dimensions are seen as vague and unimplementable. Further research to explore methods of translating these high level dimensions into practical organisational interventions is necessary. This would then permit the impact of each of the dimensions to be better understood. This links in with the proposal for quasi-experimental design outlined above as each individual dimension could be manipulated and its impact assessed.

This research examines the process of morale production as part of the overall body of research. Morale production deserves more focussed attention, not least because of the linkages to other organisational concepts. This could be undertaken with more detailed qualitative work focussing on how individuals process events and interactions and the way in which this engenders the morale. This process would also allow the difficult issue of whether morale is an emotion, a mood, an attitude or an affective state to be addressed in a more categorical way.

The third class of activity is to extend the findings of this research into new areas. The production of morale, for example, also appears to involve feedback loops leading to the exposition of a 'flywheel effect'. The impact of these inter and intra-personal feedback loops merits further investigation. To some extent these fall under the umbrella of emotional contagion but the data suggest that the present descriptions of this concept (e.g. Barsade, 2002) are unequal to the task of explaining the observed phenomenon. The idea of a flywheel effect offers some explanation as to why morale states are resistant to change – both positively and negatively.

The findings around individuals and groups could be extended, using the scales developed in this thesis, by exploring the relationship between individual and group morale. The finding that individuals rate their morale higher than that of their group could be investigated using nested models to see how the two interact. Similarly the boundary effects of who is actually in the group could be investigated using comparable approaches.

The problems of language and definition in this research raise linguistic issues which are applicable in other areas. For example when we ask a survey question does it mean the same thing to different people? The possibility of our understanding of language introducing inapparent noise into surveys is one which requires further work as it is potentially a large source of inapparent error within survey research. If two people interpret a question differently and yet

both 'strongly agree' then error is introduced and which is statistically inapparent. Much management research hinges on the assumption that interlocutors understand one another perfectly and identically but if definition is variable then this may not be a sound assumption.

Overall this thesis offers numerous opportunities for confirming the results of the research; arbitrating on the more equivocal elements and extending the findings to produce new knowledge and insights in both management and other fields.

## Conclusion

The initial motivation for this research was my personal experience of high and low morale states whilst working in the pharmaceutical industry. As discussed in the introduction the morale level in the organisation fluctuated and this had a significant effect on how I felt about my work, my output, the degree of effort required to do my job and the enjoyment which stemmed from it. Discussing this with friends and colleagues I did not believe that I was alone in this experience.

When I was first exploring research topics, initially for a limited 3 month MBA project, I thought morale might prove to be an interesting subject. What I discovered was that relatively little was known about the concept and what little there was was incoherent and not particularly helpful. On the face of it this would seem to be an ideal research topic yet the lack of literature in which to ground a research project and paucity of expertise on the topic makes research into morale difficult. Indeed a colleague at another university uses morale as an example of what not to study (Blenkinsopp, 2007, pers. com.) as the topic is superficially appealing but difficult to gain traction with as there is little firm ground.

The lack of coherence and structure in existing research is something numerous sources in the literature have alluded to (e.g. Hightower, 1944; Liefooghe et al., 2004; Peterson et al., 2008). In spite of this morale is an important topic which clearly influences individuals and organisations (see Bewley, 1999; Ramsbotham, 2003; Sirota et al., 2005; Slim, 1986). This then leaves a quandary whereby the researcher is discouraged from exploring an important topic which has a societal meaning<sup>29</sup> because it does not fit with current directions within the literature or is seen as a folk concept and yet sees the perceived need for research to help better inform organisations. The focussed and protracted nature of doctoral research perhaps offers an opportunity to investigate an ill defined concept like morale (Organ, 1997).

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<sup>29</sup> It is interesting to note that if the researcher delineates and labels a new concept, even one which broadly covers an existing conceptual space, then this is unlikely to prove controversial with the academic community.

The incoherence of the literature suggests the start point for this research which was to cover the breadth of what was already known across a number of different areas and use this to help inform the rest of the research. Although some themes were readily identifiable, for example the individual/group issue, the literature really pointed to how little is formally recorded on morale.

This is the nub of the research problem in that there is a well articulated phenomenon of morale and little useful research. In the light of this the approach of linking the social understanding of morale to research principles is the pragmatic one. It is not, however, the only possible approach. A definition of morale could have been selected from the literature or from personal experience and then applied. The history of nearly a century of morale research suggests that this approach does not work as it has been consistently attempted and yet failed to gain traction.

Basing academic research on social understanding raises a number of problems. The first is whether both parties are actually talking about the same thing. At some level this is a language problem. Does the word morale mean the same thing to different people and how do we best capture this societal meaning? The other approach is to decide on a meaning and exclude other interpretations. This then leaves a choice and in this research I have chosen to try and align the academic investigation of morale with the social understanding of the concept through qualitative and quantitative research.

The second problem results from my own interest in the topic. Given my experiences of morale and the strong feelings I have about it is it possible to be impartial? In absolute terms, of course, the answer is no. It is not possible to make value-free observations but one can attempt to expose and reveal the influences and, potentially, work with them to help illuminate the topic (Hardy et al., 2001). The adoption of the critical realist perspective (Ackroyd & Fleetwood, 2001b; Fleetwood, 2005) and combination of qualitative and quantitative method provides multiple views of morale which illuminate different areas and complement one another.

The first stage of the research is to try and clear up some basic unarticulated elements of morale. The majority of extant research does not define morale but rather relies on the tacit implicit understanding between author and reader. Similarly the actual sensation or experience of morale is seldom articulated or described. Actually describing the phenomenon is something which has been little undertaken. Quantitative appraisals of some of the fundamentals of morale are similarly important. Prior to this thesis there was no available data on whether morale varied by gender, for example.



This exploration and exposition of the fundamentals of morale seems both timely and necessary. Effectively it assembles a corpus of description of the concept as well as examining some rather unglamorous but necessary questions. Whether morale varies with age, for example, is not desperately interesting – particularly if it turns out that it does not. Nonetheless it is important to know these things as it then has implications for future research.

Effectively this element of the research looked at the footings of the morale concept and, using a construction analogy, ensured that the foundations of future research were not imperilled by the unexpected instability of demographic and other factors. Of course for certain personality factors this work is ongoing but for many basic variables this phase of the research proved fruitful if uninteresting.

Continuing the construction analogy it was also necessary to clear away some of the surrounding conceptual clutter which obscured access to the concept of morale. This clutter was the intermingling of morale with other concepts such as satisfaction. By ruling these out as being the same as morale the concept can be seen unhindered by recurrent questions as to whether we are really talking about satisfaction or happiness. The danger here is that because I wanted there to be a difference I imposed my own prejudices on the research. The comparison of SIMs is an attempt to offset this, relying as it does on a simple comparison of the individuals' interpretations of the words. Overall there is considerable evidence supporting the idea that morale is different to these other concepts and the only countervailing evidence is from the literature which offers no empirical support for the elision.

Again this is not particularly eye catching research. Yet it is crucial. If no effort is made to differentiate the various concepts with which morale has been elided then any further research is simply dismissed as really being about satisfaction/happiness/motivation and so forth.

Much of this thesis has been taken up with trying to establish some rather basic, yet hitherto unarticulated, elements of morale. It is reasonable to ask whether the work which has been done is sufficient to settle the matter. The likelihood is that it has not as this thesis is limited in both time and space. In reality only around 200 people were interviewed and a couple of thousand surveyed, and most of these were in the UK. This leaves admirable scope for doubt but the findings of this research suggest that although future research on these issues is necessary it is unlikely to be revelatory.

Having established the site it is then necessary to build some sort of edifice upon it. As with any construction process it is important to have an idea of what the final structure will look like.

This involves some elements of design and, as discussed in the reflection section of the previous chapter, choices and tensions between various different approaches.

The key decision in this research was to try and produce a generalised system for defining, understanding and measuring morale. This was informed by personal experience, the extant literature and conversations during the qualitative phase. Personal experience suggested that what I experienced as morale was the same whether working as a veterinary surgeon or PhD student. The interviews in the qualitative phase of research accorded with this view as the respondents would readily draw on experiences and examples from a variety of different industries, positions and contexts. What research there is on morale is often quite contextual, for example Hart's work on teachers (Hart et al., 2000; Hart, 1994) or Lawton's on the elderly (Lawton, 2003) and so developing an understanding which mirrored the lived experience seemed to important.

This decision had a number of implications both for the research conducted and the subsequent findings principal of which was the development of a more generalised structure and measurement system. The three dimensions of morale which emerged from the research process are, as previously discussed, somewhat abstract. This helps them be generalised from one situation to another but conversely makes them less prescriptive for managers. At some level this might be a good thing, managers need to think for themselves, but at another it risks producing research which is difficult to implement. The same inherent compromise is seen in the antecedents of morale which are similarly high level and so unconcrete.

A similar compromise was necessary for the measurement systems. Again the danger of specific measurement is that it is not generalisable across situations. This is a particularly significant problem for quantitative measures as organisations may wish to compare themselves with others. As before, however, generalisability comes at the price of specificity and the measures of morale ask about abstract sensations rather than concrete experiences.

The structure of morale which was built up, therefore, represented a series of choices, many of which have been outlined in previous sections. This means that the resultant superstructure bears the imprint of its builder, a consequence which is inevitable in any research project in any discipline. The aesthetics of the design are, so long as the building fulfils its purpose, a matter of taste. The standards of construction, however, are not. In this research I have tried to ensure that the elements which build up the conception on morale described are buttressed and supported by a combination of replication and triangulation.

The qualitative phase relied on multiple organisations and respondents allowing the grounded theory process to iteratively refine my understanding of morale. Within this process there were multiple parallel questions such as asking individuals about a time when they had high morale and also about what would raise their morale. These different approaches permitted triangulation on the concept whilst the replication increased confidence that this was a prevailing view. The quantitative phase complemented the qualitative and provided confirmation of the findings of the qualitative work through a markedly different approach. Overall the two approaches worked well to give a unified, robust picture of the morale concept.

The process by which the edifice was constructed, therefore, was multifaceted and coherent. Finding the same result through multiple methods increases confidence in that result. In spite of this this thesis would not pretend to be the last word on morale. What it is an attempt to draw together and comment on existing research and use this as the springboard to explore the concept more fully and in a grounded way. As such it represents not an endpoint for morale but rather a start point for future research.

Given the personal motivation for undertaking this thesis it is reasonable to ask whether I am any the wiser having undertaken the research. Would I be better equipped to understand and influence morale than I was in prior to this thesis? The answer is clearly that I would. The three dimensional structure proposed would prove invaluable in diagnosing the level of morale and in framing suggestions as to how it might be improved. The interpersonal effects through contagion would allow me to understand how others' morale might affect my own and so forth. This research has, however, raised a number of further questions which were outlined in the preceding section and so is by no means the end of the project.

So where does this leave us? For nearly 65 years researchers have been complaining about the state of morale research (e.g. Hightower, 1944; Liefoghe et al., 2004). The lack of understanding of the nature of morale, how it might be defined and its measurement has been frequently commented on. In spite of this there has been a considerable body of research on the topic which has been hobbled by the lack of understanding of morale.

This thesis has taken a rather different approach leveraging the societal understanding of the concept of morale. This has enabled an exploration of the topic as it is understood by individuals within the workforce. This is a reversal from much research where a phenomenon is identified, defined, measured and then promulgated.

Using society as a source to help delineate various aspects of the concept has allowed morale to be separated from the societal conception of other concepts, notably satisfaction, motivation and happiness. Asking individuals to describe morale itself, situations where it has been high or low and what would affect their morale enabled the phenomenon itself to be examined. This suggested three different dimensions to morale and enabled its antecedents and consequences to be determined.

This societal understanding was used in the quantitative phase to develop and validate measures of morale. These measures were then used to evaluate the various findings of the qualitative phase. Overall they either confirmed or complemented the findings of the qualitative research, increasing confidence in the findings of both phases.

Morale emerges as a significant factor in organisational life which individuals feel strongly when it is either high or low. It is influenced by factors which impact on the individual's affective state and sense of identity as well as those pertaining to the perception of the future and the relationship of individuals to others. Morale is related to turnover intention and various productivity measures although no relation has been demonstrated with performance appraisal.

Overall this research suggests that morale is an important organisational topic which, now that it has been defined and can be measured, should be further explored. It is to be hoped that work proceeding from this thesis will enable a more structured approach to be taken to the appraisal and measurement of morale.

*'It is not in the sphere of the maturest understanding to judge of us simply by our external actions; it must fathom the very soul, and find out the springs that give it motion; but as this is a dangerous and sublime undertaking, I wish that fewer persons would attempt it'* (Montaigne, 1776, p 10)

## Appendix 1 – Organisational information on qualitative research sites

### Scientific Research Centre (SRC)

SRC was founded in 1943. Its principal objectives are to study and endeavour to cure diseases in animals useful to man and to advance the teaching and practice of veterinary art and science<sup>†</sup>. It is based in an attractive woodland site with a number of different buildings housing the four main areas of activity. These buildings are widely dispersed about the site and consist of central administration ('The Hall'), the Centre for Small Animal Studies (CSAS), the Equine Centre and the Centre for Preventative Medicine (CPM). CSAS and the Equine Centre are involved in clinical and research activities with CPM solely undertaking research and laboratory facilities. SRC is a charity which relies on a combination of donors and selling its clinical and research services.

This funding mix has not been highly successful and the centre is uncomfortably financially poised. In the year prior to research being conducted a number of departments were closed with concomitant redundancies. A survival strategy was devised which required merger with a veterinary school 65 miles away, this coupled with pay freezes and a sense by some people that the organisation was not being run either effectively or justly led to further resignations and the defenestration of the Chief Executive. An interim Chief Executive was appointed who was unsuccessful in securing the permanent position. The merger plans were also dropped and the organisation plans to continue as an independent entity. The new chief executive had been in post for four months when the interviews started.

The centre employs ~225 workers at different levels and disciplines ranging from kennel hands to senior clinicians, laboratory technicians to world class scientists, canteen staff to financial controllers. The bulk of employees are involved in provision of services (190) with 28 in support and management and 6 in fundraising.

Morale at the organisation was generally described as 'bad'.

### Garden Centre Chain (GCC)

The Garden Centre Chain is a family owned business founded at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century initially as a nursery, moving into retail premises in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The business now consists of a chain of 13 garden centres in the south and east of the UK as well as a nursery and landscaping business. The firm has a long history of winning medals at the Chelsea Flower

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<sup>†</sup> Trustees' report and financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2007

Show. It employs around 1 200 people, a large percentage of which are either part-time or casual/seasonal workers. Each store has a core team of permanent staff who are supplemented by part-time workers.

The research focussed on the retail business and head office. To this end three stores (Cambridge, St Albans and Norwich) acted as research sites. These were selected on the basis of their perceived morale level by the management at head office.

Norwich: This store, recently modernised, had a long history of a stable workforce and good performance. Recently the premises had been refurbished and the atmosphere was thought to be good.

St Albans: This was seen as an average store within the group. There were some problems with staffing and the proximity to London meant that salary did not match living costs as well as in Norwich. There was a more transient workforce and less continuity an organisational memory.

Cambridge: This store was bought by the group five years prior to the research having been a single, privately owned garden centre prior to that. It was seen as a problem store within the group and had had a succession of managers. There were major divisions perceived within the workforce, particularly between those who had been employed at the site prior to the takeover by GCC. Store performance was poor and morale was seen as low.

In addition to these three stores research was also conducted at the head office. This had also been subjected to significant change with the family owners stepping back from management about six months prior to the research and appointing a professional CEO instead. Morale at head office was not discussed prior to the interviews commencing.

Overall the group was experiencing quite a lot of change as the new CEO had been brought in by the family to shake things up. The group had been underperforming for a number of years after a very successful period in the 1990s. This led to uncertainty within the business. Morale overall was not perceived as particularly bad but there were pockets where low morale was readily apparent.

### **High Tech Start Up 1 (HTSU 1)**

This start up organisation had only been in existence for three years prior to the research. It specialises in linking computers to multiple displays using both semiconductors and software.

The organisation is small with only around 80 workers. The workforce consists of two main groups, the engineers (both chip and software designers) and those that support them.

The organisation is financed by venture capitalists and equity is offered alongside salary. At the time of the research the business was expanding and had just made some significant agreements with Samsung. The premises occupied by the organisation were not big enough to permit expansion on one floor so the business is now spread over two floors.

The present chief executive was appointed a year prior to the research commencing and is well thought of both internally and externally. His predecessor remained in the business but this did not seem to be a source of conflict.

Overall the business was felt to be doing well and morale was viewed as good.

### **High Tech Start Up 2 (HTSU 2)**

HTSU 2 was founded in 2003 to provide ultra-wideband products combining both semiconductors and software and over time this mission has shifted to the development of wireless USB. The company is trying to develop low cost, low power but high performance chip/software combinations which are compliant with international standards.

The organisation comprised about 60 workers almost all of whom were male engineers. Other functions such as HR and administrative support were kept to a minimum. The company was not making the progress that had been hoped at the time of the interview. There were problems with the radio-frequency (RF) part of the chip and a belief that the product was heading in the wrong direction. This was exacerbated by the fact that the CEO had been highly critical of the organisation's performance at a recent 'town hall' meeting with the staff. Alongside this consultants had been drafted in to appraise the business and advise on improvement. This unsettled the workforce as did an unconsensual reorganisation of the office space.

Overall morale in this organisation was felt to be below average.

### **Silicon Chip Manufacturer (SCM)**

SCM specialises in epitaxy which is the deposition of thin films on the surface of silicon chips. This enables special properties to be imparted to the so that they can be used for a variety of specialist applications. The business was founded in 1988 and grew steadily until the dot com boom of the late 1990s when growth in the communications industry dramatically increased the demand for chips and hence for epitaxy. The company underwent explosive growth in this

period followed by subsequent retrenchment in the early 2000s. At the time of interviewing some five years later this was still a strong part of the organisational memory.

The company employed about 350 people at the time of the research with sites in South Wales, Milton Keynes and Singapore. In the year prior to the research a number of significant changes had occurred. A new facility had been opened in Singapore and one of the founders retired and another took his place. The research was conducted at the South Wales site and both of these events were perceived negatively. The new management was seen as remote and capricious and the facility in Singapore as a threat to employment at the South Wales site. Demand was also slack for the products produced in South Wales and the production facility was caught in a technology gap between an older product line, for which demand was waning, and a new technology for which demand had not yet reached a critical mass.

Workers at the site were divided into three groups. The engineers who designed the manufacturing processes, the workforce who actually did the manufacturing and those who provided support functions. Overall morale was seen as poor and the employees dispirited.

### **Fibreglass Roofing Manufacturer (FRM)**

This organisation manufactures rooflights and skylight as well as other roofing materials. It began as an independent organisation started by the present managing director's father and was subsequently bought by a larger Northern Irish group. The business is based at a number of sites but this research focussed on the Birmingham facility.

The site of the factory is on an industrial estate and is extremely cramped. There is little excess room with excess inventory sometimes filling the site. The site employs about 120 people and turns over around £20 million. There are four principal groups of workers; engineers/designers, sales people, support staff and the workers in the production process. The workforce is quite stable but there has been a recent influx of Polish workers on one of the production lines. The manufacturing work itself is dirty, smelly and relatively poorly paid however the location ensures a steady supply of unskilled labour.

The organisation is seen as well run and is performing quite well. There are concerns about the actions of the parent company and the vagaries of the market but overall morale within the organisation is good.



### **Ball Bearing Manufacturer (BBM)**

BBM is the UK subsidiary of a German parent organisation. It specialises in manufacturing bearings and automotive parts. The manufacturing is conducted in South Wales and the warehousing and distribution are managed from Sutton Coldfield. Both sites employ around 120-130 people and are quite different.

Sutton Coldfield: This is the UK headquarters and its present structure is the result of the German parent company purchasing a smaller rival. This merger still looms large and the provenance of people within the organisation is still, at a ground level, a matter of interest. The workforce in this facility comprises sales, marketing, warehousing, distribution and management. Recently SAP has been implemented by the German parent which, when coupled with insufficient capacity at European manufacturing sites, has led to supply problems. Morale within this facility is mixed.

South Wales: This is the main UK manufacturing plant and is unionised. In the late 1990s it was underperforming and saw much of its business being shifted to low cost manufacturing sites in Eastern Europe, threatening its future. The management at the site initiated a programme called L>C which stated that ‘the rate of learning has to be greater than the rate of change’. This symbol was linked to a number of other initiatives such as worker education, quality improvements and manufacturing reorganisation. This proved highly successful and the plant was not only saved but work returned from the low cost sites because of the improved quality. The workforce consists of engineers/designers and the workers manufacturing the products. Currently the plant is performing well and morale is high.

The different activities and histories of the two sites are linked by the common management team which is thought by outsiders to be quite effective. Overall the organisation is performing well but somewhat hampered by the state of production in Germany and the decline in the British car industry.

## Appendix 2 - Dimensions, Themes, Categories, and Quotations

Second-Order Themes and First-Order Categories	Representative Quotations
<b>Overarching Dimension: Affective</b>	
<i>1. Valued and taken seriously</i>	
A. Appreciation	Because they thanked you, I mean the Japanese are very kind and they thanked you for what you did and for your efforts. Even though you worked really hard and long hours, and you were under extreme pressure. (Purchasing controller, SCM, 99)
B. Trusted	I'm really into my show jumping in a big way and we had a very famous show jumper in and I got to ride it and I felt amazing so, it felt really, really good. (Groom, SRC, 94)
C. Autonomy	I was sort of left to buy and sell all sorts of merchandise, and make the decisions of where it came from and exactly what I wanted to buy, and yes I was like running my own job so, and there was no effective management interference because they were all busy. Sort of fighting another fire, so they just left me to get on with it. It was quite good. (Commercial Analyst, BBM, 57)

<i>2. Self-worth</i>	
D. Achievement	Well you've achieved something, I mean we worked hard for it for two or three years really and it's like a pinnacle type of thing you know and it was a high standard of rugby as well. (Team Leader, BBM, 39)
E. Feeling successful	I think morale was still high because the project was a success. It was a success in commercial terms, but also environmental terms and for the local people in the Philippines who helped us with the project. (Fundraiser, SRC, 13)
F. Interesting work	I was enthusiastic about doing it and I was interested in the project. It was to do with otters' eyes; it was to see whether the environment was actually affecting the sight of the otters. (Laboratory technician, SRC, 127)
<i>3. Communication and support</i>	
G. Communication	...communication as well, between the hierarchy, the managers and the shop floor, that has been improved as well...You know where you are, know what you're doing...(Manager, GCC, 162)
H. Recognition	The regional manager came down and he looked around and he goes 'Well I've been here five years, it's been an absolute tip and you've got it in perfect position, bloody well done'. You know, he actually really said well done and it made me feel really really good. (Section Head, GCC, 183)
I. Leadership	And I think actually leadership, kind of associated with morale, is this peculiar thing where you have to connect with the board upwards, and with the troops and that's about it really. (Business Development Executive, HTSU 1, 117)
J. Praise	And just praise, just praise and he'd come into the lab every day and he knew exactly what you were doing and would support you and give you praise, exactly. (Technician/Student, SRC, 203)

<i>4. Alienation</i>	
K. Marginalised	Feeling kind of excluded from the decision making process that I feel that I should be contributing to. (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 111)
L. Injustice	One of the things that spoiled the morale considerably was a perceived very different treatment depending on where you were in the organisation (Accountant, HTSU 1, 59)
M. Fragmentation	Right, so well I suppose splitting up of the team, if various members of that good support team, you got rid of them or they left. Yeah that would be low morale. (Nurse, SCM, 86)
<i>5. Low self-worth</i>	
N. Boredom	I worked in a pallet place and that was so mundane and idiot work, it was unbelievable, you know, there was no skill in it whatsoever. (Thermo-forming worker, FRM, 190)
O. Failure	If I lost a match, I'd go back to the hotel, the apartment I was staying in, wherever it may be and I'd cry my eyes out, because I was gutted, I was genuinely heartbroken. (Shop worker, GCC, 188)
<i>6. Support and Communication</i>	
P. Criticism	If I was to be criticised by management, then that would dent my morale. Yeah if you'd come in as a vet and said to me, you know, you're talking absolute rubbish, then I'd be thinking 'Oh shit'. (Pet Department Manager, GCC, 101)
Q. Being demeaned	I've been in meetings with him when he's said to the engineering manager, the reason we're in this mess is all your fault, you've allowed it to happen over the years. You know, in front of his staff and so on. (Process Engineer, FRM, 4)
R. Lack of praise/recognition	I think for me...it's the very little things, it's the getting a promotion at work, but not getting a staff announcement that goes round to all the garden centres so everybody knows. (Section Head, GCC, 48)

<b>Overarching Dimension: Future/Goals</b>	
<i>1. Vision of the future</i>	
A. Attractiveness of vision	I really would love to be associated with a vaccine for strangles, I just would, that would be a real satisfaction for me. So yeah, we've always got that in mind. (Technician/Student, SRC, 203)
B. Clarity of vision	I had quite a clear line as to what I was supposed to achieve. When I first joined the company, they'd only been set up six months, they hadn't done any events and stuff, then I was just brought on solely to get them set up and get them running and that's what I did. (Clerk, GCC, 28)
C. Better than present	As far as I'm concerned, morale is I suppose a degree of confidence that you've got in what you're doing and...it's a start up company, it's got great potential, so you come in, you buy into it, you believe it and you just do your best for it really. (Accountant, HTSU 1, 2)
D. Security	The ultimate aim is you know, if somebody said you have security to sixty five, then I'll be skipping round the factory. Again it's probably related to um, the financial situation, because in this day and age, finance, the financial areas are more important and my last child is just about to go to university, so I'd like to think that the next four years are secure, or five years are secure, to guarantee that. So job security would probably be a big morale booster for me. (Logistics Manager, BBM, 187)
E. Challenge	I mean in terms of high morale, you know, for me I know I'm feeling high morale because I look forward to coming into work every morning and I know there are going to be challenges, trials and tribulations but...I think it's feeling positive about those challenges and the sense that you can meet and achieve those challenges and objectives. (Centre Manager, GCC, 107)
F. Importance of the task	And the fact that it was a small company meant that you was very close to what was happening, you knew that if you didn't do a job by a certain time the repercussions could be fatal, and so when you did it and you achieved the goals and the milestones, people were appreciative, you felt good, you know, it was great. (Engineer, HTSU 2, 181)

<i>2. Progress</i>	
G. Sense of progress	Um, it's not critical as long as you know you're progressing towards a thing. If you need to be told that you're progressing towards it, to make you know you're progressing towards it, then yes it is critical. It's critical that you know you're progressing, but it doesn't have to be direct feedback from someone else, because you should know what you're doing yourself. (Finance Director, HTSU 2)
H. Feeling successful	At British Biotech, when despite all of the redundancies and the problems that the company had, my group managed to get a new antibiotic into phase 1 clinical trials in humans and it looked reasonably good. They actually got a clinically effective dose into people without adverse reactions. And all of the other research was going very well as well. I mean, everything looked rosy. (Group Leader, SRC, 7)
I. Contribution to goal	Like some new project came in and um, your contribution is very important and people come and ask you things and so you feel that you're contributing (...) in an effective way. (Engineer, HTSU 2, 137)

<i>3. Vision of the future</i>	
J. Lack of clarity	I've made the point before, but it is about clarity of direction. What is the company's expectation of every one of us, what is my expectation of the departmental managers and the staff. And I think, just maintaining and improving on that clarity will help keep morale up. (Centre Manager, GCC, 107)
K. Changing objectives	I don't know, I guess from my personal point of view it's quite difficult if certainly senior directors keep changing their minds and their opinions quite regularly, it's not so much their priorities change, because we always (want) to do the other things. But it just seems to swing about a lot and we don't focus and get things finished off and I think the more we do that, the more demoralising it can be. (Production Manager, FRM, 9)
L. Pointlessness	So that was awful, because that was again, the products we had which were trying to get them out of the mess needed work. So you were working hard trying to get those out, but you always knew in the back of your mind, I'm not sure...the company's going to be around long enough to see the light of day, so why am I putting the effort in? (Engineer, HTSU 2, 158)
M. Lack of confidence	I mean I've been given positive feedback by some of the managers here and they think I'm doing a good job, but what I feel is that there's confidence been lost in the team that I work in. Um and that's you know, and the morale in the team in general at the moment is really low. (Engineer, HTSU 2, 20)
N. Future seen as bleak	And we were sort of doing, we've increased our wafer production from about four thousand up to thirteen and a half thousand wafers a month, and we still can't make a profit, and we still can't get any remuneration reward for it (Purchasing controller, SCM, 99)
O. Insecurity	If they come in and said right, half of you is being made redundant, you're okay, but that's still not going to do much good for your morale is it? (IT Worker, SRC, 51)

<i>4. Progress</i>	
P. Lack of progress	Like you're sort of taking one step forward and one back and not really getting anywhere. I think it is just that [sighs], you know, and it becomes very difficult to cope with things. (Section Head, GCC, 48)
Q. Interference from others	What does demoralise me, is when...people who are essentially non executive voluntary Trustees want to take over executive responsibility...I take the view that I'm going to run this place and I stand or fall by whether I do it successfully or not. (Executive, SRC, 147)
<i>5. Portents</i>	
R. Others leaving	Then, the guy in IT, he left and when people are leaving, they have a negative impact on morale because they say you know, the end is nigh. The [SRC] is going to go out of business, blah blah blah. (IT Manager, SRC, 53)
S. Redundancy	I suppose if redundancies came round and stuff like that I suppose, that could just drop your morale straight down. (Toolmaker, BBM, 122)



<b>Overarching Dimension: Interpersonal</b>	
<i>1. Influence of others</i>	
A. Contribution	Um, I think high morale happened for me about three weeks ago, at which point I began to feel that I was making a contribution and I felt I was engaged with a variety of people from different levels, in different ways, helping some guy with some stuff, other people helping me, Really working in, what felt like, a team. (Software Engineer HTSU 1, 111)
B. Teamwork/Pulling together	We continued that right the way through the year, and it was tremendous sense of feeling of being part of an active body of people, all moving in the same direction and wanting to move in the same direction, even the malingerers, the people who still sort of always wanted to play up, they didn't become angels but they did sort of, they moved with us and they were two steps behind, but because we've all moved on, they had moved on with us as well. (Engineer, FRM, 60)
C. Pride	You know, because he started off as my Saturday boy. So I've seen James rise through the ranks and you know, that's nice to sort of think that I was party to that. (Shop Manager GCC, 52)
D. Interesting work	He got us working on some really exciting projects and you know, we started to get some really good results and this was something new...so I guess that would be a situation where there was fairly high morale. (Technician/Student, SRC, 203)

<i>2. Relationships with others</i>	
E. Cohesion	I personally involved myself in lots of social activities with the place. We have a football team, we play football a lot We go out quite often and that's what builds morale and also to an extent, the working relationship as well, feeds from it. (Graduate Trainee, GCC, 197)
F. Good atmosphere	But it was just the atmosphere about the place, you know. And the people were lovely and I, it was great going in to work, I mean I absolutely loved it. (Finance Assistant, SCM, 97)
G. Helping others	I very much enjoy helping others become effective. One of the highest morale times for me, I was a total quality manager and I joined the managing director of a company, and together we dragged the company from about to die to being the best in the group. (Process Engineer, FRM, 4)
H. Criticism	I mean, I'm sure we'll come back to other things but it can be little throw away remarks and they may be said in a context of relating to your predecessor or whatever. But if it relates to your function in the organisation those things can affect me definitely. (Fundraiser, SRC, 6)
I. Being dragged down by others	that is seriously demoralising because it feeds off as well...negativity just feeds off [itself] and no matter how good a single member of the company might be at that site trying to keep morale up, if you've then got fifteen engineers sat round with nothing to do they will be demoralised. (Engineer, HTSU 1, 69)
J. Bullying	I got pulled in to pickup pieces on a project he was leading, and he bullied myself and anybody else who was working on the project actually some of the people just upped sticks and left the company, I got to the position where my own personal morale was so low, that I knew I wouldn't be able to job hunt outside the company.( Engineer, FRM, 60)
K. Being demeaned	Yeah, or they'd be very demeaning to you. There was one manager in particular, who would tell the other cashier to do something and then he'd say, 'Repeat it after me so that you've got it.'... (Section Head, GCC, 177)
L. Organisational politics	Whereas here we are absolutely crippled by petty arguments, I mean it's just amazing. I've never worked anywhere like this. It's just crippled by it. (Designer, GCC, 25)

<i>4. Relationship with others</i>	
M. Isolation	I think a true sense of alienation because you feel isolated, both from them, you know, who are people of course who I had got on with perfectly well and from you know, the team and your colleagues. [But] because you're in a unique position of insight that they're not seeing... it's lonely and it's frustrating. (Executive, GCC, 128)
N. Marginalisation	I said I don't want to do any more exams. I've done the one and that's it as far as I'm concerned. I was supposed to have been helping her, so she brought Jane in to do what I was doing, so that was great, but then nothing seemed to get passed over to me. (Finance Assistant, SCM, 97)
O. Bad atmosphere	I don't know, she just doesn't give you any encouragement at all, it's not a happy atmosphere when you walk in. All you get from her is huffs and puffs, you know, it's all about how much work she's got to do. You never get any praise from her saying, 'oh well done Les' or 'well done Lee,' you know. You never get anything like that. (Finance Assistant, SCM, 97)
P. Division in workforce	Because I joined an organisation which during the first few weeks it was quite obvious to me, because people were coming up to me and saying "are you a [Company A] guy or a [Company B]- guy" you know, it was my first few weeks here and I was sitting there thinking, well I was in a fairly senior...and I was thinking what the hell's this about, my response was I'm a [BBM] guy. (Engineer, BBM, 185)

## Appendix 3 – Items in the morale, satisfaction and commitment scales

### Morale scales

High morale	Low morale	SDS morale
I look forward to going to work	I feel directionless at work	Enthusiastic Indifferent
I am cheerful at work	I don't look forward to going to work	Unproductive Productive
I feel in control at work	My job is pointless	Encouraged Discouraged
My job is interesting	I am miserable at work	Pessimistic Optimistic
I feel lots of energy at work	I feel depressed at work	Motivated Frustrated
		Dejected Cheerful
		Supportive Hostile

### Satisfaction scales

Tepper satisfaction	Agho satisfaction
All in all, I am satisfied with my job	I am often bored with my job
In general, I don't like my job	I feel fairly well satisfied with my present job
In general, I like working here	I am satisfied with my job for the time being
	Most days I am enthusiastic about my work
	I like my job better than the average worker does
	I find real enjoyment in my work
(Tepper, 2000)	(Agho et al., 1992)

## Commitment scales

Escrig-Tena Commitment	Balfour Identity Commitment	Balfour Affiliative Commitment	Balfour Exchange Commitment
If necessary, employees in my organization devote more time to the firm than those stipulated in their normal working hours.	I am quite proud to be able to tell people that I work for my organisation	I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organisation	My organisation appreciates my accomplishments on the job
In my organization employees play an important part in deciding what work is to be carried out.	What my organisation stands for is important to me	I feel like 'part of the family' at my organisation	My organisation does all that it can to recognise employees for good performance
In my organization employee participation in setting goals and how they are to be achieved is high.	I work for an organisation that is incompetent and unable to accomplish its mission	The people that I work for do not care what happens to me	My efforts on the job are largely ignored or overlooked by this organisation
I consider workers' level of loyalty to my organization to be high.			
(Escrig-Tena & Bou-Llusar, 2005)	(Balfour & Wechsler, 1996)		

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