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PHD

Real purchasing: deference and discourse at work

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# **Real Purchasing: Deference and Discourse at work**

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Submitted by:

**NIGEL DAVID CALDWELL**

**For the degree of PhD of the University of Bath**

**2001**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Real Purchasing: Deference and Discourse at work**

**Nigel Caldwell, School of Management, University of Bath**

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This work begins with two individuals as a statement of intent. The intention is to learn about how people (here mainly buyers) 'do' work. Much of what is published about purchasing work is grounded in a ratio-technicalist view of purchasing processes and purchasing work. Individuals are omitted from such accounts and replaced by a focus on transformative initiatives, technical solutions and fads.

Deleting human interactions is seen in such research as promoting 'scientific truth' through impartial, objective, value free research. The thesis questions whether such epistemological stances are value free, and adopts in contrast a feminist influenced epistemology, where people are seen not as interference but as forming (and performing) social constructions of reality. Putting people at the centre of analysis allows consideration of social bonds, the communal nature of work and of community. From such a perspective much of what is seen as management in supply can be reinterpreted not as knowledge management or teamwork, but as attempts to dictate or impose discourses that favour organisations over individuals.

The thesis then addresses power, the power of discourses (including academic material) to dictate, to present what is 'normal'. In this study deference is used as a lens for examining how people work within and around such discourses. The thesis concludes that deference is one social tactic used to maintain distance, it reflects the decorum with which workers treat each other, and a belief in community.

### **Acknowledgements**

Firstly I would like to thank all my colleagues at CRiSPS, past and present, especially Louise Knight, Richard Lamming, and Christine Harland. Secondly, I would like to thank all those from the various companies who took part in the research, of whom I will only single out 'Hailey'. For the academic help they gave I would also like to thank Yiannis Gabriel and John Ramsay.

I could not have undertaken this work without the constant support, encouragement and occasional indulgence of Kaye Delisser, to her – as ever - my deepest thanks, but she knows that already.

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Figure 1.1 Structure of the Thesis

CHAPTER	PURPOSE
<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
1. Introduction	Introduction and framework
2. What is known about the problem	Deference
3. What is known about the problem	Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism
4. What is known about the problem	The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research
5. Research issues	Issues identified in existing knowledge
↓	
<i>Part Two – What data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on the data</i>	
6. Epistemology	How knowledge claims are made in this thesis
7. Research Methods	The research methods, and how they were operationalised in light of the research issues
8. Narrative data	Presents & analyses narratives
9. Observation data	Presents & analyses observation
↓	
<i>Part Three- Conclusions derived and how they both link connect with, and add to, existing knowledge</i>	
10. Interpretation of findings	Interpretation of Findings/Themes
11. Conclusions	What was discovered issue by issue, the contribution to knowledge

**Chapter 1: Introduction and framework**

<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>Introduction and framework</b>
2. What is known about the problem	Deference
3. What is known about the problem	Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism
4. What is known about the problem	The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research
5. Research issues	Issues identified in existing knowledge

**1 Purpose**

This chapter sets out the central themes of the thesis, it provides a framework for what is to follow. In doing so it addresses the question – why is this research of interest? It briefly outlines the epistemological *assumptions* of the thesis, and draws attention to some of the inherent limitations or boundaries. The chapter explains how the structure of the work functions to give form to the unfolding of tenable conclusions grounded in both theory and fieldwork.

**1.1 Dean and Maisie: the Central Themes of Thesis**

Here I use two people I have met to introduce the themes developed through this thesis. One I call Dean, the other is undoubtedly called Maisie.

**1.1.1 Rover’s Cowley Assembly site, 1992**

The site is soon to be sold off to become a ‘light’ industrial site – office jobs. Consequently the buildings that were erected by William Morris (the original founder owner) in the 1920s are in considerable disrepair. The huge glass ceiling above Material Control – a room of approximately 40 desks and people – leaks, only temporary patching is economic. Buckets are out permanently to catch the drops. The work of these 40 people (nearly all men) is to bring parts into the assembly line on time. There are approximately 2000 parts per car, perhaps 600 suppliers (although some deliver to a distribution centre) so co-ordination is the key task, the

skill of the section is crisis management. A particular skill is to be able to threaten a supplier with such intensity that they agree to produce parts they haven't got in stock, to meet a schedule that has not been issued correctly, without creating a shortage of their other parts. Mysterious stock losses were a fact of life. An analyst could be happily sat at their desk, on top of their work to be suddenly told that 200 parts that were meant to be in stock were not – and unless they got some more 'in', in the next few hours, the line could stop. In theory, and only very occasionally in practice, an analyst could be sacked for stopping the line. Other issues are rejects, transportation breakdowns, bad weather, containers stuck at ports, strikes, assembly line breakdowns – oh and of course pure unadulterated totally human 'cock ups'.

Apart from daily panics and crises the work is driven by the consistency of the three assembly lines, it is a treadmill in that it is relentless, 'triumphs' are short lived and heroes can turn into villains in seconds (i.e. allow a shortage of a part to affect the line). Once inside such a work pattern – which is punctuated only by works holidays, which everyone must take at the same time, like a school – it is very difficult to see it as anything other than natural. But it is not a natural pace, it is driven by the lines, which must be kept going.

I worked in an adjacent office, I mainly avoided such routine work, part of my work was to negotiate (down) claims suppliers put in for material and parts that had been ordered from them and then cancelled. Suppliant suppliers could be very deferential to me, my best assignment involved a trip to the south of France, a beautiful French supplier representative, a series of stunning restaurants – the highlight of which was the one that only served duck, followed by a moonlit midnight swim together. This material is relevant as it puts into perspective my interest in a certain supplier representative.

I observed over a period of time the monthly visits of this representative. He did not deal with parts or part numbers, (an assertion confirmed in a brusque encounter over a part-related query). His role (for which he found it necessary to wear a cheap suit and white socks,

topped off with a pencil moustache, giving an air of a wartime ‘spiv’) – was to take parts controllers out to lunch, on the last Monday of the month. His name I think was probably ‘Dean’, something like that, something that fitted his role and the non graduate, topless posters, environment of the place.

It is the absence of this figure and others like him from management accounts that interested me. He was a slightly bizarre, even comic figure but his visits were eagerly anticipated. He himself kept them ‘special’ by being (the author can see in retrospect) acutely aware of the value of keeping boundaries around his infrequent appearances and ‘largesse’; you had to be in the right circle, a reminder that to have an in-group you have to have an out-group. With hindsight, what were of more importance were the reactions of the parts controllers, who jealously guarded this monthly event – a simple pub lunch, strictly limited in time – hardly a bacchanalian revelry<sup>1</sup>. He made them feel important, and gave them something far beyond the value of a lunch. The value of the lunch was actually not in the lunch, nor simply in being invited on any particular occasion, but in being one of those who was from time to time invited – in being part of that relationship. One of the repeated themes of the research reported here is that this ‘spiv’ figure no longer exists<sup>2</sup> – though most experienced buyers recall him (and it always was him).

The ‘lunch’ is in fact a red herring, I enjoyed far far better myself, I had far more significant overtures from suppliers. (*“We know it can be lonely away from your home Nigel, you’ll find that Dublin girls are very very accomodating, and if you would like to sample something in that line we can be sure to arrange it for you, we want you to appreciate your stay”*). Whether the same role still exists is a red herring, it is what the role was doing, how it connects various worlds together, what the role said about work that is important. I was never part of the very active golf circuit between ‘us’ and many suppliers, but it was there and these were eagerly anticipated social occasions. These occasions ‘informed’ working relationships.



But ‘Dean’ also brings out other connections, any large car plant dominates an area, many brothers, cousins, fathers and sons worked there. Everyone tends to know someone who works or worked there, some suppliers were themselves very local. Some entire families worked there – always had, for three generations. Some people remembered William Norris – Lord Nuffield walking the floor saying hello to all and sundry. There were connections, so many connections between the place – the physical place, the people, – colleagues, promotion rivals, marriages, golf partners, simply always eating sandwiches together (the baguette had not been invented). We and our suppliers shared some monetary stake in our joint success, good times meant overtime, production bonuses. Somehow that spiv, ‘Dean’, was a part of all these connections. When suppliers deferred, sucked up, ingratiated, offered gifts, that was part of it all too, part of the connections, part of a very social ‘oil’ that smoothed the running of the whole caboodle. Perhaps as well Dean and all the connections mitigated the routine of the rapacious assembly line and its indifference to a job well done.

When I read the *Machine that Changed the world* (Womack *et al.* 1990) in retrospective I was dimly aware that the game was up, there was a better way to do it, and enthusiasm for that better way carried me for some years. But in starting aiming for a PhD and reading the supply literature on inter-organisational relationships, ‘Dean’, and more importantly all the connections, all the connectedness necessary in a large factory, appears left out. One starting point was this conviction that material written about purchasing and supply should reflect the ‘work world’ of purchasing and supply, what I refer to subsequently as ‘real work’. In part I now know that this reflects epistemology – and discuss this briefly below in 1.2.1, and in greater depth in Chapter 6.

### **1.1.2 A terraced house in Oxford, 1999**

Having absorbed ‘management’ first from an MBA and then more leisurely from suitable academic reading I felt I was putting my new knowledge together well and was versed

in a vocabulary. About this time I encountered a Caribbean midwife with forty years experience, she came to stay with for a month, during which time she wanted to obtain a midwifery post in England. Having no knowledge of CVs, and no idea that she had to have ‘core competencies’ and ‘value adding deliverables’ preparing her for interviews involved getting her to articulate what exactly a midwife did, what her ‘real’ skills were. She kept talking about her work, how she could touch inside a woman and tell to within fifteen minutes exactly when she would give birth. She thought in terms of hands on touching, she talked in terms of what years and years of helping women giving birth had taught her – but she did not know anything about management. She did go on courses, but this was not the knowledge she valued most. It felt that much of my ‘management’, the life’s works of academics who I looked up to as I had once footballers or popstars, did not have the centrality to human experience that the rarefied and tapered perspective of a serious student assumed it had. Over the weeks as she continued to talk about her work, the strange ‘touching’ or I would say now connectedness of her work, struck me as different to the distinction I had learnt from my reading between ‘tacit’ and ‘explicit’ knowledge. We know that Management in some senses is usually a culture of dissection, cutting things up into discrete pieces (fragments?) that can then be labeled, categorised and filed. In some senses I decided, the management practice of labeling the skills that it emerged that this woman [and other midwives] practiced as merely ‘tacit’ knowledge, is political (and epistemological).

By chance, one of my favorite articles had been a paper examining ‘midwives’. Written with elegance and precision the paper was highly acclaimed. The paper recorded ‘talk’ - how midwives feel about their work in the context of government policy - through recording group conversations in semi-formal settings. However, in the course of time spent immersed in what it actually meant to be a midwife, I found that this favourite paper, had not at all captured what it means to be a midwife, how midwives feel about their work or, what midwives actually do.

The piece retains its stylish prose, but in trying to represent midwives in the context of ‘proving’ something about management, ‘real work’ has been lost. What emerges is a form of material that is ‘management research’, that is to say the dissection, description, decoding and dumping of real work into a fictional world peopled and objectified with inherited and unexamined concepts, totems and scenery. Late into the process, the thesis picked up a commitment to challenging, or at least to commenting and reflecting upon this process whereby research, ‘good’, ‘committed’, ‘intelligent’ research, can be transformed into this mutated artifact. Such a commitment is especially to be seen in the decision to augment the material gathered in the stories with direct observation.

### **1.1.3 And So...**

Dean and Maise gave me a desire to examine real behaviours - not sanitised and over-strategised accounts based upon techniques involving considerable distance between the researcher and the subject. This study has in all senses been an education and it seems immature to present myself as the same person who began it, it has not been serial, I did not establish a hypothesis which I could carefully and in a controlled manner test. What has evolved comes from contact, involvement, some dead ends, a false start and earnest reflection. I suppose I have had a personal commitment to presenting the world more in terms of people and how they (as I believe they must) work together – as opposed to a more technical (and therefore in my eyes fragmented) perspective.

### **1.2 My angle (or lens) - Deference**

I have to admit beginning with the notion that deference from supplier to customer (buyer) is rooted in a view of suppliers as ‘dumb’ subordinates, as of little importance beyond the product or service they supply. However such a notion never really fitted with my interests,

with Dean and Maisie. From the 'Dean' episode I saw deference all around, as a part of hierarchical work relations but also horizontally as part of the 'fun' of being at work (or at least the amelioration of work). With a head full of sociological work on deference and not really much in the way of connecting that to what I saw, from Maisie I began to wonder about my own deference, about the deference to fads or ideologies of management that I had absorbed initially at face value as 'truths'. In conjunction with this thinking about Maisie's work I also became increasingly interested in what 'real skills' people might be using in their work that are not reported upon in management accounts - were any being ignored and if so why?

For me then, I am using deference in this thesis as a focus, as a framing device, I could have used friendships at work (with hindsight) or identity or ideology itself, but I like my deference. Deference can be said to honour social bonds, it brings into consideration geographical situatedness which is often ignored, it brings in decorum (politeness). I favour the word decorum as I hoped it came through above in describing work relations at Rover, and was I believe now really central to the work experience. It is also the maintenance of distance and 'otherness', a refusal to be absorbed or colonised. This distance, this way of thinking about retaining otherness is particularly interesting given that currently management material *urges*, *proselytises* teamwork and co-operation, (and cross firm team work in supply – supply chain management). I believe it can be shown to be a way of casting a chink of light into areas often ignored or dismissed in supply relationships and purchasing generally.

### 1.2.1 Epistemology

*'The deference-emotion system functions virtually continuously, even when we are alone, since we can imagine and anticipate its motions in vivid detail. Systematic research has been unable to document this system; it is too subtle and ubiquitous for laboratory experiment or social survey. Since it often functions outside of awareness, qualitative fieldworkers have not*

yet been able to catch its details. Unlike the system of formal sanctions, the deference-emotion system is virtually instantaneous and invisible. Its invisibility makes it difficult to describe' (Scheff, 1988: 396).

Most academics place research on supply firmly within operations management (e.g. Harland, 1994), and trace its origins to Operations Research, a subject commonly regarded as generally positivist, 'dominated by a concern with numbers and 'things'' (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1996:42). Most academics *do not* place supply management research as firmly pro business (as opposed to individuals), and pro customer (as in large focal organisations). Setting out firstly to address work that is perhaps not recognised, secondly connectedness at work that is not acknowledged in the supply literature, and thirdly a general, but implicit pro-firm ideology, requires addressing how knowledge is claimed to be knowledge.

In order to pursue the issues that interested me I had to find an epistemological stance that could resist as well as any can, business/capitalist ideology. It would have to be interested in concrete performances of real work, to believe in the importance of what bonds – and preferably have a perspective on deference and 'alien' power structures. Feminist (however defined) approaches seemed to me to place the emphasis I wanted on individuals and how they interact with, and are acted upon by, social structures, on the central importance of personal narratives, on connectedness, and recognition of oppression of personal subjectivity by influences rather than more tangible regimes.

As a body of work 'feminist' approaches seek to go beyond and behind the *status quo* and place greater emphasis on issues and subject matters marginalised in many research approaches; therefore an activity or action can be interpreted as worthy even if it isn't influential in the power structure. Lakoff, (1975:2) argues in this vein that to express things in a personal way is to risk losing one's credibility with members of the power structure. Men and

women may use talk for different purposes; the language and metaphors of the dominant in supply relationships are not value-free. Feminist research philosophy therefore creates an awareness that it is necessary to use/examine what individuals actually say and do. Other research philosophies stress aggregation techniques, and the *reassembling* of data often within the framework of a dominant and potentially 'alien' power structure.

As Feminist approaches and other authors such as Pfeffer (1981) have stressed, the ability to set what is going to be acceptable as agenda matter is where the real power lies; '...concepts *produce and reproduce* a political agenda that makes certain ways of knowing privileged over others. (Mumby, Putnam, 1992:482).

The epistemology basis of the thesis is explored in Chapter 6. The test of rigour for this work is not measurement, it is that the work, stories, narratives, accounts, tropes and observations presented should feel real and believable – that it could have happened that way.

### **1.2.2 Limitations**

This work takes place within, and only addresses, UK supplier relations. It comes with the benefits and baggage of an Anglo-American perspective – these are the literatures and cultural influences I am aware of. Deference for example is a huge dimension of Japanese culture (and Korean) but that is well beyond my scope and competence. I address deference as an inter-organisational phenomenon, but it is of course also an intra-organisational phenomenon (organisations have been called 'structures of deference'. Linstead & Chan, 1994:15). Furthermore, although three sectors have formed the backdrop or environment for the research, sectoral analysis is restricted; the focus here is upon the social nature of relationships – 'actor bonds' rather than resources or activities (see discussion in Araujo, Bowey and Easton, 1998, Easton and Araujo, 1986).

The thesis has the strengths and limitations that come with 'close up and personal' observation (Alvesson, 1998). Such an approach it is argued, is unusual within the subject area,

but the capture of detail may be at the expense of a broader, particularly 'strategic' picture. Alternative foci upon the subject matter could have stressed semiotics, 'dominant chimp' themes from anthropology, depth psychology, or approached the issue exclusively from the sales or marketing side. A further limitation is that the study does not specifically look at sectors where tacit knowledge is higher, or in which through their role participants ability to articulate their circumstances may be more developed.

I either quietly observed participants without conscious interaction or conducted informal, 'chatty' interviews with them. In neither case did I inform them of my true research interests, as I felt these were value laden and open to being stigmatised, I used obfuscation, asking interviewees for discussion concerning "power" in supply relationships. A more direct approach would have been desirable, but it was the very reluctance of both supply management academics and practitioners to examine 'include' the topics in the first place that led to this aspect of the research design, and that may offer the research insight and practical contribution. The very utility of phenomenological approaches to analyse real behaviours ('what buyers actually do') limits the scope for quantification or calibration of the interactions examined. Some might find the method diffuse, open to personal bias and interpretation; the researcher becomes an acknowledged part of the research, which contrasts with the apparent absence of researcher identity in deductive supply literature in general.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

Figure 1.1 which opened this chapter highlights how the thesis is made up of three parts. Part One is made up of the first five chapters. Chapter one provides a framework and introduction; it seeks to explain why the research is of interest, the context for undertaking it, and what potential value it might offer the academic and practitioner communities. It also seeks to link the nature of the research issues to the approach to be followed. Chapters two, three and four discuss what is already known about deference and purchasing work in the form of an

extended literature review. Chapter five lists and examines the areas identified in existing knowledge which could be further explored, and that will be the Research issues.

As Part One culminated in identifying what could be studied – the research issues, Part Two is about what data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on that data. The particular methodological challenges of the topic area are dealt with, providing a rationale for the research design. Part Two is concerned with the ‘data’, the various form of narratives, stories and observations collected in the fieldwork. Chapter six discusses the basis on which knowledge claims are made in the thesis. Part Three presents the conclusions derived from the work and how they both link with, and add to, existing knowledge.

#### **1.4 Conclusions**

This chapter has introduced the topic of the Thesis, explained some key aspects and highlighted areas where more and new knowledge is required both academically in understanding purchasing outcomes, and also practically to influence purchasing practitioners.

The next chapter provides an overview of the literatures that to date have described and delineated behaviours that can be seen in purchasing work and that include deferential behaviour.

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<sup>1</sup> Schurr & Calder (1986), used a survey of buyers’ responses to three scripts to suggest that an ordinary restaurant meeting may be more effective than a fancy eating location, in causing buyers to favourably evaluate a supplier’s position in user-supplier problems.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4 in part traces the gradual ‘sanitisation’ of the purchasing literature, the earliest accounts were certainly based on recognisable behaviours - friendships, corruption etc. Such ‘real’ behaviours do emerge from time to time in contemporary work but more often only as snippets or passing observations, (Ford & McDowell, 1999 is one of the exceptions, see Christopher & Juttner (1998) for the ‘rule’).



**Chapter 2: Deference**

<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
1. Introduction	Introduction and framework
<b>2. What is known about the problem</b>	<b>Deference</b>
3. What is known about the problem	Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism
4. What is known about the problem	The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research
5. Research issues	Issues identified in existing knowledge

**2.0 Purpose**

In order to utilise deference as a way into studying purchasing work, it is necessary to go back some way in time to bring out features of deference such as a sense of community, that are not perceived as central to ‘management’ thinking. It is necessary briefly, to review diverse work on deference to fully understand why it may be a useful mechanism for studying the buyer-supplier interface. The diversity of the literatures drawn upon is suggested as a validation for seeing deference as inherent in work relations.

**2.1 Introduction**

The chapter traces deference from the pre modern world, which highlights how ancient or traditional deference was rooted in social structures, relations and customs that no longer apply in the 21st century. The tensions that dissolve ancient bonds and attitudes can be seen emerging in the early modern period. Therefore, if deferential relations are utilised in the world of supply in the 21st century, it suggests that there may still be related circumstances, such as a greater sense of community and a more situated decision making process, than many management accounts allow. In terms of

deference it is argued that what is lacking in many treatments is the 'affective life' of the subordinate.

It is argued that little work to date in supply has viewed suppliers as more than vessels, unequivocally conforming. A view challenged in psychoanalytic views of subordinates, which do not: '...regard the fact of unequal power as the central and defining force between the subordinate and superior, and assume from this static, one-up/one-down model that the two have wholly instrumental if not antagonistic and irreconcilable interests' (Oglensky, 1995:1030).

Later a model from Kelman (1969) is used, in combination with a more than one or two dimensional view of power, (Lukes, 1974) and the effect of discourses (Foucault, 1977, 1980); to highlight agency. Subsequently in the thesis deference can be seen as one response to the influences that produce or construct what appears as 'management', but may better be thought of in terms of management discourse(s) or ideology.

## **2.2 The world of traditional authority**

### **2.2.1 The individual and how consciousness is presented**

Through exploring the continuous relationship between social structure and the structure of personality, the Marxist historian Elias challenges conventional views that often project back into time contemporary understandings. He argues for example that manners and what is considered impolite are a *development* that take place through social interactions, not inviolate standards handed down over time. Elias's line of argument would suggest then that the nature and frequency of interactions influences

social behaviours, and would influence 'work' behaviours which are not innate, or the product of inviolate consciousness.

### **2.2.2 A dense network of personal relationships**

Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), forcefully brings out the nature of sovereign power; its exercise can be arbitrary and chaotic but when inflicted it is public and crushing, enacted upon the body of the wrong doer. The news or an account of it will spread, via what we would now term networks, coercing acquiescence through awe and fear. However, kingly power is not internalised, it is not efficient enough to be orderly, it is too random and too sporadic. (In its gruesome spectacle it connects with the element of theatre or show that Bagehot (1964/1867) would suggested the elite should stage, in order to maintain the deference of the lower orders).

Ancient (Anglo-Saxon) societies were dominated by churches, cathedrals and manor houses which apart from practical purposes served to construct an order; by building or linking individuals into communities. They were essential meeting points, places of inclusion, as well as symbols of authority, continuity, representative of the 'centre' of society, anchors to create a strong sense of place. In this world (or rather series of small worlds) everyone knew of everyone within their sphere (albeit that that sphere would be very narrow by 21<sup>st</sup> century standards). Personal relationships governed transactions and set responsibilities as well as privileges, there were no 'ologies' requiring endorsement, you knew or knew of people you contracted with.

### **2.2.3 Relations based upon kinship and on direct, face to face contact**

Following on from the above stress on networks of personal relationships, what would be most striking difference between the 'workers' of the modern world and those of well into the 19th century would have been illiteracy. Moves were rare or of little

distance, there was little or no contact with ‘the outside world’ both spatially (travel), and more vitally, in that they could not read. They were dependent on a network (largely kin, Laslett, 1971) of face to face contacts, accurate information was scarce. ‘... since writing was so restricted an accomplishment; only an old man could tell a young one who took up a holding, whether it ever flooded, perhaps only a man with many, many years at one job could make a mill of a particular type. Yet resident grandparents were uncommon,... (Laslett, 1971:103).

Crucially, Laslett and other historians emphasise the oral nature of such knowledge, here an old man has wisdom (which I later link to the non managerial concept of employee wisdom), short life spans limited pre-literate knowledge, but wisdom implies a thing to be shared, a resource perhaps within the community, perhaps wisdom had a purpose?. Literacy provides one means to validate and to investigate claims to authority (and thereby deference) – however whilst mass literacy can be seen as a cornerstone of modern management, the fact that alternative authorities to ‘written’ ones, to procedure manual based authority, were available should be noted. This awareness of pre-written or unwritten authorities (employee wisdom) is what may be rare now.

These ‘ancients’ did not have recourse to third party mediation, or independent observers, quasi-legal bodies, adjudicators, or mediators. Therefore there was a distinction between the knowledge that was communal, as in a part of the community or local network, and another knowledge that came from interaction with the ‘authority’ of the church, of the sovereign and of landowners. In chapter 4, ideological approaches to managing supply are examined, where ‘one knowledge’ is assumed to be sufficient for all the company, that one ideology can align all interests in a modern organisation.

In deferential relations it was critical that authority was personal. It related to the here and now, the practical, the literal bread and butter of life. Given the small scale of such worlds, the employer, the landlord, therefore had greater authority (and personal, even if he never exercised it in person, authority) than a 20th century employer. The mass of people of course had important vertical relations (friendship, kinship, intermarriage, common ancestry, communal work on the annual harvest), but these were not effective beyond a small-scale local world. It is important not to be misled then into under-valuing the 'small-scale local world' just because it did not formally impact on the wider political world – it was still the world most people lived and more relevantly here, worked in.

#### **2.2.4 The dearth of alternative relationships**

*'But for many centuries, the vast mass of people acquiesced in the established order out of religious awe, a desire for peace and security, and the inability to unite in a common political action. In those earlier times, the rule of the privileged few appeared to the many as if it were a force of nature; it was to be enjoyed when it was benign and endured when it was not...'* Bendix, 1978:7).

Giddens makes the same connection between the strength of pre-modern forms of authority, and the need to adapt to live with the unpredictability of daily life. He claimed religious authorities often cultivated the feeling that people were surrounded by threats and dangers, 'Religious authority created mysteries while simultaneously claiming to have privileged access to them' (Giddens 1991:195).

In pre-modern times there were no alternatives, no choice as we would understand it. The mentality that created the cathedrals expected attendance, it was a universal duty, an obligation. Religion touched the pivotal experiences of life: birth,

marriage and death, in cathedrals religion was also a means of being close to what would now be termed a centre of power, before conformity could be codified, religion, religious buildings and religious rituals must have been central in forming consciousness. There would have been very few other occasions in which the medieval mind could have been so close to a centre of power, its impact would have been all the more binding for it. Ritual plays a part in all religions, marking significant events such as the harvest and manhood, 'liturgical cycles' build up familiarity with time and communicant repetition, often at key times. For good behavioural reasons, religions demand that 'their followers participate regularly in the prescribed rituals and prayers... regularity helps to ensure strong conditioning ... For the individual this can mean greater stability of life cycle' (Schoenfield, 1993:149).

Giddens notes that traditional ritual, as well as religious belief, connected individual action to moral frameworks and to elemental questions about human existence (1991:204). Religious rituals involved worshippers in the framework of prescribed existence, and religion must be consistent – faith can be defined as an absence of doubt. Schoenfield (1993:107) argues that religions offer discipline for dealing with death, they prepare both the participant and the survivors, minimising variability of response and maintaining social stability.

Table 2.1 summarises the features of pre modern deference. As monopoly suppliers of contact to centres of power, authority was self-legitimising. Whilst it has been shown that deference was essentially conservative, attention has been drawn to existence and continuation of local communities (albeit stable and illiterate ones).

**Table 2.1 Features of Pre-Modern authority and deference**

- 
- Very local, powerful sense of place, no travel, communal, public relationships
  - Face-to-face, oral culture
  - Few connections with centres of power
  - When observed, power was arbitrary, violent and theatrical
  - Maintains *status quo*; uneventful, not dynamic, not about learning
  - No contracts, no equality, no third party mediation, relationships cannot be quantified
  - In place from childhood, identity is not an issue
  - Local monopolies not markets, no alternatives, no cash, no division of labour
  - Growth not a stated policy, no state 'policy'
- 

### 2.3 Deference in the modern era

From the period known as the industrial revolution onwards pressures are seen emerging that challenge traditional deference, it is still a very strong force in society, but its characteristics can be explored by examining the fissures that start to appear (Table 2.2).

**Table 2.2 Features of deference within the modern era**

- 
1. Widening division of labour, new jobs and occupations appearing
  2. Literacy (education) spreads the ability and confidence to check and challenge
  3. Experts appear, professional bodies, state agencies - third party mediation
  4. The rise of contract law, that obligational expectations are only defined by a written contract
  5. Many market features: many sellers, many buyers, price information etc.
  6. Growth as an enterprise and as an aim of the State
  7. The growth of alternative ties denies the primacy of any of the older ones, including religion and 'the squire'
  8. Shift in society from order to productivity
  9. Growth of egalitarianism, social distance in decline
  10. Growth of inauthenticity, role-playing, the double hermeneutic<sup>1</sup>, the relationship can only be maintained by both parties playing their 'roles'
  11. Sheer volume of interactions overwhelms deference and decorum and the oral culture, communication can be written – signs, letters, newspapers, contracts
  12. Spatially, 'important' space moves from the local to the national
- 

Some historians have characterised the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries as profoundly deferential societies [*The Politics of Deference*, Moore (1976), *The World we have Lost*, Laslett (1971)]. However Thompson's famous study *Customs in Common*

(1991), takes a slightly more jaundiced perspective stressing the ‘unruly’ nature of deference and the importance placed by the poorer elements of society on the ‘obligations’ of the elite. In Thompson’s work, deference is seen more as a *quid pro quo*, than as a duty or responsibility falling solely on the disadvantaged or dependent. In this thesis an irreverent view of deference is adopted (in line with Thompson’s), it is not seen as a mannered adoption of certain social values, but as one of many common techniques of social relations.

### 2.3.1 Framework of laws and other formal regulations

Moore (1976), describes the 19th century political system not in terms of parties (or classes), but in terms of ‘coterries of influence’, what he calls ‘traditional deference communities and deference networks’. But by the-mid 1850s these deferential relationships were being threatened by new developments that offered vertical ties: the move to a national not local arena (‘national’ political parties and therefore interests, urbanisation, industrialisation). The increasing threat of third party mediation - that is to say the ‘contractualisation’ of the relationship, and the growth of options for agrarian tenants (literacy, new urban opportunities, new agricultural efficiencies, the expansion of the wage economy) and the emergence of ‘experts’. Moore’s work sees agricultural productivity as a key battle ground for deference; innovation required change, and yet traditional deferential relations relied on fixed, stable roles. Views that fit remarkably well with Chandler’s analysis of the performance of British industry in the 20th century. That throughout the late 19th century British entrepreneurs viewed their businesses in personal rather than organizational terms, as family estates to be nurtured and passed on to heirs (Chandler, 1962:286).



Durkheim (1984/1893) made the point that contracts could not lay the foundation of a social order. On the contrary, he argued, contracts could only be engaged in on the basis of an already existing moral order. That is to say if contracts presuppose social order then they cannot also serve as its foundation. Traditional deferential relations (seen here under pressures which bring out their semi-mystical characteristics) are non-price mediated terms of agreement; the emphasis was on non commercial performance obligations, on role obligations.

The involvement of the state (in land improvement for tenants), demonstrated the decline of the authority and status of, and deference to, the landowner. Symbolically a vertical tie was created between the land worker and the state or government. No longer did the tenant have only to look upwards to his landlord, in theory he could begin now to look to another relationship, one that involved the 'expertise' of an [land] 'expert'.

The point was made that landowner tenant relationships were between households, between families and therefore within communities, according to Bendix (1978:601), 'All modern states have developed in competition with these communal affinities, for the state directs our attention to the non familial and, in that sense, impersonal exercise of authority'. The impersonal exercise of authority was at its most marked in the growing urban centres. What must also be taken on board is that modern 'intrusions' into community based relations and 'knowledges' could also be empowering, bringing in new expertise. Such expertise can be described as resistance, but when based upon deference, it is described in this thesis more in terms of the ability to maintain distance (and therefore independent identity).

### 2.3.2 Urban societies with impersonal social relationships

In industrial society (defined as when a society moves from a moral economy to a cash or wage based economy: Thompson, (1991)), the mystical roots of deference to transcendental powers or authority have been eroded by the scientific mode of reasoning (Hamilton and Biggart, 1985). ‘Legitimate’ authority was replaced by money as the central nexus of society. With the development of industry and an elementary conception of a ‘consumer’ the volume of interactions and transactions increased exponentially. A cathedral could no longer hope to hold the entire local population, and that population would never again be as ‘local’ with the growth of travel. The important point is that society is described as having undergone a paradigm change when the buyer no longer knew the seller. But Thompson (1991<sup>2</sup>), notes for example how even where there were acts of rebellion in the 18th century, they were often rooted in appeals to social custom or tradition; that is to say demanding the ‘reinstatement’ of order not a new, revolutionary order, see footnote). There is a vital caveat to be made here – the seller could still know the other sellers and the buyer other buyers. The ‘good manners’ of Thompson’s rioters is reflected in the data of purchasing work in chapters 8 and 9. Where rudeness is identified it is similarly requesting a return to some norm or practice, not as a desire for radical change or a revolution in behaviour. In this work the only people found calling for revolutions are purchasing academics (chapter 4).

In the first phases of the industrial revolution, there was a dearth of supply (Hobsbawn, 1968:64), and the role of selling was negligible; customers either bought, or did not buy, what was available. However, as distribution and product ranges evolved from the late 18th century on, ‘selling’ skills developed to ‘shift’ products (Davis, 1966:

255). Just as the rise of mass production led to specialised manufacturing labour, and divorced the labourer from the product, so the role of salesperson, divorced from ordering, evaluating, stocking and debt collection emerged in retailing.

The growth of 'society' meant ever higher volumes of interactions between strangers: individuals performing roles (such as seller and buyer) and, the newly emerging 'experts' or professionals, Trilling (1972:61) notes the ever more powerful existence of the public. He argues that '.. human entity [becomes] defined by its urban habitat, its multitudinousness, and its ready accessibility to opinion. The individual who lives in this new circumstance is subject to the constant influence, the literal *in-flowing*, of the mental processes of others, which, in the degree that they stimulate or enlarge his consciousness, make it less his own'. Trilling argues that what happens is that the nature of [English] sincerity changes, from being authentic to one's inner self, to being authentic to the demands of presenting one's outer self.

What has been argued is not that the people who that made up the networks of kinship changed in some mysterious way, but that much more information (potential knowledge) was becoming available to them. Critical views are expressed throughout this thesis, and employee knowledge is a key testing ground for such views, for now it is just noted that with industrialisation the 'network kin' might shift from family, to work mates.

### **2.3.3 The lessening of moral obligations due to less dependence for mutual support.**

Hariman (1989:218) argued from Foucault and Bledstein that by the mid 1850s, professionalism and specialisation were taking the mantle of authority from traditional

sources like the landed gentry. *'The creation of a special management became the most common means for authorising an institution and regulating a sphere of human behaviour. Ultimately all of society could be identified in terms of specific spaces, each having its own specific administration backed by a body of specific knowledge...'*

Hariman continues that even language itself became the property of the middle classes, the new professionals used a special language that denoted a new authority, he quotes Bledstein. 'Legitimate authority now resided in special spaces, like the courtroom, the classroom, and the hospital: and it resided in the special words shared only by experts'.

Bledstein provides links to deference as utilising the space between the parties and to the rise of management theory and intermediaries (contract law, impersonal relations, 'experts' and professionals, even management theory, see Chapter 3). We also see in Bledstein's 'special spaces' the move from the local and known, from the familiar and domestic to the 'framework of laws and other formal regulations and spaces.

So far this chapter has examined ancient and early modern deference. It could be argued that some of the original features of ancient deference began to unravel in the early modern period. It is suggesting that perhaps too little attention has been paid to the relationships (or solidarity) *between* workers, it may be that some of the communal aspects of ancient forms of living crossed over (at least in the form of work practices), into the early modern period.

## 2.4 Two schools of thought

Two broadly defined schools of deference literature are covered here: that on behaviours (social integration) and that on attitudes (social systems). Goffman and feminist perspectives represent the former; Newby and Shils (it is argued), the latter. In order to guide the reader through this discussion, some definitions are initially provided. The focus here however is on behavioural aspects.

### 2.4.1 Social integration (behaviour) and deference

Goffman's work offers at least two insights. The first is the formal, and ultimately constrictive, 'acting out' of roles inherent in the 'symbolism' of deferential interactions. The parties must 'stay in character'; it is not a flexible or informal relationship, it is ritualised. It would also appear it is customary to study the 'deferred to'. However, in the act of deference the deferred to is also placed into a role. This role generates expectations and standards that have to be met, for example, fair treatment from a landowner or a repeat order next year for a supplier. Breaking that role, or bond, means breaking the deference.

Accepting the flattery of deference will entail unwritten (and non-contractual) obligations. Goffman's second contribution is to highlight the physical and spatial elements of deference, and the importance of non-verbal behaviour and settings. His observations on the use of personal space and the physical environment in encounters connect with later work by feminist writers.

Goffman (1956:477a) defined the concept of deference as 'that component of activity which functions as a symbolic means by which appreciation is regularly conveyed *to* a recipient *of* this recipient, or of something of which this recipient is taken as a symbol, extension or agent.' Goffman's emphasis on ceremony and symbol draws

out the discipline that deferential behaviour imposes on both parties. It is not an informal or casual relationship; barriers are erected to change and it is ritualised. Kertzer (1997:9) has identified what might be termed 'bonding' as the definitive element of ritual behaviour. 'What is important about rituals ...[is]... that they provide a powerful way in which people's social dependence can be expressed'.

As far as early Goffman discusses the maintenance (or destruction) of a system, it is in terms of roles (latterly he used 'frame analysis'). He observed deferential relationships as the adoption of roles, as individuals acting out predetermined scripts or scenes. Goffman observed the physical distancing of deferential relationships (for example that a doctor may 'pat' a patient as a friendly gesture, but that patient is not supposed to touch the doctor). Bartky (1993:107) identifies deference by women in movement, facial expression, smiles and smile elicitation. Leidner (1991:164) also stresses '...smiling and otherwise demonstrating deference'.

Lakoff identifies women's language as deferential in that it has '...developed as a way of surviving and even flourishing without control over the economic, physical, or social reality. Then it is necessary to listen more than speak, agree more than confront, be delicate, be indirect...' (1975:205). Deferential forms of address, have been identified; broadly, deferential speech is indirect and polite, (Lakoff 1975).

The issue highlighted here is the indirectness of deferential language and how it can be used to achieve objectives where manifest power is lacking: e.g. without aggression, explicitness or transparency. In female deference (as commented on as a modern phenomenon) we see can see deference not just as subordination, but also as a weapon or device used by a group placed in a subordinate position, to make the best of their position. Following Goffman, Fraser (1977) conceptualised deference as 'the

symbolic subordination of the speaker to the hearer', where 'subordination' implies fewer rights and / or more obligations (in Walters, 1981:82).

Lakoff (1975, 1990), Bartky (1993), Collins (1993) and Hartmann (1982), identify male dominance with female deference. Common to these analyses is the way in which deference functions to create a seemingly natural social order: it functions to subjugate, in subtle and all pervasive ways, all females to all males. The point drawn from the literature here is that whilst deference may be enacted face to face, as a 'dyadic', it functions as a property of the wider network or society it is embedded in - a view that echoes discussion of Shils (1968), below.

A parallel can be drawn with Collins' (1993:119) writing about stereotypes of black women in American society. She observes that, 'As part of a generalized ideology of dominance, controlling images ... take on special meaning because the *authority to define these symbols* [emphasis added] is a major instrument of power'. What Collins observes as a systematic method of 'ruling' black women by a society that can define what is important, how interactions should be staged, how each party should respond, is also one special attribute of deference.

Deferential behaviours establish a standard against which all behaviour should be compared. Collins continues that, 'In order to exercise power, [the] elite ... must be in a position to manipulate appropriate symbols ... not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations. Controlling these images is designed to make [deference]...an inevitable part of everyday life'. By inserting the word deference, we return to elements of ritual, role-play, and posturing that Goffman identified. This is a stylised relationship, not a spontaneous, or a straightforward one.

#### 2.4.2 Social systems (attitudes) to deference

In the 1970s various political scientists concerned themselves with what it meant to be a '*deferential worker*' Kavanagh (1971), Chamberlain and Moorhouse (1974), McKenzie and Silver (1968) and Lockwood (1975), culminating in a conference publication '*Working class images of society*' (Bulmer, 1975). Particularly Lockwood (1975) ignited debate by identifying '*the traditional deferential worker*'<sup>3</sup>, a worker with very strong sense of 'place'; attached both to a locale, an industry and the local social order. (Lockwood's deferential worker was therefore still in a largely oral culture). This debate in some sense concluded with Newby's (1977) definitive work '*The Deferential Worker*'. A study of farm workers in East Anglia in the 1970s, it appears as the most known and influential discussion of deference since Goffman in the 1950s. However, the focus is now on deference as a component of a social system rather than on understanding individual acts of behaviour.

Newby's interest is in the relation between deference to an elite, and the stabilising of a distribution of power (Shils, 1968 has a similar concern with the 'centre'). Newby (1975a:146), argues that '*the origins of deference lie in the processes of legitimisation by tradition of the hierarchical nature of the social structure by those in super ordinate positions*'. Both these authors may share a functionalist concern with consensus that diverts their attention away from feigned or manipulative motives and behaviour.

Attributing greater agency to suppliers would 'invert' this stratification of power, that is it could be argued that deference is used as a tactic by employees and suppliers e.g. to stabilise favourable relations (business, contracts). Cialdini (1993) has noted the use of reciprocation and the human need to be consistent as selling



techniques; he noted the 'little-known pair of positive by-products of the act of concession; feelings of greater responsibility for and satisfaction with the arrangement' (1993:43). Gouldner (1960) found that 'all human societies subscribe to the 'rule' of the general association between gift giving and reciprocation.

Cunningham and Parker (1978:103) conclude, in a study of behaviour by and towards homosexuals on board ship, that deference is at once both positive and negative for the person who defers. 'The potential negative self evaluation resulting from recognising oneself as inferior is neutralised by the recognition of an equality between superiors and inferiors stemming from their all being members of a single community'. This is a view which echoes the positive identification working class Tories feel with the system that subordinates them (Parkin, 1972:84-7).

Parkin typifies deference as a mode of understanding which 'views the social order as an organic entity in which each individual has a proper part to play, however humble. Inequality is seen as inevitable and just, some men being inherently fitted for positions of power and privilege' (1972:85). Transferred to a buyer-supplier relationship, Parkin's stress on the perception of deference within an organic social order contributes to attention on manners, decorum and ritual within the relationship. Social order of an organic kind would imply a higher level of value in the performance of either buying or selling roles than a management view that stressed efficiency, neutral inputs and neutral outputs.

Shils (1968:104-105) develops this point tangentially. He argued that deference stratified existing class relationships. He mentions 'derogation' as 'non-deference' and specifies that deferential acts are not reactions to previous or anticipated behaviours. The point that he makes is that deference is not a mere exchange of X for X worth of

pounds or value. His definition includes acts of deference performed in face-to-face relationships, ‘... and in the relationship of actors who have no direct interactive relationships with each other but who are members of the same society’.

Deference then can be seen to encourage a feeling (or an impression) of social cohesion. If that social cohesion is beneficial for the party that defers, then there is a calculating motive for it. It could be a tactic of resistance or a tactic of improvement. For a supplier manufacturing stability and cohesion in a supply relationship means further revenue. From the customer’s perspective, deference could enhance both the relationship and an individual’s identity needs, connecting their work back to more intimate and personal worlds. Deference is a polite relationship as Goffman highlighted, politeness can both improve the immediate quality of an exchange or episode and also serve to validate and obliterate existential or abstract concerns with the fundamental significance of one’s work.

Self questioning and doubt are obviated by the charm (or metricious appeal) of deference. The issues being suggested are about how a part of the buyer-supplier interchange works, how performance of supply roles (which are often discussed in terms of the ubiquitous ‘trust’) relates to wider personal and social needs and issues. Discussion of the 1970s political scientists and Newby’s work is continued in chapter 3, (these authors did not consider professionals).

### **2.4.3 Contemporary [newspaper] views of deference**

Contemporary views of deference can be seen through what current commentators have written of as the implications of its decline. That is to say, media interviewers no longer having respect for, or politeness towards, politicians (Howard,

1998), as expressing (as opposed to repressing) emotion, and a decline in formality (Driscoll, 1997, Waterhouse, 1997). Also suggested is 'looking up' to local people not in formal positions of authority, rather than formal national figures as 'heroes' (Henderson, 1998). For Freedland (1997), the decline of 'protocol's cousin, deference' has made Britain more open and tolerant, and less macho and miserable, modern themes are summarised in Table 2.3.

**Table 2.3 Modern Themes that challenge Deference**

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1. The decline of hierarchy – the rise of third parties, mediation, 'compensation culture' and alternative ties.
2. Mobility – both personal (geographic and a reduction in social distance including greater informality) and in terms of roles which stress flexibility, teamwork, i.e. that stress a multiplicity of roles.
3. Modern reflexivity, the 'choices' available, the ability and the need to construct a present, a lifestyle rather than follow or inherit one; with regard to supply, globalisation. The loss of certainty/centre (as in post modernism).
4. The rise of experts, expertise and the decline in the importance of word of mouth authority and the related decline in the power of the past as a resource: 'Professionals'; '-ologies'

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## 2.5 The scope of the literature

To place the emphasis upon how deference is used in this thesis rather than considering it as an activity or state of mind Kelman's (1961:67) model of processes of attitude change, is used as a classification system. The value of such an approach is that the majority of the work can be cited concisely contained in it, that which cannot is then considered further. Kelman proposed a three level model of differences in the processes by which an individual conforms (see Table 2.4). The model seeks to explore *underlying* differences in behaviour that are overtly similar (see Table 2.5). Naturally, as with any categorisation, the division of a subject into discrete boxes is artificial; there is much overlap. The categorisation can be seen as a continuum from calculation

(compliance) to sincere belief (identification). 'Insincere belief' and resistance to internalisation are covered in the final section (2.5.3).

**Table 2.4 Kelman's Model of Conformity processes**

	<b>Compliance</b>	<b>Identification</b>	<b>Internalization</b>
<b>Definition:</b> <i>An individual accepts influence ...</i>	...because he hopes to achieve a favourable action from another person or group	...when he wants to establish or maintain a satisfying self defining relationship to another person or group	...because the content of the induced behaviour-the ideas and actions of which it is composed-is intrinsically rewarding
<b>Satisfaction</b>	Social effect of accepting influence	The act of conforming as such	The content of the new behaviour
<b>Power:</b> <i>To the extent to which the power of the influencing agent is based on ...</i>	... means control, conformity will tend to take the form of compliance	...attractiveness, conformity will tend to take the form of identification	...credibility, conformity will tend to take the form of internalization.
<b>Conditions under which the behaviour is performed.</b> <i>When an individual adopts an induced response through...</i>	...compliance, he tends to perform it only under conditions of surveillance by the influencing agent	...identification, he tends to perform it only under conditions of salience of his relationship to the agent	...internalization, he tends to perform it under conditions of relevance of the issue, regardless of surveillance or salience.

Kelman, H.C. (1961) Processes of Opinion Change, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 25, pp57-78

Table 2.5: A continuum of motives for deferential activity

Compliance	Identification	Internalization
<p><b>Patriarchy (Feminism)</b> (early liberal / early radical) Cassell (1974), Bartky (1993), Hartmann (1982), Briskin (1990), Maharaj (1995), Acker (1990), Leidner (1991)</p> <p><b>'Secular / Calculating</b> (working class Tory voters) deferentials' McKenzie &amp; Silver (1968) Lenski, &amp; Leggett (1960) Lancaster University ESRC Report (1996)</p> <p><b>Sociolinguistics</b> Lakoff (1975/90), Martin (1964), Walters (1981), Fraser (1977), Fraser &amp; Nolen (1977), Beason (1991), Arkoff <i>et al.</i> (1962)</p> <p><b>Social Integration</b> Blau, (1960), Weinstein, DeVaughan &amp; Wiley (1969)</p> <p><b>Ingratiation</b> Jones (1964), Strutton, Pelton &amp; Tanner (1996), Gordon (1996) Yukl &amp; Tracey (1992).</p> <p>An example of <b>Lesbian conformity</b> Valentine (1993)</p>	<p><b>Stratification</b> Shils (1968), Newby (1975) (Newby 1977) also identifies limited internalisation)</p> <p><b>The poor to the rich</b> Bagehot (1964/1867), Thompson (1991),</p> <p><b>Tenant to landlord</b> Moore (1976), Bartlett, (1987)</p> <p><b>Impression Management</b><sup>4</sup> Goffman (1956a), Zerbe &amp; Paulhus (1987) – Socially Desirable Responding. Hochschild (1983)</p> <p><b>Shame and Conformity</b> Scheff (1988), Goffman (1956b), Scarella &amp; Brunak (1981), Rintell (1981), Rosenthal (1967)</p> <p>An example of <b>Homosexual conformity</b> Cunningham &amp; Parker, (1978)</p> <p><b>Subordination (work)</b> Oglenky (1995) Skyles &amp; Clark, (1975). Golding, (1986) Pear, (1955), Denhardt (1970)</p>	<p><b>Far East</b> Dore (1970, 1994), Hamilton and Biggart (1988), Osland (1990), Graham (1988b)</p> <p><b>Leadership</b> Edwards (1959), Lippett, Polansky, Redl &amp; Rosen (1960)</p> <p><b>Political Science, 'Real deferentials'</b> (working class Tory voters) Kavanagh (1971), Chamberlain &amp; Moorhouse, (1974), McKenzie and Silver, (1968), John Stuart Mill (1979), Ray (1972), Lockwood (1975)</p> <p><b>Ritual</b> Kertzer, (1997), Pocock (1964)</p> <p><b>Legitimate authority</b> Weber, (1964) Hamilton &amp; Biggart (1985). Watt (1982), Laslett (1971) Parsons (1964), Cialdini (1993)</p>

### 2.5.1 Compliance

The work grouped under compliance can be said to be concerned with groups who do not share (or share in the wealth of) the values of those with whom they conduct deferential relationships. Thus feminists have written about getting by in a male run society (Acker, 1990, Cassell, 1974), those interested in sociology and language share very similar or crossover concerns, where studies have shown how those in positions of

weakness utilise language differently to those in 'power' (Lakoff, 1975, 1990). [Sociolinguistic studies also demonstrate the cultural variations in the expression of deference, Japan and Korea both have specifically deferential verb endings, Martin (1964)]. This compliance is social, as when Valentine (1993) identifies that lesbians walking into the heterosexual space of a town centre will not hold hands or demonstrate their affection or sexual orientation in deference to, or compliance with, expected norms. The early 1970s work on why working class people vote Tory identified 'calculating' working class Tory voters, and American work on ingratiation (Jones, 1964), shares a stress upon self interest, what could be seen as the use of deferential behaviour as a tactic or tool, for survival or advancement.

Modern business roles are reflexive and hermeneutic, Leidner (1991:168) in a study of the interrelationship of work, gender and identity, noted a 'required mix of deference and ruthlessness' among [male] door-to-door insurance sellers. According to Leidner, '...while success [in selling insurance] might require that they take on a deferential manner, it was seen as a matter of skill in manipulating situations, not as servility...' (1991:172). To Layder (1998), such a two-sided characterisation of deference would not be a surprise. Layder utilises Manning's (1992) study of Goffman's work, and the influence of Durkheim's views on Goffman, which Manning suggests lead Goffman to stress the importance of ritual honour and care in social life. Layder concludes, 'Therefore the interaction order and the individuals who populate it, at one and the same time, protect and exploit, as well as manipulate and trust the selves involved in social situations' (1998:54). This statement captures both the fabrication inherent in 'work' deference, and why there is a certain decorum to supply exchanges seen as deferential behaviour.

### 2.5.2 Identification: Reflexivity and the narrative of Identity

The aspiration to shared values, possibly shared destinies, informs this category. However it be the powerful, the elite, who want the world to be this way (and who proselytise that view) or the weak or common masses. The importance is that if the relationship is this way (the way that is aspired to) then an order is produced that pleases that party. Thus there is an element of choice, of decision taking, in identification linked deference that is missing in compliance. Scheff (1988:395) builds on Durkheim [1984/1893] to suggest that the force of social influence is experienced by individuals as *exterior* and *constraining*. He is concerned with the deference-emotion system as a sanction on behaviour. For Giddens in modernity 'The life course becomes a passage no longer governed by tradition, but a set of passages circumscribed by risks and opportunities' (1991a:79). His argument is that in traditional societies identity is a matter of social identity, but in modernity it becomes more a matter of *personal* identity, and that therefore 'Modernity' is about reflexive self control / self construction.

Trilling (1972:16) notes that 'The system of social deference was still of a kind to encourage flattery as a means of personal advancement. .[the] ..origins of the word villain is of a man who stood lowest in the scale of feudal society'. However in the modern world even villains have to construct themselves, in the sense that they have to maintain a life narrative that supports the interpretation that they are a villain.

The person, the identity, even the professional identity, becomes something to be worked at, to be maintained, invested in and topped up from time to time, the continual choices that modern life presents must be answered. 'The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself. A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor-

important though this is - in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*' Giddens, 1991:54).

In opening up the individual to 'reflexivity' beyond comply/ identify/ internalise what may be termed 'deference strategies' become possibilities. Lash & Urry (1994:54) argue that post-organized capitalist social order is much more than a 'time space compression' in which 'increased velocities and distances of mobility deplete and flatten economic, social and political life as well as culture and the personal sphere'. They maintain that there are still also open spaces, most critically, the reflexivity of subjects. They (and others) take the view that the choices of modern living promotes the aestheticization of everything; decisions become a matter of choice and therefore also of taste. Such a view puts a new possibility forward for the recent 'partnership' trend within the supply field, which could then be viewed in terms of an aesthetic reconstruction of the meaning of purchasing work (discussed further in chapter 4).

Du Gay & Salaman (1992) combine Giddens's concern with identity with business imposing the '...model of the customer-supplier relationship on internal organizational relations, so departments now behave as if they were actors in a market, workers treat each other as if they were customers, and customers are treated as if they were managers' (*ibid.* 619). What is being discussed here is organizations exploiting the 'whole' of the employee, not just the physical labour value associated with Taylorism. 'Organizations are to get the most out of their employees, not by managing group relations to maximise contentment, or by rationalizing management to ensure efficiency, but by releasing the psychological strivings of individuals for autonomy and creativity and channeling them into the search of the firm for excellence and success' (Miller & Rose, 1990:26).



Perhaps the best known examination of such techniques in management is Hochschild's (1983) study, *The Managed Heart*, wherein she studied the psychological costs of emotional labour on behalf of an organisation, that is the imposed and mandated deference of flight attendants toward customers. 'When the customer is king, unequal exchanges are normal, and from the beginning customer and client assume different rights to feeling and display....' (1983:86).... 'For these workers, emotion work, feeling rules, and social exchange have been removed from the private domain and placed in a public one, where they are processed, standardised, and subjected to hierarchical control' (*ibid.* 153). Hochschild's analysis is deliberately excluded here from Kelman's model, as internalization in her work would entail constant management and exchange between 'real' as in personal feelings and 'unreal' as in constructed on behalf of the employer/customer feelings. The balancing of these two conflicting and conflictual emotional demands goes beyond the definition of conformity in the model.

Hochschild's is not a study of industrial markets where there are very few customers, nevertheless, her central concern is with tactical use of deference. She argues that almost everyone does the 'emotion' work that produces, broadly speaking, deference. 'But women are expected to do more of it' (*ibid.* 168).

She concludes that 'Whereas the narcissist is adept at turning the social uses of feeling to his own advantage, the altruist is more susceptible to being used - not because her sense of self is weaker but because her 'true self' is bonded more securely to the group and its welfare' (*ibid.* 195). What Hochschild ultimately identifies is organisations seeking to foster employee identification with organisational aims and objectives (Sinclair, 1992 explores similar ground in connection with teamwork). The

next section includes an examination of what, in a supply or industrial market context, the 'group' or team might mean, it is suggested it is increasingly ideological.

### 2.5.3 Internalization

Kelman's model does not include resistance or non-conformity (as these were not Kelman's focus); such 'ambiguities' form the heart of this section. On this continuum, internalization is one extreme where the party actually believes and adopts the relationship whole-heartedly. Edwards (1959) personality scale ranked as deferential those who read the autobiographies of 'great men', or looked up to 'great men'. However, Edwards's categorisation is greatly expanded by critical views of conformity in which consent is not sought by any identifiable central power or actor, but emerges out of the simultaneous operation of many discourses. 'Subjects do not so much consent to the various technologies of power as enter into practices which are a condition and consequence of their reproduction'. (Knights & Willmott, 1989: 550).

Above all critical management approaches are concerned with freedom, subjectivity, and an awareness that power is an 'intimate phenomenon', '...it does not act on individuals at a distance and from the outside. It acts on the interior of the person, through their self' (Miller, 1987:22). Critical Theory (for an adherent's view, see Horkheimer (1972), for a sceptical view, see footnote<sup>5</sup>) argues that in producing communicative interaction, all organizations inevitably produce not only goods and services. '... but also produce and reproduce their members' knowledge and beliefs, their deference and consent to organizational authority, their trust in limited spheres of social cooperation, and their attention to a selective range of organizational problems

and tasks. ...They produce and reproduce structures of power, language and work' (Forester, 1983:240).

The perspective is a very valuable one given the tendency in management (and supply as discussed in chapter 4) to present 'what is' as 'what should be'. That is, to present the current position or distribution of power as 'normal', '... that the study of management has suffered from reification, the action of taking conventional categories and treating them as if they natural entities' (Townley, 1993:223).

What is being explored here is a Foucauldian perspective where power and knowledge are seen as linked because it is the power to define, to regulate, to measure that defines what is deemed knowledge (*cf.* Collins and stereotypes of black women above). It is in this sense that 'experts' are of interest, in supply, purchasing are the experts, and the attempts of the occupation to claim the high ground of being professionals not practitioners is explored in next two chapters.

## 2.6 Conclusions

Traditional deferential relationships were identified as grounded in small scale, local communities, where people shared a common life and therefore common problems and common work. Without doubt the rise of middle class society displaced respect for some of the forms of work knowledge that were part of holding these local communities together. However the chapter has suggested that work colleagues retain a greater sense of autonomy (including the autonomy to resist, to enjoy their work) than post modern versions of the world fracturing and disintegrating allow for. Unusually,

the treatment here stressed the spatial aspects of deference in that traditional deference was firmly rooted in a 'locale'.

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<sup>1</sup> Given the reflexive nature of knowledge - what Giddens terms the 'double hermeneutic' where the very existence of a concept influences and alters the phenomena to which it refers.. (Brown,1993:25)

<sup>2</sup> Thompson writing of the staple diet, corn, traces a reduction of transparency (i.e. local, face-to-face markets) in the emergence of a seller's market. That is as the corn passed through the hands of a more complex network of intermediaries, farmers were no longer selling in an open competitive market. In corn, the rise of intermediaries reflected a shift from the local and regional, from 'paternalist' relations, to the laissez-faire model, where those able to hold stocks (dealers and millers) could keep prices high (1991:205).

<sup>3</sup> 'a concept relating to workers who are located in particular kinds of work situations and community structures rather than one purporting to give a description of the working class as a whole at some particular point of time...a socially acquiescent and conservative element (1975:17)

<sup>4</sup> Goffman is placed here on the basis of both his emphasis on role performance and his impression management work, both of which highlight the 'performance' element in deference i.e. that is for the benefit of an audience

<sup>5</sup> 'Critical Theory is accessible only to a small group of academics devotees who 'ignore the contribution their own argot makes to hierarchy, empowering only those who speak in the arcane phrases of European high theory'. ...(Agger 1991:133, cited in Alvesson & Willmott, 1996:213).

**Chapter 3: Practice and Professionalism**

<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
1. Introduction	Introduction and framework
2. What is known about the problem	Deference
<b>3. What is known about the problem</b>	<b>Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism</b>
4. What is known about the problem	The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research
5. Research issues	Issues identified in existing knowledge

**3.0 Purpose**

Chapter 2 proposed that the literature on deference within work was rare in modern and expanding occupations (e.g. Lockwood’s, (1975) ‘Deferential worker’). Where in Chapter 2 deference was identified as local and face to face, modern business forms must be unrelated to the certainties of the ancient world. This chapter discusses deference within the work world of modern business management and professionals; in contrast to ancient deference both environments are notably abstract and ‘universal’ (in that they are transferable). However, purchasing is presented here as essentially task and practice based, the suggestion arises that the differing bases of purchasing work, professionalism, and management, may create fissures in presenting and aligning purchasing work with ‘managerialism’ and professionalism.

**3.1 Introduction**

First the tasks involved in purchasing are discussed, comparing these tasks with management and professionals reveals some germane differences between practices and management and professionalism. Purchasing practice is seen as grounded in specific work/task practices, in comparison professionals and management are seen as more closely linked to general factors not intrinsic to a specific task or activity. What follows are strictly

limited, partial views of the vast fields of professionalism and managerialism, the aim is not to define those fields as provide essential comparisons for the analysis of purchasing work. Where this Chapter examines the tasks involved in purchasing, Chapter 4 explores Purchasing work based on its academic presentation.

The previous chapter (specifically 2.3.3) argued that by the mid 1850s, professionalism and specialisation were taking the mantle of authority from traditional sources like the landed gentry (Hariman, 1989, Reader, 1966, Perkin, 1990). The new forms of authority involved defined spaces; courtrooms, classrooms, hospitals, and above all the 'language' of experts (Edelman, 1974).

The line is taken here that professional management proceeds by 'accretion', by becoming 'more' – whether that more is jargon, convoluted peer review mechanisms, uniforms, impenetrable examination systems, journals, annual conferences... A Foucauldian line would be to view such accretion in terms of more and more embeddedness in the discourses of science, professional 'ologies', the whole experience of being *bourgeoisie etc.* Regardless, for a practice such as purchasing to 'professionalise' then, it would need to absorb and accrete – here it is suggested is a central paradox, because purchasing is based upon activities that may not be amenable to accretion.

### **3.1.1 The deference literature and managerial work**

The work of the 'traditional deferential worker' school, (Lockwood 1975; Bulmer, 1975) was essentially retrospective, analysing a historical phenomenon. Lockwood argued that the typical work role of the deferential traditionalist 'will be one that brings him into direct association with his employer... and hinders him from forming strong attachments to workers in a similar market situation to his own' (1975:19). The examples Lockwood gives

are small towns, rural areas, service occupations, craft jobs, small scale/family enterprises and agriculture; work roles in which the worker is exposed to paternalistic authority.

Lockwood's work situations are personal and particularistic, the worker has a unique position in a functional job hierarchy, and is tied to his employer by a special 'relationship' between them, and not only by considerations of economic gain (Lockwood, 1975:20). Newby's contribution to this area of work was based upon participant observation of isolated agricultural workers (and a brief survey). He praised Goffman's insights into the behavioural aspects of deference but does not appear to take on board that Goffman's classic statement on deference concerned psychiatrists. Newby takes his own conception of 'legitimate' or 'traditional' authority from Weber (1964), but the profession of psychiatry cannot claim traditional authority or legitimacy. However, the eminence and authority of psychiatry is relatively modern, resource based, and clearly not '...the sanctity of the order and the attendant powers of control as they have been handed down from the past, 'have always existed''. (Weber, 1964:341).

Deference then in a modern work context can be seen as relatively new (Perkin 1990). Compared to the 'immanent' perspectives of the historical and class literatures, deference in its modern forms can be seen as something that can be 'concocted', in this thesis it is a 'white collar' phenomenon. One researcher of deference, caste and friendship in India was struck that contrary, to his expectations, 'Deference seems to be associated with *modern* occupational structure' (Rosenthal, 1966:187, italics in original). These are economically not paternalistically based relationships, they are not isolated from other occupations, individuals in business are likely to be well aware of the market 'rate' for the type of work they do. Parsons, as an editor of Weber, notes Weber's '... failure to bring out the structural peculiarities of the modern profession' (1964:54).

With regard specifically to purchasing though, it has never been incontrovertible that purchasing should have the easygoing superiority of true ‘white collar’ professionals and managers. Purchasing has always had a clerical, promoted from ‘blue collar’ rather than managerial, image. In chapter 4 it is suggested that Purchasing has had to bestow such status upon itself, peer departments having apparently seen no need to do so. The next section therefore examines what activities purchasing actually performs.

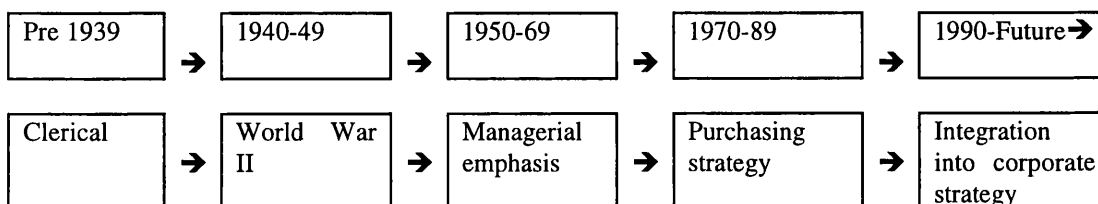
### 3.2. Purchasing work

#### 3.2.1 A new name for Purchasing

There appears to be a consensus in recent academic work and purchasing textbooks that ‘supply’ or ‘supply management’ is a better title for the work that modern purchasers do (The consultant Kraljic published an article to this effect in the Harvard Business Review: ‘*Purchasing must become Supply Management*’, (1983). This name change reflects both a wider remit for the function, and a move away from a ‘paperwork’ view of purchasing. Other practitioner targeted publications, (for example, the Further Education Funding Council’s: ‘*Procurement, a good practice guide*’ (1997)), present procurement largely as a serial process of documentation.

The following is a typical portrayal of the development of purchasing:

**Figure 3.1: The evolution of the Purchasing / Materials / Supply Management Function**



Leeders, M.R. & Fearon, H.E. (1997) *Purchasing and Supply Management*, Irwin, Chicago



### 3.2.2 Early Purchasing

Authors such as Leeders & Fearon perform a service in attempting to categorise the subject area. However, it is still important to examine such accounts in the light of the above discussion of the transformative approach taken in accounts of purchasing. Firstly, there is no reason to doubt that prior to World War II purchasing was a clerical function, also, that the war itself speeded up interest in logistics (Leeders & Fearon, 1997:3). However, following their own account of 'progress' this only takes us to 1949. Authors of another popular purchasing text book (Dobler & Burt, 1996 sixth edition) offer contradictory dates, it is quoted at length below as it offers an atypical organisation structure to support the purchasing process outlined in Table 3.1. *'During the 1960s and 1970s, purchasing and materials management frequently used manual 'kardex' systems to manage inventory. The buyer's major foci were purchase price and the prevention of line stoppages. The typical department had a series of senior and junior buyers, clerks, an expediter, a purchasing manager, and perhaps several purchasing supervisors, depending on the size of the firm. Then the world changed. By the end of the decade of the 1970s...'*

Several elements of what professional purchasing might look like emerge from the above quotation, the triumphalism of today, the contrast with the bad old days of clerical work, and a statement that the world has changed.

**Figure 3.2: The four stages of purchasing and supply management**

Stage 1 Reactive	Stage 2 Mechanical	Stage 3 Proactive	Stage 4 Strategic Supply Management							
High school education Process paper Clerical Function  Reactive/Crisis mode  Reports at very low level	Some college education Computer processes paper Transaction driven Spot buy system Measures "price reductions" Reports at low level Primary focus: Keep production line running  Tracks purchase price variance  Poor data* availability  *Data refer to quality/cost trade-offs, historic & current cost information, price, and inflation forecasts	Professional staff Proactive approach Some long-term contracts Measures some cost of ownership Suppliers considered resources Reports to higher management Some cross-functional supports Training and education offered Purchasing power "in purchasing" Limited use of data Some commodity strategies	Supply as a competitive weapon Supply strategy integrated with SBU's strategy Velocity: Development and production Measures continuous improvement Global view Optimize cost of ownership or total cost of "outside shop" Supply strategy centralized Purchasing activity decentralized Data available and used Supply base by design Leverages supplier technology Monitor environment Manage relationships Value chain "management"							
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

Dobler, D.W., Burt, D.N. (1996) The four stages of purchasing and supply management development. *Purchasing and Supply Management*, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, McGraw-Hill, USA, p6

The 'process of purchasing' when presented as an iterative sequence is fairly standardised; Table 3.1 is a listing from Leeders and Fearon (1997):

**Table 3.1: The essential steps in the purchasing process**

<b>Activity</b>
<b>Recognition of need</b>
<b>Description of need, with an accurate statement of the characteristics and amount of the article, commodity or service desired.</b>
<b>Determination and analysis of possible sources of supply</b>
<b>Determine price and terms</b>
<b>Preparation and placement of the purchase order</b>
<b>Follow up/expedite the order</b>
<b>Receipt and inspection of goods</b>
<b>Clear the invoice and pay the supplier</b>
<b>Maintain records.</b>

The 'process of purchasing' is explicated here as it grounds purchasing in what purchasing personnel are commonly employed to 'do'. Presented at this level of detail, the

work revolves around key documented tasks or activities. A paper trail has to be established, sent out to suppliers (involving substantial photo-copying as practitioners frequently complain about), received back on tender formats, up to dated and ultimately filed.

Purchasing involves set tasks, the order of which (following the textbook) is pre-ordained. There appears little scope for subjective or individual opinion; indeed this appears to be the aim. (Shown for example in the extremely detailed 'anti corruption' specifications set by the World Bank, (Tucker, 1997 – i.e. the specifications make each bid – and the treatment of the bidder – identical, there is no scope for differentiation, the purchasing act becomes fully clerical and intensely 'paper' led). The procedures that buyers follow makes their work explicit, auditable, and codified. Managers and professionals complete paperwork but they have greater autonomy, can remain less explicit, less auditable, and their output is generally less codified; they follow fewer rules.

Purchasing is presented as a serial process, a mere following of steps within a framework of the contingent nature of the buying decision (Bunn, 1993). The key distinction writers make is between routine 'non-strategic' purchases, and the ones that attract academic attention, the 'strategic purchases'. However, these two facets (strategic vs. non-strategic) of the work are presented as distinct and observable, which means that relationships (and the wider context of the network) are downplayed in favour of purchasing decision making 'frameworks'.

A result of such divisions of the work is that an elite who can deal with the 'strategic' or 'high level' work is brought about, as the low level, more repetitive work is farmed out to the more 'clerical' workers. Such an approach contrasts with say managers and professionals, where whilst there are of course specialists, individuals as practitioners

retain a wider span of work, and critically usually retain responsibility (and creditability) in the decision to sub contract to a specialist.

Of interest here however, is the role that the endemic use of such frameworks (two-by-two matrix) play in presenting purchasing as technical not political decision making. A non-purchasing academic, (Pettigrew 1975: *'The Industrial Purchasing Decision as a Political Process'*) famously saw (in a case study of a highly important decision) the purchasing process as the other way round, as highly political and not based on technical decisions.

A modicum of thought discerns that the majority of purchasing decisions must be reviewing and renewing previous decisions. "Repeat" purchasing situations come then with elements of known risk; established professional and social relations, sunk costs, an installed base of equipment or spares (that put a premium on standardisation), limitations on volume *etc* through established procedures, the views and interests of users, the possible infrequency of purchase and the ability to run without that purchase – could it stop the line?... At any time most of the occupation then will be involved in repeat purchasing decisions. What is being drawn attention to in the light of the above is that the division of purchasing into strategic and non strategic 'workers' may be further refined into strategic or new/important decision 'workers' versus those with the residue i.e. repeat, non-critical purchasing. Furthermore, individuals without any formal purchasing training often 'do Purchasing'. This distinction is not often raised, academic work discusses purchasing by professional purchasers, usually located in purchasing departments. Part of any 'project' to professionalise' purchasing appears to be to include overlooking this point, however, the odd maverick or practitioner turned academic does raise it (Ramsay, 1994, Bresnen, 1996).

Another and even more revealing omission is the lack of emphasis placed upon activity 8 – ‘Clear the invoice and pay the supplier’. It is true that there are now many automated payment systems – but they have over ride features! If capitalist management were viewed by the traditional visitor from outer space, this lack of emphasis upon actually payment – the release of the cheque - would surely surprise, when for a supplier getting that cheque in is what it is all about. The matter can be handled with sophistication – buyers can suddenly become quite unavailable at the time longish term contracts are due for signing, again for suppliers getting the buyer’s signature on the next contract is a fraught and critical time – it is ignored as part of purchasing.

Chapter 4 discusses this omission from academic debate in the light of the discussion above on the perceived status of the ‘profession.’<sup>1</sup> The ‘fissure’ within the occupational label of purchasing has significant effects given that the majority in the occupation will find themselves referred to in the literature as clerical workers, endangered by the latest ‘revolutionary’ advance in purchasing thinking. The occupation cannot present a united front from which to advance itself.

From the late 1970s the IMP [Industrial Marketing and Purchasing] group took an alternative perspective. They presented purchasing (and marketing) activity as much more the product of these re-buy situations not as ‘ahistorical’ (Cunningham & White, 1973). However as IMP work did not take much interest in purchasing *per se* (favouring the interaction) they did not get involved in these divisions within the occupation, or on impacts at this detailed level, in the purchasing process.

### **3.2.3 Purchasing work and labour process theory**

Implicit in Zuboff’s thesis in the book ‘*In the Age of the Smart Machine*’ (1989), was that explication and codification erode a group or profession’s power ‘as it increases

the transparency of their know-how and detaches them from the requirements of the action context' (1989:178). She contrasts the way some work is codified, that is made explicit, with the work of senior executives. Executive work, she contends, remains contextual, social and opaque (and therefore higher paid, and higher authority/status). Although her study was concerned with Information Technology, the findings are relevant.

'The new concept of clerical work tried to eliminate the remaining elements of action centered-skill related to *acting-with* (that is, interpersonal coordination and communication) in favor of tasks that were wholly devoted to *acting-on* (that is, direct action on materials and equipment)' (1989:119). The relevance of 'acting with' or 'acting on' can be seen in recent debate over whether the role and work of nurses has been de-skilled. It has been argued that the recent intensification of nursing (higher volume of work per nurse) has increased the ratio of work that can be seen as 'acting-on', at the expense of traditional 'acting with' work, (Ackroyd, & Bolton, 1999). 'Acting with' work, seen as individual patient care is seen as more satisfying for the nurse, the issue here is that if nursing is perceived as merely 'acting on' skills, it will be perceived as downgraded. Table 3.2 below compares knowledge bases in management and the professions with that purchasing.

**Table 3.2 Comparing knowledge bases in management and the professions with that purchasing**

Knowledge bases	Management & Professions	Purchasing
Source of power	Life / death / personal disaster / triumph / confidential issues	Sourcing decision & cheque signoff
Type of knowledge	High theory content (external – content) appeal to values	Practical and applied (internal – organisation related)
Application of knowledge	Highly contextual, interpretative	Follows procedures, Discussed further in chapter 4
Location and degree mobility of knowledge	Ability to define ‘knowledge’ / the ‘gaze’	Knowledge tends to be defined internally within organization
Risk reduction a)	Sunk costs for client: disclosure, privacy	Relationship asset specific Switching & search costs
Risk reduction b)	Minimises ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ role constraint	Annual contracts encourage annual highs and lows
Language	Unique grammar & vocabulary	Grammar broadly shared with general management

Zuboff’s analysis of which work will be deemed of high status (that which is ‘contextual, social and opaque’) is being applied here to purchasing and managerial work. For purchasing to achieve the status and deference accorded established ‘management’ and the professions it must present a ‘powerful body of knowledge’, that meets these criteria. The more codified the knowledge base of a profession, the less ‘interpretative’ scope available to it, accordingly, given little interpretative scope, the less powerful will be the knowledge base, and therefore the less formal deference will be accorded. Zuboff also saw lower grade, ‘acting on’ work as making oral knowledge redundant (discussed further in Chapter 4, 4.3.4).

### 3.2.4 Purchasing as an offspring of ‘operations research’ – ‘hands on’

The operations research strand of parentage is highlighted here in that it is both an applied area, seeking to help or inform practice, and one that is often seen as ‘reactive’, in the sense that ‘research’ in operations is often seen to follow, rather than lead practice. In an article entitled “*Is production and operations management a discipline?*”, Pilkington & Liston-Heyes, (1999:16) suggest that managers are developing strategies and finding

solutions to problems before they become the subject of Production and Operations Management (POM) articles. Much of the Japanese influence on POM and purchasing can similarly be seen as the recording and dissemination of practices first ‘discovered’ and implemented by practitioners (Chikán, 1995). Purchasing suffers from its closer relationship to the shop floor than functions such as marketing or accounting (see 3.3.1).

### **3.3 Legitimizing forces**

Section 3.2.2 identified that the cheque sign off role of purchasing does not receive much attention or kudos in the purchasing literature, that it does not help validate or legitimise purchasing as a responsible function. This section briefly presents other factors that do not legitimate purchasing (but may validate competitor functions).

#### **3.3.1 Spatial aspects of legitimisation**

Management and the established professions are ‘services’ (here seen as divorced from close association with a tangible product). It is common to denigrate any work that involves or is close to manual work (Elias, 1939:1978, Armstrong 1984, 1996). Bresnen and Fowler (1996:161) suggest that the presence of physical output in professions such as engineering, accounts for their relatively lower professional status in comparison to service (and less tangible) professions. Purchasing suffers in this respect also, as it is closer to the shop floor than functions such as marketing or accounting<sup>2</sup>.

Whereas purchasing is negatively associated (by “management”) with the space of the shop floor, and the financial detail of business transactions, general management and professionals gain reputational strength and status through their physical associations. The very distance from the financial details of transactions and through (relatively) prestigious



backdrops that buttress the impact of (relatively) prestigious offices and the various trappings that go with such positions.

Chapter 2 discussed how hierarchical relations were structured or enacted to give a strong sense of place, of location, or order, Giddens (1991:204) terms this quality of stability 'frameworks'. 'Traditional ritual, as well as religious belief, connected individual action to moral frameworks and to elemental questions about human existence. The loss of ritual is also a loss of involvement with such frameworks...'. Professionals and professions (including nursing) provide a function for the client that restores this assurance or sense of continuity or identity. Giddens analysis is that there is a fundamental difference between ancient authorities and the present in that: 'Forms of traditional authority become only 'authorities' among others' (1991:196). It is the ability to create and maintain distance from 'common people' that means the 'rituals' of professionals, the 'props', the titles, etc remain. Innovations such as the internet and 'call' centre delivery may have an impact, but to date arguably appear to operate within Zuboff's framework. For example, NHS Direct (call centre based health advice) is siphoning off only low level, 'textual' or highly 'codified' treatments.

### **3.3.2 Management and professionals pursue splendid isolation**

The line between management and professionals and non-management or professional employees is often created through attendance at some form of specialist school or university. Usually one that could impart theory; knowledge that is, 'esoteric, evanescent and fiduciary - beyond the layman's knowledge or judgement, impossible to pin down or fault even when it fails, and which must therefore be taken on trust' (Perkin 1990:117). Implicit then is the drawing of a line, or the creation of space between, those who have had a 'schooling' and those who have not. (This space or distance is reinforced of

course by the adoption of a professional vocabulary, see for example, Edelman, 1994, *'The Political Language of the Helping Professions'*).

Part of creating division between 'members' and non-members is achieved through creating dominant vertical ties within a profession. Baly (1984), contains a translation of the Hippocratic Oath given by Dr. Charles Singer in his *Greek Biology and Greek Medicine* (1932); its blatantly exclusive and monopolistic intention may surprise. *'I swear...to reckon him who taught me this Art as dear to me as those who bore him,...I will impart a knowledge of the Art to my own sons, to those of my teacher, and to disciples bound to me ...but to none other'*.

The inward looking nature of the professions has clearly been with us for some time. Blau (1967:262) notes 'Professionals in general are primarily oriented to the social approval of colleagues rather than to that of clients, and professional detachment would not be possible otherwise'. This inward, peer conscious culture is achieved through close attention to socialisation processes. 'At the centre of the process of becoming a professional is coming to see oneself as essentially, first and foremost, a doctor, teacher or whatever' (Robinson, 1978:19). In France this process is called *'deformation professionnelle'* implying a radical transformation of self which accompanies becoming a professional. It is this 'sharp split most professionals make between themselves and laymen, especially clients' (Robinson, 1978:23), that creates a distance or more accurately space, between client and professional.

Legitimation demarcations such as the *'deformation professionnelle'* mark out time and space (it is the difference that is important, not the distance). There is no correlation for a newly qualified purchasing person, no 'marking off', no new title, no new uniform, no state mandated rights to practice – no social act of legitimisation.

### **3.3.3 Autonomy**

Leading on from the above point that becoming a ‘new’ professional buyer is not socially recognised, in addition the professional has the ‘majesty’ of the solidity of a career irrespective of job – a buyer has a job. Stinchcombe parallels this in an observation on institutions, ‘Continuity in status in a labor market, instead of an organization, we take to be the defining characteristic of professional institutions’ (1959:187). In the question of autonomy there appears the widest division between management generally and professionals. Professional status acts to position the occupant as somehow above the ‘fray’ of market forces, Armstrong (1984:99) commented that the professions have traditionally been thought of as in some way ‘antipathetic’ to the values of business organizations. He highlights that professionals are seen as having values that are independent of any organisation (also Drucker 1968). Table 3.4 compares the implications of fiduciary values for the established professions and for purchasing.

The professional image is detached, objective, able to be dispassionate in the face of commercial pressures, ‘guardian’ qualities, qualities that engender trust; (albeit the professional having earned the right to trust through accreditation and ‘knowing’ presentations, Fineman, 1990:180). The ambivalent nature of the professional’s relationship with market forces is once again highlighted, as is their apparent independence and autonomy. Table 3.4 emphasises that purchasing is market driven, responding to, and part of, managerial agendas. So much a part, that it is this issue of autonomy that means that purchasing struggles to stand alone as a really independent professional function – it is a part of the management team.

Perkins argues that once an occupation has acquired control (i.e. autonomy see table 3.3) over the market it creates an artificial scarcity “which has the effect of yielding a

rent, in the strict Ricardian sense of a payment for the use of a scarce resource' (Perkin, 1990:7). Saks (1983:10) sees the process of professionalisation as 'primarily a function of the bargaining skills of occupational groups seeking the status of a profession'. Bizarrely as the occupational grouping that has bargaining skills imbued in its training, purchasing practitioners have not been able to differentiate themselves sufficient to become true professionals.

**Table 3.3 Fiduciary values, Professions and Purchasing compared**

<b>Fiduciary values</b>	<b>Established Professions</b>	<b>Purchasing</b>
Objectivity	Antipathetic to the values of business organizations	Reflect and implement values of business
The public good	Perceived dual role to client and profession	Accountable to shareholders / management & relationship
Contracts	No contract with client – client can't enforce / evaluate	Responsible for contracts – codified
Professional socialisation	' <i>deformation professionnelle</i> ' dramatic & defining change when qualified (title, uniform, pay).	Qualifying in job unlikely to be any more change than an increment
Status differences	The above factors mean that there is a clear cut difference to the qualified individual	Suppliers / employers see little difference between the qualified or unqualified purchaser.
Money	Do not discuss the 'bill' – above mere 'market' forces	Critical, central to professional identity

However, it is possible that the concept of scheming professionals 'mapping out' agendas and what is and is not a profession overstates agency, and understates that agendas that simply emerge, as Fineman (1990:152) reminds us. 'The image of a profession as a homogeneous entity has more to do with the self-protective rhetoric of the profession than to the lived-out realities of its members'. What is being highlighted here is how professionals 'persuade' clients of their worth.

**Table 3.4 Comparing autonomy in the established professions with Purchasing**

Considerable autonomy	Management & Professions	Purchasing
Continuity	The profession sends out the message that this is a career	Individual has to send out message that this is more than a job
Evaluation	Inter profession, control own evaluation – set agenda	Receive targets, part of management evaluation policy respond to agendas

One aspect of the rhetoric of persuasion Fineman identified is that professionals maintain strict control over their own evaluation. It is apparently a breach of professional etiquette to comment adversely on the work of a fellow professional, (especially in ‘In smaller communities, where friendship and other particularistic ties are strong’, Barber, 1983:151), although a fellow professional deemed inferior may be shunned.

Dent (1996) traces the development of medical audit in terms of the interaction between state demand for greater ‘management’ control of medical audit, and the responses of the medical profession. He argues that doctors and consultants moved from a position of initial hostility, to active involvement, and indeed leadership. He attributes the model of medical audit (Figure 3.1) that was evolved and implemented as being the ultimate construction and responsibility of the doctors and consultants.

**Figure 3.3 The Medical Audit Model**

STRUCTURE	⇒ PROCESS	⇒ OUTCOME
The hospital facilities and equipment, skill and qualifications of staff (etc)	The clinic Work processes directly under consultants control	The patient’s condition after treatment (i.e. morbidity, mortality and quality of life)

Dent, M (1996). *Autonomy and the Medical Profession: Medical Audit and Management Control in White Collar Work: The non-manual labour process*, [Eds], Smith, C., Knights, D., Willmott, H. MacMillan, London

What appears to have happened is that an evaluation model was created that sites the key episode of medical intervention as the interaction between doctor and patient. This is not the only possible outcome, it is arguably an entirely non-holistic model. (The model and the issues it raises reappear in Chapter 9). What is most noticeable is that the doctors

have implemented a solution that values *their* input, assessed by *their* colleagues, over more wide ranging solutions ('cradle to grave' as it were), that might for example stress *overall* patient satisfaction. Within such a model and presentation of the medical process, it is easy to see the doctors and consultants as the key, the dominant players within such an arrangement; doctors can define medical situations primarily in terms that favour their own professional interpretation (see James, 1993, '*Disclosure and Cancer*').

In fact what the doctors have done is more strategic than that, in that they have leveraged the physical presence of the input / structure side into being a support to their enterprise. That the hospitals and other facilities, the vehicles, the sheer number of staff running around, all the uniformed presence physically buttress the consultants position from any potential opposition. The facilities are seen as there to serve doctors and consultants, not the other way round (Chapter 9 examines this issue).

### 3.4 Conclusions

Purchasing work is linked to very specific tasks, located in specific relations / market / forms, dependent upon in depth specialised knowledge including financial details. In terms of internal relationships purchasing work has to function without the buttresses provided by professional kudos and the spatial attributes of impressive or staged locations. What might have been constructed as a key or critical activity – paying the supplier (or with more sophistication, delaying signing a contract) – is not, it is barely acknowledged in most management literature. Finally the issue of autonomy singles out purchasing activity as only a facet of the structures that support "management", and undermines any aspirations to the status of a modern professional.

The distance from the fray that managers and professionals may be able to offer exudes an appearance of independence and authority. This may echo connection to the kind of certainties individuals tend to seek in times of stress or uncertainty. Chapter 2 suggested that in former times such reassurance was provided by a profounder sense of place, that is grounded in geographical (spatial) realities. What managers and professionals extract from interaction with their publics then will relate to the external, however what purchasing personnel extract from their interfaces will more likely relate only to that interface / relationship and not have currency beyond. Purchasing it is suggested, would only be seen as important within a specific context, whereas for example managers by definition function across contexts.

Foucault saw the profession as one (key) example of disciplines, of types of power that judge and inscribe the body (and therefore all society) in patterns of surveillance and control ('normalization'). That medicine assumes a normative posture, it not only dictates standards; it also 'polices' standards. A Foucauldian would view the entire medical apparatus not just as a mechanism for training doctors but also as providing a mechanism for legitimating medical competence, and thereby all the sciences. '... analyses or practices employing the root 'psycho-' have their origin in this historical reversal of the procedures of individualisation' (1977:193). If "management" is only one of many such discourses, one pattern of surveillance and control that legitimates itself, then if purchasing has the particularistic and contextual qualities proposed here, it may have escaped total alignment with hegemonic disciplines.

It is the creation of space (through status, the space need not be wide) between a lay person and a professional by the professionalisation process, that creates professional deference. Deference may be a mechanism for *bridging* that distance without reducing it.

No such gap or space is created in the qualification of a purchasing person, however, buyers may have knowledge that management may not value, that is not 'esoteric, evanescent and fiduciary' – but is of some practical use.

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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong (1984) writing of professions, notes that '...the elites within a profession may attempt to monopolize for themselves the esoteric indeterminate aspects of professional practice, thus producing... a 'horizontal fissure' within the profession'.

<sup>2</sup> Veblen (1904) suggested engineers, technicians, direct managers think more pragmatically, in terms of cause and effect. Those separated from it (accountants, lawyers and financiers) think more in terms of precedents, morality and values; in Friedman, (1990:185), who also suggests we might think of distance from the labour process as a dimension which is correlated with a tendency to treat management practice in philosophical and static terms, rather than in pragmatic, strategic and dynamic terms.



**Chapter 4: The Enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing Research**

<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
1. Introduction	Introduction and framework
2. What is known about the problem	Deference
3. What is known about the problem	Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism
<b>4. What is known about the problem</b>	<b>The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research</b>
5. Research issues	Issues identified in existing knowledge

**4 Purpose**

This chapter deals with the academic presentation of purchasing activity. One issue, baldly stated, has to be why is purchasing considered so unimportant in the general management literature? (It does occasionally appear in more general management publications, Stuart, 1997, Spekman *et al.* 1998). Many management academics are still surprised to find that it is treated as an academic subject. Purchasers' concerns for the status of their profession is endemic to the purchasing literature, as this chapter will seek to demonstrate. The presentation of purchasing in management research is traced from the late 1960s. In some respects it is suggested that remarkably little has really changed over this period, Purchasing is still a poor relation as a management 'discipline'. However, in terms of the presentation of Purchasing, what is identified is a project to achieve higher status. This project appears to include suppressing some aspects of what performing purchasing work involves, including deference.

**4.1 Introduction to the Purchasing revolution (?)**

The literature review that follows is unconventional within the supply literature in that it starts concerned as much with what has *not* been written about, and why, as it is with

reviewing what has been covered. Accordingly, the literature is explored for what discourses have been adopted, how themes have emerged and how themes have been submerged or even discarded. The more conventional approach would be to identify and attempt to categorise the various models that have been produced. Instead, a framing device of deconstructing an early but influential purchasing article is adopted, such an approach enables alternatives to be considered.

Young (1989:204) argues that the presence of aggressive outward manifestations of a cohesive culture may be a sure indication of inner division and fragmentation. Throughout the purchasing literature to be reviewed here there is a concern to distance 'modern' purchasing from 'old', to establish that a 'revolution' has now occurred within the function, and that purchasing has moved up to become part of the strategy-forming elite. This chapter adopts '*... a postmodern view which seeks to appreciate the organization as an interweaving of a variety of 'texts' and textual features... [the academic presentation of purchasing can be viewed as] the result of the way in which it is staged rather than how it is transmitted from the unconscious individual or collective depths*' (Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992:334).

## **4.2 The Progress of Purchasing**

Endemic to accounts of purchasing is a relentlessly 'transformative' approach, where progress has been made, *is* being made, and will eventually culminate in an end point: strategic purchasing / supply management / network supply (Cavinato 1999). The one-way nature of this progress ignores the idea that if things can move forward, they could also move backwards, for example, purchasing could decline in strategic significance. '*The idea of decline is actually a theory about the nature and meaning of time. So is the idea of*

progress. The notion of history as progress stands largely discredited today among intellectuals, and especially among historians. They debate instead the origins and history of 'the idea of progress' and how it has served as a powerful cultural 'myth' in Western thought' (Herman, 1997:13). It appears that what is commonplace thinking among historians has not penetrated purchasing. [This analysis does not apply for example to the IMP, in fact the relative 'pessimism' of IMP approaches, is arguably their fundamental distinction to the more 'main stream' purchasing literature. It is interesting to speculate whether this accounts for the relative failure of IMP approaches to penetrate the 'mainstream' American marketing and purchasing literature].

To examine this change, the focus will be on one, in its day much cited piece written by Feldman & Cardozo in 1969, entitled '*The 'Industrial' Revolution and Models of Buyer Behavior*<sup>1</sup>'; the revolution they refer to, is of course in the nature of purchasing work. The paper is chosen for its age, its influence, and the continuing salience and apparent modernity of much of its image of the future of purchasing. The paper begins by seeking to differentiate between the old (pre revolution, clerical purchasing) and the 'new' work of purchasing.

*'But many marketers and analysts recognized that this "honest clerk" [the traditional view of purchasing] had a greedy, self serving brother whose goal was not to minimise expense to the firm, but instead was to maximise personal gain. The marketing strategy adopted for this man stressed social activities between salesman and buyer, and other personal side-benefits to the purchasing agent. ...The appropriate marketing strategy, under this classical model, includes low prices, large catalogs, and liberal expense accounts for salesmen. ...'* (ibid.:78).

#### **4.2.1 Corruption and outsider status**

In the very early days of academic purchasing work, corruption was part of what people thought of when they thought of purchasing. Purchasing's ability to influence internal perceptions, to qualify and disqualify suppliers (the 'unofficial' process of qualification is found in Cunningham and White's (1973) study of machine tool buying, and Luffman's (1974) study of earth moving equipment) is a major gatekeeping role for the entire organisation. In this context, it is interesting to note Zaltman & Bonoma's (1977:54) cryptic comment. 'The motivations of vendors in bidding on a job whose specifications they know they cannot meet is another interesting facet of organizational buying'. Some readers would understand what this comment was alluding to; the practices continue (it is one of the narratives in Chapter 8).

Wind (1970) found buyers were reluctant to talk about reciprocity: the policy of buying from the companies' customers. Brand (1972) also noted that reciprocal trading rarely appears in the literature, but is known to occur. Whilst there is the omission of subjects due to their nature, there is also the more subtle omission of subjects due to the research method issues they raise and Brand acknowledged this. 'Those involved in the practical cut and thrust of industrial sales negotiations are in the best position to assess the extent to which unethical practices distort the buying procedures in their own particular businesses' (1972:42).

Given the origins of purchasing as an applied subject, and the realities of research funding, it is unsurprising that corruption has not been pursued as a theme. However such a reading of purchasing work would also define the Buyer in terms of what the Seller does,

placing purchasing on the perimeter of the organisation; not a good location for an ambitious function.

**Table 4.1 The Sales role, derived from Feldman & Cardozo (1969)**

	<b>Classical</b>	<b>Neo-classical</b>	<b>Consumeristic</b>
Sales role	Discuss price and buy the drinks	Discuss terms in addition to price, and instead of buying drinks enhance the status of the purchasing agent	Source of detailed information about specific topics on particular occasions
Sales effectiveness criteria	The next order	On being well informed, persuasive, and 'well liked'	Depends upon his ability to help the purchasing executive solve problems and on his believability – not always synonymous with being well liked

Given the increase in hierarchy, bureaucracy and formal control that the 1960s and 1970s represented (the age of strategic planning, Mintzberg 1994) purchasing was perceived, it is argued, as a corporate 'outsider'. It was 'suspicious' in the first place to have an outward face onto the market. The earliest purchasing literature takes one of its themes as the need to portray purchasing as a *legitimate* part of the organisation, this theme is developed in the next section.

#### 4.2.2 Outsider status and infighting

In these early formulations, purchasing agents had to fight for their right to specify suppliers (fight for the right to define themselves as the customer). Suppliers often '...directed their major selling efforts through the 'back door' to top management, in an effort to have products specified on the requisitions which purchasing agents passively received' (Feldman & Cardozo, 1969:84). This is supported in the early 'turf wars' literature referenced below with Engineering, and more subtly in Pettigrew (1975).

In the 1960s and 1970s so little purchasing work was published in main stream academic journals that what there was is much cited by other authors, sometimes out of all

connection with what today would be termed the 'rigour' of the original research. One such example is Strauss's (1962) article which concluded: 'The ambitious purchasing agent skilfully uses formal and informal techniques in order to influence the terms of the requisitions that he receives' (*ibid.*161). We should not overlook the centrality of paperwork (requisitions) to Strauss's analysis – though it is suggested later that subsequent accounts of purchasing work do. Strauss' paper was based upon the 'lateral' relationships between purchasing and engineering (and scheduling), and set a theme running. Acknowledgement of the role of vendors (vendors' agents: salespeople) was swapped for 'academic' debate about the relative role and importance of purchasing versus other (internal) departments, notably engineering: Pingry (1974); Jackson & Sciglimpaglia, (1974); Spiro *et al.* (1977); Fox and Rink, (1978), Laczniaak (1979).

It is being suggested that the presentation of purchasing pursued organisational 'legitimacy', being portrayed in the act of seeking validation internally, *through* the organisation, rather than externally, through relationships with vendors. [Bresnen & Fowler (1996:177) in a study of professionalisation and British management practice notes that specialists obtained power through aligning their skills with organisational goals].

#### 4.2.3 Emotional Purchasing and word of mouth

Feldman and Cardozo (*ibid.*) were perhaps the first to comment upon the emotional aspects of purchasing work. They were perturbed by the presentation of purchasing as 'emotional' which they perceived as presenting purchasing as 'irrational', a key barrier to higher status. They explicitly include 'psychic reward' as a part of the work, but in their "revolutionary" model, sales people offer 'buyer enhancement' rather than drinks (see Table 4.1). The buyer's status is enhanced in that his organisational problem solving capability is enhanced by better quality information. Such a formulation goes beyond the

stimulus/response portrayal of the buyer/seller interface. What is explicitly promoted replaces helping the buyer to do his or her job (or helping the buyer 'help themselves'). In this new model the buyer is helped to be a more useful, productive and important member of their organization; thereby helping to 'legitimize' purchasing as a function (ideas further explored in the Decision Making Unit concept as discussed below).

*"The consumeric model defines the purchaser as a procurement manager, rather than as a purchasing agent. The procurement manager's job is problem solving, not simple buying. To solve problems, procurement managers employ a variety of strategies. These strategies are sets of decision rules designed to solve particular problems within acceptable limits of risk and resource allocation. Because this problem-solving activity occurs in a social context, it requires both analytical skills and skill in interpersonal relations"*  
Feldman and Cardozo (1969:81).

Their 'consumeric model' appears to be deliberately stressing those roles within purchasing that cannot be commodified and codified, work that involves interpersonal 'higher order' skills (see discussion of Zuboff, 3.4.2). In order for purchasing to move beyond clerical status, the exposition of beyond clerical skills would be fundamental. In the opening line of the next paragraph, the authors expose their hand. 'Where earlier models described the behavior of a 'purchasing agent', the consumeric model describes that of a 'procurement executive'. Suddenly we have a purchasing executive, (job titles are dispensed more liberally in America, but it is indicative). The whole section presented here recalls to mind Mintzberg's (1979a) account of executive work, and makes the link to claiming higher order skills beyond clerical work. In an even more striking precursor to both Mintzberg and Zuboff, they interpret these higher order skills in terms of orality.

*“In addition, although it has not been recognized in either the classical or neo-classical models, word of mouth [WOM] communication from other company executives, as well as from procurement officers in other firms, may form a significant source of information for procurement executives. ...especially new technical developments (ibid.:85)”.*

The importance of word of mouth communication (*pace* discussion of deference as an oral culture) was pursued in the earliest literature. Webster (1968a, b, 1970) noted an industrial seller needs listening skills and empathy. Martilla (1971) expanded Webster’s work on WOM to include the intrafirm perspective. It is suggested here that this early strand in purchasing development has not been pursued within the project of aggrandisement. Purchasing has been unsuccessful at presenting itself as a field with the degree of orality necessary to attain high status. One explanation may be the point that Zuboff makes: ‘Oral communication tends to be more highly charged, emotional, and potentially conflictful. When communication must be face-to-face, interpersonal attractions and antagonisms are kept high’ (1989:171). It may be that a sanitised version of purchasing, more ‘logical or ‘rational’ than market driven ‘hard bargaining’ would suggest, was adopted. It cannot be stated that acknowledgment of all the face-to-face side of purchasing has disappeared, but it has been in the main marginalised (in strictly academic terms) to (practitioner or popularist) negotiation literature (Fisher & Ury, 1990, Van Weele, 2000: 277-288, Howard, 2000).

Harland (1994:54) notes that the training of purchasing agents has been (until recently) inherently adversarial. ‘However, there are severe doubts about the validity of the traditional assumptions about the ‘rational’ industrial buyer. The buyer was encouraged to take an adversarial position to its suppliers using a variety of negotiation techniques to gain



control over sales representatives (see for example England 1967, Westing, Fine & Zenz 1976 and Lee and Dobler, 1977) to gain the best deal ...'. In part, Webster and Wind's work can be seen as a reaction against the perceived corruption and emotionality of purchasing (Shoaf 1959, Sawyer 1959, cited in Brand, 1972).

However, highly developed interpersonal skills would be seen as only one small part of many 'strategic' purchasers' skills. This distancing from negotiation<sup>2</sup>, or bargaining skills, it is argued here, is part of the professionalisation project. Although in fact writing of *consumer* negotiation, Gabriel & Lang (1995:70) cleverly draw attention to its disreputable undercurrents.

"Looking for a bargain then, is not the same as looking for value for money. It is more like looking for opportunities to discover anomalies in the market and take advantage of them. The bargain hunter is akin to a trickster figure who exposes fissures in the system and triumphs against its dictates...Finding a bargain marks the triumph of opportunism..".

### 4.3 The Buying Centre Literature

Thus far Feldman and Carodozo have been prescient in their analysis, now attention turns to those areas where this pair (and by implication the early literature) were not so prescient. They had moved from considering a 'purchasing agent', to a 'procurement executive', however, the next literature to in some way define the image of purchasing was much more integrative to the organisation, more 'corporate' than these two had imagined. They had written that this new purchasing executive '*...may choose to accept higher cost and less efficient specifications in order to preserve his working relationships with engineering. As one executive remarked 'You've got to work with those fellows. You can't argue over everything, even if you know you're right'* (1969:84).

Although there is an air of typical honesty and common sense in this observation, as in most of the early observation based literature, such down to earth observations are now rare in the main stream literature (Olsen, Ellram, 1997 note the subsequent 'macro approach'). However the views which these two expressed do not presage the new corporate light that purchasing was to be presented in. The literature of buying centres originates with Robinson (*et al.*'s, 1967) model of industrial buying behaviour. The model of industrial buying that is most commonly referred to is Webster and Wind's modification of the original in 1972. Webster & Wind in fact stress the kind of iterative (as opposed to serial) and oral (as opposed to codified) activities that could have taken the projection of purchasing activity in another direction.

#### **4.3.1 Buying as a corporate activity: external and internal influences**

*'Organizational buying behavior is a complex process (rather than a single, instantaneous act) and involves many persons, multiple goals, and potentially conflicting decision criteria. It often takes place over an extended period of time, requires information from many sources, and encompasses many interorganisational relationships'* (Webster, Wind, 1972).

The contribution of Webster and Wind's general model was to provide a framework within which to examine the complex intra-firm industrial purchasing decision process. Like all 'generic' models it had to down-play the unique factors, here how 'individual' organisations buy (Campbell, 1990). It could be argued, that in spite of the logic of the 'internalisation' of buying that the model is striving for, the most dynamic and proactive environmental determinant is likely to be interaction with the sales functions, and the sales personnel, of suppliers and potential suppliers. (Perks and Easton (1999:4) highlight the

role of a good sales force with 'persuasive and problem solving skills', in contrast to Porter's emphasis on activities). Such interpretations are much closer to the adaptations / influence work of the IMP group (see section 4.5).

This section argues that Webster & Wind had three major influences on subsequent work on purchasing (regardless of the influence of the model on subsequent marketing work) beyond the DMU concept itself. The first was the downgrading of the role and importance given to individual sales personnel; the second was the professionalisation of purchasing by association. The third, providing a framework whereby, in concert with deductive methods, emotion, sentiment and human 'cussedness' could be written (or factored) out of the buying process.

#### **4.3.2 Breaking the link with sales**

The model was the start of a process that effectively 'writes out' the salesperson, substituting instead depersonalised 'marketing activity', Bonoma & Johnston, (1978:214) noted the phenomenon. 'By studying the purchasing agent or 'buying centre' within the buying organization it is felt possible to gain an understanding of the industrial buying process. The seller somehow gets left out of the process'. Another pair of early observers were Cunningham and White, 'This approach [Webster and Wind's four variables as the influences on organisational buying] surprisingly fails to emphasise the strong marketing influence of the supplier companies themselves' (1973: 191).

The argument here is that whatever 'status' purchasing lost as a boundary spanning function, it more than recoups in greater legitimacy within the organisation. 'No factor is more critical in understanding the organizational buying process because the authority structure determines who sets the goals and who evaluates (and therefore determines rewards for) organisational performance'. The role for a supplier in such a model, is

reactive rather than proactive, decisions are complex, but internal. There is not an 'environment', there is an environment as perceived by external facing employees (principally purchasing), and as portrayed by sellers. Håkansson, Johanson, & Wootz (1977:323) recognise this limitation, in their work on supplier-influencing strategies, that whilst buyers will see through deliberate inadequate information (lies), suppliers can instead 'manage' perceptions through influence tactics.

Heide and John (1990) came up against this phenomenon of 'gatekeeping' boundary personnel, that in firms one person would act as the focal point for relationships with a given supplier (1990:31). From Heide and John's work (on original equipment manufacturers) it would appear that, in their sample at least, organisations' relationships are heavily mediated by individuals. Spekman (1979:105), notes purchasing's important role in the acquisition, importation and processing of information crucial to the firm's survival, but goes on to note the importance of perception and mediation. He states that a boundary role person '...is also a role sender – an influence agent - attempting to influence the decisions and behaviors of those individuals with whom he interacts'.

After the organisational buying model literature, purchasing is embedded into organisational processes. By Patchen's study in the mid-70s (1974), the role of individuals was completely swapped for demonstrating the internal complexity and multi-faceted nature of the buying decision (4.2.3, *Outsider status and infighting*). In becoming an organisational as opposed to a functional player, it is crucial that purchasing has to be presented as not taking risks, the management of risk instead becomes absorbed within the wider organisation.

A further twist and a direct parallel, can be drawn through the increasing use at this time of 'survey' data to research industrial buying and selling by the American literature (in

contrast to the early 'observation' work). It could be argued that the distance between subject and object in survey approaches, parallels the removal of interpersonal skills such as emotion work from the research. A comparatively rare non-positivist paper by Leigh & Rethans, (1984), examined roles using cognitive script theory. Whilst their work appears to map out basic scripts in buyer/seller interaction, it could be argued they ignore their most important finding. In requiring groups of buyers to write down exactly what they would do in an important negotiation with a salesperson, they find that contrary to buyer training and everything purchasing textbooks expound, the buyers opened on the major item price, and then negotiated the 'extra' dimensions last. They do not examine why such 'non-rational' behaviour should occur.

The argument here is that the embryonic profession of purchasing, flattered by attention from other academic disciplines, and in need of legitimisation, was happy to ditch previous associations with emotionality and sales person ingratiation. Such an interpretation would appear to contradict certain observers' views, which find the buying centre concept a setback for the 'power' and internal status of an individual purchaser. Brand states the viewpoint, 'The popular interpretation of the DMU concept, which "cuts the Buyer down to size"...' (1972:25). The difference between the two opposing views rests on a subjective assessment of how much power and status purchasing had achieved and could confidently take into the future, and whether its status should be externally based on suppliers' perceptions, or internally based on legitimate authority within the organisation.

### **4.3.3 The de-personalisation of the buying/selling process**

The original Webster and Wind model attaches great significance to non-task factors: personal values and needs, informal, off-the-job interactions, methods of personnel evaluation, and the impact of the environment on values and 'norms'. They are also explicit

that ‘...any given set of variables will have both task and non-task dimensions although one dimension may be predominant’ (1972:13). Individual sentiments, the role perceptions and expectations of individuals, and by implication, the capabilities of individuals, are seen as a major influence within the organisational buying decision, after all, they concluded. ‘In the final analysis, all organizational buying behavior is individual behavior’ (1972:18). Zaltman & Bonoma, (1977:54) claim the major factors influencing the industrial purchasing decision are social ones, not rational economic ones. ‘The role of friendships maintained by purchasing agents is important and very often ignored or even denied in traditional treatments’. They also note the phenomenon of the purchasing agent working ‘diligently’ with a friend to get them competitive.

The forms of behaviour that explore the ‘non-task’ elements of purchasing work that Webster and Wind stressed include the following. Friendship, feelings that might be aroused in ending a supply relationship, even discussion of ‘how’ to end a relationship, that a new buyer may ‘want’ (as opposed to rational planning) to be a new broom sweeping aside previous relationships in favour of ones they create themselves, inducing a supplier to provide a product they do not currently produce *etc.* are no longer pursued. In pursuing this Boulderised presentation of purchasing work, key skills and behaviours; what might now fashionably be termed ‘emotional intelligence’ (see Fineman, 1999) are omitted.

For the internal function of purchasing, lacking the external value systems of the professions, presenting purchasing as part of the corporation and corporate strategy, meant underplaying and understating risk taking as a part of purchasing activity. With the denial of risk taking it is argued here, out went skills of ‘acting with’, contextual and interpersonal skills; what Zuboff and Mintzberg both identified as executive work. Out too goes one route to higher status for purchasing work.

Although essential to any purchasing activity that is not merely a documentation process, following dissemination of the DMU model, risk could not be treated in terms of professional values; as those values would be linked to a particular organisation. In essence the profession denuded itself of one of its most critical – and potentially highest rewarded roles – that of managing risk externally. Again one can see here how the IMP focus on connections between organisations ('Companies, as all organizations, are units of interlocking behaviour, Håkansson & Snehota, 1995:192), is not conducive to viewing purchasing in risk taking terms.

The legacy of the Webster and Wind model (minus 'non-task' factors) is one of intra-organisational or more precisely contingent 'values'. Purchasing could henceforth be presented as having evolved away from disreputable origins, but it could not be presented as having a bedrock of core values.

#### **4.4 The contribution of the IMP**

The work of the group of researchers collectively categorised as the IMP has a long history and is widely dispersed across many books, journal articles and conference papers. This makes it problematic to generalise about what an 'IMP' view actually is, or whether indeed there is such a thing as 'an IMP view'. Therefore where the IMP is discussed here it is through work published by individuals who have been associated with an 'IMP approach' over a period of time,

Attention has already been drawn to their role in presenting a more embedded view of purchasing activity. It is speculative to suggest that the IMP have been susceptible to a heavily 'democratic', as in an 'even handed' approach to managing business relationships, perhaps in part due to Nordic influences (Arajou, Easton, 1996:99, Gustavsen, 2001, also

Lindblom's (1959) study '*The Science of Muddling through*' ). The subject matter of this thesis is likely to have different cultural contexts to Nordic business relationships.

The IMP approach pays much more attention to the setting and context of purchasing decision making, and to the forces of stability in relationships, than the highly (American) consumer [new business] marketing approach. (Source loyalty had been recognised in the early literature (Wind, 1970, Webster & Wind 1972, Jarvis & Wilcox, 1977; Gadde and Mattson (1987) distinguished between loyalty and inertia). Beyond longevity in inter-firm relations, the IMP stress adaptations (Brennan and Turnbull (1985), business as networks (Axelsson & Easton, 1992) and interaction (Håkansson, Johanson & Wootz, 1977, Håkansson and Wootz, (1979)). The Actor-Resources-Activities (ARA) framework has been highly instrumental in establishing a robust analytical framework for the IMP approach.

The IMP revitalised understanding of industrial markets, popularising a vocabulary that enabled more informed and sophisticated discussion of inter-organisational buying and selling. As a project though, the IMP was very quick to broaden its view of business to business markets from dyads or relationships, to the network (Araujo & Easton 1996, Ford *et al.* 1990:441:542). 'The network position of a company is the base of its performance. It matters not only for its capabilities and costs (the use of resources) but also for the revenues (its capacity to be a resource provider to others)... (Håkansson & Snehota, (1995:327).

#### **4.4.1 The limited use of the IMP in this thesis**

The IMP is not dealt with at the length here in spite of their contribution to understanding of industrial markets, on two levels; their limited interest in purchasing *per se*, and their downplaying of power and ideology. These reasons might be summed up by



saying that the IMP approach does not treat purchasing (or purchasers) in a way that might advance their conception of professional status.

In IMP literature, power is still treated as a 'thing', a property (usually) of dominant customers, this approach is still the standard one in purchasing (Cox, 1997a, Cox *et al.* 2000, exceptions are Ramsay, 1996, Stannack, 1996, Caldwell, 1998). Krapfel (*et al.* 1991:26) express the position: '...the most relevant aspect of power is a party's perception of having or not having differential power *vis-à-vis* their trading partner. ... Power is frequently considered the inverse of dependency'. Similarly, the influential IMP Interactive model for buyer-seller relationships presents 'power/dependence' as *one* aspect of 'atmosphere' (Håkansson, 1982). [Fairhead, 2000 illustrates the breadth of IMP approaches with a viewpoint similar to that expressed here].

Other literatures have adopted far more sophisticated approaches (for example, Lukes (1974); Foucault (1977, 1980). Both Lukes and Foucault it could be suggested, assign the dominant party conception of power as being only one of a variety of ways of studying power. More complex conceptualisations of power, such as Foucault's, have profound epistemological effects; power cannot be studied or understood by studying only the powerful. Power, Foucault argues, is '... exercised rather than possessed; it is not a 'privilege', acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions – an effect that is manifested and sometimes extended by the position of those who are dominated' (1977:26). To understand power, Foucault argues, it must be studied at the point of exercise. The 'IMP' conceptualisations of power in business relations may not be sophisticated enough to study the 'deference-emotion' system at work. Equally, IMP concepts assume a neutrality in the exercise of power, that would not permit sufficient scepticism toward the self-legitimizing role of dominant ideologies.

It is argued here that the IMP approach in writing of respective resource exchanges, actor bonds, activity links, *etc* tends to present again a sanitised version of business, purchasing, and the power of purchasing, people wanting and waiting for a cheque to be signed off for example, are not ahistorical. The IMP does not present for example the work practice of delaying and manipulating the signing off of a cheque, any more realistically than the purchasing literature generally. If this analysis contains any seeds of accuracy, how could it come about? The suggestion is that it comes at least in part through the dominant research method of the IMP - that of the case study. Such a method, whilst having manifold strengths, may marginalise work practices that are not discernible on what may be relatively brief visits<sup>3</sup> to see a few 'key' personnel; such work practices or areas could include the more 'sophisticated' views of power discussed above. Where, for example, it may be necessary to study the individual (upon whom power is exercised) rather than the relationship. The case study has of course many other advantages and can be justified on the grounds of epistemology and praxis (Easton, 1995); this discussion excludes the emerging 'critical realist' approach, (Easton 1998, Harrison and Easton, 1999, Mutch 1999, Aastrup 2000).

To continue but also to close a speculative thread started above, IMP case study descriptions often come across as portraying a very ordered, somewhat 'dry', 'unemotional' business world. Without irony, this thesis (and the fieldwork presented in chapters 8 and 9) find game playing ('cheating'), and above all awareness of being part of a community much more the content of everyday purchasing work. Arajuo and Easton, (1998:56-7), suggest that concern with social 'Actors' within the 'ARA' framework has not taken precedence.

#### 4.4.2 Purchasing as a profession and the IMP

As to purchasing *per se*, for the IMP any sharp distinction between sales and purchasing activity is irrelevant to their level of analysis (Cunningham, 1980:323). Secondly, whilst the group is titled Marketing and Purchasing, the vast majority of their output is marketing focused and infrequently mentions purchasing as a necessary, independent function. Lars Erik Gadde has perhaps published the most work related to purchasing. However, even he does little to boost those anxious to stake a claim for strategic purchasing by purchasing professionals; 'Highly specialized purchasers will be replaced by more general problem solvers' Gadde & Håkansson (1994:34). The subsequent lack of penetration of IMP thinking into mainstream purchasing practitioner thinking is unsurprising.

Finally, the IMP's network level of analysis makes it easy for critics to accuse it of lacking the 'solutions', the implementability and operationalisable qualities practitioners seek. Managers seek academic approaches that they can 'do', they do not generally want to know that action is complex. 'A business network is not something that is *imposed* on the companies in it, nor is it something that can be *designed or managed* by any one of them. No one manages the network, but many have to try to manage *in it*'. (Ford *et al.* 1998:270) In summary, the strength of the IMP approach, its holistic network 'meta' analysis, coupled with the relative lack of interest in passion; the emphasis on marketing; and on network level analysis are not of great importance to the research issues here.

#### 4.5 Alliances, Partnership and Networks

Above Ford (*et al.* 1998), argued that one cannot manage networks, only manage within networks. The contrast with the approaches adopted within the more mainstream

purchasing literature is strong; purchasing assumes you *can* manage: through alliances, partnerships and above all, through supply chains. However, as far back as 1969, our pair of navigators could be said to have accurately foreseen the tenor of the ‘new’ purchasing interest in inter-organisational relations and even agility.

*“That given operational constraints, as well as the traditional motives of minimizing total cost, delivery, service, quality ... other strategies may have as an objective maintaining the ability of the entire firm to respond quickly to new developments in the market for its end product. Procurement executives in such cases may use as a decision rule the maintenance of good working relationships with capable and flexible suppliers”* (*ibid.* 86, emphasis added).

Thirty years after they wrote this paragraph the emphasis on good working relationships with capable and flexible suppliers could be inserted into any number of purchasing articles. The 1980s and 1990s have seen the purchasing literature dominated by an emphasis on closer relationships with suppliers, rather than a narrow focus on price; the approach parallels the relationship marketing literature. Even in the other great growth area of purchasing literature – outsourcing, there is the same attention to inter-organisational relations, and an awareness that purchasing at the lowest piece price may not be beneficial to the entire firm; managing relationships is key.

Once again these aged guides can be used as a touchstone for how the perception of purchasing has developed. Two issues from the above quotation are highly salient. They did not predict the ‘markets as networks’ approach of the IMP, however, they were more prescient with regard to subsequent concern with relationships (‘good working relationships’), ‘flexibility’, longer term horizons (‘the maintenance of’) and speed to market (Spanner, *et al.* 1993). They were in effect, to impose current parlance, writing of

'supply base management'. The key difference though with modern supply thought is that they did not impose an ideological framework such as the partnership concept (Carlisle and Parker, 1989, Kyoryoku Kai (supplier clubs, Hines 1994) lean manufacturing (Womack *et al.* 1990) or lean supply (Lamming, 1993). All of these approaches share, in various guises, a central mandate for a higher status profession.

#### 4.5.1 The Partnership concept

In the late 1980s and 1990s whilst the wider management literature was examining 'alliances' and alliance making, what really took off in the purchasing literature was the partnership aspect. Writing about the purchasing-marketing interface as an ongoing partnership rather than as an adversarial encounter has a multiplicity of roots including : Arndt, (1979), Dwyer, Schurr, Oh, (1987), Johnston & Lawrence, (1988), Dyer & Ouchi, (1993), Lamming (1993). The influence – or rather the deliberate adoption by the purchasing literature of the lean or supply chain approaches to purchasing will be considered in 4.5.2. Briefly though it is necessary to include here what was not part of the original Womack *et al.* account – the 'nice' view of partnering (Ford *et al.* 1998:69).

It is not surprising that a view of business relationships as partnerships should arise, what is surprising in a purchasing context is the sheer degree of enthusiasm with which the academic presentation of purchasing work adopted it. It is suggested that this enthusiasm must have some links to boosting the standing of the 'profession'. 'Partnering' could be presented as a new skill for purchasing. 'Old lags' as with every new initiative, could claim it was just commonsense and that they had been doing it for years anyway. The underlying ideas of moving from promiscuous to stable relationships and 'sharing', are inherently attractive, and often couched in metaphors drawn from the private (relationships) as opposed to public sphere, thus adding a meretricious appeal.

The ideas or ‘conceptual foundation’ for partnering as a (or even ‘the’) purchasing activity can be grounded in game theory (Axelrod, 1984), transaction cost economics (Williamson, 1985), and even the fundamentals of why people cooperate (Durkheim, 1984/1893). What happens instead is that the purchasing literature whilst giving lip service to transaction costs (and less so game theory) steers partnering toward ‘strategy’. (However, it is appropriate to mention that neither game theory nor Williamson’s transaction cost approaches are easy for a manager to utilise). In the context of the research matter of this thesis the shift is central. For example it is instructive to take another view of partnering from an entirely separate field (although relevant to chapter 11, on health care) that of doctors and [unemployed] patients.

*“... the professional no longer has to rely on having all the right answers,... propped up by mystique. The client is party to the sense-making process and can provide some of the necessary frameworks.... The client is his or her own expert; the helper does not do all the work. Clients share responsibility for their own well being and for decisions that affect it. The helper is still the professional anchor, and oversees the proceedings, but the helper's frameworks are constantly being challenged and adapted”* Fineman (1990:182).

Fineman chooses to stress that the professional is not always right, and can indeed function better by casting aside the need to always be seen as right. He stresses the mutual creation of something that might be beyond both parties individually; ‘the helper does not do all the work’. Here is a view of partnering that the purchasing literature chosen not to adopt, choosing instead to present partnering as a strategic activity performed and led by purchasing. The Buyer, it could be said, still wanted to maintain the appearance of having all the answers.

To return to Zuboff's concept differentiating between 'acting on' work and acting with work, the presentation that purchasing in fact chose was not a strategic role, but a tactical role. The partnering concept as put forward in the literature is acting 'on' the relationship and is therefore doomed to be commodified or codified, to become a tool not a philosophy able to support a fundamental reappraisal of the value of purchasing. The commodification effect would be even more pronounced in the next purchasing literature to 'transform' the profession (Cavinato, 1999); supply chain approaches.

#### **4.5.2 Supply chain management (SCM)**

The dominant metaphor in academic purchasing is now SCM (Croom, *et al.* 2000, see also Table 4.3 from Cooper and Ellram, 1993). What is addressed in this section is that for the purchaser, and purchasing, SCM offers a significant change in role; relationships are subjective, temporal, and in need of co-ordination if not management. SCM and traditional purchasing are compared in Table 4.4, which draws attention to the impact of supply chain thinking upon purchaser subjectivity (also Caldwell & Lamming, 2000).

**Table 4.2 Traditional and Supply Chain Management Approaches Compared**

Element	Traditional	Supply Chain
Inventory Management Approach	Independent efforts	Joint reduction in channel inventories
Total Cost Approach	Minimize firm costs	Channel-wide cost efficiencies
Time Horizon	Short term	Long term
Amount of Information Sharing and Monitoring	Limited to needs of current transaction	As required for planning and monitoring processes
Amount of Coordination of Multiple Levels in the Channel	Single contact for the transaction between channel pairs	Multiple contacts between levels in firms and levels of channel
Joint Planning	Transaction-based	On-going
Compatibility of Corporate Philosophies	Not relevant	Compatible at least for key relationships
Breadth of Supplier base	Large to increase competition and spread risk	Small to increase coordination
Channel Leadership	Not needed	Needed for coordination and focus
Amount of Sharing of Risks and Rewards	Each on its own	Risks and rewards shared over the long term
Speed of Operations, Information and Inventory Flows	“Warehouse” orientation (storage safety stock) Interrupted by barriers to flows; Localized to channel pairs	“DC” orientation (inventory velocity) Interconnecting flows; JIT, Quick Response across the channel

Cooper, M. C. and Ellram, L.M. (1993) Characteristics of Supply Chain Management and the Implications for Purchasing and Logistics Strategy, *International Journal of Logistics Management* 4, 4, (2), pp13-24

What Table 4.3 highlights is that the new SCM work appears to demand more of the subjective skills of the purchaser – whilst couching these demands in highly technical, objective language (or competencies). The new type of work that would be required of the buyer include those that Zuboff (1989) would label ‘acting with’. That is to say an occupation that performed this form of work might have a high likelihood of achieving independence and autonomy. The argument can be made (paralleling that of Kerfoot and Knights, 1995:232 discussing HRM) that what is distinctive about SCM is the aligning of the methods of managing employees with aspects of business strategy. Within SCM we find the concept of the ‘cult’ of the customer (Du Gay & Salaman, 1992) and a much wider remit.



However, arrayed with subjectivity, is the degree of personal autonomy within purchasing work. (The only relevant critical work may be New and Ramsay (1997), however, studies on JIT purchasing (Wilkinson & Oliver, 1989; Sewell & Wilkinson, 1992, Delbridge, 1995) do contain some relation to the topic. What is being suggested is that rather than being given professional style autonomy, purchasers are being confronted with what appears to be an aggressive ideology of what work to do, how to perform it, and work what it means.

#### **4.6 Purchasing and Dominant ideologies and Discourses**

Ideology indicates 'a broad view of how society [in this instance a supply base] should be organised' (Schwarzmantel, 1998:2). Ideology 'as a concept thus took as its basis the notion that it was possible to transform society and change human nature to make people into suitable members of this new society' (Schwarzmantel, 1998:63). The same author goes on to suggest ideology contains three elements. Critique (a condemnation of existing society as flawed and a vision of a better society); a view of agency or the means to move to create this better society; and an assumption about the nature, potentials and limitations of human nature. All three elements are present in supplier management: belief in co-operation and synchronization across company boundaries as opposed to adversarial or arms length relationships. A tool box of methods and procedures: *takt* time, kanban etc; and a belief that employees respond to calls for waste removal across a chain or network.

**Table 4.3 A comparison of ‘old style purchasing’ and supply chain management purchasing**

	<b>Old purchasing</b>	<b>SCM purchasing</b>
Time frame	Short: annual contract renewals	Long-term: Purchaser has to think and be responsible for long-term development of relationship – (i.e. closer integration with company objectives)
Emotion work	Generated through the ‘exchange’ act e.g. negotiation tactics	Involved in the process of creating and maintaining the relationship (i.e. more pervasive, whilst the actual ‘act’ of negotiation should be less confrontational)
Language / common business metaphors	Military, aggressive (‘strategy;’ ‘tactics.’ Distinct from home life	Softer, drawn from domestic sphere – ‘trust’, ‘relationship’, ‘partnership’, ‘commitment’
Teamwork	Functional ‘silo’, on the edge of the organisation. Individualist	Teamwork mandatory – within department, across departments and with suppliers
Scope of buyer’s responsibilities	Lack of awareness of optimality in designing practical concepts, tools and techniques. ‘Reactive’ mode, specification and turf based.	Requires detailed knowledge of suppliers’ capabilities and processes. Responsibility for holistic thinking i.e. requires greater mental commitment in order to be proactive
Performance appraisal – buyer	Formal, annual, linked to quantified savings targets Linked to doing a ‘job’.	Developmental, subjectivity in appraisal of maintaining and developing relationships. Linked to company strategy.
Culture – Internal	Little pressure, in-fighting with other departments	Need to demonstrate equal claims to professional status as other occupations e.g. distinct body of knowledge, own lexicon, etc
Culture – External	Emphasis on cost and information acquisition (Spekman 1979), minor PR responsibility	Expected to transmit corporate strategy, objectives and ways of working. Expected to walk the talk.
Location	The office – fixed, stable	Less stability in location, trends augmented by email/ internet/ intranet/ICT
Supply base	Suspicion, dual sourcing, frequent (‘symbolic’) switching. Large number of suppliers, lots of options. Low involvement, tenders – low subjectivity in assessment.	‘Trust’. Few suppliers, no fallback, i.e. restraint on behaviours and ability to switch, sanctions limited. High involvement, extensive appraisal, evaluation and monitoring.
Learning/Training	An occasional, peripheral activity. Long courses, externally validated, funded or contributed to by employee, primary beneficiary and motivation source: employee, aimed at promotion (both categories adapted from Roberts & Concoran-Nantes, 1995)	On-going, part of the job. Short courses, internally validated, provided by employer, funded by employer, primary beneficiary employing organisation, motivation: compulsory or part of keeping job, aimed at increased horizontal responsibilities/keeping up-to-date

In a seminal essay the Czech writer turned politician Havel argued that there was a fundamental distinction between classical, dictatorial forms, and modern ideology - that there is no such divide along social class in an ideological society, all participate in it. ‘...for

everyone in his or her own way is both a victim and a supporter of the system. What we understand by the system is not, therefore, a social order imposed by one group upon another, but rather something which permeates the whole society and is a factor in shaping it...' (1985:37).

What Havel and a Foucauldian view of ideology imply is that once any particular strategy is in place, all parties, including the customer / focal firm become implicated in the maintenance of this 'world-view', even when widely known and accepted 'facts' contradict it. (Kornai, (1980) suggests how in the former USSR 'belief' in the system was maintained in spite of the contradictions furnished by day-to-day living). Chapters 10 and 11 stress the role of management literature as one such discourse.

Purchasing's redemptive, transformative nature lends itself to ideologies, practitioner led, it is closer to the latest 'improvement', whereas a research agenda could be pursued, rather than following what emerges (Arajuo, Easton 1996:99). Wilkinson & Young, (1997), for example question whether relations must develop toward a uniform, mature state as supply chains imply.

Of central importance is that the supply management literature downplays the essentially dominant power positions of focal firms (and their buyers), Harland (1998), Lilliecreutz, 1998). Scheurich, (1997:14-15) believes that prior to the contributions of critical theory, '*certain phenomenon were rarely discussed. Virtually non existent were explanations of organizations which entailed an exposition of how some individuals and groups have access to resources and others do not; why some groups are underrepresented and others are not; why certain influences prevail and others do not*'.

There is to date very little if any, critical (taken here to mean in the sense of questioning the *status quo*) work in the supply field (perhaps New & Ramsay, 1997,

Caldwell & Lamming 2000), in the tradition of writers such as Alvesson and Willmott, 1996; Knights and Willmott, 1990). However, purchasing research generally has been observed to take a positive view, study outcomes and results rather than other possibilities or setbacks, and to adopt a 'macro' perspective, (Olsen & Ellram, 1997).

Supply chain management defines situations, events and work from the viewpoint or perspective of those in dominant positions. In rejecting society's [or supply chain's] dominant symbolic and ideological 'totems', a subjective (in the sense of being detached from normally accepted/male experiences) viewpoint often emerges (Layder, 1998:177). Horkheimer (1972:232) also identifies certain research approaches (primarily positivist ones) as inherently supportive of the *status quo*. Mumby & Putnam (1992:481) comment that 'Researchers are frequently so accustomed to their own vocabulary that they become unable to recognize its cultural, historical, and political situatedness'. It is not just the language of the *status quo* that can mystify relations, '..metaphors that assume consensus displace and discredit the use of more challenging alternatives' (Alvesson & Willmott, 1996:92).

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is at its most potent when unseen and invisible. This is an unusual view of power within supply management (it must be acknowledged that 'much' power in supply is of the one dimensional 'sovereign' form e.g. a dominant firm demanding something with veiled menace). However, other potentials exist:

*'In fact it is likely that a conflict between the more powerful and the less powerful will not even occur. The more powerful will dominate the agenda to such an extent that their choice appears to be the choice of the whole committee and community, with the less*

powerful having difficulty in appropriately verbalizing their needs)' Scheurich, (1997:14), drawing on *Bachrach & Baratz, 1970 and Lukes 1974*.

In the interpretations and conclusions of chapter 10 and 11, the influence of the presentation of work implicit in supply chains is examined in the light of the worker-to-worker, and community basis of some 'knowledges' previously identified. Rather than declare management literature a 'false consciousness', the approach taken is to question the influence, and the reach into the experience of the individual at work, of even the highest rated research. The following section highlights specific areas where the ideology of SCM affects the work life of buyers, Part 3 of the thesis addresses whether such effects cause 'harm' to subjectivity or in fact can be reinterpreted as undermining the centrality of work ideologies to 'white collar' subjectivity.

#### 4.6.1 Customer ideology

Du Gay & Salaman's (1992) work proposed that the rise of the customer as the dominant force had effectively 'marketised' the social and work relations it had reached. With regard to supply chain purchasing, the core of the approach – longer-term, single sourced, stable relationships – flies in the face of the [modern/post-modern] obsession with 'choice'. (Delbridge *et al* 1992). In one area of their lives (the domestic), purchasers are encouraged, even exhorted, to be 'consumers' - active, searching and discretionary in their spending. However, in the world of work, they are part of a process of creating quasi-market, or effectively non-market conditions; captive relationships. Doubts might be raised by the potential contradiction between the long-term nature of SCM principles and individual needs such as secure employment contracts and individual career needs (there is a rare mention of the often rapid turnover of purchasing staff, significantly from a consultant, Hughes 1999).

#### 4.6.2 Emotional labour

SCM stresses factors that are less tangible, more open to subjectivity and personally involving decisions or evaluations (table 4.4). Such personal involvement is in part the result of the need for greater interpersonal skills (Spekman *et al.* 1998), commitment and ‘genuineness’ are required (Giunipero, 1990). Supply chain purchasing as well as involving the ‘acting out’ of the supply chain principle, involves the purchaser in a move toward ostensibly altruist behaviour – the ‘relationship’. It is not proposed that purchasers become ‘altruistic’ – but that they must develop behaviour that implies a bond, a genuineness, or trust, thereby exhibiting a responsibility towards suppliers. It is proposed that here the purchaser has to deal with a complex tug of emotions and drives that were not present when the key criteria was ‘cost’ (*pace* Hochschild’s (1983) emotional labour. A related issue is the language now expected in supply chain purchasing: relationship, partnership, commitment *etc.* The question arises of whether the new vocabulary advances an autonomous purchasing function (and employee) –or puts it more firmly under [external] managerial control?’ If the new vocabulary is sufficient, does it match ‘real world’ behaviours.

#### 4.6.3 Teamwork

Teamwork, particularly when cross-functional, is seen as a vital ingredient of the new purchasing (Leenders *et al.* 1994, Pearson, 1999). Teamwork is not new: the culture of Taylorist teams could be interpreted as one of mutual support for colleagues. What is new in the supply chain team principle is that the mutuality and reciprocity are more channelled toward use by the company, than for the benefit of peers (*cf.* the Hippocratic Oath and the ‘*deformation professionnelle*’ of Chapter 3).

What cannot be ignored is that teamwork does involve commitment, compromise, and emotional labour, to work; it does not simply happen and indeed some teams are dysfunctional (Sinclair, 1992: 612). The pressure to be successful at, and within, teams, is part of the new supply chain purchasing, and an additional demand (as well as opportunity) for Buyers.

Flexibility and related concepts (teamwork, empowerment, learning) can be interpreted as the wider utilisation of employees, the tapping into of skills that in purchasing were conceived as beyond those which 'management' could, or perhaps would, want to call upon. This can be viewed either as a result of the build up of competitive pressures from commoditisation and globalisation leading to a search for new competitive frontiers, or as the intensification of work inherent in 'capitalism'. Regardless of cause the complexity added to the mental life of a Buyer by the above, is a key driver of what is seen here as a changing mental landscape for practitioners.

#### **4.6.4 Monitoring and control**

SCM is both a contributor and a symptom to the explosion of monitoring and control. Power (1997), suggests that the essential function of audit is to 'provide comfort' for stakeholders, given the 'essential obscurity' of modern [as in incomplete or sampled] audit. He makes a link between audit/regulatory frameworks and the need to redesign market and government frameworks to make such an approach possible. 'Audit has become a benchmark ...not merely to provide for substantive internal improvements to the quality of service but to make these improvements externally verifiable acts of certification'. (*ibid.*:10/11).

Power suggests that the audit concept shapes public conceptions of the problems for which it is a solution. [His approach dovetails with Dent's (1996) analysis of the medical

audit model presented in 3, Table 3.1]. The insight that Power's perspective provides, is that an essential component of the SCM project is to aid cross comparability of suppliers and, it is suggested more controversially, purchasers'. Adopting Power's approach at a global level, the normative and evaluative aspects of SCM purchasing can be seen as one agent of the societal shift to remote control (as opposed to old fashioned formal hierarchy). It is through audit/quality procedures (and in purely purchasing terms, outsourcing and supplier development initiatives) that 'comfort will be provided' (to focal firms or taxpayers), whilst at the same time removing the need for direct supervision. However, pursuing the same logic to the level of an individual practitioner, SCM purchasing mandates more involvement with the ideological 'system' that it represents as the reality of supply work performance, by displacing perhaps, a more communal, contextual version of that 'reality'.

Power comments: 'it is also at this point that the audit process begins to disengage itself from the transactional realities which underlie these control systems; the system becomes the primary auditable object (*ibid.*:20)'. In parallel, the web of measurements / auditing leaves the purchaser liable to measurement/performance appraisal on the very same lines. That is to say, in contrast to earlier (1960s/70s) numerical target appraisal, the onus on the individual is to demonstrate that the systems 'objectives' have been met, which may, or may not, match with doing the best 'job'.

At the level of the individual then, SCM purchasing can be interpreted as attempt to re-establish control over purchasing employees who would otherwise, as outward facing boundary spanners/gatekeepers be uniquely in control of relationships (see Blois, 1997). In this sense SCM can be seen as an attempt to control both the supply base, and purchasers, by regulation/regulatory force, as opposed to the more direct control by *fiat* or possibly



whim (and perhaps ineffective) - dominated appraisal of older forms of purchasing. In this context SCM represents the attempted 'systemisation' of the occupation – both in the sense of uniting previously diverse elements and in terms of facilitating cross comparison (necessitated by devolved forms of regulation). Parallels can be drawn with a Foucauldian perspective of normalization.

Accordingly, for practitioners, it may be that whilst SCM purchasing offers opportunities and a learning curve well beyond traditional roles, it may not be the great step forward to higher status some propose. If this line of argument is valid, a method capable of operating at the micro level ought to be able to detect intimations of Buyers' awareness of these contradictions. How far in fact does SCM thinking and its inherent quantification, measurement and monitoring penetrate into a buyers real work?

#### 4.7 Conclusions

This chapter has sought to trace the development of how purchasing has been presented, from an early, *jejune* transactional state to a 'mature', 'sophisticated' and an increasingly network approach (Harland, 1996, Cavinato, 1999). It has attempted to avoid presenting current interpretations of purchasing as inevitable. It has highlighted how purchasing chose to evolve away from clerical, emotional and external facing origins, toward something more internal and corporate, culminating (to date) in supply chain purchasing (the IMP developed a networking approach). Other routes could have been taken, the 'non-task' features of the work could have been developed, especially the oral and less codifiable elements of purchasing work. In a sense, purchasing can be seen as attempting to '*burrow*' its way through the organisation – paradoxically attempting to reach a summit of status.

These conclusions could be interpreted as endorsing the mainstream management literature view that purchasing as work is a relatively unimportant. But also, the argument of this chapter does identify the use of skills and abilities in purchasing work that could form the basis of a more sophisticated and better regarded discipline. However the ideological content of SCM purchasing may have the reverse long term impact on the status of the work, and the issues of how far its rationalist, managerialist reformulation of work and relationships really impacts upon individuals has been identified.

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<sup>1</sup> Feldman and Cardozo christened their new model of purchasing 'consumeric', their term is occasionally quoted in this chapter. However, it was an unfortunate and doomed naming in the light of the development of business to business to business marketing.

<sup>2</sup> For a review of emotions in the various stages of negotiation see Kumar, (1997).

<sup>3</sup> It is not being suggested that the duration of the case study is the problem, or of course that case studies themselves are the problem. A methodological paper by Hill *et al.*, (1999) draws attention to the 'usefulness' of the case study in that it can be 'delegated'.

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**Chapter 5: The Research Issues**

<i>Part One – What others have written: key issues that emerge</i>	
1. Introduction	Introduction and framework
2. What is known about the problem	Deference
3. What is known about the problem	Purchasing Practice vs. Professionalism
4. What is known about the problem	The enacting of Purchasing in Purchasing research
<b>5. Research issues</b>	<b>Issues identified in existing knowledge</b>

## 5 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to identify (based upon the literature reviews in the preceding three chapters), the issues raised by deference in purchasing work. Having reviewed in chapters 2, 3 and 4 what others have examined, this chapter seeks to identify the areas or issues in knowledge that this thesis could seek to address. The chapter presents five research issues that inform the body of this work and the field research undertaken. The individual questions are prefaced by a short section, that relates the issues raised to the literatures reviewed earlier.

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 suggested that with the decline of face to face authority in hierarchies came the rise of experts, mediators, reflexivity and professionals. Chapter 3 compared the work of professionals and managers to purchasing practitioners concluding that purchasing work was more particular and specific, and too *dependent* upon management to achieve professional autonomy. Chapter 4 reviewed the creation of 'Professional Purchasing', avoiding presenting the current outcome as inevitable. It highlighted possible tensions between the implications of SCM ideology (and by implication management literature) for work, and the worker. It noted the continuing unimportance of purchasing in mainstream academia.

This lack of “status” within management has led to purchasing academics boosting the occupation at every turn, each fad or management bandwagon is given a purchasing / supply spin. However whilst purchasing can be positioned as fashionably strategic, the work content, the day-to-day skills and endeavours are not so malleable. Thus practitioners face a literature about themselves which supports an integrative, constitutive version of themselves re management as a discipline – while ignoring their day to day experience.

A reiterated theme appears to be that the subjects being addressed in this study often appear to have been omitted from the supply management literature. Raising such questions alone may be a contribution to knowledge. An underlying issue is always why there is a lack of supply-related literature to draw upon. It is not proposed that the skills and behaviours exercised in supply relationships are anything extra-ordinary. It is not proposed that this is an example of a ‘clever’ researcher able to see the woods for the trees – not at all - practitioners given a voice and urged to be themselves, are aware of all the issues omitted. It may be that there is something in the epistemologies used upon purchasing work that is marginalising purchasing practices. Perhaps the embeddedness of practitioner ‘nuances’ are difficult to capture with some ‘dominant’ research methods, but equally likely is that many approaches do not acknowledge in full or at all the *a priori* disposition of power and influence in supply - practitioner – academic and academic-academic - interfaces.

## **5.2 The research issues**

### **5.2.1 Research Question 1**

Stand still, the saying goes, and you fall behind. Purchasing like any self respecting field (e.g. human resources, Townley, 1993) has had to move forward or risk being left

behind for ever. It would be common to assume that strategies of advancement for an occupation are based upon existing skills and strengths. Some of the literature examined has brought into question whether the purchasing literature actually reflects the work practitioners do. In parallel, how does management literature with pressures and agendas of its own, reflect sometimes detailed and localised practices? Does it take practitioner work seriously on its own terms or in terms of management understanding? Can it be shown that 'management theory' would produce work that is superior to work performed to 'professional standards', whose practitioners may scant regard for, or knowledge of, management theory?

### **Research Issue 1**

**Both academics and practitioners increasingly present purchasing activity as a 'profession' performed by 'professionals' rather than a 'practice' performed by 'practitioners'. Given that purchasing began as a clerical, applied, and entirely practical 'job', how closely does practitioner work resemble the theory driven treatments of purchasing?**

### **5.2.2 Research Issue 2**

Much of the face-to-face quality of traditional working lives has been exchanged for the anonymity of enscribed hierarchy and technologically mediated communication. Work, Chapter 2 (and also Chapter 4) reminded us was once highly oral, that was how information was exchanged, how tasks were co-ordinated. It appears many sales 'reps' have been replaced by 'strategic account managers', 'spiv' like figures such as that of Chapter 1 have disappeared, and the selling role generally is downplayed (even denied). Commercial life is

perceived as faster and above all more 'professional'. The issue is: 'what place do practitioners see now for deference, friendship, reciprocation, corruption, whim - all the vagaries of being human - in business to business markets?'. Do practitioners support the management led, business as technical problem solving literature as opposed to the parameters cast by past decisions (Lindblom, 1959), and the continuing importance of personal relationships and behaviours?

Have all these human elements really disappeared? Is that possible, it even sounds unlikely – or is it that their latest forms are either not susceptible to, or not encouraged by, purchasing researchers? Reasons were put forward in Chapter 4 for why purchasing activity may be presented in journals in a sanitised form, but is that the form buyer themselves adopt?

## **Research Issue 2**

**The literature review of Chapter 4 suggested that the purchasing/supply academic literature effectively gave a sanitised depiction of purchasing work. How do buyers themselves present their work? Do practitioners sanitise their work? How do they deal with issues such as cheating, friendships, reciprocation? What does the answer tell us about how purchasing is presented?**

### **5.2.3 Research Issue 3**

Deference was identified with societies in which communication was conducted face-to-face, that were stable, hierarchical and had formal centres of authority. Increasingly the world of supply is seen as part of the wider global picture of constant change, technologically mediated communication, and flat empowered organisation structures where the team is supposed to be more important than the individual. Multi-functional

teamwork is the answer to the sub optimisation of individual silos or functions, Knowledge is seen as the key competence of organisations; a resource to be managed.

Authors have identified that procedures codify and commoditise what was once hard won personal experience, making it freely available to others with no history of a certain relationship. Information is more freely available than ever before, and transparency is a threat to individual careers built on hitherto mysterious 'expertise' as well as to opaque profit margins.

The trend towards greater dependence upon fewer suppliers can improve the opportunities to make the most of relationships. Joint design offers opportunities for locking in customers just as much as cross selling; however individuals still crave respect and the endorsement of their personal narrative (Giddens, 1991). Given a perspective that does not see buyer knowledge totally in technical, 'organisation' based terms, how do buyers feel about their knowledge and skills in an increasingly automated and regulated business environment?

### **Research Issue 3**

**The latest thinking in purchasing suggests in part at least, some systemisation (for example SCM) of areas of purchasing expertise which could currently be described as tacit or 'working with' knowledge, or skills. Is there conflict between practitioner knowledge and 'system' (i.e. SCM) or 'expert' (here taken as in medicinal) knowledge? Do buyers exhibit any of the dissonance that might be expected if there is conflict between these approaches? Can Practitioner knowledge be differentiated from expert or system knowledge, and if so how?**

#### 5.2.4 Research Issue 4

One of the stranger features noted about supply chain management was just how directive it is, in an age when choice, diversity and pluralism are in the ascendant. Chapter 4 highlighted how supply chain thinking in some senses attempts to impose larger emotional or subjective burdens upon a buyer than older style purchasing, but in other ways constricts a buyers actions. The operations management heritage to supply is not helpful here, concerned as it is with measurement and immediate practical application. It does not encourage delving into how buyers cope with some of the contradictions inherent in SCM.

#### Research Issue 4

**The ‘critical management studies’ literature found useful earlier has consistently implied that the souls, the very subjectivity of purchasing employees would have been mis-shaped by management led concepts of ‘work’. The suggestion has been through out that management ideologies are dominant, irresistible forces that infect all they touch, crossing work/private life boundaries with ease. Does the research confirm that management ideologies (e.g. SCM) are internalised by an occupation responsible for them? Is the deference real or manufactured? Is there laughing behind the (invisible) hand?**

#### 5.2.5 Research Issue 5

Chapter 3 suggested that there are differences between practitioners and managers and professionals, but that at heart lack of autonomy aligned purchasing more with management than independent professionals. However major divisions were identified between purchasing and management, yet supply articles and the IMP both seem to have ‘closeness’ as an assumption of inter organisational relations. What will practitioners have



to say about closeness? - they should be keen given the prevalence of the topic in academic work. To whose benefit is this closeness? How is 'manufacturing closeness' performed in purchasing work? What does it imply about the new vogue for networks?

### **Research Issue 5**

**A central assumption of the management literature reviewed here has been that organisations and employees seek 'closeness'. Deference as one way of relating assumes a distance, a space between employer and employee, customer (person) and supplier (person). Does the managerial desire for intra and inter-organisational 'closeness' find expression in supply work?**

## Chapter 6: Epistemology

*Part Two – What data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on the data*

<b>6. Epistemology</b>	<b>How knowledge claims are made in this thesis</b>
7. Research Methods	The research methods, and how they were operationalised in light of the research issues
8. Narrative data	Presents & analyses narratives
9. Observation data	Presents & analyses observation

### 6.0 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the ontological and epistemological choices that underpin the work presented. The chapter seeks to demonstrate that the research issues (Chapter 5) can be answered within the chosen epistemological framework.

### 6.1 Introduction

According to Usher (1997:42-55) regardless of discipline, academics are socialised into a method, ‘...a theoretical framework that derives from a research tradition. In order to be able to justify our choice of methodology... we need to be able to articulate its characteristics, analyze the categories of analysis it takes for granted, be alert to the ways that these categories structure our opinions and provides us with criteria to make judgements about social experience’. Her argument is that researchers need to be aware of how an individual’s choice of research method forms a context and rationale against which the individual evaluates other research approaches.

Ontology and epistemology involve then choices about meaning, about the relationship between what is claimed as knowledge and truth. Such examination of academic knowledge claims comes about through rejecting what is seen as the legacy of the Enlightenment, that knowledge can be ‘scientific’ that is to say knowledge can be

universal, objective, impartial and not subject to, or evolved from, 'political' motives on the part of researchers or research or other communities. (See Diesling 1983, *Ideology and Objectivity*, for a study of the influence of ideology on a research team). To ensure such knowledge is impartial it has to be created by means that stress objectivity, therefore part and parcel of such knowledge is the assumption that there are research means, research methods that are objective. If it can be accepted that the source of claims to objectivity is in some way the 'Enlightenment era' a doubt is already raised about contingency, that of specific social, historical and cultural influences. If one era, one culture, one combination of trade, aesthetic and cultural values can create one combination of knowledge claims it seems dubious for this thesis to set up the culture, aesthetic and commercial influences of another later era as 'the antidote', the objective response.

Skirberk & Gilje, (2001: 32-33) in a work on the history of Western thought, trace a shift in Greek thinking after 450BC from 'pretentious and often ill-founded cosmological speculation to a sceptical critique of knowledge and knowledge theory, a shift from ontology (theory of being) to epistemology (theory of knowledge)'. What is drawn attention to here is that these authors attribute this shift to the greatness of the Greeks and to their *recent contact through colonisation with other ways of living, beliefs etc*, which led to them questioning the primacy of their own assumptions of knowing and being.

Harding (1994:110) observes '*These analyses [various authors] undermine the idea that the problems of traditional epistemology are timeless, universal problems. They are the problems that faced some people in European cultures in the past, and they are your problems or mine only when we chose to live our professional lives in some sort of time warp. The phrase 'science and society' is misleading; science has always been fully inside the societies that have supported it. Its internally contradictory progressive and regressive*

*tendencies are activated by social agendas for which it (intentionally or not) provides resources. - and the desire to provide 'pure science' is no less a politically identifiable social agenda than is the desire to put science in the service of 'national defense'.*

This chapter puts forward as the epistemological underpinning of the thesis what is broadly a 'feminist' approach to epistemology, in part as such approaches seem to suit the research issues. However it is also a *conscious* choice to endorse an epistemological approach that recognises the *possibility of a variety* of epistemologies.

Collins (1994:97) writes '*Alternative knowledge claims, in and of themselves, are rarely threatening to conventional knowledge. Such claims are routinely ignored, discredited, or simply absorbed and marginalized in existing paradigms. Much more threatening is the challenge that alternative epistemologies offer to the basic processes used by the powerful to legitimize their knowledge claims. If the epistemology used to validate knowledge comes into question, then all prior knowledge claims validated under the dominant model become suspect*'.

Collins is concerned that trying to uncover universal knowledge claims that can withstand translation from one epistemology (in her case black women) to another (in juxtaposition she uses Eurocentric masculinist epistemology/ies) is a false goal, the two (or more) may be antithetical. It may seem that the 'purchasing and supply' issues of this thesis have very little in common with Collins's admittedly higher level concerns. But in trying to examine the research issues (and the vast majority of current purchasing and supply literature) is to face similar (but lower level, or more mundane) issues. That is the thesis attempts to examine the actual work purchasers do – when the purchasing literature does not. Examining such day to day work and the individuals who perform it means for example to acknowledge communities of interest between practitioners that are not

permitted or accounted for in matrixes that divide purchasing decisions into discrete choice boxes, A to D, that fundamentally treat work as a technique. How the issues that arise out of the research area have similarities to feminist epistemologies is discussed in detail below, but the link between the thesis and authors such as Collins, is that whatever claims to knowledge the thesis will put forward, they cannot be endorsed by the traditional 'epistemology' that infuses most purchasing writing. Such an attempt – to somehow incorporate conclusions within a male, subject-object, 'scientific' framework would simply lead to being ignored or more likely discredited as Collins put forward. Thus choosing a 'feminist' epistemology is in part a statement of belief that a variety of epistemologies exist and should co-exist, but it is also a personal commitment to an agenda of challenging (in some small way) the dominant 'research philosophy' in purchasing and supply. In this sense this is not an 'objective' piece of research, the researcher is 'involved'.

## 6.2 Dean and Maisie

Two people kicked off this thesis, a midwife and a 'spiv' like sales person. The key link between these two diverse figures is the non appearance in much management literature of the experience based knowledge of the former, and the smarmy, ingratiating but also somewhat haughty presence, of the latter. This section seeks to establish how a feminist inspired epistemological standpoint can bring out how many management accounts must be treated with caution when they describe the roles and talents of such people. To avoid such an examination of management would be to accept at face value assumptions about knowledge and knowledge claims that are also at the heart of deferential relations. As a artificial but useful structuring device, the categories Collins (1994) uses to categorise the

social construction of black feminist thought are used, with the addition of an implicit one, that of the need to acknowledge epistemology. Her four categories are; concrete experience as a criterion of meaning; the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability.

Two categories are discussed with relevance to the midwife Maisie of Chapter one, the latter three are discussed in relation to the sales person of chapter one.

### **6.2.1 The midwife (the need to acknowledge epistemology and concrete experience as a criterion of meaning)**

The work of a midwife is perhaps the ultimate in 'hands on' labour (in fact 'labour' itself?), Maisie describes herself as an 'artisan', I take this to mean she has knowledge that cannot be separated from context, from the body. Terms used for such abilities in management accounts would be 'embedded' or 'tacit', however both phrases (whilst useful in other contexts) actually take the emphasis away from the original context and can act to re-embed the context within wider management discourses. The effect of course is to heighten the ostensible role, scope, authority and capability of management, at the expense of hands on skills. For Maisie, as for Collins (1994:87), '...concrete experience as a criterion for credibility is frequently invoked by Black women when making knowledge claims'.

To adopt such a viewpoint is to challenge 'rationalism' and run the risk of being seen to prefer the 'irrational'. However what is at stake is whether rationalism is defined as experience extracted and processed into some more or less veiled 'science' of management, or is based in the unextracted, unprocessed experience of real people doing real jobs. Management has made (or colonised?) knowledge and learning as something to be organised – which is perhaps a natural effect of capitalism extracting value but also of

course involves the firm or organisation in defining that knowledge. Some feminists and others prefer the term 'wisdom' which values the individual over the corporate and is contextual in that it harks back to knowledge grounded in practices, in task grounded activities. Wisdom is also associated with verbal transmission rather than codified forms, wisdom is to be shared.

In starting off examining midwifery and then moving to Purchasing one major difference is that Purchasing is of course part of management, and therefore it should be contained within it, and explained by it. However the analysis of Chapter 4 argued that many behaviours and much of the work purchasing people do is not described in the literature. It is suggested that the purchasing literature does not acknowledge for example 'non verbal' purchasing, nor the skills and determination needed to play hardball, to outthink and outwit customer or supplier (or the boss!) – because management literature prefers not to present such a political and contentious view of purchasing. There is no greater deference than to assume that the interests, the language (as in the power to name or not name things, skills, and emotions) and the motives, of those with power and of those without power, coincide. As an ontological and epistemological assumption it appears bizarre in its ambition. This holds true whether the social situation or reality is an emerging country, political classes, genders or management functions.

It is not just as Olsen & Ellram (1997), have suggested, that the supply management literature reflects the dominant 'macro' level of research, it is also an epistemological issue. For this thesis what Olsen and Ellram do in noting a bias toward macro level analysis at the expense of micro level studies is not sufficient. It is necessary to question what such bias involves, what other assumptions come with it. Research that is conducted close up and personal (Alvesson, 1998) rather than through structural interactions; the 'how' and 'why'

rather than the 'what' (Harrison & Easton, 1998) expresses a belief in the importance of context. Josselson (1995:29) has argued that to study whole persons researchers cannot rely on logical positivist methods that isolate simple factors and trace their effects through statistical analysis. It will be necessary to examine what the occupation of buying 'is', and what buyers actually 'do' (following Geertz (1974) cited in Van Maanen, 1995:134). Mumby & Putnam (1992) note that researchers can lose any sense of irony beneath the desire for 'certainty, objectivity, and final truth'; researchers too far removed from actors settings may produce research that emphasizes the realities of "research work" at the expense of realities of the work they study. How feminist epistemology informs the thesis in this respect is to ground the study as far as possible in the contexts in which the work is performed.

Hall (1997) has written about how social workers view their own work, and suggests that in their writing and talking about their work they actually create what social work 'is'. Following the drift of Hall's work on social workers, much purchasing work to date has been based upon research traditions that treat the reality of purchasing work as unproblematic. If purchasing work is treated as unproblematic, then empirical research can easily interrogate practitioners, read documents, categorise, and evaluate what is good and effective purchasing practice. In this thesis, supply work is approached as a 'less certain and bounded enterprise', which is constructed only a little through activities, and in the main part through talk, and what Giddens labels a concern with identity [work]. Feminist writers such as Collins (1994:83) make an overt link between the work an individual does and how they think.

**6.2.2 The sales 'man' (the use of dialogue in assessing knowledge claims; the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability)**



The Sales person of Chapter was reported as an outlandish but reasonably familiar part of purchasing and supply. Although 'key account management' is said to have replaced 'him' according to the literature, the midday appearance of the sales person – just in time for a brief 'business' discussion before lunch – and his/her non appearance in purchasing accounts is still contemporary. Like deference itself such characters are not a 'top of the mind' issue for those involved, even mentioning activities as business lunches has pejorative connotations. It follows then that even those closely involved may struggle to articulate their behaviour or actions in response to direct questions (Fineman 1983); the subject matter may be emotionally charged.

However in Chapter one the car plant as a work place was presented as a network of inter connections, of connectedness, a part of which was that 'knowledge', how a job worked, how to work a supplier, was transmitted through the 'connections'. What could be called 'on the job experience' but even that term denies the role the connectedness, the local myths, urban legends, stories of sackings and promotions, played in transmitting and delineating how to perform the work – and suppliers were an influence as well, consciously and unconsciously setting out expectations.

In attempting to describe purchasing work what is at stake in epistemological terms is that omitting such individuals (or their successors) denies for example, the oral adeptness of those involved. Talk' can be important whether the mundane sort of everyday encounters, or in moments of crisis. Weick, (1993: 644) notes that 'nonstop talk, both vocal and nonverbal, is a crucial source of coordination in complex systems that are susceptible to catastrophic disasters'. Such a view places a strong emphasis on observation, language and words, but also on the relationship between researcher and researched (which includes taking a viewpoint on the issue of impartiality). In situations where the 'data' to be

collected are less of an entity with the interaction, for example with a survey instrument, there could be a clearer separation of researcher and subject.

At stake is that one epistemology puts forward a task based, rationalised, and therefore possibly anaemic view of how inter personal intra and inter organisational personal relationships, create and continue business activity. To deny the importance of such relationships and activities (and how they are carefully, or as in this case even ritually maintained) becomes a statement of what is and is not knowledge (and acknowledged).

Collins suggests three components make up her definition on the ethic of caring (the emphasis placed on individual uniqueness, the appropriateness of emotions in dialogues, and developing the capacity for empathy). The unaccounted presence of the 'spiv' sales character challenges attempts to interpret purchasing work as technique, as moving from step A to step B to step C etc. We need to include somehow the individual as spiv, as father, as graduate keen to make a reputation, the golfing events that cement inter organisational relations outside workspace – that individuals have identities beyond the task that inform performance of the task.

Collins three components of caring are used here to conceptualise the epistemological assumptions made in the thesis that business works through, and not in spite of, personal relationships and personal characteristics. Chapter one discussed 'Dean' and a harsh manufacturing environment in terms that stressed the care, the social bonds and obligations that criss-crossed the work place and the work. Although the individuals would have denied it (being part of a highly macho culture) there was tremendous mutual respect within that workplace which extended outwards (and inwards) through the suppliers. (It hardly needs adding that Maisie as a midwife could create a bond with expectant mothers

that went beyond technical requirements). Nobody who has worked in such places can doubt the existence and importance at workplaces of ‘characters’ – and where in management research are they? ‘Characters’ could be eccentrics, figures of fun or exemplary (task) performers but their presence or absence was always hugely atmospheric. Chapter four included in purchasing activity such matters as friendships, reciprocation, cheating and the difficulty of ending commercial relationships. What is at issue is whether epistemology should be based upon tools and techniques that separate out what can be put forward as uncorrupted ‘truth’ or a more connected, ‘more joined up’ epistemology. The ethics of caring and personal accountability (lumped together here but treated separately by Collins) again reflect views not put forward in much published purchasing material.

Finally it may seem strange to even contemplate a link between ‘Dean’ and that car plant, and Collins’s ethic of personal accountability. Collins means that ‘not only must individuals develop their knowledge claims through dialogue and present those claims in a style proving their concern for their ideas, people are expected to be accountable for their knowledge claims’. In effect she claims the social construction of black feminist thought involves being able to live the talk, to be personally creditable.

Work places and inter-organisational relationships throw together people of different politics, regions, religions, hobbies, and a new (work) community forms (it may well have no existence outside working hours). Chapter 2 highlighted the connections between deference and geographic location, face to face relations and ritual. All of which can be seen in the ‘Dean’ role, he looked the part, he lived the part, he gave a character to the analysts for them to play off as actors do, whether in praise or in complaint. Again work places are replete with such ‘identities’ and appearance. Over and over in the data reported in chapter 8 and 9 concern with identity came out, with how a buyer perceived themselves

or perceived others as seeing them (I mean of course professionally not appearance). The epistemological assumption here is that as well as performing a task, workers perform an identity, they maintain in Giddens words a personal narrative. Examining rather than ignoring that narrative and its links to the task of purchasing should create new insight, as well as examining as a feminist approach would, where the identity is coming from and who constructed it.

### 6.3 Positivism and the division of space

Traditional deference was defined in terms that stressed a concentrated geographic location which aided face-to-face relationships. Post modernism is associated with a *loss* of geographic authenticity (ie globalisation), see Bryman, 1999 and '*The Disneyization of Society*'. Positivism, and much management material views space as a resource to be 'filled', to be divided and sub-divided until there is no space left. (Baldry, (1999) discusses space as a resource used within organizations. Loader, (1999) is more relevant here, in discussing how the commodification of policing and security redefines the boundaries between public and private space. The issue can be illustrated in management two-by-two matrices and even the interaction model of the IMP (IMP group, 1990), where the [business] world is shown as 'filled up' by the various categories. There is an epistemological issue about how 'filled up' the world needs to be portrayed, just as broadcasters detest silence on radio, management academics seem to detest free spaces, everything has to be labelled and named, nothing must be unfettered. The research has to tackle where the boundaries are between organisational life and the subjective life of the individual, part of doing work is stopping doing work. I share a belief (Gabriel 1993) that not all of an individual is engaged all the time in their work – that an inescapable part of

‘doing work’ is to ‘not to work’, to simultaneously retain other identities. I do not wish to present or represent participants as automatons.

#### 6.4 Conclusions

From the discussion in this chapter, close and empathetic research methods are preferred, the research issues do not lend themselves to techniques that stress distance that is: ‘...an epistemology of separation based on impersonal procedures for establishing truth’ (Collins, 1993:94). Oakley (1991) memorably mocks distance and hierarchy between interviewer and interviewee as a ‘hygienic’ approach, and one that is morally indefensible. I have learnt that there is not just quantitative versus qualitative research. ‘Many people working in an interpretative paradigm do not challenge the subjective/objective dichotomy on which positivism rests because they believe that the strength of social research is that it can be objective in a subjective kind of way’. (Usher, 1997:46).

The biases and omissions in supply management accounts, the relationship between deference and the maintenance of an existing distribution of power, and a personal commitment to charging at the fortress walls have been used to suggest a feminist influenced epistemology. A critical view has to be taken with regard to accounts of existing roles, metaphors, expectations - the ‘*status quo*’. The values, even the language of those at the top of the power distribution – here usually the buyer / customer – cannot be taken at face value as neutral, value-free mechanisms of exchange or as ‘scientific truth’. These considerations lead directly to the exposition of my methods in the following chapter.

## Chapter 7: Research Methods

*Part Two – What data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on the data*

6. Epistemology	How knowledge claims are made in this thesis
<b>7. Research Methods</b>	<b>The research methods, and how they were operationalised in light of the research issues</b>
8. Narrative data	Presents & analyses narratives
9. Observation data	Presents & analyses observation

### 7 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to explain how the research issues were operationalised – the research methods. The choices made should reflect the epistemology discussed in Chapter 6. Unsurprisingly narrative forms have a weight of well written and extremely well phrased supporting literature. What seem to me well grounded claims can be made, based upon that literature, for narrative as a method capable of producing fecund data. However for my own purposes and research issues, which are tied up so tightly in conceptions of ‘real work’, I found my use of methods rich, but fragmentary. I found that the stories, narratives even sound bites that I gathered, tended to be the ‘interesting’ material of an interview, whilst the majority of the interview would have been about more mundane matters (and work). Extracting one or two narratives from an interview is fragmentary in a way that I did not want my data to be, given my need for context and my interest in real work. I then chose the most basic or obvious form of supporting or supplementary data – actually watching people at work. Adopting such a method (barely utilised in contemporary purchasing research?) also allies the thesis with the early purchasing work I praised for its practical and human content, in Chapter 4.

## 7.1 Alternative research approaches

Chapter 6 made the case that the research issues were best open to exploration using phenomenological approaches. The research issues appear to favour the strengths of qualitative research for work that is exploratory or descriptive. According to Marshall and Rossman (1995), that is work that 'searches the value of context and setting, and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences of the phenomenon'. Below the research issues are linked to choice of method, but a theme through all five is a concern to challenge, to go beyond day to day assumptions and presentations. In some sense using 'listening' and 'watching' as methods seem highly practical, down to earth, 'real' methods to observe real work practices and attitudes.

**Research issue one** – (The Practice vs. Profession). seeks to examine the real work of purchasing compared to academic presentations of it. The literature had provided the academic accounts. Here narrative method would be enable practitioners to voice in their own words how they see their work. However work is contextual and observation was used to add back in context, depth and complexity.

**Research issue two** – (examines whether purchasing work is sanitised). Here the method must first be able to bring out whether 'non task behaviours' such as cheating, friendships, reciprocation occur. Narrative has established strengths at accessing such material. Whilst the narrative method was successful at establishing that such activities are part of purchasing work, I felt that through observation I would have a better method for assessing how significant a part of the context of purchasing work they form.

**Research Issue three** (codification). Examining the codification of knowledge means using a method capable of tapping into such things as tacit skills, letting buyers talk about their work is a powerful way of doing this.

**Research issue four** (subjectivity). Do buyers feel oppressed by management ideologies, by work intensification? Such material can only be addressed by being very close to buyers, both methods, narrative and observation, were appropriate here.

**Research issue five** (management accounts promote closeness) What I felt was needed to address this intangible issue was observing the flow and flux of real work.

### 7.1.1 Findings from pilot interviews

Six pilot or trial 'straight', as in question/answer interviews (three buyers, salespersons, pragmatically selected through existing contacts) established deference was not an easy subject to broach; that it is value-laden for both groups, and it can embarrass. The buyers regarded it as slightly passé, something that used to happen a lot 'in the old days', it seemed to be associated with 'outdated' authoritarian attitudes, and with accepting excessive 'hospitality'.

Similarly, the salespeople interviewed only slowly warmed to the concept of deference. Firstly, in an unspoken order of responses within the interaction. Salespeople will leave meetings with 'actions' to perform for a buyer; however, there is a 'deferential' order to such actions. No action could be expected of the buyer in return, in the early stages. One salesperson enthusiastically agreed with this, adding that it was a deliberate ploy his firm encouraged in order to seize the initiative. (The sales practitioner literature advises as much,



Swan *et al.* (1985:208-210) report such minor actions as trust building mechanisms). Secondly in the second form of the form of the nuances, subtle probing, and subtle responses to responses that they employ. That is to say, various interactional, 'positioning' tactics are used, however, these lack consistency and decorum, and are really more ingratiation than deference.

A far more reflexive style of interview: a conversational interview where topics could be built up seemed to be called for to access knowledge or recollections that were not available automatically. It would also be interesting to observe what they actually did; that particularly sales people would offer staged accounts is not surprising. There was not a store of ready-formed 'deference' information or stories to call upon, the interview topics had to be circled around, discussed, topics repeated and represented with a slightly different emphasis. Inevitably, participants who did not 'take part', that is, actively and reflexively engage with re-examining their work practices in a way that was not familiar to them, would not receive the same weight in the subsequent analysis. What could be produced would not therefore be a 'sample' in the scientific sense. Quite simply 'rapport' would be more important than sample size or industry coverage. This suggested a supplementary strategy, the practical and philosophical implications of samples are further discussed in section 7.5

## 7.2 Choice & justification of method

The research method has to be able to respond to the challenges that arise from covert aspects of deference, the value-laden qualities of the concept, and its legitimisation of the *status quo*; and that it often has a physical expression. Methods had to be capable of accessing topics which the participants would not normally discuss, even to verbalise. An in-

depth form of interviewing would allow practitioners time to reflect on recent behaviour and in addition, and allow the researcher time to pursue diverse avenues.

Additionally, the value-laden nature of the concept presents an access barrier that demands a sympathetic interview style where participants are encouraged to explore their own actions and examine their thinking, rather than being directed by the schema of the interviewer. ‘...[The] ostensibly irrelevant might be highly relevant from inside. It is the perceptions and emotions of participants within a supply relationship that influence its progression, rather than an objective, detached view imposed from an outside source’ (Hopkinson & Hogarth, 1998). The interviewer's role becomes then to probe that individual construction of reality in order to generate as full a picture as possible of the participants' understanding. An alternative perspective is that participants may not be aware of their actions and behaviour in part due to the subtlety of the deference-emotion system, and partly perhaps in the very embeddedness of deferential behaviour in the *status quo*. This embeddedness is to be tackled through a period of observation, discussed separately in 7.5.

Finally, the connection between the self-legitimizing qualities of dominant discourses and deferential attitudes and behaviours, challenges techniques that do not encourage probing beyond what is accepted (e.g. elite interviewing). These factors represent a barrier to data collection that can be overcome with a method that allows the researcher to respond to participants. It is proposed that collecting narratives, whether as accounts, fragments or full stories, that is: linguistic reconstructions of business, relationship and career episodes, empowers respondents in a way that question and answer interview formats do not.

It has been suggested that much of the supply literature takes a simplistic and one-dimensional view of relationships, and therefore underplays behavioural aspects of supply chains and networks (Bresnen 1996, Harland 1996). The issue here with regard to choice of

method is the nature of deferential relationships; they are not acts, but a series of acts. They do not occur distinctly at one captive moment in time; they are on-going, and 'enacted'. That is to say, deferential relationships rely upon the interaction and agreement of two actors that it is a deferential relationship, and a tacit agreement as to the form that the deference is going to take. Which Goffman (1959:21) refers to: 'Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to whose claims concerning the issues will be temporarily honoured'. It follows that in the first instance deferential relationships cannot be defined by the researcher, they are constructed by participants.

Deference is value laden, it has embarrassing connotations, and may even be expressed without the deferent being aware. Hansen & Kahnweiler (1993) suggest '...stories are effective ways to uncover unspoken and perhaps unconscious norms within an organizational subculture'. Czarniawska-Joerges, (1995:13) makes the point that narrative permits the tying of the exceptional, the extraordinary and the deviational 'to what is 'normal' by finding 'an intentional state that mitigates or at least makes comprehensible a deviation from a canonical culture pattern'.

Gabriel (1991), using a delineated focus on stories rather than wider narrative forms, found that stories can reach deep-seated conflicts and anxieties; whilst allowing the storyteller the opportunity to retain whatever credibility or glory that they choose to bestow on themselves; stories are natural. In this sense, emotional matter need not be 'interrogated out'. Stories as narrative forms are a rich mixture of the storyteller's needs and wishes, as well as his or her re-constructions for a particular audience. The truth or truths, of each story lie not in its accuracy but in its meanings, since stories are reproductions of lived realities rather than objective descriptions of facts (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996:2).

As a method, narrative is grounded in '...a particular theoretical commitment: Understanding general social processes *requires* a focus on their embodiment in actual practices, that is, in actual narratives' (Chase 1995:20, emphasis in original). Mishler (1991:118) states that narrative analysis enables attention to be shifted away from investigators' "problems" such as technical issues of reliability and validity. Instead the focus is on respondents' problems, specifically, their efforts to construct coherent and reasonable worlds of meaning and to make sense of their experiences'. It should also be noted here that the research collaborators would have encountered the deference in their personal social and perhaps family lives as well as in the work place.

Cortazzi (1991:6) found in researching teachers' descriptions of work in the classroom that teachers gave 'stories or narratives rather than analytical accounts'. Cortazzi cites Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1985:513), 'Caught up in the demands of their own work, teachers cannot solve problems in general; they must deal with specific situations. Thus their descriptions of teaching sound more like stories than theories because they are full of the particulars of their own experience'. Doyle (1990:355-356). suggests that not only are teachers' descriptions of their work like stories, but that 'experienced teachers' knowledge is event-structured'; it is 'fundamentally particularistic and situational'. This 'case knowledge' derives from understanding and experiencing classrooms, ... Such event-structured knowledge is closely allied to narrative, so it can be argued that by tapping teachers' narratives we are drawing on their knowledge structures and seeing how teachers think...'. Buyers' and salespersons' knowledge and competencies are practical and applied, they are 'event-structured, particularistic and situational'. My assumption is that their knowledge and experience of deference will also be 'event structured, particularistic and situational'.

However, the philosophical ramifications of narrative analysis go beyond a partnership with the interviewee, beyond a 'nicer' relationship. Organisations are embedded in chains and networks, their fate riding on the success, competence, and direction of network 'collaborators'. The more significant problem is that in a traditional question-answer interview, respondents' answers are disconnected from essential socio-cultural grounds of meaning. *'Each answer is a fragment removed both from its setting in the organised discourse of the interview and from the life setting of the respondent. Answers can be understood, or at least interpreted by the investigator, only by reintroducing these contexts through a variety of presupposition and assumptions, and this is usually done implicitly and in ad hoc fashion e.g. coding ...'* (Mishler, 1991:23). It is suggested that the use of narratives can be supplemented and complemented by real time observation.

### 7.2.1 Differentiating between interviews and narrative analysis

Josselson (1995:36) states that 'Language connects experience to understanding. Only by listening to what our participants tell us of their experience can we enter into dialogue with their meaning system - and this is the value of narrative forms of investigation'. That narratives or stories can tell us about organisations is supported by Deal (1985:607) cited in Cortazzi (1991:6), '...In effective companies, managers and employees freely discuss positive stories about philosophy, exploits of heroes or heroines, and the success of distinctive practices. These shared stories carry company values'. Boje (1991:106) supports the claim that understanding the stories or narratives that employees and stakeholders tell reveals the organisation itself; he argues that within organisations, storytelling is the 'preferred sense-making currency of human relationships'.

The major strength of narrative analysis in terms of data collection is seen as being the interview focus upon the participant's view of events. Within narratives there is considerable freedom for interviewees to present their perceptions of events and define relevance by their perceptions. In some forms of interview, too much attention can be diverted to the procedure itself, and then to making sense of what respondents 'say when the everyday sources of mutual understanding have been eliminated by the research situation itself. (Mishler, 1991:3). That is to say, narrative methods permit and have the advantages of an 'emic' (through the subjects eyes) view as opposed to an 'etic' (or outsiders view). Table 7.1 summarises the key differences between 'traditional' interviews and narrative interviews.

**Table 7.1 Key differences between 'traditional' interviews and narrative interviews**

<b>Interviews</b>	<b>Narrative interviews</b>
Eliminate contextual meaning (McCracken, 1988)	Incorporate context from interviewee (encourage real world conversation)
Focus on research agenda (McCracken, 1988)	Focus on interviewee's agenda
Question/answer format (stimulus/response – Mishler, 1991)	Discourse, jointly constructed, circular, iterative process. '...investigators in the survey research tradition [view]... the research interview as a behavioral event, as a verbal interchange, rather than as a speech event - that is, as discourse. (Mishler, 1991 )
Seek to minimise variability	Encourages diversity as aid to research, can utilise serendipity
Hygienic (Oakley, 1991), 'earnest'	Abhors moral hierarchy, more 'fun'
Speaker & audience	Speaker, audience, simulated speaker & hyper reality (Pinnington, 1998).

### 7.2.2 Narratives, Accounts, Stories and this research

Polanyi, (1979:208) offers the following definition of a story '... the linguistic encoding of past experience in order to explain something about, or by means of, the events described. A story is thus an illustration'. Hansen and Kahnweiler, (1990:1394) suggest stories are defined as 'socially constructed accounts of past events... Stories thus reflect what

people think *should* be true'. They continue that stories permit researchers to examine perceptions that are often filtered, denied, or not in subjects' consciousness during traditional interviews.

It could be said that there is some consensus on what a story does, it explains or illustrates, and there is some consensus at least among those who study the topic, that stories are socially constructed (Boje 1991). (Ignoring for now the caveat that for example a Marxist would have about the limits of individual social construction i.e. that material conditions are perhaps boundary and assumption forming mechanisms). Polanyi (1979:207) refers to stories as being 'culturally constrained', not all cultures follow the Western story pattern (of beginning at the beginning). What is less clear is how to define what is and is not a story.

Storytelling - more formally called narrative analysis - has become fashionable as a method in fields such as organisational behaviour (see table 7.2). Unfortunately as a method it is open to all encompassing interpretation - at one level everything can be viewed as a story, even the total *absence* of a story. Gabriel (1997, 2000) has extensively critiqued the use of stories, showing a concern for their 'misuse', that is that researchers commonly describe what he terms accounts, (basically simply recantation of facts) as stories. 'Not all narratives are stories; in particular, factual or descriptive accounts of events which aspire at objectivity rather than emotional effect must not be treated as stories'. He goes on to stress the entertainment and recreational affect of 'real stories', they are loyal to their effect, other forms are loyal to the 'facts'.

**Table 7.2 Storytelling in Organizations (adapted from Gabriel, 2000)**

Stories	Opinions	Proto-stories	Reports
The narrative test for a story is relatively straight forward: would a listener respond by challenging the accuracy of the text.	Strongly held, often containing some factual or symbolic material, but lacking plot, characters, and action. Opinions.. announce a story that never materialises.... no singling out of a particular episode.	Fragments, sometimes symbolically and emotionally charged ... plot rudimentary have a beginning and no ending. Poetic incompleteness	The only category here that does have a plot and characters but stubbornly factual, refusing to read any meaning into events .. devoid of overt symbolism or emotion.. accuracy valued above effect

Gabriel, Y. (2000) *Storytelling in Organizations*, Oxford University Press, Oxford

Mandler & Johnson, (1977:119) suggest that even the simplest story must have at least four propositions, representing a setting, beginning, development, and ending. However, they go on to make a distinction between a story needing an ending, and a story needing an outcome; an outcome is not logically necessary. Gabriel's formulation of a story tends toward the 'ending' definition, which suggests some 'finished' or honed quality. In this research, where the accounts or stories often emerged as participants reflected, there were outcomes rather than endings, reflecting that they were not telling Gabriel-like 'stories'. Much of the narrative data presented in chapter 8 is fragmentary, snippets, tropes, these are certainly not professional raconteurs, and the narratives that emerge are (with exceptions) not rehearsed or pre-packaged. Referring back to Mandler & Johnson's (1977) distinction that a story needs an ending but not necessarily an outcome, narrator reflexivity in dealing with the complex issue of deference does not have the same 'finished' or 'ended' qualities as the stories Gabriel pursues. The issue has a practical implication also, researchers with an 'event' focus, can hope to achieve very large samples of stories. For example Cortazzi (1991:20) in his study of teachers interviewed 123, recording 856 narratives, further interviews yielded 961 narratives in total. However his focus was effectively on events that had occurred to



teachers, culling in the main, stories that were easily available to respondents. He did not have to engage with his interviewees, he was accessing pre-digested subject matter – incidents that had occurred in teaching.

### 7.3 Direct Observation

Watching people, buyers, at work harks back to the earliest purchasing literature where this thesis has argued, a more ‘real’ version of what purchasing work was presented.

In the ethnographic literature, direct observation without participation is commonly portrayed as one option, sometimes as the base from which other, ‘more appropriate’ observational strategies may be examined, and the polar opposite to direct participation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). This in part reflects the core tenant of Anthropological and ethnographic methods: that they are longitudinal (Light, 1979, Pettigrew 1979, Rosen, 1991). However, observation without participation for a short period (here one week) is not without famous precedent, without implying any equality of outcome, Mintzberg’s (1979a) study of what managers actually do was actually based on one week’s observation of four different managers. Table 7.3 contrasts participation and observation, highlighting that ‘detached’ observation has some salient strengths for the research issues of this thesis.

The superiority of longitudinal research though cannot be argued against, neither can ‘fast’ forms of such research, as a recent spoof advertisement in the SCOS Network (May 2000)<sup>1</sup> pointedly makes clear. However, in an applied study, where substantial theory has already been generated in the research, a strictly limited time period can also help to maintain focus and avoid the ‘drift’ noted in more pure ethnographic approaches, Rosen (1991:7). Nason & Golding (1998) argue that ethnographic approaches should not be used to

'test' hypothesis, subsequently in chapter 9 for example, the assumption that direct observation could focus on entrances and exits was exploded.

**Table 7.3 Participation Vs Observation adapted from Rosen 1991**

	Direct Participation	Observation	Relevance to this Project
Working Knowledge	High – researcher can be actively involved in processes or have a colleague's insight	Shallow or guessed	Not germane to the research topic, lack of sector knowledge may help 'in making the familiar new' Rosen (1991:14)
Organisational Secrecy	Barriers lower (as accepted as an employee)	High barriers	Public organisation, any 'secrecy' probably maintained at the senior Exec level, as it would be for any ethnographer
Trust	Dynamic, created in action	Outsider status	Too short a period to develop Trust, would still be An Outsider
Role definition	Role confusion, going native, stress	Freedom , concentration, not overly sympathetic	Novice and time Constrained

Rosen, M. (1991) Coming to terms with the field: understanding and doing organizational ethnography, *Journal of Management Studies*, 28, 1, (January), 1-24

Again, without in any way decrying the ethnographic approach, there may be situations perhaps such as this thesis where short studies involving observation without participation are acceptable. Geertz (1983:74) makes the observation that anthropologists traditionally studied societies of one particular form or type, and then sought to understand that phenomena in juxtaposition to their own world ('veranda anthropologists'). Modern anthropologists are much more aware of defining others in terms of self referential 'differences', but there is still a dominant view of fieldwork entering 'another world' - 'the well insulated groups traditionally favoured by anthropologists' (Van Maanen, 1988:109).

In part this has to reflect the role requirements placed upon researchers totally immersed in a new environment for an extended period. Such researchers have to create a

credible and maintainable research 'persona', a public face they present to those they observe and interact with. Schein (1987:27) develops the theme '...ethnographers, in contrast, often must develop a longer-range perspective and sell the organization on the prospect of being around for a long time'.

Serendipity presented a wonderful opportunity here to avoid this issue (and therefore in part one of the drivers for lengthy observation), the PCG environment is one in which 'shadowing' is extremely common – to the point where it is unexceptional. In this sense the researcher was truly able as far as it is ever possible, to be just 'part of the scenery' – introduced to and then ignored by participants as just another 'shadower'. Being introduced as a 'shadower' for one week meant that those being observed could know that they would not come across the researcher again. Only on one occasion in the week was the researcher's presence overtly raised; which could be adduced to support a minor concern in this thesis, that research is often written up as if it were as central to the participants, as it was to the researcher

Hammersley & Atkinson, (1995:110) identify a final concern to be dealt with here: 'The danger that attends the role of complete observer is that of failing to understand the perspectives of participants'. Because of the narrow focus or remit of observation (work and deferential behaviour) that much was missed, observed but wrongly dismissed in selecting 'highlights'; or that events are completely misinterpreted is freely acknowledged. As is typical with observation, masses of material was gathered, selections are then presented here that highlight the research issues. The presentation is such that it makes clear that there were at least instances where the researcher got it completely wrong. Furthermore, observation without participation means one cannot interrupt to question, one cannot always confirm (in a meetings environment) the exact organisation or status of a speaker.

The whole field of primary health care was entirely new to the researcher, as was the medical terminology and even the subsets of professions that appeared. But notwithstanding all these variables, it was a meeting dominated work environment – and meetings are reasonably generic. It does not require professional training to spot dominant characters, ‘bluffing and waffling’ by those under prepared or unprepared, anger, aggression, dissembling and other demonstrations ‘faces show (and are examined for) cheating, doubt, fear, sweat etc’ (Fukuyama, 1999:178). As part of the public sector the PCG was publicly accountable and minutes were constantly produced and circulated and read and noted. A management environment is not a community of ‘exotic’ islanders - in its consensual mien; large meetings; exchanges of weighty documents and multitude of loosely connected parties who must be consulted or copied, - it has a lot of resonance with for example University administration.

#### **7.4 Sample and mechanics of the research**

The research interviews were generally of no less than forty minutes and up to two hours. Wherever possible the material cited was recorded on cassette tape. A series of research topic headings was used (and shown to participants), which included the word deference. However, participants were not told that the main interest was in deference, they were told it was a study about power in supply relationships, and purchasing work. Due to the conversational style, and the need to really attempt to ‘engage’ with the participants, individual interviews could be widely different. For example, a common starting point was to ask about their background, how they came to be in this role. This might kick off the interview well with some, not with others. For those it interested the topic would be pursued

and for those who saw it as unimportant or perhaps intrusive the next topic was swiftly adopted.

The original research proposal was to examine three UK supply chains, comprising three focal organisations, three of their major suppliers ('first tier organisations') and three of those suppliers' suppliers. The research differs from much supply chain literature as both purchasing personnel and sales/commercial personnel were interviewed. A possible further differentiation of this research project was the decision from the outset to focus only on operational actors; 'do-ers', senior management was the highest level interviewed and only then by their insistence (for vetting purposes no doubt, not interest in the research). All those interviewed have active, day to day responsibilities for supply interfaces; some supply research may be based only on the research interface at senior i.e. director, levels. Whilst acknowledging that there would be some gaps and mishaps in such a 'tidy blueprint', the plan was to interview the buyer and salesperson at each interface, thereby studying supply chain relationships. A stated aim was to capture the same incident recounted by different personnel from different organisations.

This approach however was found to have a number of problematics. Firstly, the 'supply chain' concept whilst currently fashionable is very much geared around a view of an organising 'focal firm', most apparent (in that examples are most usually drawn from) in the automotive industry. However the 'focal' automotive manufacturer which was the first chain interviewed was not a focal, dominant or even particularly significant actor to say the steel supplier. The steel suppliers would not think of themselves in any primary sense as in that organisation's supply chain. This was even more apparent in the second chain studied, where the 'focal firm' was a major railway infrastructure distributor. The suppliers interviewed did not in any sense see themselves as in a supply chain, one laughed at the notion. In the

industries studied the concept of 'supply chain management' seemed to exist at the focal/major supplier level, but failed rapidly away from that level. In terms of the research issues of this thesis, using supply chains as a unit of analysis was 'researcher led', (and coincidentally reflected the views of an elite) it was not how participants generally thought.

This issue was fully borne out by one very significant issue that arose out of the research. Participants did not think of deference, deferential relationships, issues of power in supply chain bound ways. They discussed previous employers and other companies, companies outside the supply chain relationship the interviews were trying to focus around. Quite simply it was a researcher-led initiative to try and bind participants to a concept they did not use, what they did *use*; and *thoughts* they expressed, were in terms of relationships.

Therefore, in terms of the sample, the research moved away from a time consuming and unproductive attempt to pin down individuals with a specific focus on certain supply chain interfaces. Requesting specific individuals tied to particular roles was extremely difficult, and did not guarantee a high quality input e.g. new starters, fresh graduate trainees, uncooperative individuals. Furthermore, it has to be noted that the initial research design did not take into account the rapid redeployment (and 'sacking') of personnel. The majority of the sales personnel interviewed are no longer either employed in the same role, or employed at all with the research target organisation. This issue of staff turnover, particularly in sales, does not appear to be recognised in research that writes of supply chains as reified entities (for an exception, although he writes of purchasing, see Hughes 1999)<sup>2</sup>. What was focused on instead was the willingness and capability of participants to speak about relationships in their industry. Which is what they did anyway, or rather they could not be encouraged to be both open and reflexive, and, manipulated in a rather mannered attempt to make them conform to a researcher's hierarchy of research topics and research design.

The 'contact' time of the research divides between over 50 face-to-face interviews, and one week spent observing purchasing in a Primary Care Group (PCG). The interview portion divides into two, between automotive and rail. Of the automotive, fourteen interviews were conducted with the focal firm, ACARCO, in the rail sector, nine interviews were conducted with the focal firm NRAIL personnel, (the balance of interviews were with suppliers); attempting to conform as closely as possible to the supply chain concept of a hierarchy of supply<sup>3</sup>.

The 'rich' methods chosen were intended to acknowledge and seek to work *with* the complexity and dialogic construction of meaning within and between organisations. Therefore, such an approach could claim to aid understanding of the context and dynamics of supply relationships. Also the methods were selected as part of seeking to blur a hierarchical distinction between researcher and subject, aiming for an intense collaboration. (Lenski & Leggett, (1960:467) discussed the issue of deference to the researcher, in interviews where the respondents were of low social status).

#### **7.4.1 Researcher access**

##### **7.4.1.1 The two focal firms – ACARCO**

The Vehicle Manufacturing [VM] organisation is a Japanese transplant, here designated as ACARCO, with a reputation for long-term development and collaboration with its suppliers; as such, it could be seen as a supply network 'best practice' organisation. However, significantly, this VM maintains comprehensive design control within Japan. It is also has only one UK plant, which means that it is a low volume producer (and purchaser) by car industry standards. ACARCO is heavily involved in the supply chain management approaches discussed in chapter 4.

The dominant ‘motif’ of the interviews within ACARCO and its suppliers was ‘cost-downs’. That is to say, annual (and sometimes more often) price reductions generated through increased efficiencies. ACARCO had ‘supplier development’ teams that would work on site at suppliers to ‘help’ identify cost reduction opportunities.

The process of gaining access to ACARCO was long and bureaucratic, they were not unhelpful or unfriendly, they simply wanted everything (including the questions to be asked) in writing, and formal outputs agreed. ACARCO insisted on contacting suppliers on behalf of the researcher, it does not appear from the data to follow that they selected particularly impressive ones in terms of performance. (The fascination of ACARCO with standard information formats, operating processes, and the repetition of information comes through in the narratives of chapter 9).

Throughout the access negotiation, no new information was provided by the researcher, eventually and reluctantly a one page summary under the exact headings the ACARCO contact used was submitted; key inputs, key outputs, key objectives, resources. It met with instant success, and further interviews were back on – provided the contact could have a prior, face-to-face meeting to go over the process, key inputs, key outputs, key objectives and resources.

### **7.3.1.2 The two focal firms – NRAIL Railway Infrastructure Distributor**

“NRAIL” was formed out of the privatisation of British Rail; all its employees appeared to be ex-‘BR’. Its primary role was as a distributor of railway infrastructure products. However, distribution could be a regular order or an emergency weekend delivery from stockholdings of safety critical items. In effect NRAIL acts as a go-between or wholesaler for manufacturers of track and signalling, holding stocks on their behalf. It



supplies the civil engineering companies who had won post-privatisation contracts to maintain the track on behalf of Railtrack. [NRAIL had another small business that employed 25-30 people and was proudly shown to the researcher – repairing antiquated signals - a business for which there were no competitors. It seemed to be the management's pride and joy [one sales manager commented that he wanted to burn it down so the business could 'move on']].

The dominant 'motif' of the interviews within NRAIL and its suppliers was that innovation was being stifled by short term contracts and the bureaucratic [safety-led] procedures imposed by Railtrack. Conversely Railtrack's refusal to license new products and processes acted to keep new entrants out of the industry; many participants seemed to struggle with the concept of new entrants doubting even that European competitors could emerge within five years. NRAIL's competitors were the civil engineering companies it sold to, who could chose to negotiate direct with NRAIL's suppliers.

NRAIL only supplied Railtrack; the maintenance companies could only buy from NRAIL or direct from each supplier; the suppliers could only sell to NRAIL or the individual civil engineering companies; new product or process innovation was virtually impossible (so the researcher was told). An environment reminiscent of what Araujo, Dubois, Gadde (1999) term stagnation at the interface. This 'network' appeared not to conform to what would be expected, that a company's supply and customer markets do not exist in isolation (Ford *et al.* 1998:270).

The contact with NRAIL agreed to provide interviews with three of his buyers and three of his sales people, and to provide subsequent help in arranging interviews with their suppliers – but not anonymously, they would have to be able to nominate which suppliers.

Following a successful session with the focal firm, and allowing a short time for the supplier to be informed by the buyer at the focal firm, the first supplier contact was approached.

*Good morning, my name is Nigel Caldwell, I am a researcher from the University of Bath, I believe (name of NRAIL representative) has primed you to expect a call from me?*

*Supplier: 'Who are you again? ...No old Mick F. hasn't said anything but always delighted to help Mick, he is a gentleman and an old friend, how is he and what can I do for you?'*

The supply personnel in the automotive industry had a variety of backgrounds – the first 'putting at ease' topic was how they came to be there today. However, in the railway infrastructure industry with one exception all the personnel were 'rail' people: either their father/family had worked in rail, or they had grown up always wanting to work in rail. The one exception is the organisation that provided *The Letter* story below, whose purchasing manager had a formal policy of *not* employing buyers from the rail industry.

### 7.3.1.3 Comparisons

The bureaucratic nature of gaining access to ACARCO has been juxtaposed here with the relaxed attitude of the NRAIL. Both approaches were stereotypical of the on-going assistance received – both were ultimately effective, both were in their own way helpful. What is being drawn out here as an introduction and marker for this chapter is the significant cultural differences between these two organisations and their industries. ACARCO with a standardised, high volume, repetitive product wanted to have procedure based, continuously improving relationships with its supply base. NRAIL's product – timely delivery of the right quantity of product, to often hard to access areas, at off-peak hours – was a mixture of standard and non-standard product. NRAIL (or rather the senior managers) aspired to having

the co-ordination implicit in supply base thinking, but dealt with an industry that worked through close personal relationships and a supra-organisational commitment to 'rail'.

The NRAIL network has features that could fit the profile of the political scientists' descriptions of sectors that could potentially be 'traditional deferential workers' – highly centralist, but also isolated, strong vertical ties, lack of alternatives (high fixed and specific asset investment), and strong personal ties. However, ACARCO's emphasis on procedures and process at the expense of the particular, would indicate a more modern contract, expertise and learning based competency with little need for deference. Unlike most car producers they had limited muscle in the market, one supplier described their business with ACARCO as the icing not the cake; suppliers did not usually depend on them.

#### **7.4 Conclusions**

This chapter has stressed acts of creation or recreating versions of reality involved – by participants and the researcher. 'Narratives are not records of facts, of how things actually were, but of a meaning-making system that makes sense out of the chaotic mass of perceptions and experiences of life'. (Spence 1982, cited in Josselson 1995). The value of the narratives or accounts to follow is not related to their 'accuracy' or inter-comparability etc; their value lies in their ability to draw out individuals' constructions or re-constructions of their working lives. Observation was introduced as a means of seeing whether the narratives reflected how people actually work, and also for rich physical data, and a some element of triangulation.

However, one central concern of the thesis, related to the act of creation, is that it should not be assumed from the start that all space is filled by human actions, the assumption is the exact reverse – that we start with a blank space to be negotiated.

<sup>1</sup> for 'Ethnofast 15.2' produced by RRE© (Rapid Results Ethnography)

<sup>2</sup> These comments are intended only to highlight that such approaches may better suit large research teams as opposed to an individual Phd student, or that an individual would do better perhaps to pursue one chain in depth than spread effort over a variety where the impediments multiply.

<sup>3</sup> The VM provided a list of ten first-tier suppliers, from which three were selected by the researcher (that is, respondents' identities were in theory at least, concealed from the VM). For pragmatic reasons, the first-tier suppliers were allowed to nominate suppliers, and hence, the identities of these second-tier suppliers were known to their customer.

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**Chapter 8: Narrative data**

<i>Part Two – What data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on the data</i>	
6. Epistemology	How knowledge claims are made in this thesis
7. Research Methods	The research methods, and how they were operationalised in light of the research issues
<b>8. Narrative data</b>	<b>Presents &amp; analyses narratives</b>
9. Observation data	Presents & analyses observation

**8 Purpose**

The purpose of this chapter is to present various narratives, accounts and occasionally complete stories proffered by those interviewed. Each account is allocated a title that in some way summarises and distinguishes it to aid the reader in subsequent chapters. Each account is prefaced by additional context identifying the speaker, his or her organisation, status, relevant details of the interview surroundings, the wider environment, side issues in the interview *etc.* that might help the reader appreciate the scene. Immediately after each account an interpretation is provided focused on what the researcher deems of interest in that particular account rather than addressing commonalities. Themes and findings appear in chapter 10 where all the data (including the observations of chapter 9) are taken in to account.

Table 8.1 is a summary intended to help the reader identify, recall and better understand the functional and company backgrounds to the accounts. The participants are numbered to identify that 17 different individuals are represented in this chapter, generating 25 accounts, 4 individuals contribute more than one account.

Table 8.1: Accounts by number, title, function and industry

No.	Title	Sector	Organisation	Role and status
1	Bowing at your feet	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 1
2	Glamorous	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 1
3	I felt dreadful	CAR	ARCARCO	Buyer 1
4	Cheating 1	CAR	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 2
5	Cheating 2	CAR	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 2
6	Scream in the corridor	CAR	ACARCO	Senior Manager 3
7	Curve Ball	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 4
8	Credibility	CAR	SUPPLIER	Buyer/ Manager 5
9	Christmas gifts	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 4
10	No more salesmen any more	CAR	SUPPLIER	Senior Manager 6
11	The Kicking	CAR	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 2
12	Reception is bad in the Cotswolds	CAR	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 7
13	Feed a donkey enough and eventually it will crap	CAR	DISTRIBUTOR	Manager 8
14	Two coats	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 4
15	The magical number is 7%, or sit there and shut up	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 9
16	Don't mention the Germans	CAR	ACARCO	Buyer 10
17	The Sales Story	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 11
18	The Letter	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Buyer 12
19	He cheated!	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 13
20	Today Now!	RAIL	NRAIL	Salesperson 14
21	Meddling and Rooting	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 13
22	Making life easy ....	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Senior Manager 15 Buying
23	Loneliness & Paranoia	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Salesperson 13
24	A nod and a wink – and the business is yours	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Buyer/Manager 16
25	What's the benefit to us?	RAIL	SUPPLIER	Sales Senior 17

### 8.1.1 Bowing at your feet

This account is actually a second round interview with this thirty-ish woman, a buyer at the large focal car firm ACARCO. Local, with a pronounced local accent, she was aware that she was doing well career wise for a woman in that part of the country, she was keen on her work and proud of ACARCO. The researcher had specifically requested that she be made available again if possible, in part on the basis of the next account, 8.3.2. The two accounts

refer to her previous role as a commodity buyer, and it is suggested make most sense when read immediately together (although the chronological order has been reversed). She is also used to provide a third account, of having to disappoint and possibly put out of business local suppliers, which emphasises the influence of locale, giving a very grounded and 'situated' as opposed to market and theoretical impression of purchasing activity.

ACARCO had been the subject of a major alliance with another (overseas) automotive manufacturer (RIVALCO). The context was that the buyer was talking about the cost saving opportunities presented by the alliance with 'Rivalco'.

*'On Commodity X when [the new model] comes along I would have been purchasing a 100 tonnes of Commodity X which is big business in the UK, 100 tonnes delivered into one site is huge business. [RIVALCO] at the moment purchase 1000 tonnes of Commodity X, that's the difference really, you go out in the market place and say I've got 1000 tonnes of Commodity X to buy and people are literally bowing at your feet ... I would have liked to have swanned into [the supplier] with a 1000 tonne order...*

Here is purchasing as the function with the cheque book, however the buyer, in spite of having all of ACARCO's spend on this commodity, actually feels she has very little 'cheque book power' as her volume spend is comparatively small. Her spend is significant in purely UK terms, but it appears she would get a better deal (and more attention, it seems, from the curiously personal language) from the act of 'going out into the market place'.

For this commodity it should be emphasised that there is no physical market place, no place to go out into – and if going out 'there' is a possibility, it implies that she as a

buyer does not feel she is currently 'in' a market place. Market place is taken by the researcher to mean here the economic sense of a market: no relationships of influence past or present, perfect information, substitutability and therefore lowest prices. Whilst she talks wistfully of having the volume to go into an impersonal market place, the actual account is highly personalised. The phrase 'swanned' suggests appearance and identity satisfaction.

However, it is just a wish, a wish that could only be fulfilled via the new alliance (which may pose other threats to the buyer). The buyer does not swan at all, here is a buyer dealing with a powerful supplier over whom she has less leverage than she would like. Note it is not any buying skill or intervention that brings optimism to this account, it is the sheer accretion of volume through a strategic alliance.

### 8.1.2 Glamorous

The same speaker as in the first account, first round of interviews.

*I learnt most on [Commodity X] as it was very much linked to the corporate world and [Commodity X] is very much linked to Government and the national monetary policy and things so I learnt an awful lot with the [material suppliers]. Both because I went to Japan and visited [sites] and visited [sites] in France and the UK and how the [Commodity X] market fluctuated etc, steep learning curve, I felt as if I was part of the real world, I sat in on meetings in London [a national Trade Association]. I was a member, I got a Member's badge, [Material supplier] was an excellent supplier to work with, they would give you all the information on what was going to happen, who sat on what committee, who had power and influence ...People think you are buying [Commodity X] and that you will have horrible Yorkshire men knocking on your door demanding a price increase but it was*



*not like that at all it was quite glamorous, it was glamorous, I used to love going to the [Trade Association] meetings in London.*

An initial review of this account would suggest it is rare in the collection presented here, as it appears to be an example of a purchasing person accessing knowledge (that is beyond training or tradition) through their work and inter-organisational relationships. Uniquely in these accounts, a purchasing person actually says that they have learnt something as opposed to saying they have implemented something (but implying they have learnt something). The 'learning' appears to have occurred through going outside the companies normal boundaries, through travel and interactions, not procedures and manuals.

The buyer was made to feel important – and even received their own physical badge of recognition. The buyer was made to feel attached to and a player in 'the real world'; a part of something much larger, government even foreign government, policies, international trade and politics. The traditional inferiority of the supplier is reversed here; the customer is not a big player, read in conjunction with *Bowing at your feet*, above, the customer is of low importance. It is the supplier who is in a position to offer the buyer access to the wider network of supply. The interpretation placed here is that the buyer really feels themselves part of a small and enclosed world, one that seems perhaps parochial compared to that of the capital cities and foreign travel of this commodity organisations.

The buyer is invited into another world, or perhaps more accurately another community, she is given a badge that gives her an identity as part of this new world, a badge of fitting into this new community. The account suggests at least two invisible but real *modus operandi* for boundary spanning employees; worlds or communities within worlds or communities. It is also (in contrast to the last story) a polite, if not kindly,

possibly indulgent world that is described. The buyer is 'taken care of', it is a civil role, made exciting by travelling across distances to attend 'glamorous' activities.

### 8.1.3 I felt dreadful

Same speaker again, first round of interviews. ACARCO has an industry wide reputation for meeting its schedules. That is to say it builds exactly what it says it will build whereas the industry norm is to vary forward schedules (and therefore build, and therefore what suppliers are suppose to supply) enormously. Predictability both helps the supplier plan and is generally conceived to improve quality. However the speaker here is recalling a period soon after the transplant factory opened where due to recession they had had to reduce the forecast build of a model; meaning a loss of volume (and therefore profit and jobs) for suppliers. It was rare in all the contact time with ACARCO or their suppliers to hear them described in terms of 'unpredictability'. The speaker was very close to tears by the end of this account.

*At that time the volumes just had not come through, it was not just a [ACARCO] thing, the whole [car] industry was suffering, but I was having to tell suppliers, suppliers from here, local suppliers, people who live and work around here and whose livelihood depends upon us, and for who I knew circumstances would be very very rough if we let them down, and I had to tell these [local firms] that we could not that we would not be achieving the volumes that we had set out, that we had said we would achieve. I had to tell this to firms who live around here, who would take it very hard, who might not survive a hit like that, I had to tell them and I felt dreadful about it.*

#### 8.1.4 Cheating 1

The speaker here is a sales person at a supplier ['M'] to ACARCO. He has worked his way up from the shop floor and is clearly proud of having left manual work behind. He is also local with a pronounced local accent (toned down here). Whilst the company itself is 50% Japanese, 50 % American and trades all over the world, it works by setting up satellite plants like this one very close to its customers. It in fact seems to be run locally, both sales and purchasing seem in touch with the shop floor, one of those companies where most people would know each other. The salesperson is speaking about how his organisation copes with demands for cost downs.

*We do make good margins with ACARCO, when you first quote the business – say it's 20 grams, then we actually quote at 30 grams so we are actually getting an extra 10 grams of material because at the time all you get is a sketch - got to make a lot of assumptions in there about surfaces... detail ,.... And you always put on 10% contingency, no flow information, no panel information,... 99 times out of a 100 I would say we are always 20 grams heavier than what we actually are when the part comes in so we have that 20 grams to play with right at the start.*

*So the first thing we ever do [when] we do a cost down is we say "We can look at the weight and maybe take that down?" well there's a couple of per cent there...*

As discussed earlier, ACARCO related conversations heavily featured 'cost downs'. Yet this account proudly reveals that 'fixing' at least the first cost down, by deliberately

incorporating it [the cost down i.e. waste] into the product, is the norm; a conscious and coordinated policy, built into the quotation documentation.

The intention is that, when ACARCO requests a cost down, the supplier could come up with a suggestion *viz.* a reduction in weight. That a part may be unnecessarily heavy is one of the most basic dimensions a sophisticated customer might examine. The speaker tells it as if each and every time to date, the ACARCO TEAM have investigated this supplier's proposal to reduce the weight, and approved it. This effort apparently meets a large part of the required effort to achieve the first annual cost down exercise. (Some scope could be kept for a further but more minor reduction in weight, for a future cost down initiative). The supplier seems to have evolved from the stress in much traditional quality literature on removing physical aspects of waste, to the more sophisticated and intangible waste narrated here and in the following account.

Complicity of ACARCO supplier development personnel in this process is discussed in relation to the following, sister account, *Cheating 2*.

### 8.1.5 Cheating 2

The same sales person at supplier M. He is really enjoying the attention of being interviewed and is talking about his work ten to the dozen. 'TEAM' are ACARCO's supplier cost investigation team, trained to identify and remove waste at suppliers in order to bring down costs to ACARCO. He is still speaking about how 'M' copes with demands for cost downs, including visits from the customer's 'crack' team of experts.

*[The] next thing on your process side is that you always quote at 1.5 minutes when you know you can work at less than 1.5 minutes. There are elements built in there on the*

*manufacturing side that you know that you can actually take down so it doesn't really affect your margin that much.*

*I know it does affect them [meaning cost downs affect margins] but built in there are items you know you can take down, manufacturing efficiency can go through the roof downstairs.*

*What you do is we sit down and we say we know we've got [TEAM] coming we know they are going to find something out, so let's sit down and lead them in the direction of this part. We know we can give them a little bit but let them find it...*

*[For example] ... we know really we can run injection at 1.2mins, so let's lead them in the direction of that part .. let them suggest it like,*

*[he attributes this remark to the ACARCO TEAM, acting out being them] "if you maybe speed up your machine?" ,*

*we'll then set the machine to run at 1.5 ... then we'll take it down to 1.3, and everybody is happy because we took it down to 1.3, TEAM's happy they've done a good job, we're happy we've down a good job everybody is happy – it's just the way you go...*

*To me if I was a buyer the first thing I would do I would get a part and say to our Buyer, "One Saturday morning, get all the quotation analysis forms out - look at what they are charging us - weight - and if there is a big difference I'd be on the phone... you're charging us too much! That's the first thing I would do, I would go and weigh a part if I wanted a cost down.*

*Then after that ... THEN we take them down [machine speeds] after the first cost down, it takes a while for your process to settle down .. volume production, trials .. over pack then you get a clearer identification of what your weight should be anyway once process settles .. does the excess weight make it a more robust part? No! If you put too*

*much plastic into the part you tend to get lots of flashing ... First I'd talk about weights then I'd look at cycle times with the engineers, that part should only be running with this cycle time ,, so to me it's not really rocket science getting cost downs, you can go out and get it somewhere.*

This supplier was deliberately setting machine rates at a sub optimal level, in order that this too (as with weight in Cheating 1) could be 'discovered' and cost down targets met. It is not suggested that these tactics met all the cost down requirements. Additional needs were achieved for example through the genuine use of ACARCO expertise in matters such as layout and flow - aspects of the ACARCO's TEAMS expertise universally praised by all the suppliers interviewed.

What is being highlighted in these two stories, *Cheating 1 and 2*, is not deceit. Deceit suggests one party is aware and one party is in the dark. The striking issue here is that the deceit is a jointly constructed performance, indeed since it is repeated at least annually on all products and all new products it is not a one off performance it is ritual-like. The real question is not how does the supplier get away with this manipulation of the improvement/cost down process (sheer predictability inherent in volume manufacturing is obviously a factor), but why does ACARCO's 'TEAM' go along with such manipulation?

One manifest answer is that the performance creates a win-win, to quote 'everyone walks away looking good'. The supplier achieves the cost down objective (painlessly), the supplier development team meets its target and has been seen to fulfil its role (incidentally the personnel from the ACARCO are rotated, this is not a matter of the behaviour of particular individuals).

The 'corruption' of the system was further demonstrated by another account provided in this conversation (not used here) on how this particular supplier was now set on winning a supplier development award. [Corruption is taken here to mean the difference between the meanings placed upon reality by ACARCO's supplier management system and the meanings placed upon reality by a supplier]. An award was sought not on strategic grounds or the grounds of rising quality or kaizen initiatives, but simply that the MD had received various awards from other VMs and now had his heart set on an award from ACARCO. A simple, basically tactical plan had been put in place to achieve this - in the main part based not upon improvements (which would be achieved, but almost as a by-product) but on an understanding of how the ACARCO supplier awards system worked - based again upon its predictability.

From these two accounts it is almost as if the Taylorist concern with economy of movement or flow, has been subverted by 'white collar' (as opposed to manual) workers. 'Management' at the suppliers will lead ACARCO to those areas it wants 'found'. There is deference to the system in these examples, which leads not to efficiency, but to the production of the circumstances in which it *appears* to the senior management at the customer that their systems – are 'right'. From this account there seems to just as big a divide between ACARCO's senior management and their own TEAM employees, as there is with the employees of M.

It is as if the two sets of workers are treating the system as strictly external to themselves, they have not been co-opted into it, they do not, referring to Kelman's table in chapter 2, 'identify' with or 'internalise' the system. Neither would be it be fair to say they are merely 'compliant', they do not stop work when not observed, they are actually making the system produce acceptable results. It is suggested that there is an unreported distance

between the workings of the system, and its supposed leanness and effectiveness, and how the individuals involved actually do the work. As in *Glamorous* above, there seems also to be a certain gentility (as in mannered performance), in the interaction between the two organisations.

There is a very strange mix in these two cheating stories between the objectivity of the system - weight, speeds - its carefully monitored and measured performance, and that of the subjectivity involved in the implementation and application of the system. Perhaps this 'strange mix' supports the use of a phenomenological approach in this study.

#### 8.1.6 Scream in the corridor

This interview is described as part of the process of getting return access to ACARCO for a second set of interviews. This account comes from a trip to ACARCO purely to reassure the speaker here of the motives of the research, although not against the research continuing he wanted a pre-meeting to discuss the interview 'process'. Now a senior Purchasing manager, he had worked his way up through the company from graduate trainee, we can see him then as at home in ACARCO culture. He is concerned with inputs and outputs, processes, milestones and tick boxes; the man appears to have no irony bone.

*'Of course there are frustrations, I said we have a 'one voice' policy [that meetings should achieve consensus] and yes that can be very frustrating. You spend all day in meetings with engineering – and then you just have to go out into the corridor to scream, it can be that frustrating, but then, feeling better, you go back in, smile, and continue on...*

On one level, this is a pretty conventional and universal account of frustration with meetings, it also resonates with the early purchasing / engineering divide literature (chapter



4), and is depressing for those who would claim a new and more proactive, 'revolutionary' strategic purchasing profession. However it is included here for the insight into the heart of the supposedly impersonal control mechanisms of ACARCO.

The Buyer absents himself to express his frustration with engineering, his frustration must not be seen, there is a 'one voice' policy. He comes back to the meeting smiling (shades of Hochschild). As a senior manager he is part of policy making, it is not unusual to see frustration, but his operationalisation of frustration within the one voice policy mirrors subsequent accounts of ACARCO's policies and their implementation – appearances must be maintained. The task is to maintain consensus in the public forum of the meeting, waste here takes the form of stress (Newton *et al.* 1995). Unusually, given the rigorous discipline of right first time and removal of waste, the lean production system seems to be operated (here at quite a senior level) without addressing the causes of the waste. The waste is allowed to continue (as long as it is hidden out of sight in a corridor). One interpretation is that at all costs the logic of the system must be maintained; that the system is the hierarchy here. It may be that the workers of the cheating stories above learnt by [senior management] example.

In terms of space the purchasing manager has to move outside the supposedly consensual space of the meeting, a company controlled space, to metaphorically scream in the corridor, an informal space, before returning to the consensual space. Note that in ACARCO fixed spaces are used for meetings, but that corridors, - the spaces that link separate spaces together – are used here as a 'retreat' from the space assigned to consensus building. In the accounts sales people tend to express emotional stresses related to

loneliness and paranoia, 'isolation' themes. Here purchasing angst reflects team work and relationships – 'involvement' themes.

### 8.1.7 Curve Ball

This buyer at ACARCO was one of those people aware that they had reached as far as they were likely to go, he had a nicely mocking sense of humour both towards himself and the researcher. Probably in his late 40s, he had worked in purchasing all his life in a variety of companies, he was delighted to have (eventually) got a good job in the area he was born in. This account follows discussion of how conflict is managed, the setting of this extract is a good working relationship with a long term supplier.

*I would, you know, throw him off balance maybe, you know...*

[Researcher]. *No I don't...*

*You know, you have to put them off balance from time to time, you know...*

[Researcher] *No... you mean?*

*I would, I would, maybe not return their calls for a few days, maybe just be strange with them, you know...strange...*

[Researcher – laughing]. *No I don't tell me...*

*You know, throw a curve ball*

In a follow up interview the buyer was reminded of this story.

*'hmmm...curve ball... back foot... sometimes would have done that with a Japanese supplier got to retain credibility even with all the things happening now that allow you to get on with the relationship but if that doesn't come forth then sure at some point you've got to stimulate ... maybe that was what I meant...*

[Researcher] *I think it was more a tactical thing, something like not answering a phone call*

...

*well maybe with some of our relationships because of the [name of his organisation, known for a partnership/long term] stance you didn't get the service that is afforded to other buyers... people relax... '*

Paradoxically, the supply chain approach, if adopted wholeheartedly, actually curtails the customer's ability to sanction a supplier. This account addresses the issue of how a buyer seeks to discipline a supplier in such a long-term relationship.

A successful, rational, articulate buyer surprisingly struggles to explain a part of his job, a task he performed. Perhaps he intuitively understands what he means but lacks a 'professional' vocabulary to describe it. His inarticulateness reflects at least in part the contradictions he is managing between how he feels he has to perform his job, and the supply chain approach he is responsible for. This 'curve ball' the researcher has also heard as *'you have to throw out the occasional left jab – just to keep them [suppliers] honest'*.

The behaviour represented is common and commonplace; it may be that some methodological approaches do not capture such 'detailed', micro level behaviour. Here, it is suggested, those actually working in purchasing – as opposed to researching and writing about it – are tackling more complex and contradictory impulses than the literature suggests. Ford and McDowell (1999:431) sagely but obliquely comment (but at a generic, and organization rather than individual level, perhaps a reflection of their method?). 'It [a customer] may be concerned a long term supplier is taking it for granted, and so it will seek to make the relationships less 'close' by being less predictable in both its ordering pattern and its more personal interactions'.

Ford's comment above however presupposes 'closeness' as a desirable end state of the relationship. The buyer here is certainly mitigating that closeness, he exhibits 'bad manners', but the lack of civility is in the form of a sanction, a desire to have the supplier 'return' to former behaviours or attitudes, not create new ones. There is still therefore a sense of decorum, of wanting to have non contractual obligations restored. Also note, it is not a specific action that appears to be required, it is not a strict *quid pro quo*, the exact circumstances are not 'articulated'. This and the next account are linked in that both stress 'credibility'. Both buyers in passing, speaking in widely different contexts, vocalise that a part of what they require to do their job effectively is credibility – one is with a customer, the other with a supplier. Credibility is not a common word in accounts that describe SCM purchasing capabilities; it is also a particularly intimate, instinctive and personal phrase.

### 8.1.8 Credibility

This is the senior buyer at 'M' the local multinational satellite to ACARCO. He is extremely proud of his work relating without prompting various initiatives to out source control of small items, allowing him to take a more 'strategic' role. There seems to be a very good relationship between purchasing and sales at this satellite organisation e.g. they attend external meetings together. As the account wove through an hour and a half of interview it is presented here in only the bare bones. He does not talk about ACARCO here though, this relates to another VM (XYZ Co).

*XYZ Co...are particularly strong at the moment ... starting to build up the trust more with [us] and make supplier selection much more [our responsibility]... had some fairly frank discussions with OEMs shall we say, where we have disagreed with their*

*supplier selection .. er.. and we have actually taken some tools away [hand gesture] from some nominated suppliers as we were not particularly delighted with the performance of those particular individuals ...[He tells it as if he had personally gone to the supplier and removed the tools] fairly recently for a number of reasons, fully justified.. – [having been mandated as the supplier, the supplier was failing on quality and trying to increase prices] and that gives you a fair amount of credibility, particularly if 3 or 4 months after you the OEM has to make the same decision ... [i.e. the VM, XYZ Co also had to remove tooling from this supplier].*

Told with relish and an air best described as ‘I told you so’, this buyer referred back to it several times as did, later, the Sales Manager. Indeed it emerged as a linking theme or motif for the conversation, but not to add any new information to the account. Beyond self congratulation, and an indication of increased trust by a focal firm, the account also addresses one aspect of SCM – customer-mandated suppliers (i.e. suppliers one has to deal with at the behest of one’s customer). For this buyer the event of challenging a customer-mandated supplier was highly significant.

The account disputes the image of focal firm infallibility (we are told it took the focal firm some time to reach the same conclusion), reinforced and (perhaps created by?), much purchasing research. It is not surprising that focal firms are fallible, what is interesting is how individuals work in their consciousness to offset a reality that does not accord to theory. Whilst proudly related, in essence the contribution of purchasing to added value here is to *belatedly*, drop a poor supplier. It is hardly an uplifting vision of ‘lean supply’?; it actually implies purchasing has very little control, and very little ‘credibility’ that its proudest boast is to have achieved something that would be assumed to be an order qualifier rather than an order winner? It is not a heroic role, the action of this story does not

appeal to any core values or professional standards. The content quietly challenges SCM, it does not endorse it, but at the same time does not improve upon it.

### 8.1.9 Christmas gifts

This is the mildly and humorously cynical ACARCO buyer of The Curve Ball. From the first round of interviews, this account relates to when he had to live in another part of the country.

The account here is set in the 1970s when he was a new recruit in a large purchasing section, within a well known automotive distribution organisation. Positioned as a distributor, dealing with predictable after-market volumes, the work was largely clerical style purchasing. He recounted how people kept disappearing at Christmas time to get spare garage keys cut in order to have gifts delivered to their home. He continued that at the in-house professional purchasing course they attended his colleagues argued all through one session with the lecturer that these gifts were their 'right' (the implication was that the lecturer implied they were bribes] – a reward for performance throughout the year.

There is undoubtedly some embellishment and some contradictions; was it really the whole office? Why did not one of them dare to have these gifts delivered to their desk or workplace if they were so brazen?. It suggests that there was some level of ethics operating, however 'unofficial'. If the situation had been entirely lawless, how was it that the buyers were not prepared? Why had they not had the keys cut earlier, or had them left over from earlier years?

It is one thing to give someone a Christmas present, quite another to collect a key in order to drop something off at their home during the day (and why just the garage, why not

inside the house?). The external nature of the garage adds an element of 'grubbiness', not something you would want in the house - or suppliers themselves (the telling implies) are not someone you would want in the house. Delivery is to the backdoor, the tradesman's entrance - suppliers are not invited as equals to the front door.

The account is included here for its linking of the exceptional and the day to day, in communicating how relationships were played-out, in 'those days'. It is not really about enticements, if a buyer had wanted to receive an illicit reward from a supplier, they could have quietly got a key cut, there was no need for the entire office to know. It is a tale about work, what it is like to work somewhere, it has a low key role as a 'homely myth'; it was definitely intended for office consumption. One aspect is that the satisfaction these buyers derived from the story was the importance it attached to them, to their role. The fact that the story spread was deliberate self-aggrandisement; quite simply there was so little fulfilment or intrinsic satisfaction in the purchasing role within this organisation, at that time, that buyers encouraged this extrinsic satisfaction / illicit reward'. Through dealing with the real voice of purchasing personnel, we begin to touch upon topics not in purchasing textbooks; this is the world of the 'spiv' character mentioned in chapter 1. Real work worlds – but not textbooks – are punctuated by holidays, the 'summer' and 'Christmas'. This tale revolves around the annual ritual of Christmas an annual but also traditional and perennial event, which invokes the stable and ritual quality of purchasing in a routine buying section in the mid-70s. Here deference could be personal (deliveries to home) reflecting the older style purchasing-sales encounter, the importance of which has been downgraded (Caldwell & Lamming 1999b). The predictability of this supply relationship permits a deference that is stable and personal enough to mimic the qualities of regal and agricultural deference.

The subordination of the supplier can be seen through, if not being kept quite at arms length, then kept away from contact with the family home itself. In the stress on the garage in the story we observe a critical but delicate aspect of deference, it has to be in each and every enactment a polite or civil relationship (what happens after a door is closed or the both parties are 'off-stage' (Goffman 1959) is irrelevant). Delivery to the garage distances the buyer from potentially awkward issues with other family members about the propriety of the delivery, decorum is maintained. Delivery during the working day similarly distances both parties from direct acknowledgement of the transaction.

It is a non-contractual obligation, which whilst a tangible duty on the behalf of the supplier (delivery), has an intangible, conspiratorial reciprocation by the buyer. The 'gift' to be delivered and received is not for a specific action performed, it takes on an unarticulated quality from its year end association with the wider gift giving of Christmas. A clear distribution of power is present, which at once divides (the buyer is dominant), and bonds buyer and supplier together, in collusion. Finally and most subtly, the relationship is embedded in role performances, a confederacy born out of intrigue, and rituals of behaviour that contribute conservative forces to the commercial relationship.

#### **8.1.10 No more salesmen any more**

The speaker is the Sales Director of 'M', he is the manager of the individual who told the cheating stories. He is the oldest person interviewed, maybe mid to late 50s, and from his frequent references to such things, clearly finds working life hard and a struggle to keep up with. However, he is also enthusiastic and talks confidently of the future, he insisted on giving the researcher a standard slide show on M prior to the interview. The major value of this account is when it is placed alongside the story that follows (*The Kicking*), in which



this manager's assistant describes the experience of being a punch bag for a Vehicle Manufacturer's engineers. These engineers expect to see a team from this supplier, not just the salesperson.

*'Salesmen do not exist any more. You are a project team, you are a leader, so although I will wear a commercial responsibility, you have to be heavily involved with the project. If you look at a project like this I will be involved from four years out, four years before production.'*

*Most of my time is spent on project development, so it's much more team playing now the role has changed ... the Japanese were early leaders of that, they would resource. You would often see teams of them coming into meetings and you wondered why they were doing it because you would be there at the meeting on your own'.*

The speaker vocalises a theme that emerged, that respondents felt the sales role as an entrepreneurial individual was finished; 'salespeople' were yesterday. However, a twist on this view is suggested; that the sales effort is now directed at higher up the value chain – into the future – rather than the face-to-face interaction. Later accounts, *Meddling and Rooting* and *Loneliness & Paranoia* both support the individualism of the sales role at least in the railway infrastructure sector. But in the light of the 'revelations' that this company is stuffing quotations with waste in order to meet 'cost downs' (*Cheating 1 and 2*), one could argue that the sales effort is no less manipulative than clichés of sales people behaviour suggest.

What is novel is that it is now directed at a different level of the business. This would suggest that purchasing faces a new interaction dealing with sales (see Wilson, 1993), it may not be helpful that several ACARCO buyers described account managers

humourously, as 'Entertainment Directors' i.e. as largely irrelevant providers of freebies. What may be inferred into what the speaker is suggesting is that the value added by these sales people is now to add 'fat' to the forward plan, rather than any as previously, in the details discussed face to face. This is a subtle shift from the face to face "7% negotiation" of an earlier story of an earlier time, to a more systematised environment, where distance is maintained differently.

The sales manager expressed frustration with ACARCO, that they wanted project management capability from him/the supplier – but were not prepared to pay for it. However, according to his words, he was practising that project management. The following story (his assistant) takes the gloss off of this version, but the manager's version does suggest both active managing of risk and information between customer and supplier, 'acting with' roles for purchasing.

### 8.1.11 The Kicking

This is the third and final account from the sales person at 'M', the salesperson is required to lie about the lack of resources. This account is included in part for its perspective on speakers managers account '*No more salesmen anymore*' above. In the course of the continuing conversation the salesperson contradicted the facts but not the import of this story.

*"... the other week I was sent to an [OEM] meeting, like we'd just been awarded this business for some [component on a new model] ... I went down there by myself. The engineer couldn't go and when I got there, there was like [OEM] guys and me there, all concerned about the lack of resource at [the supplier, his organisation] and here's me sitting by myself saying. 'No, we've got no problem with resourcing, and it's like we all look*

*around and it's like where's the engineer from [the supplier, his own organisation]? and like they said that the engineer was supposed to come down I had to say that the engineer - he's actually out on the job but I couldn't say that. I had to say, well he's actually off sick and couldn't come down .. but the next quality meeting we'll have all the [supplier's staff] here...*

*' .. so the next meeting we went down there was two of us you know .. They said like I thought you said you were [going to bring a team down] . I said like yeah, ... like that was one of the main concerns the [OEM] had, the lack of resources at [the supplier] 'No, I've got loads of resource no problem man' ... That one I came away thinking there was seven of them and they were just like beating us up you know .. I didn't mind ... wrote a report saying I didn't want to be sat down there by myself saying we've got loads of resource when I know we haven't...*

[Researcher:] So being given a 'kicking' helped form the relationship, it was beneficial?

*Yes, the [OEM] guys beating you up [meaning the supplier, his own organisation] .. I was just the kicking boy.*

*You just think like 'I got a good kicking there, I've had a good kicking before, I've had kickings off of [focal OEM] .. and you've just got to get on with it, the next kicking will not be too bad ... and now the engineers who actually gave me the kicking we get on great, they like phone me up ... People I get on well with I'll turn things around very quick, I turn things around very quick ... the engineers that gave me that kicking I get on great with now, great man , I can turn something around very quickly, I'll even drop something to do it and I'd do it for them as I get on great with them after that kicking we all get on like a house on fire after that like you know*

This tale of a very common commercial situation can be examined from many perspectives. For example, he was left cast adrift to make excuses and get an [inevitable] kicking. This is in itself support for receiving kickings as an underreported aspect of the sales role - and that dishing them out is perhaps an under-represented part (at least in academic work) of 'real-world' purchasing competence. '

In terms of what front loading of resources there was, it was the sales function that were leading the effort, not engineering, which does support the account in *No more Salesmen anymore*. The logic of joint development in a chain would lead to this supplier utilising its early involvement to involve its own suppliers in the engineering effort. It is significant then that not only can this not happen - as there is no supplier engineering resource attached to the project - but that the resource allocated (sales) is customer, not supplier facing.

Moreover, the underlying facts of the account from a supply chain perspective are much subtler. The customer asked for evidence of more engineering resource being committed to this project. (It is tempting to ponder whether the existing engineering resource is tied up dealing with [operational/process] supplier development 'TEAM' initiatives). They received flannel, and then at the follow-up meeting exactly the same scenario played out. However, the impression is given by the salesperson that the customer is now happy, the relationship is a good one - but *no additional* resource has been allocated. The salesperson simply runs harder - at the expense of attention to other work - and the customer has been satisfied with this. The rhetoric of SCM has been adhered to, through behavioural adjustment, and this appears to have satisfied both parties. Nevertheless, closer integration, the front loading of resources and cross functional teamwork, are still lacking.

Such an interpretation is very reminiscent of the access issues raised by ACARCO in chapter 7, (7.3.1).

With regard to deference the subordination of the supplier is manifest in the unilateral nature of 'kickings'. Civility is maintained in the lack of response from the salesperson, in quiescence at the nature of the interaction, there is no 'revolt' or attempt to pass responsibility to other members of the suppliers organisation. The salesperson is obliged to accept kickings; implicitly a social system has been defined with predetermined roles, the role of the customer is to demand; the role of the supplier/salesperson is to respond.

Deference is transferred from the purely personal to the social (from individual buyer to customer organisation). From the essentially 'homely' and amateurish world of gifts and garages (*Christmas Gifts*) to a process (rather than personal) orientation toward systems. The latter day deference is directed to the form (lean production and supply chain management) rather than the content of the relationship. Where in the 1970s a supplier could strive for stability in a supply relationship through close individual, exclusive ties, the 1990s sees a different stress: that of the closeness of the suppliers adherence to the *form* of the relationship; the supplier's ability to appear to offer teamwork, joint pre-production engineering and speed/flexibility. As recounted here, it is the form that in fact the customer demands, rather than the real achievement.

Suppliers defer to an OEM view of the world; and a mutual pretence of integrated supply management emerges as a working *modus operandi*. An appearance orchestrated by a sales team who are conducting an imaginary supply base orchestra, composed of extras from Beau Geste. This interpretation is rooted in the same sales manager's own words. '*... so your role is much more co-ordinating the activities on behalf of them [the OEM]. The*

*perception he [a buyer, cited by the researcher] has is wrong ... that there is a massive supply base out there with hundreds of people out there and all I do all day is look after the commercial interests of [the OEM]'*...

In terms of information sharing these stories are highly intriguing. If the sales manager is taken at his word, then what he is dealing with is at most four years away from production. Indeed the theories of supply chain management and the Toyota production system would suggest this could be true – then exactly what information could he share with a buyer? Information sharing would be aspirational – in fact from *Cheating 1 and 2* it can be seen what they do with the shared information – they cheat. When a customer has to provide forward information about product development, and a supplier has to use that information to assess future production methods, layouts, costs etc, the customer picks up a new vulnerability. Did this VM's engineers actually needed additional supplier engineering support – or were they just offended that the game had not been played by the rules? Were they offended at the lack of adherence to custom and practice of supply relationships rather than engineering requirements? Once the relationship had been re-personalised by the kicking, and the subsequent enthusiastic responses, they seemed content. Again, while ostensibly about rudeness and assertion, it is actually re-assertion, a restoration of what the customer perceived they should receive, the rudeness, the kicking is a sanction, seeking to restore, not to damage – this is a restoration not a revolution. Another juxtaposition is that an 'objective' engineering (function) appears to demand a highly subjective and unquantified response.

### 8.1.12 Reception is bad in the Cotswolds

This is a French owned supplier to ARCARCO. The ‘concierge’ told the researcher that he would be lucky to see the person he had come to see as ‘this place is pure chaos, always has been’. Waiting to interview the MD of this supplier, who would stand in for the Sales Director who was ‘no longer with the company’ the researcher was mistaken by a sales rep for a sales rep. The rep asked how long I had been waiting. He told me that this was his third visit, he had never got to meet the people he had set up appointments with before, and he was not too hopeful now. Although the factory was quite new, frantic messages came through on a tannoy urgently calling for personnel.

Much later a pointless interview with the highly suspicious French MD yielded nothing. I opened by thanking him for seeing me on what was obviously a busy day with a lot of problems, he said ‘No, these are only our usual every day problems’. Luckily I had arranged an interview with an extremely reluctant sales person, as it turned out the MD was going back to France to work, and that he would only recommend my research to his successor if I supplied them with a report on their company within 36 hours. A bizarre and laughable interpretation of the abilities of a PhD researcher.

The sales person surprisingly was there, and turned out to be quite pleasant in person. For the first twenty minutes he insisted on speaking whilst ostensibly typing an e – auction bid into Ford’s web site. At the same time he said it was a waste of time and poor business, he had never been successful at one of the bids and did not think the company at this location could have dealt with any more business. He kept claiming to be under intense work pressure, he was an engineer turned sales person but appreciated his sales role for the ability to get out of the office and see new processes.

As I left he was very friendly offering to come to visit me for a follow up interview, he would be happy to make it to Bath, he had a visit he could make that way. In passing I said that Oxford would be an even better location for me and he said. “Oxford, that would be excellent, I love the Cotswold’s, I have a firm I visit around there, it’s a good trip, nice day, make sure the timing suits, and, well, well the old mobile gets turned off and I find a lovely pub, nice lunch, no hassle no one can get hold of you .. you see reception is bad in the Cotswold’s – you understand me don’t you?”

The sales person was soon ‘no longer with the company’, but he evidently found ‘space’ to take a little time ‘to smell the roses’ and was happy to reveal as much.

### **8.1.13 Feed a donkey enough and eventually it will crap**

#### **Distributor to ACARCO – Buyer [Male]**

The researcher was recommended to seek an ‘outsiders’ view of ACARCO, this national parts distributor had done business with ACARCO for many years. They also had set up their own in house University and were dedicated to lean ideas and the forms of supplier development ACARCO specialised in. Three interviews were held with buyers from this distributor, if the success of their training and their ‘University’ could be measure in the consistent use of the a consistent vocabulary they were doing well. It was difficult to get them to express anything beyond the party line. The speaker is a senior manager, whose has been with the company all his working life (incidentally he is another local), he describes a system whereby special offers were made on certain lines to boost revenue.

*Traditionally the company has been very marketing led, probably always will be. Purchasing was seen as a subservient organisation but has been seen to have delivered so much over last ten years. Margin growth has not come from price rises or price policies, it*



*has come from high worth and value, and increasing involvement in logistics. It's no longer suppliers supplying into a warehouse, it's no longer feed a donkey enough and eventually it will crap.*

[Researcher] Can you paint me a picture on how purchasing was subservient?

*...huge amount of promotions (price led), huge swings in demand, no thought as to whether we were building a business or any real growth, e.g. success was measured in marketing by reaching 150% of target sales; in spite of off-standards all over the place in the rest of the business that were not attributed to product action.*

*Product marketing would go away and say 'we made all this money'. Sales would secretly leak out the details / dates to wholesalers (in order to be popular), who would for example stop purchasing and wait for the promotion. I.E. we would have zero sales for a period, then they would order maybe four months worth at the promotional price! But also they would maybe look at our internal stock systems and see that we would be unable to supply, then they get it delivered over the coming months i.e. at the normal ordering time, but at a cheaper price.*

*Now there is none of that kind of promotional activity... Offer things like stock profiling and electronic catalogues. Idea was that if you force enough stock into the wholesalers they will have to do something but the reality was that they played the game as well as we did, in fact better.*

This particular account is redolent of hierarchy and internal division and secondly, the disadvantages, the problems, such internal 'Chinese walls' caused. The metaphor employed equates the product going out to the end customer with 'crapping'. The story is one illustration of a reasonably common theme in management, that internal divisions are all treated as separate categories, which sub-optimises the organisation. The crude

metaphor could be used as an example of not treating or thinking of customers as equals; a donkey is commonly regarded as a low intelligence animal, plodding, venal and stubborn. It is these customers who provide the revenue that keeps the distributor supplier solvent. The teller implicitly reveals the degree of stratification both inside and outside the organisation, and how each department rarely thought beyond its own objectives. The story confirms Evan (1966) finding that personnel with external role partners can begin to 'go native', i.e. begin to adopt the aims and values of those they deal with; sales here are leaking information to suppliers. (The speaker ignores the fact that sales could have been generating revenue at times when the organisation might have been desperate for cash. This story is another that features the view that salespeople are no longer relevant).

#### 8.1.14 Two coats

This is the third and final tale by the friendly but cynical ACARCO buyer of Curve Ball and Christmas Gifts. He tells of his induction to being a buyer (by pure chance the Distributor whose Buyer Manager contributed a story above – but then both organisations are in the automotive business).

*Well I can tell you a story that exactly sums them up, sums up also why I left and did not want to stay, the day I joined, as soon as I joined, I was told, you know, two coats.*

[Researcher] *Two coats?*

*You know, bring in two coats, [still expecting researcher to understand]*

*you know to bring in two coats, one for the back of my chair, one to wear, that way you if anyone came looking for you, you could always be seen to be in even when you were out.*

The first impression of this story is the extent to which cheating and dishonesty permeated the 'old style' purchasing 'profession'. It is notable that the new buyer is made to understand that his touchstone should be the approval of his peers, not the organisation or an external code of professional practice or ethics. The biggest risk taking in this role, it is implied, would be to ignore the peer culture.

One angle of interpretation would be to stress graduates entering the 'profession' for the first time, in environments that were full of time served rather than trained practitioners. Graduates with less loyalty to place, to tradition, to a [new] occupational peer grouping.

The question arises what else was there do? Was there in fact so little challenge in the form of purchasing work offered that these buyers almost to stimulate themselves, devoted their best efforts to skiving? It is suggestive that the introduction to purchasing should be in the form of advice about *internal* (organisational) monitoring. This fits well with the version of purchasing as seeking organisational legitimacy of chapter 4.

#### **8.1.15 The magical number is 7%, or sit there and shut up**

The ACARCO buyer who gives this account is in his early 40s, he is happy with his job, with ACARCO, he has no problems with suppliers he sees ACARCO systems and procedures as tried and tested ways of getting the job done. He seems a bit dull, someone who is very happy with rules.

*As a new graduate my manager at that time told me if you go to a meeting with a supplier sit there and shut up. He said that if someone attended a meeting with a cost only perspective, then the value of that meeting was 7%. So you sat there and you were quiet,*

*there was no analysis, no costing, ...it was all tender, ... that was the involvement he wanted to have for his section, but if he was achieving his target for his section then why rock the boat? ... I never found out where the 7% came from, whether he had in fact any basis for it.'*

This is one of many examples of an account about the past being used to explain the here and now. In this story, there is no information, no analysis, the main tool of negotiation seems to be a belief which may be only a faith, that keeping quiet and looking serious generates a 7% cost saving. (it is likely 7% is an arbitrary amount, as the researcher believes the speaker did).

In contrast as a buyer at a Japanese transplant tools and techniques and data abound; detailed cost comparisons, derived from Japan or benchmarking, or from desk analysis, or simply from asking for cost breakdowns. Secondly an ability to confirm or deny any statement on costs made by the supplier through having at their behest a 'supplier development' or improvement team [the TEAM of chapter 8] able to spend up to a week at the suppliers premises looking for waste and cost and process improvements. This is significant in that unlike the purchasing scenario above, in addition to the ability to wave a big stick, the ACARCO buyer has the potential to offer the supplier support, and possibly transferable expertise.

The buyer has the opportunity to investigate sourcing globally, but beyond increased information, the buyer is now operating in a team environment. ACARCO is run by 'standard operating procedures' representing a common platform and knowledge base shared by all in purchasing. Compare this database of purchasing practices and activities with an experienced manager's "7%", and his closure of all team working through

insistence on silence (i.e. non-communication). From the supplier's point of view, the description of their treatment does not allow them to co-operate except by submission. There is no incentive for the supplier, nothing to gain except through similar negotiation tactics. The supplier is treated simply as a product deliverer, there is no reciprocation, which is curiously paralleled in the way the trainee buyer is treated. There is an enormous distance (too fulsome to be a gap), between buyer and supplier (and even buyer and buyer). What relationship strategies are advised when there is such space between parties? Deference might in fact be of limited efficiency, saving the resources – time and risk – involved in trying to span such a space, reciprocal ties may develop over the long term.

#### **8.1.16 Don't mention the Germans**

This incident comes from an interview with a youngish graduate buyer at ACARCO, obviously pleased with his career to-date. He was one of very few interviewees to press for additional details of the research aims, as part of the initial sparring of meeting each other, we compared business Masters qualifications. Having researched and written a dissertation he was comfortable with the interview format, and the similarities in our backgrounds – he had asserted himself.

He was articulate and precise, perhaps to the point of dryness – he was Scottish. In the interview he continuously mentioned strategy, he felt that he personally was adopting a very strategic approach to the work (by implication not all his colleagues were – but he could not be drawn into discussing this, it 'was not my place to comment'). He frequently spoke very slowly, precisely picking his words so as not to speak 'precipitately', a very mannered approach designed to impress the cassette recorder. The discussion was about how suppliers

perceived ACARCO's supplier development programmes and initiatives. He asked for the tape recorder to be switched off, again.

*Having throughout given the impression he was proud of ACARCO, sotto voce he expressed with measured solemnity that in his view, thinking with his strategist's hat on, ACARCO's supplier development could be seen as a sign of weakness. Prompted further by the researcher feigning astonishment at such an unorthodox view, he continued that given that ACARCO only had low volumes to offer suppliers, it had to offer / it needed to offer something different to its supply base.*

*However, he had also had experience buying from major German suppliers. He found himself saying that the large German suppliers did not want to take part in supplier development, they found it 'silly'. [Apart from this response, his answers were expressed in strict monotone]. He then tried to change the subject, and saying that he was generalising too much anyway. I turned the topic back to this subject, why should German suppliers not want to take part in such a widely perceived success as ACARCO's supplier development. His reluctant answer had a highly emotional quality, a sense of 'they're spoil sports, they wont play our game', he tried to change the subject again, I brought it back to this issue. Finally, clearly uncomfortable, he took a piece of paper and insisted on slowly and deliberately drawing out two graphs - Japanese incremental improvement versus German steep leap-forwards. He would not expand on this topic despite of my clear signalling that I was aware of both the concepts and the graphs - standard management course fare - knowledge we knew we both shared, as our introductory chat had made clear.*

The interpretation placed here upon the surface meaning of the above is the mental work, emotional toil even, that the young buyer had to undertake to square the apparent

disinterest of the Germans with the formal ideology of supply chain management. Worst of all for a fervent supporter of any ideology, the Germans simply didn't care, they did not regard supply chain management as very important, a response which puts any true believer in an awkward situation. The German approach could be said to be a refusal to defer to what the buyer expected of it. [The researcher had also encountered this German approach in the car industry, which appeared then to be based upon a belief that their technical expertise was benefit enough to the customer – and the customer could take it or leave it].

#### **8.1.17 The Sales Story**

This is the only account used in the thesis that was the result of a direct request for a story, two hours and a factory tour having failed to elicit anything approaching a story, and out of tape, the request was a last gasp. The speaker is near retirement and looking forward to it, he was an engineer but having been made redundant at his age he could not find more engineering work and has had to settle for a sales role which he obviously at heart despises (as well as University research). Alternatively it might be that as the researcher was distracted 'setting up his stall' he had responded to the sales person's account of his daughter having just finished a media studies degree at a very lowly rated institution, with an expression of sympathy, and the thought that she was bound to get a job soon. The ex-engineer turned sales rep indignantly put him straight that she was now working at the BBC in a very good ('proper') job – which was more than the researcher had, was the implication.

*He and a small team had taken a prototype machine to demonstrate to a major customer. They were given an imposing boardroom in which to set up and present. The*

*boardroom was dominated by a large and imposing executive boardroom table, shiny aged wood, probably mahogany. In the course of the presentation the machine burnt a large hole in the expensive looking boardroom table. [They did not lose the existing business with the customer].*

Two other sales people had given similar accounts, involving damage / potential humiliation at a customers premises, they sounded very pre-selected in that they would give an impression of the teller that the teller was in control of, pleasantly depreciatory but with a happy ending. (The American ingratiation work cited earlier (Jones, 1964) suggests that a parallel American tale or story would involve self promotion). They had been told, if not rehearsed, before, ideal tales it seemed to tell to a university researcher.

There appears to be a concern with proper appearances having been damaged/punctured. There is as well the sense of being in someone else's territory – salespeople play away from home. They are expected to perform a role (the overtone of acting or role-play is a deliberate), in unfamiliar environments, where unfamiliar things can happen which they must then confront (a similar incident at 'base' could be covered up). There is support for such feelings of course in the sales and marketing literature and the point is not controversial or unexpected (Caldwell & Lamming, 1999b).

This story is one of those that brings out strongly the amount of acting supply interactions seem to require, or at least have invested in them by participants. Participants do include some sense of their identity in their work. Sales people have to keep themselves buoyant, the past has to be reinforcing – nobody who told this story lost the business, failures are not repeated though they may be etched on the memories of those involved they are not accessed in public.

A different salesperson when asked what he did to keep his spirits up said:



*'Go onto the next thing, highlight another job that you want and go for it and you know, remember the jobs you win rather than the jobs you lose. Go into a sales conference, go into any sales training conference and you won't find many people talking about that (laughs) great big job they lost back in 1983 (laughs) you know I think we are all by nature reasonably optimistic, thick skinned, [people] who thrive on nostalgia'.*

### 8.1.18 The Letter

This customer of NRAIL had been extremely reluctant to be interviewed, having pressed instead for a telephone interview. However, in spite of protestations that they had no time, when the researcher arrived for a forty minute interview with one buying manager, this story came from the third interview - after five hours at the company. It is reported as written down both during and immediately afterwards – it is presented as *'very nearly exactly what was said'*, so italics are used, however the actual words are the researcher's.

It is also the only story presented that was discussed by participants before it was told (in part due to the lack of privacy in the interview location), it was obviously well known throughout the buying team, assuming a status of organisational myth. Everyone knew what was meant by *'The letter'* story.

[Purchase Manager] *Steve – he wants stories, tell him about the letter* [Another purchaser]

*Oh the letter, that's a good one*

Steve [With pride, with the enjoyment of someone who likes to tell a favourite story and has just been asked by a fresh audience] *Would you like to see the letter?*

[Purchase Manager] *He doesn't need to see the letter, just tell him the story*

[Another purchaser] *I think he should see the letter*

Steve *I think I should show him the letter*

[Another purchaser] *Show him the letter*

[Purchase Manager] *Alright show him the letter*

Steve *I'll get you the letter, I think you'll enjoy this, I think it will tell you why we have the problems we do with NRAIL* [returns with the letter].

Researcher [By now agog with interest, reads letter, instantaneous impression that it is incomprehensible and a real let down].

Steve [After a few seconds, not enough time for anyone to have taken in the letter] *So you see, you see what we are up against* [with NRAIL]

Researcher *I think I do, I really think I do* [lying but beginning to think that the point of it must be in some part its incomprehensibility], *but give me the background*

Steve [he described how he had made a simply query about a part they bought]

Researcher [beginning to understand but aware of being watched by three buyers] .. *and this is all they sent you?*

Steve *This is all they sent me, listen to it, listen to it, I deal with this woman* [name, who had been interviewed by the researcher and had provided this supplier as one of her worst] *nearly every day, nearly every day, and this is how she writes to me, and why not use a phone? It's madness.* [Reads] *Pursuant to Railway infrastructure reg. 125/b 1994 amended 6/2 of the procedure of 1992, parts are tested under process order 19/2 of the standing procedures as amended in 1968 by section two of the Act...*

*What does it mean? Why is she talking to me like that? Who has time? What is the point? Why did she write it in the first place, why did she use a standard format and what on earth are all these railway procedure references – I asked a perfectly simple question that she could have rung me up and answered and she sends this – AND IT STILL DOESN'T*

*ANSWER THE QUESTION! How are you supposed to deal with such people? Why can't she not answer a perfectly straight forward question?*

[The two on looking purchasers nodded in agreement, and happy that the letter had been presented and performed went back to their work].

However, the Purchasing Manager [the speaker of *Making life easy*] was still listening although appearing engrossed in his work. When Steve asked if the researcher would like a copy, he piped up that '*he doesn't need a copy*'; he must have been listening all along.

This customer was unique in that as a civil engineering firm, they were not 'rail' insiders, track maintenance was their link to rail, not father son tradition. Furthermore, the manager had a policy of deliberately not employing buyers with a rail background. The real issue behind the letter was that NRAIL in the form of the salesperson had responded to a simple commercial inquiry with a standard response that assumed and presaged knowledge of 'rail'. There is an inherent implication that if the customer really knew rail they would know the answer to the query. By citing chapter and verse of the appropriate rail procedures the salesperson infuriated the customer firm, in the process implicitly stating that the industry specific factors and knowledge are more important than the customer.

Two distinct identities are visible, the steeped in the industry supplier, and the 'professional' buyer. To the supplier professionalism would involve close adherence and knowledge of standard industry practices. To the customer professionalism would involve questioning, customisation of response, issues and processes rather than the detail of rail paraphernalia. Ford *et al.* (1998:137) note that in a loose relationship it is the customer that bears the 'hidden' costs of adapting its activities, actors and resources to cope with its suppliers.

The supplier treats the past as a resource, the supplier assumes stability and continuity, the customer wants to question it, to challenge or to have the right to challenge, received opinion. In some sense traditional forms of supply hierarchy are challenged here, but there is hierarchy, the hierarchy is to the industry, to the railways, to the custom and tradition of supply, of the materials that are and can be and cannot be used. The customer is expected to know the limitations on what can be used (and therefore supplied). It could be argued that the supplier is offering learning in the sense of 'you should know this' but it is unreflexive, it is not thinking that is being offered, it is received knowledge, rote learning.

To the sales/supplier what is important is rail itself, her response is devoid of personal interaction, in this instance it is the customer who wants a more personalised relationship. The supplier does not take into account the risk of upsetting the customer – but why should a customer be upset? Welcome to the railway industry. But even more vitally, risk in part of the rail sector is materials malfunctioning, wearing out, or not being available. The highest risk is of fatalities not customer dissatisfaction. Therefore repetition of tried and tested methods and materials becomes a risk management policy; change and innovation may have a higher risk hurdle than other sectors.

#### **8.1.19 He cheated!**

This interview took place in a faded board room in at the headquarters of an organisation that had clearly under invested for years. This salesperson had come into sales via window cleaning and selling burglar alarms door-to-door. He was the salesperson and the sales manager, it appears he 'left' the organisation very soon after the interview - he may have been expecting that.

*I have contacts within some companies who were purchasing people who have now moved on to better and greater things .. they now sweep the floor... one particular guy (laughs) who was a purchasing guy responsible for [electricity board] who has now moved on to the production side he'll have contact with us because we got on quite well. He told me that on certain projects for which we were negotiating, he had no intention of giving me the project, even if I was 10% cheaper, it [their being asked to tender] was to keep his other suppliers interested.*

*This was a job that was going somewhere else and it had someone else's name written all over it so that if it came to it he could say to somebody that is what you are competing against. That is from the horse's mouth, well he has left, gone into another area of the company but that's happened and again you have to acknowledge that, it happens.*

The rules of the game have been transgressed – but note also that he knows this because of his close personal ties with the ex-purchaser, ties based on the fact that ‘they got on well’. Information here could be said to have been leaked, a production person leaks some (historical) information about purchasing. Just as in ‘*The donkey crap*’ story sales leaked details of future discounts to be ‘popular’.

Prior to this account the salesperson had been saying that you know when you are being asked to tender with no chance of success – you just know. As to the task, the account describes a buyer getting the price down through manipulation, through using a competitor's prices as a tool – but not through knowledge of suppliers processes, wider market conditions, trends ... etc. The buyer is seen by the teller to abuse their position to force one supplier to undermine another - and incidentally may well be underestimating the extent to which one or more suppliers knows exactly what is going on.

In this story part of being a good supplier is keeping the customer sweet, helping the supplier (indirectly) deal with his other suppliers. In order to keep their own business, the supplier has to aid the customer in sourcing elsewhere. If an entire industry were run on this basis, it would be impossible to manage capacity, excess capacity has to be available somewhere to behave like this. The customer is trading on reciprocation, and the salesperson/supplier is forgetting to mention that the customer will be morally in his debt after this transaction. As previously, it is not a *quid pro quo*, it does not guarantee any particular future business, but the supplier has been economically useful to the customer, a sense of obligation or debt is half way to a deal (Cialdini, 1993). Also note how this salesperson laughs at himself as well as the situation, one of few signs of an individual aware of irony in the work, along with trickery and deception.

#### 8.1.20 Today Now!

A salesperson is talking about some purchasing people in customer organisations. He is clearly very bright and also very young, on reflection he appears too young to be here. He makes the observation that some seem to want to prevent NRAIL speaking directly to the suppliers' engineers, and also that some Buyers appear to make delivery demands for the sake of asserting their role rather than any real operational need.

*'... procurement people who almost try and insist that they don't want like for NRAIL to speak to the engineers or forbid, or try to forbid the engineers to speak to NRAIL. Again it depends on the size of the company, the bigger the company the lines between departments are very rigid, very little co-operation, certainly have incidents ..*

*Say the Buyer is demanding we deliver Friday, the end of the week. Say if we can't deliver till next week (instead of Friday) but you get the chance to speak to the engineers.*

*Then you find they don't really care like if it is Friday or not, the engineer will say they don't need it until Tuesday, but ,, so they [purchasing] think they will get a rollicking off of the engineer if they don't meet that date but really it doesn't matter ... we deliver it and then it sits there, pointlessly, until Tuesday.*

*... shows also how we tend to dabble a lot in each others areas.. but things can be missed on the assumption that say sales is dealing with it, then buyers picked it up, or warehouse picked it up.. we have a lot of informal interaction, helps to build the relationships ... procurement if they are struggling don't have too many qualms about asking us to progress orders, sometimes we can get across the urgency*

The salesperson here is repeating a very common occurrence; but a matter that the purchasing literature usually chooses not to address – early delivery required as show of machismo, that conformance to the purchaser's demands is a test. A test that disregards efficiency (for example the customer firm could end up paying too early for the supply, could incur emergency transport, could suffer damage or theft from the supplies being in place too early). This does not come across as an example of a more commonly discussed theme, that of the desire to cover one's backside by erring on the side of too much rather than too little inventory (which, conversely is a popular theme in the purchasing literature). Instead the theme seems to relate to one of the earliest purchasing themes discussed in chapter 4, competition with engineers.

The actual task – even though the story meanders into cross functional team work, (the teller is not as interested in the researcher's focus) is to help purchasing with order processing. There is by implication still a high degree of mechanical, rote work in this organisation, and reactive supply. The supplier must be seen to be reactive (in responding to the purchaser's demands) as well as responsive (getting the parts out on time). There is no

information sharing, there is no trust from the customer, there is in fact an assumption by the customer/purchaser that they know best – that the supplier is not required to think, to assess the situation and respond accordingly. What is expected of a supplier is obedience.

### 8.1.21 Meddling and Rooting

This is the second account by the sales manager of *He cheated!* He seemed only too pleased to talk about his work.

*There are things that you get up to, that you get away with that perhaps you shouldn't get up to and get away with, left in offices on your own you do a bit of meddling and rooting that's quite amusing [laughs],...*

*...the best position to be in is when you know **exactly** [emphasis in original] what someone else's offer is, because either somehow it has come through to your fax machine or because somebody else has told you exactly what the offer is and you are sitting and negotiating and somebody is continuing to tell you that you are five per cent out and you say: 'There are my prices and I'm going home now', speak to me on Monday if you want me, or if you don't then it's fine. We can't do it in the first place, then they are wonderful positions to be in .. but that's few and far between ... but then on the other side of the table, 90% of the time it's the other way round, [laughs]*

*... because you don't know, you don't know what is going on, and I think it is the unknown, the fact you don't know what you are competing against and that everything is changing, that for me keeps you interested, keeps you creative, what you must do to overcome the lies that you get consistently [laughs], and its not lies, I don't know, I don't .. I get on really pretty well with all the people I go and see*



Here is sales side of 'information symmetry', once again it features 'cheating', reading or obtaining confidential information and using it to gain advantage. (That information that is left in a room with a salesperson could be a double bluff – i.e. that it was assumed the salesperson would lean over and read it, is possible, but would also be double cheating. A cynic might connect such occurrences with the horse trading of information sales people were said to have used in *Feed a donkey enough and eventually it will crap*). Also there is suggestion of reciprocation or collusion, of quiet price fixing, when he comments that he knows **exactly** what the offer is – it came through on a fax or somebody told him exactly what is bid already.

But note the sheer enjoyment of being in the dominant role, this is an example of a salesperson swanning or swanking. In its uninhibited individualism it harks back to the early purchasing work, of the late 1960s and early 1970s, on informal inter firm information availability; it is perhaps more easy to pick up information in this way in a mature industry. But also the salesperson appears to relish the 'guile' and 'opportunism' displayed here, this is an example of what was meant when some IMP accounts were described in chapter 4 as lacking in passion.

However, if the account is examined in terms of what is done, the task and the knowledge it involves, a different issue arises. What the salesperson is describing is spying, industrial espionage offers too much dignity and valorises the actual task. But to have value such serendipitous information needs an organisation structure that can take advantage of it. For example, formal bureaucratic, procedure based organisations (such as ACARCO) would not be able to cope with, to absorb, such informal knowledge. In the ACARCO supply environment such informal knowledge, 'uncodified' and possibly due to its illicit

origins, not actually codifiable, would not be useful. However in *Cheating 1 & 2* and *The Kicking* there are examples of similar knowledge in use.

### 8.1.22 Making life easy ....

This is a senior manager who runs a purchasing section; one of his employees contributed 'The Letter' story, what follows reads as a stream of consciousness because that is how he told it. He conducted various imaginary conversations with himself wherein a better world of harmony, common interest and sharing of duties and responsibilities, and payment, is presented.

*Its not about that its really about common sense, and if someone would pick up the phone like NRAIL and say c'mon F\*\*\* it lets see what really hassles you guys ,, ten times a year I've got to receive it the other end and why don't we sit down and ring each other at 8 o'clock in the morning and ring each other and say "well how many have you got",*

[Imaginary supplier] "well 8, until tomorrow morning"

*and that has taken a quarter of an hour to do. A quarter of an hour phone call and I've nothing really against it, not unless it is an emergency okay okay got it all and oh by the way he won't ring and he won't ring and he won't ring for me today, and that is all I have got to do today. Then I can group that with that, that with that, [he means consolidate a transport load] and that is all I have got to do today. Okay, I'll organise that, and here you are transport department, that is all you need to do*

*And if I say" well how much are you going to charge me? then you say "well here is your price list until the 1<sup>st</sup> of January and here is your price list until the end of December and that is what you are going to pay [his organisation], all the way through and here is"*

*... And that is what you are going to pay all the way through. That's what you are going to pay, but I have to say if copper does go up can I come back to you?*

*Yeah that's fine, but if copper does come down then yeah we'll look at that, so a cable, because that's one that is going to F\*\*\* up, we'll look at that, but we won't look at it every week, we'll look at it every six months. Did it go up? Yeah, but only so much or it went down so we'll say no we won't bother so we'll put it up here now, but then at the end of the year. ...*

*And then when we order something, well actually I spend four million pounds with you over a year so why don't I just give you a million pounds worth a quarter – four million a year – why don't I just give you a million pounds a quarter, no matter what we buy, we'll buy **everything** off you, we'll give you a million pounds a quarter and you supply us with everything we ask for then when we tot it up and then if at the end of that quarter if it is above a million pounds we'll say right then we'll give you the difference .. but that's too simple isn't it, but that is what innovation is, but that's too simple, that's all about making life easy ... here Endeth... [laughs, simultaneously making it clear the interview is over].*

This speaker went off almost into strange mixture of articulate and non-articulate, this is an almost mystical quality to the narrative, it is a 'vision thing'. There is an unbelievable and unconventional naivety to the purchasing arrangement proposed : single sourced on trust, there is no desire for control (and control mechanisms) by the purchaser. There would be a tremendous assumption of risk in such an arrangement based upon full and joint information sharing. The story is of a better world, where customer and supplier work together focusing on making life easier for both parties; there is a notable absence of concern with hierarchy.

Instead of monthly invoicing there is a proposal for quarterly invoicing, for a blanket trust of the other party, and a 'friendly' reckoning up of the differences at year end. Price rises are allowed if there is a pressing case for it (the example given of copper is of a highly volatile commodity), as long also as the supplier is treating the customer with equal respect. This is the only story that is Lamming's conceptualisation of lean supply, there is transparency in this vision of supply.

However, the vision is grounded not so much in an insight into the future as a profound frustration with the present, with nit-picking, suspicion, excessive paper work and the need to check what is done with NRAIL. This participant began the conversation by talking about invoicing problems, they were his bugbear with NRAIL. One interpretation could be that by freeing the purchasing function of housekeeping or order chasing it will have more time for 'strategy' and involvement with the wider value creation issues of their business. But there is no support for this elsewhere in the story. An alternative interpretation is that the speaker is under pressure (the organisation was facing a round of redundancies), and simply wanted to have a less pressured working life, that is to say the story could be seen as plea just for simplification (which is how it starts out).

Note how the speaker had planned this story, it climaxes the interview both in topic and performance – 'there I have told you the best' – now go away. Aspects of it, the underlying thoughts have probably been spoken before – it would be researcher naivety and arrogance to assuming this was a first telling. However the speaker really does get rolling with the story, impassioned (the teller delivered a dialogue of imaginary conversations taking both parts). It is suggested that the speaker actually revealed more than he had meant to – not in what he said, which was presented as aspirational from the start – but about what he thought. An interpretation that veers toward the making life easy

interpretation. Embarrassed, he ends it, having nowhere else to go without a possibly very penetrating examination of his world views.

### 8.1.23 Loneliness & Paranoia

This is the third and final contribution by the sales person of

*If was to write a book about the events that happen in sales, a lot of it would be based on the job because whilst you are not really a part of the day to day office make up, you have an office, you come in, you go in but you don't really know what's going on in the company, because ..er quite a lot of people might have got pregnant and had a baby in between the times that you are in, away from the activity what's going on, and you are on your own, for a long time.*

*You spend a lot of time on your own, two weeks on your own, I think that is one of the things [involved] in a job or role, with a large geographic responsibility. The fact that you spend a lot of time on your own, too much time sometimes to analyse things that are going on around you, you can over think things. You can over complicate matters and over complicate issues to the extent that you become paranoid... err..., insofar as, generally I thoroughly enjoy my work and I don't really want to move out of sales and maybe but I think the downside is perhaps the loneliness factor, and at the end of it, if you then get a knock back as well, on a Friday and if you are not seeing anyone you know, then it can be really difficult, ...*

Here the loneliness and more importantly isolation of the salesperson on the road is discussed, which contrasts with the relationship management / key account management that supposedly taking over sales functions. Whilst as had been said, purchasing is

embedded within the organisation, older style sales comes across here as very much on the edge, the frontier of the supply organisation – almost as much outsider (who does not know who is pregnant, such intimate and important knowledge) as when visiting potential customers. A Relationship Manager is a much more corporate figure, and significantly, at least in theory, a member of a team. This salesperson would write his book about the ‘work’, the stuff out on the road, not the organisation. This highlights one aspect of this thesis that the assumption within the IMP literature that sales and purchasing as roles can be treated as two sides of the same coin, may have limitations.

What also comes through here is the way this shift affects risk. With regard to risk it is clear how personal the risk is in this older style sales role – the salesperson is literally out there on their own, they have little contact with base, little to fall back on in terms of personal relationships. They do not have the forms of information that would help reassure them (in this story it takes the form of pregnancy). In some sense it may be that the newer ‘incorporated’ role of account manager shifts risk from the [former] salesperson back to the organisation. This individual shows no sign of blaming ‘the system’, he appears to take any failure or lack of success as a comment upon himself.

#### **8.1.24 A nod and a wink – and the business is yours**

The speaker was Logistics and Procurement Manager at a FTSE listed Engineering and Construction company that had been awarded one of the track maintenance contracts. The interview took place in the MDs smart even trendy office, the MD being out. The buyer seemed an assured professional who was taking the research process seriously, he was up on the latest management buzzwords and all-in-all appeared a successful and professional person. However, some of his early remarks are included as his answer to the researcher’s

stock (soft) opening question in the rail sector, “are you are a rail or purchasing person?” was a nice but typical example of the answers received. He was highly professional, purchasing (CIPS by examination) qualified – but he was at heart ‘rail’, such answers were less surprising set in run down offices.

*... I have been in rail and trains since 1980 as a management trainee, - 19 years - I suppose I always wanted to work for BR, that was just what I always wanted to do, my father had, and my uncles, I have always worked in rail, always would have done – [that I don't] not anymore is more an act of government than choice...*

The theme being pursued here is that of how contracts were awarded in this industry. Given that there is only one national rail network and that there were only seven national companies rewarded contracts to maintain that system, identities, contracts, deals etc. could not be kept secret.

*So.. given the industry shape and size, the blame [for late or cancelled trains and for the general run down state of the network] always ultimately comes back to Railtrack. ..[they are] a very powerful organisation, ninety five percent of our business is with Railtrack, it is a monopsony, it is after all a very strange industry. You can't say bugger that, we are going elsewhere. They are a very hostile customer, they are very difficult people to work for, can not walk away and say “blow that for a game of soldiers” [ie dispute a contract term or condition and walk away], they are the major supplier of railway infrastructure work in this country and nobody will change that .. its part of why it is so very very difficult to get them to change anything.*

*They are a nightmare, Railtrack do things on whims, they don't do them for all the best commercial advantages .. [its] whims,,... in the latest round of renegotiating tenders some contractors are just getting a nod and a wink and "reduce your price by so much or do this and this and you will get the contract" other contractors are being put through treadmills and getting told to go away, not getting the contracts they are being given to other people, almost on a whim... you are not contractor of the month so you are not getting your contract.*

Having asked for the tape to be switched off he gave a specific example, where

*'the perception is that we lost a contract for not playing the game – [name of a rail contract location] - the TPSs [train performance scheme] were so low we just could not achieve them and we always told them so and kept telling them so, told them on day one of taking the contract .. I guess we had to keep going back for a bit more money, then a bit more, then a bit more .. but Railtrack will just not listen..*

Academic presentations of purchasing rarely include the perspective seen here, that of a small or concise industry where secrets cannot be kept for long, where everybody has a pretty good idea of what their rivals and competitors are doing. In spite of the enthusiasm in management literature for globalisation it comes across as a parochial industry.

The buyer obviously feels the industry is dominated by the one customer, Railtrack, and how does he attribute sourcing decisions being made? To 'nods and winks', the most old style, opinion, subjective and 'whim' dominated form of tender evaluation. After all the rhetoric of supply chain management, as decisions are perceived in this industry they still come down to grace and favour, 'whim'.



### 8.1.25 What's the benefit to us?

This account stems from a brief meeting with the Sales Director of the civil engineering firm in *A nod and a wink and the business is yours* above. He seemed dubious that the researcher did not have an engineering background, '*none at all?*' as if that would not only make it impossible to understand the industry but more importantly limited the researchers chances in life generally. His job was to persuade Railtrack to continue or even extend their contracts. He was trying to give an overview of the rail industry and came up with this account of thwarted innovation, the subject matter is signalling heads (a signal has 4 lights connected to relays, each light has a coloured glass in it).

*...as relays change it shows different aspects - the most vulnerable thing on a signal head is the bulbs, so every six months you have got men changing the bulb – we use failsafe bulbs with a double filament, if the first one fails, then the second one kicks in...if we were to come up with a maintenance free signal head say basically maintenance free for 20 to 25 years, and if we then said to Railtrack*

*“Look, we know we can cut our maintenance costs by £X a year because we won't have men running up and down changing signal boxes, we won't have to buy the signal bulbs we will replace all your signals for you at this [i.e. £X thousand pounds] cost .. OK?*

*... But Railtrack will turn round and say “No thank you, it is not an approved product”, so we say, OK, Fine. We will put it through the approval process for you”.*

*[He means Railtrack will respond] “That's great, that's fine but you take all the costs for that, the cost of getting through approval, any train delays, fitting it and everything”.*

*So then we go to the supplier and say “Mr supplier we would like to do this joint venture with you. But [The problem is] we have got to pick up all the costs for it, so then*

*what's the benefit to us in terms of us going in with you and they will turn around and say "well I'll give you maybe a years discount on it". But they know that once you have actually got a product through the product approval route Everyman and his dog can use it. You cannot keep it exclusive, you can't say XYZ Co maintenance are only going to use this product on [a certain track – the one they had the franchise for]. You cant because Railtrack will say this product is approved for use on all Railtrack infrastructure then all the other companies like [names a rival] will run to the supplier and say "oh we'd like to buy some of them".*

*Our contract [to maintain a section of track for Railtrack] is only for five years, now if our contract was for 20 years we might actually be able to say "OK Mr Railtrack, we accept that argument but we will actually re-signal the line anyway for you with all these new signalling heads because we can actually recover the cost in 7 or 8 years in terms of doing that ... [But] theres ...no incentive for us to do that as our contract is for only for five years .. you cant even look at the long term, if you've got a signalling heads that will need no maintenance for 20 years you wouldn't even look at it on a five year contract. Basically, theres just no way you would get the benefit of your investment ... the next sucker or lucky guy who took the contract off of you would get all the benefit. That's where the problem lies - the contracts are not long enough, the process is too tortuous, and Railtrack then turn around and say once its approved it's a free for all. So the supplier knows that if he can con an infrastructure company into helping him the bottom line is that he will have to pay them maybe something, but he wont have to pay them a lot because he knows that he can turn around and tell them to get lost after a year. Because he knows all the infrastructure companies will build his business up if the product is that good and there's nothing, you cant defend that ...so these contracts ,, and that's where NRAIL come from ...*

The sales director says that if his organisation takes on all the cost and risk of innovating, then not only will his rivals will quickly utilise the innovation negating any relative advantage to them, but also the length of the basic contract they have is too short to make it worthwhile in the first place. The barrier this second element poses to innovation – personal and organisational – could be seen as highly specific to rail. In fact it is interpreted here as an example of the kind of personal and organisational inertia that is another part and parcel of working life.

## 8.2 Conclusions

Tables 8.2. and 8.3 summarise the work activity and work behaviour involved in each account. Much of the work tasks involved appear mundane.

**Table 8.2 Purchasing accounts**

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>
<i>Today Now!</i>	Expediting	Aggression
<i>Sit there and shut up</i>	Negotiation	Acting
<i>Christmas gifts</i>	Receiving gifts / tithes	Stewardship / arrogance
<i>Curve ball</i>	Disciplining	Acting/denial
<i>Credibility</i>	Deselecting	Firmness
<i>Scream in the corridor</i>	Liaison with engineers	Acting / restraint
<i>Two coats</i>	Attendance	Cheating /Acting
<i>Making life easy</i>	Drafting Contract	Information sharing
<i>Don't mention the Germans</i>	Supplier development	Acting/denial
<i>A nod and a wink</i>	Negotiation	Whim
<i>I felt dreadful</i>	Deselecting	Information sharing
<i>Feed a donkey</i>	Support promotions	Expediting

Table 8.3 Sales accounts

	<b>Task</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>
<i>Cheating 1 &amp; 2</i>	'Costing'	Cheating
<i>No more salesmen anymore</i>	Project management	Team work/leadership
<i>The Kicking</i>	Relationship Management	Acting / lying
<i>The Sales story</i>	Presenting	Acting / socialising
<i>He cheated!</i>	Tendering	Acting / role play
<i>The Letter</i>	Answer query	Apply procedure
<i>Loneliness &amp; Paranoia</i>	Supplier visits	Coping
<i>Feed a donkey</i>	Support promotions	Cheating
<i>Reception is bad</i>	Supplier visits	'Skiving' – going awol
<i>Whats the benefit to us?</i>	Not innovating	Protectionism
<i>Meddling and Rooting</i>	Negotiation	Cheating

## Chapter 9: Observation

<i>Part Two – What data was collected, how it was collected, and the interpretations placed here on the data</i>	
6. Epistemology	How knowledge claims are made in this thesis
7. Research Methods	The research methods, and how they were operationalised in light of the research issues
8. Narrative data	Presents & analyses narratives
<b>9. Observation data</b>	<b>Presents &amp; analyses observation</b>

### 9 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to further explore purchasing work by watching (more formally known as unstructured or ‘free’ observation) a purchasing environment, with the aim of recording the complexity and manifold performances and audiences of real work. By observing deference ‘*in situ*’ it was hoped to ensure that the full complexities of such events or episodes were being captured in this study. The research issues of Chapter 5 underpin both this observation data and that of the accounts in Chapter 8.

#### 9.1 The Research setting

The work environment is that of ‘Urban Town’ Primary Care Group (Urban Town PCG or the PCG) in the South East of England. The principal purpose of the PCG is to support the General Practitioners (GPs – local doctors) and community nurses of Urban Town in purchasing and providing local health services and medicines.

However, the role of the PCG is not a simple one of a junior supporting role to the GPs. The PCG also has to control spending by the GPs and provide leadership and new initiatives in both locally based provision and preventative strategies. Such strategies aim at areas such as smoking cessation and teenage pregnancy, for example pushing for the

distribution of the ‘morning after’ contraceptive pill through community pharmacists, in addition to GPs practices.

Nationally, PCGs control over £20 billion (two-thirds of local National Health Service - NHS budgets) of spend. Urban Town PCG has a large and sizeable socially disadvantaged population. The purchasing strategy for such groups has been set out by a government document – the NHS Plan – and prescribes local provision of services where possible. Accordingly, much of what is presented in this chapter concerns the PCG attempting to use its funds to provide local – at the point of contact services.

The majority (estimated at 75%) of their spending is non-discretionary – it would be ‘destabilising’ not to purchase health services and beds from the major local hospital (NHS plan, p65). Furthermore, spending on prescription medicine is largely unavoidable; although the PCG does employ a pharmacy advisor one of whose roles is to advise GPs where cheaper alternative medicines are available.

## 9.2 Academic background

The decision to observe real time purchasing as part of this thesis in part reflects a degree of opportunism, the reasons illustrate the epistemological underpinnings:

Chapter 4 noted the absence in the purchasing/supply literature of studies that involve methods involving close study of behaviours, and concluded that this absence of social constructionist perspectives has impacted on the literature. The sanitisation in purchasing/supply chain accounts of how purchasing works, suggests the need for a method that closes the gap between the work performed and its academic presentation. Watching such work is one reliable (and under-utilised) method of actually seeing what purchasing

practitioners 'do'; 'Direct, current observation can not only document attitudes more accurately, but it can also record what [people] actually *do*' ... (Light, 1979:552).

The data collection method of chapter 8 set out to attempt to represent the views of 'practising' purchasers, rather than Chief Executives or Board level Directors – who appear often to be the 'sample' in qualitative purchasing research. However, Schein (1987) distinguishes between research outcomes based upon participants from the lower levels of the organisation and those at the top. Contrasting ethnographic (non-interventionist) and clinical (interventionist) researcher styles, he suggests the former has to seek the 'disaffected' (and therefore lower status employees), risking an *anti-establishment* bias. The latter, he suggests, tends to have a *pro-establishment* bias. The former, he concludes, in working with the power centers, appreciate the motives and intentions of key people, but not the consequences of what they do.

In contrast, he argues, ethnographers often see the consequences of, but not the intention of, the 'top people'; as they may not be able to get motives and intentions. 'Only when both perspectives and knowledge bases are brought to bear on the situation does it become clearly understandable'. This chapter aims to illuminate purchasing deference further by adding a perspective on the deference work performed at Executive level.

It is easy to fall into the trap of generalising about purchasing from observations on large-scale purchasing functions, such as the car industry, and manufacturing particularly. Accordingly, it was desirable to study a service environment, where 'softer', 'networking' skills would be more relevant; also the health service provides (in contrast to rail and the car industry) a largely female workforce including those in senior positions. In terms of sector, deference to the medical profession has long been recognised (Goffman, 1956a), Edelman, (1974), James, (1993)). Whilst recent popular accounts suggest deference to the

medical profession is under challenge (Potter & Morgan, 1994), it is still buttressed by a huge bureaucracy as well as a hundred years of custom and practice; it is a truly embedded setting. The approach contains a weak claim to triangulation 'to the extent that it is another method to get at under reported phenomenon' (Rosen 1991:12).

Discussion of deference from Bagehot (1864/1867) through Shils (1968) and Goffman (1959) has always had a theatrical quality to it: it is a performance. The research will be strengthened by incorporating the freshness that comes from an 'eye witness' account. With this in mind the observation set out to focus especially on entrances and exits although the visual research did not eventually support this assumption. In this study care has to be taken not to present deference as the dominant issue in participants minds, it is acknowledged that it is but one issue (however interwoven with others), raised by a visiting researcher, and of far greater interest to the researcher than the researched. Fineman (1993) cautions researchers in the field of emotions about the falsity of selecting out one emotion. A 'messy' method, involving close up and personal research may well help one to avoid simplistic, dichotomous and 'black and white' interpretations.

### 9.3 Setting the Scene

The research presented in this chapter is based upon a week (9<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> October 2000) spent observing the work of a Chief Executive (CE) 'Hailey' in a PCG.

PCGs<sup>1</sup> have the right to provide appropriate services in-house, or to transfer funding and services to alternative providers. Set up under a 1997 white paper, they are responsible for 'shaping and commissioning care to local groups of doctors and nurses working together' (NHS plan, p57).



The method used was to sit as discretely as possible in meetings (that was more or less the entire day for the CE) observing and making notes. As a non-participant observer the researcher did not interrupt or ask questions. It is not presented as a holistic portrayal; for example the purchasing work on behalf of 'Disabilities' does not feature, as there were no events involving that aspect in this particular week. The aim was to observe deference; it was not an attempt to 'comprehend' the NHS in the community.

The Urban Town PCG is located by choice in a drab council estate, sharing premises with a local GPs surgery – Hailey had felt it imperative that the PCG be seen to be local and accessible. Some meetings were held there, but the majority involved car journeys, traffic jams and frequently getting lost. Getting lost was involved as following the local ethic, meetings are dispersed to what seemed to the researcher an extraordinary variety of health related settings – GPs surgeries, local health centres, Shire Hall, drop in centres - all involving travel for most of the participants. Hence, one feature of the week was the 'fluidity' of the meetings. Many people would be late, nearly every meeting had someone sick, on holiday or on a course. Such fluidity may qualify as a modern day modification to Webster & Wind; it cannot be assumed in the 2000s that all those who could or should be involved in a buying decision are there at the time it is taken.

In this county there were currently eight PCGs (six female CEs; two male), which was going to be reduced in the next month or so to six (PCTs, Primary Care Trusts). Each Chief Executive had to re-apply for his or her job (or each other's) in competition with any new applicants. Thus those dealing with the CEs knew that they might be dealing with individuals potentially on their way out. Early in the week Hailey was told that her management costs were too high and she would have to make someone redundant. This was the background to Hailey contracting for primary care on behalf of the local population.

This account (and the week) were punctured from time to time by in-car observations made by Hailey, who may or may not have been insightful or even disinterested enough to be trusted (but no more so than the researcher?). They are used as much to puncture the notion of [management research] observer infallibility as for their import. They demonstrate both the potential fallibility of the researcher voice and of the method employed; and hopefully fortify the epistemological concerns of the thesis. The research is presented in the form of seven scenes from the week, Table 9.1 highlights the purchasing issue within each scene, at the end of each scene is an interpretation of what has happened and why it was deemed to be of interest by the researcher.

The reader is asked to engage, and to draw their own conclusions, rather than scour each scene for an authoritative narrative. A slower than usual reading may allow the reader to enjoy the ironies that emerge in the 'real world'.

#### **9.4 The NHS Plan, 2000, p26**

*2.11 On July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1948, the day the NHS was founded, the high street banks were open between 10am and 3pm. Today, the public has 24-hour access to banking services. In 1948, women formed a third of the workforce. Today, they make up nearly half. We now live in a diverse, multi-cultural society. Family lives, social structures and public expectations have moved on too. In 1948, deference and hierarchy defined the relationships between citizens and services. In an era of mass production needs were regarded as identical and preferences were ignored.*

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Health by **Consent of Her Majesty**, July 2000. [Emphasis added].

Set against the backdrop of the NHS plan (above), the following scenes have been selected from the material gathered in a week-long observation. Table 9.1 outlines the scenes which are discussed in the paragraphs that follow.

**Table 9.1 Outline of the scenes presented, including purchasing's role**

Scene	Purchasing issue	Deference issues highlighted
<b>I: Lead Commissioning</b>	How to exert performance pressure on a large supplier, mid-contract. How to enforce quality of performance	Agenda setting, locations / permanence / confidence / impermanence / job security. Refusing to defer
<b>II: Consultants turn doctors 'flaky'</b>	Having the purchasing 'mission' rubbished	Deference as the 'right' to be ignorant (ignore agendas)
<b>III: Shire Issues</b> a) home facilities b) networking	Attempting to plan from an unstable position	Impact of random occurrence / lack of ability to store up reciprocation
<b>IV: Steering group</b>	Having the purchasing 'mission' rubbished. Experts know best.	The peer to peer self-legitimizing way that knowledge is defined stifles innovation and change
<b>V: Board meeting</b>	Purchasing impartiality is compromised	Deference functions to create 'no go' topics, subjects that cannot be raised
<b>VI: Community nurses</b>	When offering workers 'empowerment' and choice – and want something else	Deference to age Peer to peer world meets management world – and ignores it
<b>VII: Provision for Elderly</b>	Power to tackle vested interests	No go areas, the weight of the present in support of conservatism. Purchasing as tackling or clearing up unwanted and avoidable outcomes

#### 9.4.1 Scene I, Lead commissioning

**Day One, 9am** The largest hospital in Urban Town. The meeting takes place in a modern office up many flights of stairs. The hospital is represented by four people, two male, two female, one has to leave after half an hour. Hailey is accompanied by her Finance Manager (female), but outnumbered two to one.

The week began with an important meeting with the major hospital in the area (the 'acute services provider', which runs two hospitals). Hailey was 'lead commissioner' for all the PCGs on this particular contract relating to mental health provision by the Hospital to

the PCGs. Thus Hailey had to represent and speak as one voice for eight small organisations dealing with one large organisation.

The purpose of the meeting was to monitor performance of the contract. Hailey was half an hour late (traffic), her Finance manager had just returned from three weeks holiday and had not been able to prepare, or prepare Hailey, for the meeting (the PCG could not afford cover). The meeting finally kicked off with the exchange of huge tomes of documentation. Both parties, but particularly the hospital repeatedly referred to information given in the unread documents.

The PCGs had had an 'audit' of the Hospital's provision of mental health by a Director of Mental Health from County Hall. However it was actually in 'letter format', that is to say it looked like a letter, but with ten one or two line criticisms. This meant that any 'prescriptive' impact was mitigated, it could be interpreted (and evidently was by the Hospital) as 'feedback' or suggestions; an advisory document.

*'Do you have specific responses'* Hailey inquired -

*'You had them a while back'*. Hailey's Finance manager politely disagrees. The subtext to this exchange establishes that the Hospital does not intend to treat each item as an 'agenda' issue.

Hailey tries to go through each point by point – each point is batted away –

*'Mental Health always find something to criticise, it's their job'...*

*'No, there is no user group to measure patient satisfaction or specifically how well they were informed in advance of what their treatment would be – we do ask the [mental health] patients of course and the feedback we get is pretty good really..'* They will look into user groups. [User groups for mental health patients are specified in the NHS plan, p119-122].

One of the ten ‘suggestions’ is highlighted here, relating to the *quality* of provision to the mentally ill treated in the hospital. The audit/letter stated that the standard of two wards was unacceptable in terms of gender separation, privacy and heating. However, the Hospital was able to not do what it was mandated to do in the NHS Plan and the contract with the PCGs. The hospital made it clear that whilst it had refurbishment, ‘prettifying up’, money, this could not address the structural issues involved in ‘privacy’ issues. *‘Perhaps the PCGs had some money, or could come up with some next year?’*

The Hospital sometimes chose to emphasise any differences between the individual PCGs, in a ‘well this is rather comic’ fashion. One of the PCGs was unilaterally threatening to pull some provision out of the hospital (without having informed Hailey, the lead commissioner). The Hospital pointed out that they would not give any refunds in this situation as they interpreted the contract as being about recovering certain fixed costs that were incurred already. Thus, both the negotiating position of all the PCGs was weakened, and also the break away (on this contract) PCG would, so the hospital said, obtain no refund. The hospital presented the issue in the form of ‘silly (specific) PCG’.

#### **9.4.1.1 Interpretation of Scene I – Lead commissioning**

In some senses the accounts of chapter 8 appear dominated by low level subterfuge of one kind or another, bending, stretching or avoiding or not conforming to implicit and explicit rules. In scene I, what takes place seems to be a vying for what those rules are, and who decides upon them (N.B. of course this is not explicitly discussed). The change in emphasis will in part reflect the shift to a senior management / executive perspective. However, what is just as important here are the added contextual factors gained from observation.

At the outset of the meeting a contest could have been said to take place, one of documents – the outcome of which would shape both the meeting, and any possible outcomes of the meeting. The meeting began with the exchange of massive documents, the reading and digestion of which would have taken many hours. That neither side had had time to make any sense of the documents gave the exchange a ceremonial quality: like footballers self-consciously giving and receiving club pennants at the start of a big game.

Hailey attempted to set the agenda according to her [PCG] documentation, including using the ‘audit/letter’ as an audit. The hospital attempted to define the meeting according to their documentation, which could, if they chose, pick up on themes in what they perceived as ‘the letter’; but would not ‘answer’ issues as might be expected in a formal audit. The outcome of how the hospital chose to interpret the meeting was to put matters Hailey referred to outside the scope of the meeting (and the relationship).

As raised in chapter 2, Shils (1968) is rare in that he briefly discusses the opposite to deference which he called ‘derogation’ (the opposite of ‘appreciation’). Those who are derogated, he argues, are being labelled as unworthy, in the sense that they do not contribute to the overall worthiness of the social world. In scene I, the supplier: the hospital, refuses to defer, in refusing to adopt a deferential pose with regard to the customer, Hailey (acting on behalf of all the PCGs). The derogation of Hailey’s role is all the more interesting as Hailey is putting her points in line with both the spirit and letter of the NHS plan. (N.B. Hailey chooses not to draw attention to this, the NHS plan is yet another unspoken subtext). In line with the argument of chapter 3, one aspect will be the close guarding professionals do of the right to examine themselves (this line is pursued in scene IV). However, that line of thinking could be presented as a ‘factual’, objective argument, and could be stated categorically. Such a bald statement of authority (or the

bases of authority) could facilitate examination or challenge, additional 'expertise' could ultimately be brought to bear. It is suggested that the Hospital's derogation is better understood by incorporating contextual factors. Hailey had kept the Hospital waiting half an hour (not too much should be read into this, traffic is democratic and universal). Much more importantly her job was (publicly) under threat, the organisations she was representing were being rationalised, and above all, the contract was already place.

All these features of impermanence must then be spatially located in the meeting setting of the vast edifice of the hospital. The insecurities of the loosely co-ordinated PCGs' negotiating position, stand juxtaposed against the durability and sheer physical volume of the hospital. The enduring qualities of the hospital (appurtenances of professional status coupled with physically dominating presence) appeared expressed in the meeting as 'we know what we are doing, leave it to us'. All these issues conspire to make it all the harder for 'other health professionals' such as Hailey to feel that they are, or can, make a difference. Any success they might have, it would appear, would turn on the status and acceptance of the managerialist NHS plan.

#### **9.4.2 Scene II, Researcher and Chief Executive in her car**

**This first journey in the car on the first day (*en route* to a meeting allocating computer purchases for the local practices) set a hare running for the observation period: to hunt the 'Snark' of community health: a consultant.**

Hailey '*Put anything to them and consultants will go into 'We have people waiting on trolleys, we have seriously ill patients waiting in beds, we are in a situation of serious, chronic demand, we have patients to treat' mode. They see the GPS as dealing with coughs and colds and when it comes to work in the community, pah!*

*I was incensed at our last Executive meeting; the GPs always turn to jelly in front of consultants. There is such a hierarchy in the medical profession, you are the lowest of the low for so long, that when you get there, when you make it to be a consultant, then it is your turn to dump on those below you. They can be so rude. At this meeting, one of the consultants turned around, and said to the whole meeting*

*'Does anyone have any evidence that these community schemes are making any impact?*

*And not one GP said anything, not one GP would even say that these are long-term, often preventative measures, that these are community based measures. They are so spineless, there's your deference.... But they are brave together, put a load of doctors in a room and they will denounce consultants to each other, but not in any public forum, not face to face, they go 'flaky' ...*

Hailey set running a hare that the week had to include seeing a consultant. Without prior discussion, she had made an explicit link between the socialisation process of doctors and the subsequent emergence of arrogant, imperial consultants. Scene III also features an assertion or assumption by Hailey.

#### **9.4.2.1 Interpretation of Scene II - Researcher and Chief Executive in her car**

The previous scene highlighted the weight of permanence and authority a huge building complex can bring to a supply relationship. Here getting lost appears to be an aspect of the role given the spread of locations and the commitment to the 'local'<sup>2</sup>. One could almost redefine the NHS in terms of location: those who work in 'NHS structures' – hospitals, consulting rooms, surgeries – and those who perform their work in more extemporaneous settings.



In the main, the sick must attend the place of the physician. (In Scene V, a consultant is described as refusing to relocate their practice to Urban Town). Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that the 'place' of the physician can contribute to physician authority through carefully staged public fronts. What is less well aired, it is suggested, is the 'scurrying about' of those who supply, or defer. Travel (where the destination is a new one, or traffic congestion is rife) adds uncertainty and vulnerability to a role. Bledstein raised the issue of 'specific spaces' (court rooms *etc.*) with regard to the rise of professionalism

The consultant's comment reveals a complete ignorance of the aims and intentions of the NHS plan – and it is being highlighted here, non centralised provision. As GPs are central to the delivery of that plan, his comment also subtly undermines any claims they might have to authority *vis-a-vis* consultants.

Furthermore, his comment suggests that the 'in the community' approach to health is in some way marginal. In chapter 3, (3.5.2) Dent's medical audit model was presented, in which: 'The clinic work processes directly under consultants control' are observed as one of three components of health provision. What the Consultant is doing here is presaging this aspect of health provision at the expense of others. This theme is developed throughout this chapter, especially scene IV, (9.6.4) again using Dent's model of medical autonomy. This is not to adopt a subjective view of the consultant's comment, inherent in his viewpoint is a division of health provision; crudely 'hospital vs. community'. The NHS plan is explicit on this point, that there will be a 'radical redesign of the whole care system... delivered in new settings... as part of a single local care network' (p71).

### 9.4.3 Scenes IIIa and IIIb, Shire Health Authority Building, 8.05am – Day 3

IIIa. Two PCG Chief Executives, a Finance Director from the Shire, and two others have a meeting in order to attempt to map out the decision taking bodies and their relationships involved in the move to PCTs. Their aim is to identify decision making bodies in order to prevent decisions being taken in meetings / committees / groups that should not be decision making forums. That is they attempt to draw a network map.

Hailey summarised at one point (verbatim) '*So this [committee] is really us acting as a conduit between two, er the three, no, the four decision making bodies?*'

IIIb. Immediate follow on meeting, around 10am, standing up in the foyer of the County Health Authority. Hailey is with two earnest representatives of social services who have waited patiently to catch her leaving the previous meeting (this *ad hoc* arrangement was prearranged by them).

The health service provides hoists, walkers, toilets, wheel chairs, and special mattresses, as does Social services<sup>3</sup>. The PCGs purchase these services (as do Social Services and 'Education', notes not clear why). Giving five days' notice one Borough has announced that it will be contracting out of this arrangement. Rather than 'a man with a van' from that borough delivering and setting up such loan equipment on behalf of each provider, each provider would face organising their own collection, transport, setting up, and re-collection.

Within the Shire, the six unitary authorities, the six social services, the six education departments and the eight (soon to be six) PCGs are trying to explore the idea of one central loan store. The ideal solution this informal meeting agrees, would be a partnership between all the providers / purchasers. However, the critical barrier is seen to

be the bureaucracy and inflexibility of the providers having to work together under the Government led 'Partnership' legislative requirements. This is seen as a greater barrier to co-operation than the acknowledged individual 'turf' concerns.

#### **9.4.3.1 Interpretation of Scenes III a & b - Shire Health Authority Building**

This is the first occasion in the scenes when 'circumstances' suddenly erupt, management is seen not as a serial process, but as an urgent response to the abrupt emergence of an issue. It therefore raises the issue of how well the PCGs are structured to cope with such eventualities. The networking approach of this section of the purchasing and supply side of the health service is demonstrated in the urgent, informal corridor (foyer) location of this meeting. The PCGs, social services, and education (it affects the entire apparatus of local care) have to co-ordinate a network, coalesce power, and produce action out of a multitude of interests and parties. As was raised earlier, networks are increasingly presented as a 'better' form of organisation (an exception being Araujo & Easton, 1996). It is not clear in this case that the network organisation, and networking skills of the various community health providers is the best structural form to present and preserve the interests of those in the community needing help.

Deferential relationships may be compared to the 'with profits' approach of life insurance companies, in that in good times, some surplus is held over - retained to be redistributed in bad times. In effect returns or payments are 'smoothed' by this process. At the heart of this process is the ability to generate confidence in the smoothing approach; confidence that there will be reciprocation.

The uncertainties and diversities built into the administrative structure of the community health networks do not support the ability to offer 'certain' reciprocation.

Compared to the professional and 'locational' certainties of the clinical and facilities sectors of the health service they are marginalised. In terms of the deference discussed in chapter two, they lack a self-legitimising aspect. In this respect doctors, consultants, and hospitals are surrounded by or imbued with 'managerial' confidence – they can plan or act within bureaucratically legitimated boundaries. Patients, but perhaps more importantly bureaucrats, can deal with this side of the health service in the knowledge that it will survive, and will be substantially still in place in the foreseeable future; that it can also reciprocate.

#### **9.4.4 Scene IV Day three Commissioning Consortium Meeting – 2.30pm to 5.45pm**

**This is the steering group for purchasing/commissioning for the eastern half of the county, this is the forum where key issues should be raised so that a united front can be presented to the Hospital.**

The meeting starts extremely late, with two Chief Executives present, one GP, a health promotion manager, a manager from social services, a manager from the County Shared Services Organisation and the PCG business manager – to take notes. Much later (an hour and a half?) two more GPs and one more Chief Executive arrive.

The meeting is set in a large room in Hailey's PCG. It is separated from the GPs surgery waiting area by a very old pull across screen which does not pull all the way. The environment is tatty and run down, most posters that cover the walls appear targeted at the socially disadvantaged; the room is unheated. Teabags, powdered milk and cheap coffee are arranged on a table 'help yourself' style; the assortment of cups must have been donated by people unable to sell them at car boot sales. No consultant appears, though one was expected.

The start is shambolic, a GP who is also Chair of a neighbouring PCG opens the meeting;

*'In spite of Hailey's efforts to make us into a group we are not acting like a group, we have 'lost the plot', these meetings are not working'.*

After lengthy discussion the first action of the meeting was to agree to a further meeting to discuss again what the true purpose of this meeting should be – 'the way forward'. There is a 50/50 split on knowledge of the whereabouts of the proposed meeting site, which creates much discussion. The proposed timing of the meeting has to be changed, as the traffic is terrible at 9am. [However, the next meeting has been set fortuitously at an ideal time, two hours before the consortium meets its Trust 'supplier'].

Another doctor appears, so the meeting has to rehash the decision to meet to assess the meeting's purpose. One hour and five minutes after the meeting started all are agreed on the 'revisiting purpose' meeting, its time and venue; no other business has been discussed. The social services manager now has to leave immediately but *'sees this group as a strong commissioning role, we have got to get our act together'*.

A document is discussed which is well thought of, except that the title is 'rather grand' must be toned down before it is sent out to the local GPs or it will be seen as telling GPs what to do. New names (acronyms) are constantly emerging, there is an East County Older People's Group with a mandate to represent the views of the local elderly that few present have heard of before.

Child protection is emerging as an issue – cover is very low in East County. The question is asked how come (phrased as a joint responsibility, not accusingly) it is emerging now – apparently it was not seen as a priority when the contract was negotiated – it is seen as a priority now. [This is raised here as an example of one of the risks involved in this

form of purchasing, the previous year, 1999, having seen child protection gain national attention in a series of high profile cases].

A discussion of the risk to the consortium of overspending the pathology/radiology budget centres around rectal cancer.

The GP *'General practice has changed out of all recognition over the last ten years, and will change completely again in the next ten years. Good GPs have to be investigative [i.e. spend consortium money on tests]. I have legal issues looking over my shoulder now, for rectal cancer have to do a lot of tests that we were not doing years ago, ECT, passing liquids, blood sugars, they are all a part of good practice. As to commissioning no I can't be sure that money is being well spent'*. (In response to a friendly question – the GP does not know how much the tests cost).

It is suggested that if the patient is referred to the Trust (Hospital) the first thing that is done is to repeat the same tests as the GP has been through. It is proposed that the whole system needs to be audited; the GP concurs that it would be good to have an audit and guidelines. However, the GP only uses the phrase 'guidelines' he does not use 'procedures', but, he stresses, it would need to be someone who would ask difficult questions of the Trust – i.e. a pathology GP interested in that issue.

Hailey relates the comments she first made to the researcher in her car. She is highly emotional in her fury at the lack of support from GPs to the Consultant's query. *'Has any of this community stuff actually produced results'*.

Another PCG Chief Executive reels off the schemes that could have been mentioned including 'Integrated home care teams' and 'Rapid Response teams'.

The GP says *'I wish I had been there'* – implying he would have supported the CE – but then after a pause says – *'What are these local schemes?'*

There is a brief meander led by Hailey saying that both she and her nearest (geographic) Chief Executive did not yet know if they would be required to come up with extra money to fund winter beds (this is 10<sup>th</sup> October).

Returning to the topic, the GP and the two Chief Executives present debate the provision of care to the elderly in the community. In summary, the GP is 'not sure I support the need for a community geriatrician' (but he does favour rapid response units). The GP says he prefers a more central model of provision of care. It emerges that he has an excellent working relationship with the best consultant in the area and feels he can ring him 'anytime', therefore he doesn't support local provision. [He agrees that the other consultant in the area is next to useless, he does not use him except in emergencies].

Few issues were clear-cut in this week of observation; later in the meeting the same GP argued for more cardiological care *in the community* (it must be presumed that he was not unaware of the contradictions in his views).

A further twist emerged when Hailey spoke as if it would be quite possible to fund putting small ECG machines into every practice. In another twist the GP was very unkeen. '*Not all GPs can do ECGs, and if you have an ECG machine on the premises and you don't offer an ECG then it opens up liabilities to being sued – at the moment you can just refer on...*'.

#### **9.4.4.1 Interpretation of Scene IV - Commissioning Consortium Meeting**

One moment within this scene is where a report that the steering group spoke highly of has to be renamed before going out to GPs, in case they feel they are being told what to do. Similarly, a GP, whether consciously or not, rejects the use of the term procedure

(which the non GPs had used) and refers to 'guidelines' for GPs. This is presented as another example of the clash between professional autonomy and the managerialism and attendant integration inherent in the NHS plan.

The GPs, it is argued here, are attempting to preserve the *space and distance* around them that supports the professional aura of the medical profession. 'Integration' is not part of their vocabulary, their peers, as per chapter 3, are other GPs (for consultants, other consultants). In Scene I, an audit had been conducted by a 'professional' upon other 'professionals. In this scene a GP speaks against the general thrust of greater purchasing of localised treatment of the elderly, and in support of consultants (in part based on his own 'one-off' good personal relationship). Cyert & March comment 'One of the most important consequences of professionalization in general is that extraorganizational groups have the responsibility of providing task performance rules for the organization' (1963:105).

In both cases the purchasing 'structure' is attempting to implement a process through and with a profession which appears as more committed to its own 'medical' identity than to a 'managerial', let alone a 'purchasing' identity. In scene I it is hard not to ascribe some responsibility for Hailey's travails in attempting to pin the hospital down to tangible commitments to improve, to the 'collegiate' style the auditor chose to adopt. In this scene, an audit, the GP makes clear - could only be done by another GP, such an individual would be the only person to 'ask tough questions'. (An interpretation that is highly at odds with Hailey's view that doctors go 'flaky' faced with consultants).

The kindest interpretation that can be placed on the GPs' opposition to care in the community for the elderly, is that he momentarily fails to recognise the 'names' of the schemes. Yet he, (both as a Chair, a member of this consortium and as a practising GP) is as deeply involved in the system that is implementing the NHS plan to provide such local



services, as a GP can be. As a practising GP and member of this Commissioning group he has delivered a mortal wound to much of the purpose, the *'raison d'être'* of local purchasing by PCGs, and the NHS plan.

This GP does not see health provision as a seamless, integrated, local care system, he appears to see it as what 'doctors do'. Hence, he can justify the continuing existence of the current arrangements with local consultants on the basis that he has a very good friendship, and therefore working relationship with one of them; that, for him, means the system works.

Figure 11.1 is used to contrast the integration central to the NHS plan with GPs / consultants' separation of functions.

**Figure 9.1 The Medical Audit Model**

<b>STRUCTURE</b>	⇒ <b>PROCESS</b>	⇒ <b>OUTCOME</b>
The hospital facilities and equipment, skill and qualifications of staff (etc)	The clinic Work processes directly under consultants control	The patient's condition after treatment (i.e. morbidity, mortality and quality of life)

Dent, M (1996). *Autonomy and the Medical Profession: Medical Audit and Management Control in White Collar Work: The non-manual labour process*, [Eds], Smith, C., Knights, D., Willmott, H. MacMillan, London

The issue has been raised of the medical professions lack of commitment or possibly understanding of 'management'; of what the local commissioning strategy is trying to achieve. It should also be noted that at no stage in the week did anyone from the PCGs take up the issue when GPs mentioned litigation. In an in-car aside, Hailey dismissed this as GPs 'moaning'; and given the 'non interventionist' style of the research it could not be raised again without drawing attention to it. Similarly, the community nurses became highly agitated with the implications of professional malfeasance actions (Scene VI). These signs

of legal or juridical authority invading the territory (or space) of professional groupings appear to be ignored by the 'management' structure. This at least in part reprises one argument of chapter 3, that communication structures within the established professions tend to be vertical (among peers), rather than external (to outside parties). The danger inherent in such communication structures is that when outside help is sought (as with the rising threat of litigation), the profession may not be able to muster sufficient outside attention.

Finally, this scene cannot be left without commenting upon how this example of 'network purchasing', or purchasing by a network (see also scene VII) operated. This meeting (and scene VII) opened with a discussion querying the very value and purpose of the meetings; seeming to raise awkward issues about 'networking'. It is clearly difficult to arrange and maintain large (network) meetings; discussions and outcomes could be manipulated purely on who was able to be there; considerable resources are expended in attendance; and a low level of mutual understanding may be more likely in pluralistic meetings.

#### **9.4.5 Scene V: A Community Medical Centre, Urban Town PCG Board Meeting**

**A Board meeting of the Urban Town PCG; the Chair is absent, ill. There are three GPs, two nurses, a stand-in Chair from another PCG, a Non Executive Director and Hailey.**

In the only display of luxury in this week, a pharmaceutical company had sponsored the meeting (apparently a fairly regular occurrence). There were Marks and Spencers' sandwiches and fruit juice; no one knew this would happen so most people had already eaten. In return there was a very short but bizarre interlude where a young medical rep

briefly commended a HRT-related drug that helped women through the menopause and, this is the part he chose to major on, restored female libido.

One of the three GPs dominated the meeting, and one example follows. The GP said that he had been involved in running a dermatology outreach clinic for six years. Then one day they were told by the local area consultant 'that they were picking up too many of the consultants skills and should stop', he said obviously they had to stop the clinics.

The [County] Education department was already unhappy with Urban Town PCG provision for Special needs for children. The county policy was that Speech and Language therapy should be provided in the same unit. However, Urban Town's provision was going to be split, as the relevant consultant would simply drop it if it were moved into Urban Town. (The consultant did not want to work in Urban Town, and therefore the service would be split. The consultant would retain the part he wanted to do in his preferred location; and the rest would be transferred to Urban Town].

The same GP exploded 'Typical old style big consultant deciding the shape of services without regard to the realities on the ground... This is important, if strong personalities get their way without reference to procedures then it is open season... sets a precedent'. Hear, hear, all outraged, was the response of the meeting.

In essence, Hailey said that if she was going to take this and another major issue up, she needed to know she had their full support, that they would back her all the way, not be intimated, and not go 'flaky'. The doctor told her with authority that if she had any such problem she should bring the consultant *here*, to this meeting.

The Non Executive (an ex-nurse) interpreted a discussion of local provision to include surgery opening hours. She described initiatives she had seen where doctors surgery opening hours had been extended into the evening.

This was not what the GPs interpreted as local provision, one said a lot of local people worked in London and would far prefer to visit a doctor there, another backed him up with an example he had had recently. The third said that doctors had families and did like to see them occasionally. Gently but firmly the doctors took the issue off the agenda, this was the only occasion that all the GPs spoke to a topic (that patients want GP opening hours extended is p134 of the NHS plan). The issue was dropped without further discussion

There was another issue that the researcher saw and heard but did not make notes upon; there was some comment from the chair that a new immunisation programme might be necessary. Two of the doctors were very clearly very interested in this, but Hailey appeared not to want it discussed at that meeting. The doctors asked to be kept informed about this issue – which seemed to the researcher to be just another paper chase starting.

#### **9.4.5.1 Interpretation of Scene V - Urban Town PCG Board Meeting**

The GPs behaved true to Hailey's typecasting, numbers made them very brave in this meeting (led by a strong personality). The GPs openly criticised consultants; the use of the phrase 'old style big consultant' seemed to be appreciated in the meeting. Telling Hailey to bring a consultant to the meeting was brave talk and patently impractical.

The work issue of how agendas are constructed that arises from this scene relates to the late modern deference of chapter 2. Examples were given which if even half true show consultants as trying to run health care to suit their own interests not those of patients. However, before launching into a tirade against the consultants, it is worth remembering the opening paragraph from the NHS plan at the start of this chapter. It gives banking as an example of how services have moved to 24 hour availability, but the GPs gave even opening a discussion on this topic very short shrift. Claiming that locals preferred surgeries

in London did not sit well with earlier discussion of the social disadvantages of many of the population of Urban Town and their impact on local health needs. Fineman (1990:153) comments: 'Professional groups are usually well defended against their users' complaints, and therein lies considerable power: to mould their clients to the shape they require to make their own life workable'. The doctors had managed to make this a non-item, discussing it as one would indulge a child's romantic but impractical notion.

After the meeting in the car back to the PCG, Hailey unprompted commented;

*'Did you notice how all the doctors smelt the money when immunisation was raised?'* The researcher said no, he had not been aware of any significance to the discussion. Hailey said that a nice immunisation programme (as opposed to say one involving mental health patients who are hard to contact, harder to treat, geographically dispersed and ungrateful) were easy money makers for GPs and that they 'chase after them'. *'They were licking their lips at the thought of another programme. You have to think of doctors as little cottage industries, no one does but that is what they are – small businesses, with small business mentalities.'*

In any earlier discussion with the PCG pharmacy manager a similar view had been expressed; asked how she persuades GPs to switch prescriptions (to cheaper drugs) she was categorical – *'Money. They are money oriented, like you and me, they get their basic package and then they like to add to it, just like you and me, they are cost centres really, doctors, people don't appreciate that'*. Van Maanen (1979:548) wrote that misdirection in fieldwork can be due to 'the ethnographer's own lack of sensitivity for the discrepant observation and lack of appreciation for the tacit bases of one's own understanding of the social world'.

The issue raised by Van Maanen highlights the way that GPs are presented as divorced from a remuneration system. Those GPs who sit on the PCG board actually have vested interests<sup>4</sup>. Throughout this thesis so far supply chain management has been presented as a focal firm view of relationships, reinforced by a self-legitimizing vocabulary and metaphors. In the structures observed here, and without making any comment on the individuals observed, it is quite possible that purchasing integrity could be compromised by the dual roles assigned to GPs, on the basis of their professional integrity - '*quis custodiet ipsos custodes*'. Deference in buyer-supplier relationships can be an expression of 'no-go areas, 'non-subjects'; subjects that cannot be raised.

#### **9.4.6 Scene VI, Meeting Room of Urban Town PCG (as scene 4)**

It was Hailey's responsibility to commission the provision of community nursing. She complained in the car on the way to the meeting about the response of her community nurses to being consulted about a new structure. Where, she said, she was trying to involve the nurses in the decision, and give them a sense of ownership, they had instead proposed a 'daft', centralised structure. Their proposal, she said, would involve 60 nurses reporting into one head nurse and that there would be no feeling of involvement.

Thirteen community nurses appear (not all at the same time). With Hailey there are fourteen women in the room. The atmosphere is jolly and down to earth, like a day's outing, but always sensible. Presumably most or all community nursing has had to stop to produce this 'quorum'. The presence in one room of so many women who have seen so much life, death and suffering in their day to day work is both a little unnerving and fills one strangely with confidence, this group have literally seen it all before. One said, 'The Bottom hasn't changed. But the stuff you use to wipe the bottom may have done'

*The discussion is framed by a (pc-drawn) proposed structure that the nurses have come up with it. It appears to suggest that a senior nurse and a subordinate clinical facilitator report into a Head of Nursing. Very late in the meeting it emerges that that is just how it is drawn, in fact the two are equals, but with different responsibilities. The nurses do not seem to appreciate that the diagram does not present what they mean; the diagram is unimportant to them.*

A nurse doing the facilitation – ‘Our dominant role is managing care, care in the community, in the home not the hospital’. Some of the nurses made it clear that they felt they were being steered to a particular conclusion. Hailey said not at all, whether their proposed structure cost £12k or £40k it would all be wasted if it did not bring out nurses trapped feelings, innovations, and their contribution to ‘strategic visioning’.

The nurses (in unison) responded with a withering assessment of the previous teamwork structure – the appointment of team leaders in paper only – ‘£500 a year for signing mileage forms and timetables’. For the team leader tag to have meaning, that team leader must have a budget. [It seems to the researcher quite reasonable to stress throughout the consensus within this grouping of nurses].

However, Hailey explained that she was excited by ‘little seeds’; the structure she envisaged had smaller, local teams of individuals working together.

A nurse replied that the reality is that we work in smaller teams now, going through the three types of nurses she estimated their structure would give reporting ratios of 31 to one and 28 to one, not the 60 Hailey had suggested would be reporting into one person. Plus, they said, they also already informally worked in groups of ones and twos, ‘so let us get on with it and just give us a conduit’.

The heart of the discussion was (to Hailey) how would you in the structure you propose, pick up bad practice? (That could be either in the interests of patients or provide a system that is auditable, or both).

The nurses' response was that the multi-disciplinary approach had failed, and that they were happier in uni-disciplinary teams... 'it is easier to identify bad practice in your own team'....There is the UKCC [UK Central Council], there is peer pressure; and there would be the clinical facilitator'.

Hailey: But you didn't mention the 'team'

Nurse 'I did'. Other nurses say that she did but she called it peer pressure. One speaker began 'I don't even want to use the word team now'.

To the nurses, there was also a crucial distinction between the clinical governance expert and the senior nurse. Being good at clinical governance they said, does not make one good at the serious professional grievances issues – these cannot be dealt with without training.

One nurse recounted the horrors she went through in being involved in contributing toward a serious professional grievances case. The room appeared to listen with interest and respect. There was agreement that what was important was 'the breadth of issues you have to grapple with, not the number of people' [which is not the answer much management literature would suggest]. In the course of two and a half hours, the only time this body of experienced nurses seemed in anyway shocked or ill at ease was in this discussion of dealing with putative serious professional grievances. Quite literally all were horrified by the prospect of involvement with this procedure, seemingly more than anything a patient could do or suffer – the procedure was frightening, not their responsibilities as practitioners. Hailey indicated that she was pressed for time and the discussion was getting off the topic.



[Still defending their proposed structure]

'Mature' Nurse, speaking for the first time (her colleagues had joked at her length of service but appeared to give her genuine credence as someone with a lot of experience).

*'I go back to the last time we were on this wheel. To me this structure looks exactly like what we had last time so I don't see what all the fuss is about'.*

Chorus *'No, (amused but indulgent of a treasured 'old timer') that was the time before the last time. The only difference between this and what we used to have under the Robinson model is that clinical facilitators were this way (notes don't make sense of this point) and the senior nurse (nurse manager) is from our own discipline'.*

Hailey: *'And was the Robinson model got rid off because it didn't work?'*

Nurses [Chorus] *'No! We had someone who had an inverted triangle– and he sacked them all – and then he got sacked. We had to flatten the management structure – apparently'.*

As the researcher left with Hailey for the next meeting, leaving it still in progress, he heard the 'Mature Nurse' saying (in response to some ribbing). 'Well if you work in the NHS long enough you do see these things come round, come in, come out – then come back again'; she said this with a laugh, part coping mechanism assuredly, part self-mockery at her own longevity, but perhaps also in part, laughing *at* management?

It would be nice in some ways to leave this brief whirlwind tour of primary care there, with the nurses laughing and joking and having the last word. However, it was Friday afternoon, so another committee (to do with Urban Town provision of care for the elderly) was scheduled from 2.30 – 5.30pm. The last word would go to the managers, administrators, and GPs. Hailey was very keen that this would be the researcher's last

chance to see a consultant, without which sighting, she still implied, deference could not be understood in the NHS.

#### **9.4.6.1 Interpretation of Scene VI – meeting to restructure community nurses**

One theme of several scenes has been the use of different words by different groups (e.g. the GP in scene IV who bypassed discussing a new procedure for GPs, speaking instead of guidelines). Here Hailey, who appeared to display great sensitivity to people and appeared popular and respected, just could not hear ‘teamwork’ in the nurses uses of peer pressure. Granovetter (1973) wrote of the role of personal relations and structures in generating trust and discouraging malfeasance. Here Hailey’s interpretation of team comes closer to a process of commodifying inter-professional and personal relations to become a tool of management interests (i.e. provide something that fits management’s need for predictability, control and an audit trail).

During the meeting the nurses lack of faith or trust in management was self evident, half the confrontation of the meeting was generated by the way their diagram (which none of them queried) did not conform to the way someone from a management background (including the researcher) would interpret it. Not taking slides seriously begs the question what then did the nurses use as core co-ordinating values if not management?

In the account of the scene the nurses’ sense of self worth has been stressed, there was a rugged feeling to their self-confidence. They had seen life come and go and would not be bamboozled by any flash demonstration of the latest in management thinking (though they would have had to go along with it). It was humorous that although they all knew the diagram (a slide) that was their presentation of their proposed structure was misleading, they did not say so. They did not appreciate that Hailey (and the researcher)

would interpret a slide literally, so that showing two persons in a proposed structure side by side suggested, in fact downright stated, that they were going to be equals.

This confidence in their worth might be reflected in the apparent absence of turf wars between the three types of community nurses. There were no visible signs of demarcation disputes or of one set of nurses being superior or better trained than another; they appeared to treat each other as equals. This confidence above all showed in their readiness to discuss 'bad practice'.

One further issue that links work practices, deference and method is that in this meeting deference to age / experience was shown. These nurses consciously quietened down when mature nurses spoke, the experience of these women appeared valued, which could even be expressed as strongly as their experience was 'treasured'. It is suggested that such perspectives are not common in management research, where employees can be seen as interchangeable; and as treating each other as interchangeable. There was far more mutual respect in this room than the researcher, steeped in management literature, would have anticipated.

In chapter 1, it was stated that management descriptions of midwives' knowledge as 'tacit' knowledge, is banal, political and patronising. The sheer respect these women showed for their craft is understandable in management terms, their respect for their 'elders', for those amongst them with the most experience suggests that there is a quality to their knowledge that is not captured in 'tacit'.

Leaving the meeting Hailey said 'You did realise the significance of what they said about the current organisation set up of team leaders being no good; that it was because they are all G grades already?' She explained that in West County the team leaders were G grades too, but that all other nurses were below that (i.e. paid less). She had inherited a

structure where all the nurses were already G grades *i.e.* without the extra responsibilities of team leader - they were higher paid than their colleagues in West County – except those that had team leader responsibilities.

Presciently, Van Maanen (1979:543) comments upon mistaking presentational (what actors want you to see) data for operational (what is unprepared, unadulterated, what is really going on) data. Thus courting the danger of ‘merely parroting back the normative abstractions (presentational data) used by members of the studied group to both describe and account for their behavior’. Van Maanen continued ‘Events bearing on an individual’s behavior are often quite literally hidden from view’ (*ibid.* 544).

On such a short observation there is not the volume, and most importantly the longitudinal evidence here to come down on either side of the issue of nurses pay here. Nor as to how much being a small business impacts upon GPs actions, or other issues that have been raised. Except in one respect, and that is to dispute any ‘ideological’ interpretation of the health sector, where for example GPs might be portrayed as heroes, nurses as angels, and administrators and managers as unprincipled carpetbaggers.

#### 9.4.7 Scene VII, A Gothic Community Hospital

*The Friday traffic had been appalling. The meeting room was up a series of fire escape staircases in a building that Hammer Horrors would have been happy to use. Entering the meeting (Hailey was late as ever, delayed by the nurses of scene VI and the traffic) all hope of an early finish or even an on time finish drained from the researcher. There were nineteen people present seated around a long table, representatives of social services, GPs, nurses, County Hall, and TWO consultants.*

The discussion in progress was whether or not the meeting was working, some said it seemed to be going nowhere (after two years), a talking shop, blown off course by vested interests every time it neared making a decision; continually commissioning more research into matters it had already researched. A decision was soon made to commission more research, then decisions could be made.

A presentation was made by a Director of Nursing, critical of 'estates driven planning'. He said that to-date Purchasing had been conceived in terms of additional buildings and additional beds. He argued that what would in future be important was not the volume of services required today, but the services likely to be required. What was needed was dependency profiles of 'who' will be able to buy 'what' care in a variety of settings. His message was that much more care would be delivered in the home or in the community, not in public 'estate' properties (and incidentally, that care would be bought by those that could afford it). The old style 'estate driven planning' was a fundamentally flawed purchasing strategy. This was the first presentation with professional slides and some thought for audience sensibilities in the week. The speaker said that the problem they faced may be as much 'unpurchasing' what we have already (buildings; beds; - capacity) as it is purchasing anew.

A social services person responded at the end. *'The issue, like it or not, is volume, the impact of offering free nursing care has to be addressed, in my experience demand is unlimited, absolutely unlimited, as soon as you provide more beds they are used up, demand is inexhaustible. This is the paradox; if you offer free nursing care the conclusion will always be that mother needs nursing care.'*

For the first time in this observation a consultant spoke.

*'Don't look at readmission rates you will never understand them. Nobody does, you are wasting your time. Re-admission rates are beyond comprehension...'*

He soon followed up with a diatribe against 'Needs analysis'. *'I say I don't see the point behind all this needs analysis – I mean what good is needs analysis anyway?...'*

If the researcher could not be sure that he upset the meeting the first time that he spoke, on the second occasion it was clear that there were discretely raised eyebrows – needs analysis being a centre-piece of care strategies, and a familiar tool in academic work. In other formats he might have been reproved; here no one did. The observer's impression was that he hung himself out to dry with nonsensical opinions that no one could be bothered to argue with – but that no one would contradict.

Finally, just before rhubarb burst through the ground beneath our feet the meeting ended. However, the post meeting discussion groups began. A doctor approached Hailey; he was now very animated (he had not been in the consortium meeting, or this one).

*'I'll tell you why we are short of beds, it's these consultants, these geriatricians. We will never find more beds whilst the only person able to release a patient is the geriatrician and they only come round once a week, so beds can only be freed up once a week, it's scandalous'.*

Hailey *'So why are you telling me now, why didn't you say that at the meeting?'*

No response.

*Why don't you tell him? – points at Man prominent at the meeting – he employs them, he has some control over them I don't...*

GP *Well, hmmm, maybe I should, hmmm ....* GP wanders in general direction of Man, who is admittedly in conversation – then out of the door and home.

Did he go flaky or was it by now 5.45pm on a Friday (and the traffic is awful)?

#### 9.4.7.1 Interpretation of Scene V11 - A Gothic Community Hospital

The setting of a labyrinth like Gothic hospital could not have been better for a meeting that had a mixture of the speed of the processes of the law in Dicken's Bleak House coupled with the spirit of innovation of Peake's Gormenghast.

Deferential behaviour includes allowing the super-ordinate to make fools of themselves, without their definition of the exchange being challenged. Deference throughout has been described as so subtle as to be hard to capture, it can also of course be blatant, unsubtle – obvious.

By rubbishing both the study of re-admission rates (admittedly a very difficult process) and also 'needs analysis' the consultant, like the other clinicians observed, presages the clinical interaction component of health care provision. His comments take a side-swipe against management tools and techniques, the kinds of processes that might undermine consultants apparent hegemony.

Then there was the outraged GP who once the meeting had finished, blamed consultants for the lack of hospital beds for the elderly. His comment, if accurate, was surely the sort of issue the meeting ought to have been discussing (and one which they could have addressed without commissioning research). He was not alone in his silence though, there were other GPs present, including the 'strong personality' of scene V, who had criticised 'old style big consultants'.

Deference here is not clothes, language, posture, titles, entrances or exits. It is the ability to prevent subjects being raised, to continue in a well trodden path, and to resist innovation and improvement. From another perspective such actions could be interpreted as the maintenance of 'clinical' perspectives in the face of a rising tide of 'fad-driven

management-ism'. If GPs were for example to challenge this system, it would be the start of questions about their own roles in the process.

In a similar vein another issue remains with the researcher from that meeting. To walk late into a large meeting that is well in progress requires some confidence and assertiveness, to immediately interrupt and put forward an opinion contradicting that of the current speaker even more so. That Hailey did so, and seemed to be encouraged to speak out appeared to reflect how highly she was regarded. However, when the topic was whether or not to commission more research Hailey very loudly and clearly said that the previous research by the suggested research company 'was absolute rubbish' 'wasn't worth printing or reading' – and no-one appeared to hear her. Same women, same standing, same assertiveness – but suddenly she was not given the floor as it were, no one heard her remarks – though the researcher could not see signs of people disagreeing with her. Further research would be commissioned from exactly the same people as last time.

## 9.5 Conclusions

*"Some of the old style practices, old style demarcations between professions, uncollaborative ways of working must go".*

The Prime Minister, The Right Honourable Tony Blair, Speech to the Royal College of Surgeons, London, 17-10-2000

*'It is the literature of management that often emerges as naked, since much of what it says becomes transparent when held up to the scrutiny of descriptive research'.*

Mintzberg (1979:583)



There is a bond between nurses, doctors and consultants forged through working in a specialised field with momentous responsibilities, both ethical and practical. At the same time each grouping has differing socialisation processes, economic prospects and space reserved in the hierarchy. No examples of nurses criticising doctors over deference are presented here (reflecting the research setting, management convened meetings), but surely these would not be too hard to find. There are examples of GPs being critical of consultants' imperious ways. In the final meeting presented here, there is a very damning – all the more so because Hailey throughout had been able to predict it – example of the worst of deference from a GP to consultants.

One of the most striking aspects is how each level appears to identify the behaviour in the next level up, but not in their own field. Take for example the GPs present when even discussing extending GPs hours was kicked into touch. These same individuals were apparently also present when one 'colleague' publicly thought through and rejected the core care in the community (at least with regard to the elderly) strategies of the whole PCG structure. There is a link between the discussion in 10.2.2. of how participants appeared more ready to see previous roles as funny, peculiar and perhaps more full of irony, than their current roles.

Throughout there have been examples of deference, and also a lack of concern for, or knowledge of, management. Beyond a lack of respect for management, (e.g. in the foolish comments of the consultant above), there is also a lack of competency at it. For example, the Director (scene I), who wrote such a weak audit – what is his or her justification for such poor managerial skills – that they are a health professional not a manager presumably? There have been many examples of a complete lack of appreciation – or a sense of

sensitivity towards – those working on the management side.

It cannot be brushed aside as it often is in operations management literature (Knights & McCabe, 1999:218) as a (mere) “communication” problem. There is obviously some very good – profession to profession communication – but that is how it appears to be organised, profession to profession (internal), profession to ‘management’, but never formal acknowledgement of the need for management to professional communication.

The suggestion is that what has been observed as deferential behaviour in these scenes is both wasteful, and conservative. In this real ‘world’ purchasing environment, deference was most often what was *not* said, what was not challenged or mocked. What is raised is a more complex, more mutual relationship between ‘management’ purchasing decisions (and management generally) and their adoption on the ‘shop floor’.

All the issues raised in this piece of research cannot be dealt with here. The difficulties involved in trying to purchase services for local consumption have been raised; travel time is one of the easier issues to tackle. Langfred’s comment (2000: 581) may be an understatement. ‘.. autonomy at the individual level may conflict with autonomy at the group level, producing countervailing influence on the cohesiveness and, indirectly, effectiveness of the work group’.

Communication is via profession not management, management has done itself no favours associating itself with initiatives such as a conception of teamwork that ignores peer pressures, and can be outlived by keeping your head down and waiting for the next initiative to replace it. The NHS ethic did not appear inclusive of the management side. There were instances of the emerging influence of a statutory framework impinging upon traditional deference e.g. the growth of the threat of lawsuits. The management side appeared totally unconcerned with the rising fear of litigation (or professional grievance)

issues.

'Flow' the new buzzword of operations is interrupted by 8-hour day GP surgeries and once a week geriatricians visits to hospitals desperate to free up beds in time for the 'winter rush'. However, these are the visible interruptions to flow, the imperceptible hurdles are those created by the hand-over between professions – in this observation GP to consultant, but it could be implied and supported by other literatures (Edelman, 1974) also perhaps from nurse to doctor.

Similarly entrances and exits where not of the consequence anticipated. On reflection this accords with Thompson's (1991) views on the show put on by those in Georgian England who expected to be deferred to - the element of theatricality they put into their clothes, wigs and postures. It enabled them not to have to demonstrate (and therefore risk) the very power bases that supported their position. In the NHS and modern purchasing situations 'power' is often so entrenched that such daily 'acting' even the wearing of identifying clothes (white coats) is unnecessary as a part of the deference relationship. Presentation issues were likely to be less important in an environment of frequent and close (as in sharing a meeting room) contact. Control of: the agenda, of who does audits, of how a document is to be construed, and of language is more important. Physical locations can offer enough buttresses to medical dominance.

In this style of research - a real purchasing setting, participants are seen as more spontaneous - yet paradoxically the issues are much more trailed, more discussed, over longer periods of time, than an account based purely upon the accounts of chapter 8 would have suggested. Humour, boredom, avalanches of acronyms, over talking, stupidity ('wish I hadn't said that'), are all mixed up with strategy, ambition and thinking about the traffic. Meetings and decisions can be swung on who feels like pushing for something on the day,

and on absences. Intelligent people will often say something stupid – and part of deference can be not pointing it out or challenging it (Goffman's face saving).

In a small scene within scene V, not presented here, some local health promotion workers described the NHS Plan as being about 'superiority of document'. The suggestion has been from chapter 2 on, that documents play a larger role in inter-organisational deference than has been ascribed to them so far in this thesis – perhaps because in traditional forms of deferential encounter there were no documents.

Some research accounts present nurses and doctors as working with heroic disinterest on behalf of patients and GPs made saintly by the Hippocratic oath (see chapter 3). Others give a view of the health service as staffed by dispassionate and compassionate experts – beset by a class of carpet bagging opportunist administrators.

Such interpretations cannot be supported by what was observed. The PCGs do not have the reporting structure, information, staff cover, or truly 'independent' audits of performance. They are at such a resource disadvantage (and at the time of observation in such insecure positions) compared to the hospitals, GPs and consultants. Far more importantly, this study has shown that the purchasing process is marginalised at the expense of a model that presages face-to-face clinical intervention. There are examples in these scenes where it is the maligned 'professional / administrator' who is the person to stand up for those unable to stand up for themselves. With regard to deference, this attributing of perfection to hospitals, consultants, GPs and nurses, is not in patients' interests.

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<sup>1</sup> In the NHS plan Primary Care workers such as Hailey are referred to as 'other health professionals'.

<sup>2</sup> Another related aspect is the networking structure of the PCGs. In the work that is emerging on 'Purchasing networks' it does not appear to be made clear that with the commitment to the network 'form' comes a responsibility to be available, this theme is not pursued here.

<sup>3</sup> [To] enable 50,000 more people to live independently at home through additional home care and other support. In addition, 50% more people will benefit from community equipment services (assistive technology) ranging from simple care equipment and adaptations, like grab rails and pressure relief mattresses, to more sophisticated devices such as fall alarms and remote sensor devices NHS plan, p126.

<sup>4</sup> Hailey made a half comment that the issue of GP neutrality was to be addressed when the new Primary Care Trust boards were set up.

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**Chapter 10: Interpretation**

<i>Part Three- Conclusions derived and how they both link with, and add to, existing knowledge</i>	
<b>10. Interpretation of findings</b>	<b>Interpretation of Findings/Themes</b>
11. Conclusions	What was discovered issue by issue, the contribution to knowledge

**10 Purpose**

Part One of the thesis discussed what others have written about some of the key issues identified and suggested less explored issues to examine. Part Two described how the data was collected, what the data are and what interpretations are placed upon the data. Finally then in Part Three it is time to present conclusions about the interpretations and to state how these interpretations both link to, and add to, existing knowledge. Specifically this Chapter seeks to induce explanations based upon all the data, using the research issues as a structure.

**10.1 Introduction**

This study has been of roles within [UK] ‘white collar’ office environments, hence the politeness and manners found are a measure in some respect of those environments. Such environments do not replicate the hierarchical relations found in manual work environments. White collar workers have frequent and multiple interactions with authority figures, which may not have been historically true of manual work environments; naked hostility or antagonism might not be expected.

**10.1.1 Caveats – Let the reader beware**

Before introducing conclusions designed to knit together themes, a health warning should be placed upon any data. Boje (1991: 110) comments that: ‘Only in the rare instance in which the storyteller is faced with a researcher or a new applicant is he or she likely to tell

the whole story, since much of the detail of the story cannot be safely assumed to be recreatable in the novice's imagination'. The point being extracted here from Boje is not about stories *per se*, but the implication that if you were not *there*, if you did not *do* that job yourself - then you can never completely "know".

One support for Boje's viewpoint, and the caveat here, is that whilst the researcher can see and indulge in irony, there was usually a lack of self awareness on the part of participants, participants took themselves seriously, something probably encouraged by the presence of a 'researcher'. It was not a sample of pompous people, in fact I would be taking myself too seriously to fail to point that out. In the accounts of previous happenings, previous jobs, there is the gently mocking, ironic humour of 'you wouldn't believe what we used to get up to'. But the idea that one day, in the same way, participants would be describing their current roles in such terms did not appear. Previous roles were 'funny peculiar' but not their current ones – not presented to a university researcher anyway. Certainly supply academic material appears to share or possibly reflect such a lack of irony.

Using deference as a means of approaching purchasing work sensitises one to when viewpoints actually express support for frameworks laid down by dominant elites. It must be noted that research is not a virgin birth, there has been prior input from the research community in terms of norms, standards, formats, and perhaps most invisible of all, 'shaping' of subsequent written output. Chapter 6 identified the research data collection issues that surround a diffuse but 'subtle and ubiquitous' phenomenon such as deference; its invisibility. Researchers in many (most) research approaches make themselves invisible, in some approaches if a topic is not raised, it is assumed irrelevant. Ideologies can be so dominant that the ideology itself can appear (disappear?) to be invisible. 'Work' that is not observed can be subject to assumptions that are not questioned. Management research in the main does not dwell upon (or publish) what workers actually 'do' when they work – (sometimes because it is mundane) however, real behaviours could become invisible.

In the accounts of Chapter 8, narratives such as *Curve ball* and *Cheating 1 and 2* describe recognisable examples of what happens between customer and supplier development teams; bizarre ritual exchanges the essential emptiness of which neither side acknowledges. What comes across is not an intrusive all-controlling [Foucauldian] disciplinary mechanism but how two parties disunited by role (customer and supplier) come together to tacitly agree a new definition of how this system will be made to work. Some of the health scenes observed in Chapter 9 appear almost comic in their lack of self awareness (meetings that discuss whether or not they are fulfilling any purpose and then agree to meet to define their purpose). But it is often the task, the work situation itself, the system and the contingencies that arise from it that forces out into the open discrepancies that cause humour.

In one sense then in the pluralist 21<sup>st</sup> century the purchasing worlds presented in this thesis seem to continue the restraint, the stiff upper lip, 'the show must go on' qualities associated with the Britain of the 1950s. The research presented continually comes back to presenting workers struggling to maintain appearances, maintain systems, maintain procedures, relationships, even structures that do not perform in the way they are meant to.

The lack of contemporary irony - the way that those described in these pages do not have the knowing "hip" self awareness of the American sit-com characters they go home to watch after work is a sign of a strange conclusion. What is most surprising in these 'anything goes times', 'the end of history', 'the end of hierarchy' and of course 'the end of deference' – time, is the amazing solidarity in support of keeping up appearances, repairing irrevocably flawed systems, 'sucking up' and generally making do and mending, that these characters apparently willing perform.

Perhaps the biggest ideology then is that imposed by management research, when it suggests that management is more coherent, more organised and above all, more important, than it actually is to the people who perform it/within it. Shockingly, there appear to be



more important things than management. The strength of community analysed here suggests individuals may have other non-work related communities in their lives to whom or to which, they dedicate their best efforts. The most interesting thing about the nurses meeting to discuss a new 'management structure' in Chapter 9 is that they appear, on a daily basis, to have nothing to do with 'management'. They strikingly and consciously reject the management imposed teams, they prefer the co-ordination that comes through their peer-to-peer socialised co-ordination. Nothing exposes ideology for what it is more than refusing to acknowledge it, ideology can withstand opposition but the process of being ignored exposes its foundations which is what ideologies cannot withstand - hence the brutality and heavy handedness of ideological dictatorships to the simplest act of non compliance (Havel 1985).

In Chapter 9 the Consultants who don't want to work in down market Urban town, the GPs who chase immunisation programmes, the nurses who (disingenuously?) seek better pay than their counterparts in the other side of the county, all reflect individuals chasing rewards. Perhaps most startling to me has been seeing GPs as financially motivated, Dent's audit model (9.4.2) is an analysis that links the apparent creation of a value free 'system', with the motives and individual preferences of a group (Consultants). The work described here is not performed for fun, or usually out of fear of the breadline, it is important to remember in discussing 'real work' that it results in, and is performed for, 'real money', real rewards. The issue is that removing the aspect of worker motivation appears also to be part of presenting work as technical and non constitutive, this aspect of presenting work seems to give 'management' as a function and as an academic discourse, more authority or legitimacy.

### 10.2.1 First research issue

**Both academics and practitioners increasingly present purchasing activity as a ‘profession’ performed by ‘professionals’ rather than a ‘practice’ performed by ‘practitioners’. Given that purchasing began as a clerical, applied, and entirely practical ‘job’, how closely does practitioner work resemble the theory driven treatments of purchasing?**

The image of purchasing work that emerged from the end of Chapter 4 was of a new global logic (supply chains, possibly supply networks) cutting a rational and rationalising swathe through inefficiencies at inter-firm interfaces. Purchasing was a key driver for change, for a new order, for closer integration and for creating cross functional team working *across* organisational boundaries. The following sections identify areas where the words and actions of purchasing work did not match the appearances suggested by academic portrayals.

#### 10.2.1.1 Documents

‘Documentation’ – physical, tangible paperwork, weave through out the data, academic accounts tend to play down or ignore (Chapter 4) the continuing role paperwork, ‘hard copy’, still plays in office work, not just purchasing. (Ironically it is the spiral bound hard back NHS plan - a must for all ambitious NHS related personnel’s equivalent of a coffee table - which is seeking to change the NHS. ACARCO appear unable to do anything without a written process).

The continuing appearance of paperwork undercuts the ‘strategic’ orientation of much purchasing literature, in *Today Now!* when purchasing are overwhelmed, sales help out processing orders. *Meddling and Rooting* features stealing a glance at the Buyer’s paperwork, *The Letter* is a standard document, and *Making life easy* could be interpreted as

a plea to reduce paperwork. Scene 9.4.1 starts with a ‘ceremonial exchange of paperwork’ and then revolves around interpretation of a report (or is it a letter?). The physical manifestation of the letter was vital here, the meeting took place with a copy of that letter / report in front of everyone. By excluding the ‘presence’ of paperwork academic accounts can only present a dis-embodied, de-contextualised account of purchasing work.

Two further documents appear in the purchasing work examined here: cheques and budgets. Although due to automated invoice settlement systems cheque sign off can not always be referred to as paperwork, it is a parallel example. The parallel is that although academic accounts take all the cheque paying status out of purchasing work – (all that nasty and degrading contact with money as opposed to theory) - yet buyers always know *exactly* their spend with a supplier, and are not shy of reminding them. In the world of purchasing work seen in Chapters 8 and 9, money, payment, costs, spend, discounts, percentages, turnover all the various ways of describing cash flows are ever present (*Glamorous, Whats the benefit to us?, the magical number is 7%, Meddling and Rooting*) – deals are in process, not for supply chain glory or strategic vision but to reduce costs 5% or increase margins by 2%.

In Chapter 9 Hailey never appears to mention – and thereby associate herself with – money, but she knew the nurses’ grades and salary scales in scene 5, she was aware of the doctors financial motives in chasing immunisation programmes. It does not come across so much in the scenes selected but Hailey’s work world is dominated by budgets – she is first seen in scene 1 accompanied by her finance manager. The local consortium purchasing forum (scene IV) refers to budget shortfalls for child care, pathology / radiology, and to the sudden appearance of an extra winter provision for the elderly, to there being budget available for ECG machines (scene IV) and more pcs in their practices. Even the non-management oriented nurses of scene VII equate meaningful power with having budget

responsibility. The problem of scene IIIb is to align what each individual authority has in its budget for distribution of care in the home aids, with some form of central provision.

### **10.2.1.2 Continuity**

The dominant quality of the work described in both sets of fieldwork has actually been its continuity. If there is one outstanding difference between the work portrayed here and that of the academic world it is that the work seen here is embedded, situated, and on-going. It does not 'start' in the way purchasing case descriptions (or prescriptions) tend to, for Urban Town PCG the contracts are in place with time left to run, the Hospital / supplier can feel confident, even smug.

Buyers have to throw curve balls to restore the attention and alertness of suppliers who know they have the business. The work itself is full of niggling queries that relate back in time, unpaid or missing invoices, engaged phone calls; the kinds of problems which (although often by no means major or challenging) cannot be simply dealt with and have to be left running, kept in the in-tray, to be returned to again and again. In the opening scene of the observation the PCG is shown trying to enforce qualitative standards within an existing mid term contract – this form of on-going, embedded problem is not the transformative work that the purchasing literature tackles, where revolution is always a (quick) 'fix'.

### **10.2.1.3 Context**

Chapter 8 summarised the behaviours involved in the work described in the various accounts (8.4). The tables do not give a positive impression; at heart, the issue is that no underlying body of knowledge is involved, the tables present buyers' decisions and work as contingent, pragmatic, and very often ambiguous to the point of dishonesty.

This contrasts strongly with the centrality of a body of knowledge to the sense of Professionalism presented in Chapter 3.

#### **10.3.1.4 Knowledge, skills, competencies**

The issue of whether buying skills are being codified and commodified is tackled in research issue 3. The prevalence of what has been described as cheating is tackled in issue 2, the focus here is only on the nature of the work as it compares to academic portrayals. In fact the knowledge, skills and competencies that are displayed are those that relate to dealing with contingencies (known and unknown: risk), pragmatism and realism. These are forms of skills and knowledges that in fact only exist within a specific context. Taking away that context and replacing it with an ahistorical, unspecific one – as it is being argued here the academic treatment of purchasing work does – means that those knowledges and skills no longer have a place or a value, they are marginalised.

Context here is taken to include an appreciation and understanding of the role of the past, of legacies (a supplier may have been very helpful in a previous tough phase). In Scene IIIb social services wait patiently in a lobby for Hailey, as based upon previous work they ‘trust’ her, or believe she will be influential and proactive. Just as continuity has been stressed, knowledge in the accounts and observation is often of what has worked or not worked before, not text book versions of knowledge, but knowledge in textures. (Of course one can over proselytise, performing a version of Braverman’s rosy eyed view of craft manual labour as entirely soul enriching and spiritual). The argument here is not that a textured purchasing is “better”, but that without appreciating the context of the actual work (as opposed to a desiccated, ‘strategic’ judgement of it) one cannot understand – and therefore even attempt to make an accurate account of the value of the work. In essence then, academic accounts tend to validate the portrayal of work that is deemed important to

them, whereas redefining the work in terms of for example context, then the work is validated (or not) differently.

In terms of the strategic pronouncements criticised earlier, those who make such proclamations seem highly divorced from those in the front line. Taking the same line from an academic perspective suggests that a similar divorce (or worse, really a jettisoning) of concern with the actual work being done, in favour of debate about how it might, or could, or should be done. Such an interpretation suggests very little connection between the mass of practitioners and the academics who claim to write about the work that they do. It raises the question that if academics are not interested in the work of (purchasing) practitioners then who or what is the audience for their output? One suggested interpretation is that there is very little connection between the output expected of the majority of academics who write about purchasing and the actual practice of purchasing.

#### **10.3.1.5 Cheating, lying, friendship acting, etc.**

The significance of Cheating is dealt with at length in issue 2, what is discussed relates to how it forms part of the work. Cheating is taken to be behaviour contrary to implicit and explicit rules, in which sense it has to be a conscious act; to cheat the actor has to be aware that there are rules or norms, and therefore, that they are adapting them. Occasions are recorded here where 'cheating' is necessary to do the job, however such necessary work appears unacknowledged.

Earlier Webster & Wind (1972) were cited as stressing the kind of iterative (as opposed to serial) and oral (as opposed to codified) activities that could have developed a purchasing profession with a higher profile. More recently management academics have downplayed these and other tacit, embedded, socialised, skills in favour of portraying purchasing as a purely technical problem solving activity, where things can be achieved without co-operation. Examples have been presented where purchasing even lacks

vocabulary for its activities (the two most prominent examples refer to 'geeing up' an already ensconced supplier; *Curve Ball* and Scene 9.1), purchasing does not give Hailey a vocabulary to deal with her real issues. Purchasing academics have not built up understanding from the base line of the actual work, but from looking down upon the work with a 'strategic lens'. That strategic focus prevents the work with its continuity, politics, and 'messiness' (including its localness, such work is geographically located) appearing as anything but technical. Hence also the disparities between detailed objective measurement systems and the subjective behaviours presented.

### 10.2.2 Second research issue

**The literature review of Chapter 4 suggested that the purchasing/supply academic literature effectively gave a sanitised depiction of purchasing work. How do buyers themselves present their work? Do practitioners sanitise their work? How do they deal with issues such as cheating, friendships, reciprocation? What does the answer tell us about how purchasing is presented?**

How do purchasers see themselves going about their work? This section suggests four ways that they cope through 1) working with a sense of decorum and decency that is not portrayed in academic accounts (some might argue that such things can be assumed), nevertheless their 'disappearance' from accounts of the work has the effect of making the work seem that much more dispassionate and technical 2) Friendship, reciprocation, cheating 3) a profound sense of community in the face of capitalist structures and capitalist relationships 4) Not talking about issues - such as the fragility of their own positions, and that much of their work is often the 'unimportant, non-critical' decision making, where they are left to in effect pick up the pieces and implement something strange, short term, unpopular, *etc.* The best response to issue 2 seems to be that the buyers and sales people of

Chapters 8 and 9 seem to see themselves as part of a community rather than a market, as part of something local rather than global. Which means that the way they appear to treat each other in fact mimics local rather than global cultures, hence the decorum, politeness and reciprocation,

The data presented here does not contain outright resignation, despair, contempt, *etc*, it may well be that university led research can often become sucked into reporting the blander sides of organisational life – cries for help should not be expected perhaps. In part however the line is taken here that one would expect those going into work Monday to Friday, to see a continuity in events that mitigates against both triumph and despair.

#### **10.2.2.1 Local not global.**

Only one buyer felt 'dreadful' and that was because of having a feeling of responsibility to local (small) suppliers, whom volume reductions might finish. She was local herself, like several of the buyers, with strong local attachments. It is taken as one of the most significant utterances of the accounts that this particular buyer should have spoken in Bowling at your feet of going 'out into the market place'. In fact all three of her accounts reported in Chapter 8 build upon quite the opposite of a market – where identities and histories are unimportant and price is everything. As Gabriel and Lang, (1995:68) have pointed out, markets are not friendly places, they are unfamiliar, exciting, and dangerous - but also opportunistic - which by implication these buyers are not. That actors within management research may have profound connections to their locale is often understated.

In Chapter 9 Hailey is not dealing at all with a market – whatever the NHS Plan says, - local PCGs have to buy from the local hospitals, it would be extraordinarily difficult to do otherwise. The market is effectively the parish, it is typical of the parochial world of purchasing work portrayed here. In the rail infrastructure industry 'local' means national



but a uniting sense of ‘rail’ fashions a community out of those who supply Railtrack, communities can also be defined in terms of who they exclude, as *The Letter* explores. The approach is to deal with people (not organisations) that the buyer has known of for a long time. This may be less apparent in the car industry data (although the first three accounts mentioned above are all car industry) but it is there in *The Kicking*, where a sense of ‘us’ is created a little bizarrely, through the customer rollicking the salesperson. There is the community collusion in *Cheating 1 and 2*, the poignant angst of the buyer who does not want to deal with the fact that the Germans will not ‘join in’ (*Don’t mention the Germans.*) The sense of responsibility to a community (however dispersed) that includes peers, rivals and the ‘other team’ comes out strongly in the unexpected – to the researcher – politeness and decorum of the purchasing work.

#### 10.2.2.2 Decorum and politeness

*The Curve Ball* could be said to include ‘bad manners’, the abrupt ‘blinking’ of the supplier, however, the lack of civility is in the form of a sanction, a desire to have the supplier ‘return’ to form behaviours or attitudes, not create new ones. There is still therefore a sense of decorum, of wanting to have non contractual obligations restored. ‘*Credibility*’ links this story and the next which has that title. Both Buyers speaking in widely different contexts, in passing, vocalise that a part of what they require to do their job effectively is credibility – one with a customer, one with a supplier. Credibility is not a common word in accounts that describe system capabilities; it is a particularly intimate, instinctive and personal phrase.

The people who contributed the data are not unaware that they are on a par with the people they deal with – there is the collegiate quality that comes from being in the same industry. Aware without articulating it that the fate of the sector for good or bad will impact on both buyer and seller, and possibly that given personal commitment to an industry that

there is a chance of one's CV ending up one day on that person's desk - the point where personal relations negate market features (Williamson, 1985). In Chapter 9 the precariousness of all the PCGs and those they work with, who have had countless 'reorganisations' in the past, is tangible. As is the position of some of the sales people, but this is never mentioned - out of deference to everyone's feelings, and yet the rhetoric that surrounds them is of long term relationships and partnerships.

Early purchasing work identified that marketing personnel gave psychic rewards to buyers. It has been suggested that increasingly in supply much of the psychic rewards is identity confirmation and involves confirming (or appearing to confirm) the 'professional' – partnership/supply chain/ network purchasing - stance of the buyer or buying organisation. It can also be a conduit for individuals expressing more care and concern about relationships in their working lives than management material usually allows. Deference is part of the individual's subjectivity, and it has been argued that it is the usual denial of subjectivity in the purchasing literature that denies the presence of deference, emotion, community *etc.* 'Management' by presenting all the actors as equals and equivalents is making a significant political decision by ruling out the base line motive for action – that those who stand to gain most by a particular decision or approach will support that decision or approach. Certainly the nurses themselves (given the power of being a group or crowd) were not shy of speculating on Haileys's motives for example – it does happen.

#### **10.2.2.1 Friendship, Reciprocation & Cheating in general.**

Chapter 4 identified friendship as a factor in supply relationships. After *The Kicking*, customer and supplier get on like a house on fire. In *He cheated!* it is a friendship that reveals the deception in asking the supplier to quote for a job they would never get, *Loneliness and paranoia* is about life on the road without friendship and the sustenance it provides. In Scene 9.4.4. the GP sees no need for change as he is good friends with the only

good geriatric consultant in the area. In the PCGs the ability to reciprocate, to horse trade, is vital, their inability to proffer long term reciprocation with the hospitals and service providers is a huge flaw in their bargaining position.

In terms of the cheating behaviour observed, a vital caveat is to take in just how low level, how lacking in subtly, the cheating manoeuvres described are. Peering over someone's desk when they leave the office, being aware of being asked to tender with no chance of success (because your mate tells you so), this is all 'home made' and 'amateur' cheating. Most of the workers seen are actually operating from such fragile platforms, so vulnerable to new strategies, new bosses, new ideologies, so resource poor in critical aspects that such 'cheating' activities are necessary to cope, rather than indicative of any deeper meaning or function. Where there are structures with some air of permanence (ACARCO, the Supplier Hospital) they are in a position to enforce themselves through rigid insistence on rules and procedures. The examples of cheating are more the use of what is available - flexibility, opportunism in the face of the 'ponderous' advantages of some larger, more stable customers.

#### **10.2.2.4 Lets not talk about it – the risk in talking about risks**

Before moving here to discuss how purchasing workers cope with the risk inherent in their work, this section will briefly examine the career risks – expressed without euphemism as unemployment – presented. Chapter 9 is introduced with the comment that all eight Chief Executive's of Shire are having to reapply for their own jobs – and that the current eight posts goes down to six. The turnover among the sales people interviewed was startling, other accounts obliquely refer to the loss of jobs.

There is an unstated paradox through out supply chain and partnership inspired approaches, that the front line employees expected to implement them, do not themselves

have the long term job security to back up the rhetoric. The next issue tackles how buyers might feel about that, here it is just raised as something that is not raised.

Generally people did not overtly talk about their own careers – that people even have career objectives that may not accord with those of their employer is not widely acknowledged in the purchasing literature. Graduates especially may be seen as rootless carpetbaggers, with greater loyalty to developing their own career, skills, competencies, learning, rather than accepting the offered ‘career path’. This comes through in the *Two Coats story*, *Christmas Gifts* and also *7% or sit there and shut up*. In the local worlds it is argued these supply relationships inhabit, change is not transformative – and yet supply chain management is intended to over turn existing orthodoxy. But the point being made here before turning to discussing risk within the work, is that such matters were not discussed – not talked about.

Chapter 4 suggested that in becoming an organisational as opposed to a functional player, it was crucial that purchasing had to be presented as not taking risks, the management of risk instead becoming absorbed within the wider organisation. With the denial of risk taking it is argued here, out went skills of ‘acting with’, contextual and interpersonal skills; what Zuboff and Mintzberg both identified as executive work. Out too goes one route to higher status for purchasing work. Again one can see here how the IMP focus on connections between organisations (‘Companies, as all organizations, are units of interlocking behaviour, Håkansson & Snehota, 1995:192), is also not conducive to viewing purchasing in risk taking terms.

The buyers exhibit a concern with consistency rather than a one off best deal (e.g. in their distrust of the market). Chapter 9, scene VII shows how in *Provision for Elderly*, there is an intractable power of vested interests (and sunk assets - a speaker talks of the need to ‘unpurchase’ asset related care - to sell off buildings). There are such no go areas (for example the role of consultants), all combining to make the “present” a weight in support of

conservatism. Purchasing is not powerful enough to attempt such tasks, its real role is as tackling or clearing up unwanted and avoidable outcomes – *responding to what has already happened*. This is not a highly strategic role. Without power, without a true mandate, with a shifting platform from which to operate, branching out, taking risks, would be reckless.

There appears an unspoken, tacit agreement that tasks must be presented in such a way as to in the first place avoid risk - a risk minimisation strategy (for customer as well as supplier),

### 10.3.3 Third Research issue

**The latest thinking in purchasing suggests in part at least, some systemisation (for example SCM) of areas of purchasing expertise which could currently be described as tacit or ‘working with’ knowledge, or skills. Is there conflict between practitioner knowledge and ‘system’ (i.e. SCM) or ‘expert’ (here taken as in medicinal) knowledge? Do buyers exhibit any of the dissonance that might be expected if there is conflict between these approaches? Can Practitioner knowledge be differentiated from expert or system knowledge, and if so how?**

The response to this issue involves initially putting together the answers to issues 1 and 2. Firstly that there is more continuity and context in real purchasing work, and, from issue 2, that some of the skills and competencies involved in being a buyer are not given recognition in academic accounts.

However such an approach has already raised a conundrum, Chapter 4 assumed that the approaches of critical authors who had identified the ways in which modern management commodified worker expertise (drawing it was noted really upon manual work examples) would transfer to purchasing work. However to-date the thesis has concluded that the real work of purchasing is not recognised in academic versions – therefore how can

SCM (which has been seen as at least a co-creation of the academics) commodify what it does not recognise or value?

### 10.3.3.1 The commodification / de-skilling argument

ACARCO appears to take great care that everything has a written process, a standard operating procedure, writing such procedures was discussed as an important element of purchasing work. In contrast, in the account *Sit there and shut up or 7%*, the 'knowledge' was only in the manager's head, unwritten and uncoded, ARCARCO has codified or made explicit huge swathes of expertise.

In terms of what a supplier might defer to there is a clear shift, in the first story (*Sit there and shut up or 7%*) it has to be to the individual, and their oral knowledge. Whilst that individual is located within an organisation and its culture even any attempt by such an organisation to assess or measure the manager is limited by the lack of codification. The knowledge, the expertise of the manager remains enigmatic and diffuse. Whereas in the transplant knowledge appears to reside not in the individual so much as in the system they maintain and implement. As with the '7%' story the distinction is not entirely clear-cut, the individual transplant purchaser performs their duties within certain bounds of autonomy, but it appears valid none the less. The issue of how autonomous such a buyer is will be returned to, but the general distinction between the two 'era's of purchasing remains. With regard to whether Buyers have been de-skilled, repeatedly the buyers interviewed when pressed on this very issue of whether the systems and procedures they maintained meant that they were effectively interchangeable, responded that what was unique and individual about each buyer was the way they handled the personal relationships for which they were responsible. (These were primarily, the account manager/sales manager interface, but also the suppliers engineering manager or director, and internally functions such as design engineering and process engineering). There was support for this view in the complaints of

first tier suppliers at the frequency and disruptive nature of changing purchasing personnel at ARCCO.

### 10.3.2. What then is being commodified?

Given the argument that the real skills and behaviour used by purchasers are not recognised, what is being commodified? The Post-modern / late modern era is associated with pluralism, with a loss of unity and certainty, with a loss of hierarchy and centre. These are the very values which SCM seeks to (re)impose - a concern with a universal model of transferable best practice. Perhaps the real extent of “practitioner knowledge” is the ability to work within paradigms such as SCM and experts or new management ideas generally, being able to retain a way of working that suits the specific circumstances rather than a best practice, a response to dealing with variable and unstable power sources. Perhaps SCM is a response to management’s recognition then of its *inability* to control individual employees

*The Curve Ball* story was an illustration of employee dissonance, the vocabulary and tools that his SCM training gave him, did not equip him to pressure that supplier. One of his *senior* management team did not have the vocabulary to handle dealing with engineering and used the release of ‘*Screaming in the corridor*’. So then were there signs of rebellion, that is expressions of dissatisfaction? Reluctantly as it would make a simple and compelling narrative No! - there were never any signs of methodical resistance or rebellion. Thus did the employees ultimately care? The next question addresses this.

### 10.3.3 Is there conflict?

The Pareto rules says that 20% of occurrences have 80% of the major impact. In the accounts presented similarly it seems that the amount of the work of purchasing that is of interest to researchers is only at best say 20%, however practitioner knowledge works as well in the other 80%, being on going, embedded and contextualised. However part of the

value of Chapter 9's observation is to show how in a real purchasing setting, participants 'involvements' are seen as spontaneous and contingent. Whilst paradoxically, the issues they deal with, are more trailed, more subject to prior discussion, over longer periods of time, than an account based purely upon the accounts of Chapter 8 would have suggested. It may be that in the major 'set pieces' of a buyer's job, where there truly is a strategic and nearly technical decision to be made SCM or expert knowledge may have greater sway.

#### 10.3.4 SCM purchasing 'unmasked'

So far this thesis has tried to understand SCM as a new form of purchasing, replacing traditional skills and face to face interpersonal communication, as replacing understanding of risk, and, as exploitative of individual buyers. First, it has to be recalled that like any management function with a new label there will be a considerable installed based of 'old timers', people trained (probably by 'nellie') before the latest initiative. These purchasing people would be fully aware of previous struggles to gain and maintain responsibility for major purchasing decisions, to be given early and strategic involvement in new projects. In Hailey we see someone with huge purchasing responsibility working without any of the 'cachet' of SCM, indeed her 'purchasing' skills (she was formally trained after graduating as a buyer) seem to be ignored completely by the GPs. What to her was a purchasing strategy designed to deliver local care was publicly 'rubbished' by Consultants, in effect they rubbished the mission of such purchasing. It could be argued that Hailey would have had more success if she did have something like SCM to hang her policies around. In part to communicate to non management people like GPs and Consultants that these were not individual whims, or clerical actions, but a coordinated strategy aimed at obtaining best value for money for care delivered.

In order to address the third research issue it is now necessary to bring the strands of this response together, and in the process *invert* the logic adopted toward



supply chain management so far in this thesis. Instead of seeing SCM as a new imposition upon buyers, it can instead be seen as a not unwelcome response to how *unimportant* the role has been in the past. The buyers reported upon in this thesis are actually aware of how unimportant they are strategically, they have to do their work in the best way they can in the knowledge that they are more or less ignored. From this perspective it is not SCM that *uses* them, they feed off of it, riding the wave of its impact – but, *critically*, not to do something new but to do more or less what they have always done. Part of what purchasing professionals do then is to take ‘management’ and make it work, or work within it. This inverted logic casts a new light on the continuing importance of documents in purchasing. It could be that traditional, as in inter personal, oral, non verbal and risk related skills are still there (but disguised) – and that is why documentation is still needed to support how the work is still done, in spite of the rhetoric of SCM. The relationships between organisations are still so controlled by individuals that paperwork is still needed to bring consistency and the capability to replicate previous actions and courses.

#### **10.3.4 Fourth Research issue**

**The ‘critical management studies’ literature found useful earlier has consistently implied that the souls, the very subjectivity of purchasing employees would have been mis-shaped by management led concepts of ‘work’. The suggestion has been through out that management ideologies are dominant, irresistible forces that infect all they touch, crossing work/private life boundaries with ease. Does the research confirm that management ideologies (e.g. SCM) are internalised by an occupation responsible for them? Is the deference real or manufactured? Is there laughing behind the (invisible) hand?**

Such critical views of the performance of purchasing work could be seen to relate to Hochschild's (1983) work, and her argument, that the airlines insistence on tight control and standardisation of flight attendants responses, which she sees as a new development in de-skilling. 'The 'mind' of the emotion worker, the source of the ideas about what mental moves are needed to settle down an 'irate' [customer], has moved upstairs in the hierarchy so that the worker is restricted to implementing standard procedures' (1983:120). It would be possible to draw a parallel between the tight control over emotions required by the airlines taking the real 'thinking' work away from employees and embedding it in management processes, with the process driven SCM approach to Purchasing.

Much has been made of the amount of acting and personalising of the relationships that comes through in the accounts; so much has come through that is part of the 'unmanaged organisation' (Gabriel, 1993). In the observations of Chapter 9 we see corridor and hastily convened informal pre-meeting meetings of huge importance (scenes IIIa and b). Elsewhere Buyers are seen enjoying their omnipotence and sales people 'the crack', the pleasure involved in once in a while getting one over someone, of being able to turn the tables. In *Glamorous* the buyer appears seduced by glimpses of power (of 'the real world'), another buyer [*Credibility*] is pleased to have been validated in rejecting a supplier and gains 'credibility', the major customer having been 'not particularly delighted'. These are performances during which the speakers present themselves through their work: the salesperson who receives *The Kicking* is a cheery soul who bounces back; and the injury and outrage adopted by the Buyer who received *The Letter*.

The amount of 'performance' and of employees seeing (or recounting) themselves as acting has been noted, acting involves an audience. But a theatrical metaphor breaks down in two respects. Firstly, this is not a one night performance, there is not a fresh

audience each time. Secondly, the audience – in all the accounts – is always small (perhaps the largest is in *The Kicking*, where we are informed the audience was six or eight – though these numbers themselves suggest exaggeration). Another exception to the small audience rule could be seen as *Glamorous*. But intriguingly, the account says only that she ‘sat in’ on large meetings, far from stressing the large-scale and the formal, she stresses the small-scale, the intimate nature of her connections; how she regards her role is as part of a ‘community’.

Whilst the word community never appeared in the research interviews, it actually comes through very strongly in the stories. At least in this research, people did not tell speak of ‘global forces’; the accounts are local (sometimes in local accents), particular, and speak of a particular, and small-scale world. It was particularly in the part of the railway industry studied that Buyers seemed very aware of suppliers’ problems, perhaps more aware of the ties or bonds between them and their common interests, than in the automotive industry stories. A finding not unexpected given the legacy of the ‘diaspora’ of former employees of British Rail. In the car industry such sympathies were less discernible to the researcher, reflected in the less personal form of working together to make the system ‘appear’ to work,

Rather than viewing the rail industry as a monolithic and impersonal bureaucracy, the impression is that the rail ‘system’ is also in some sense a refuge; a paternalistic structure that provides protection for employees. The ACARCO network with its procedures did not appear to have the same relationships with employees; perhaps as befits a high volume, repetitive industry. Within NRAIL more personalised knowledge of the idiosyncrasies, accidents, and circumstances that can happen in an industry subject to weather, old age, and vandals, appears more valued. Many authors of a ‘critical’ persuasion have been cited in this thesis, and they have noted control and oppression at work. In the data however there emerges also support for and identification with, the work and the workplace. It is suggested this is not brain washing or false consciousness, it appears

bestowed not manipulated; perhaps in part a human need for spatial and temporal identity, for community?

Whilst the motives, philosophy and ‘world-view’ of the critical approaches remain a powerful and consistent influence upon me, I can not find support for translating their approach to working lives to the workers I studied. I suggest they underestimate the pleasure (if that is not an inexact word) from doing a job well, from being well regarded by colleagues –and from working with colleagues that one has a high regard for. Some authors of a critical persuasion have acknowledge such points, but they still me to me miss the ‘hands on’ element of doing a job well – whether digging coal or crafting a pleasing sentence in an academic piece. It is important to put across how varied such satisfactions can be as this thesis has been concerned with ‘lower to middle management’, with comparatively protected ‘office’ jobs. Thus the ‘pleasure’ or satisfaction has to come from completing work under one’s own control – not from some ideological commitment to manual work being superior and ‘meaningful’. Nothing has suggested to the researcher that the community nurses (and midwives) of Chapter 9 would take a ‘critical management studies’ any more seriously than they do conventional ‘*inverted triangle*’ management studies.

One ‘outlier’ of the research was that the Community nurses of scene VI were seen to value the contribution of older, long in the tooth colleagues, for what they had been through. However this was the only instance of such acknowledgement of ‘wisdom’. Sadly this came too late to make a major impact on the data gathering, it is suggested that much more of this ‘wisdom’ exists at work particularly in industries with some stability. Different research instruments, particularly more time spent with participants interacting might have brought out more of this. It is extremely hard to comment upon how ‘wisdom’ is transferred, as (as per chapter 6) it includes some ‘on-the-job’, embedded element. However even in the seemingly dispiriting account of 7% or *sit there and shut up*, without

overdoing the praise, there is at least a sense of 'watch how it is done' in order to learn.

(The alternative would be to read a textbook?).

A subject of salience here is evaluation, something that has received considerable attention in the critical literature. Having in this chapter to-date favoured traditional purchasing it is important to note how subject to favouritism it may have been. The issue is hard to handle when traditional purchasing research methods ignored the topic, so we are not really in a position to suggest definitively whether or not the efficient and rational world of supply chain management is more effective for practitioners than the old, deferential world of cosy relationships, '*A nod and a wink and the business is yours*'. However it is not so contentious to suggest that the pre-SCM / rational purchasing world would have had favourites, and that these would unlikely to have been 'new comers' with different accents, sexual preferences or skin colours.

The thesis has drawn upon Power's (1997) perspective, adapted from accounting to purchasing that an essential component of the SCM project is to aid cross comparability of suppliers and, it is suggested more controversially, purchasers'. Adopting Power's approach at a global level, the normative and evaluative aspects of SCM purchasing can be seen as one agent of the societal shift to remote control (as opposed to old fashioned formal hierarchy (1997:134). It is highly intriguing to suggest that this shift from peer control to remote control, from any kind of face-to-face control to system or systems control could be taken as paralleling the shift from face to-face, peer mediated communities like the nurses to some depersonalised, dehumanised and remotely controlled 'network' form. Surely a heretical suggestion at a time of the reification of networks / networking? The final research issue pursues this line further.

### **10.3.5 Fifth Research issue**

**A central assumption of the management literature reviewed here has been that organisations and employees seek ‘closeness’. Deference as one way of relating assumes a distance, a space between employer and employee, customer (person) and supplier (person). Does the managerial desire for intra and inter-organisational ‘closeness’ find expression in supply work?**

When individuals behave deferentially, they are actually creating or acknowledging space or distance between themselves and the other person or role. One of the central aspects of the interaction model of the IMP is that closeness between customer and supplier is desirable. In contrast, the critical management literature cited in chapter 4 takes the perspective that through sponsoring the ubiquitous teamwork, management is actually trying to harness the worker’s subjectivity (as well as management’s traditional concern with the body), for the good of the firm. That is, to get the objectives of the firm, and the employee closer together. From the data presented in chapters 8 and 9 neither explanation appears totally satisfactory with regard to deferential behaviour at work.

#### **10.3.5.1 Deference as a mask**

One issue of the thesis has been the relationship between what buyers actually do in their work, and how management accounts present what do they. Management accounts in purchasing, supply and operations management have been seen to present work as technical and ahistorical (as in lacking significant context). The buyers and sales people presented here however cheat, lie to their bosses as well as their suppliers, use skills to do the work that their superiors (or at least their Personnel led competence frameworks) do not appreciate. Most of all there appears to be many horizontal bonds, friendships, personal

debts and obligations, best summed up as a general commitment amongst the lower to middle management observed to 'get things done', to achieve the targets set them, without engaging in the 'strategic discourse' of the bosses (and academics). 'Getting things done' without involving the bosses or supposedly strategic ideologies such as partnerships implies not just different goals to the those at the top of the firm – but more importantly a commitment to colleagues (internal and external) that has not been recognised in the purchasing literature. Using deference may be only one way of keeping the boss away, but it is one grounded in a distance, a 'moat-like' defence against intrusion.

However where the critical management literature would identify this as resisting oppression, this thesis suggests the critical literature is refusing to see the enjoyment office employees can take out of their work interactions (not *the* work, but *working with* other people) – how much they enjoy (perhaps need? *Loneliness & Paranoia*), social bonds. (The critical literature has recognised inter-work enjoyment in studies of factory workers, but also often dismisses it as game playing to beat tedium, to ward off political activism *etc.*).

With regard to purchasing the conclusion is that organisational buying is far more 'embedded' in friendships, custom and community than management accounts allow – even where they are proselytising inter organisational teamwork. As regards to practical outcomes of this research, chapter 4 highlighted the continuing 'transformative' quality of purchasing research – the search for the next big thing. However it is concluded that even the ability to change purchasing outcomes is limited by the inability (it appears from the data here) of senior managers and supply academics to understand what the 'real' work is, and how it is performed.

For the individual buyer, on an occupational or professional level, many daily deal with the fact that they are not treated internally as a key function, and yet they are often required to support ideologically based calls for partnership and chain management. They

know that they cannot deliver on these claims (too many other functions and other organisations that do not treat purchasing as strategic are involved for a start). Many buyers will have lived through previous management mantras, from Management by Objectives on. On the one hand deferring to management initiatives is protection against a doomed personal commitment, Chapter 2 discussed deference as risk adverse, and also before I become too positive about deference, that it limits learning. On the other hand, it is a more career enhancing strategy, than 'disinterest' or outright opposition. Agree with it and it will leave you unaffected (if you can maintain the distance), some appear to suggest that in turn you affect the proselytisers.

*'One of the great revolutionary things I've learnt is how to grovel. Let people see that you're doing your best to obey their commands. Faye was up early this morning preparing her Sunday school class. She knows that's the way for a revolutionary to survive. To do stuff that people who have no notion of drugs and have never read Kerouac can understand. Don't fly in their faces with it. Don't try to browbeat them with your point of view. Like it says in the Ching, just agree with everybody and pretty soon, who you are affects who they are'* (Kesey, 1998).

Of course employee do many things other than use deference during the course of the day, and have the inconsistencies of all humans, but the view expressed here is that when they use deference, consciously or not, they are 'doing' work. The direct alternative is to assume that employees daily actions, and the firms strategic goals, are identical. The conclusion here is distinct from the of most critical management approaches. In part this is because the data is based on 'junior to middle management office workers'. But the key (and somewhat original?) contention is that where critical approaches stress the organisation's attempts to integrate the employee, they contain an implicit assumption. They do not examine their own conclusion that employees much be



*fundamentally distanced from management in the first place*, in order to need such determined, co-ordinated, and sometimes heavy handed attempts, to integrate them. This theme is pursued in the conclusions.

#### **10.3.5.2 Politeness is not closeness**

Deference is polite, I have seen and heard it where it is barely perceptible, in mutual respect, in smiles, in complicity against systems, in concern for the other's family, often expressed through small-scale rituals, even in hard-nosed supply relationships. Political ritual, Shils quipped, had been given a 'bad name' by Western intellectuals raised in utilitarian traditions. Blinded by their rational model of the political universe, these intellectuals ignore the ritual that envelops political action and political power. The ritual is still there (in modern forms), if unreported, in buyer-supplier relations; 'Perhaps the most striking aspect of this symbolic process is its taken for granted quality' (Kertzer 1997:4).

Above all I believe that the people I interviewed or met treat work life with a decorum that reflects a form of community, of 'we are all in this together'. I conclude that there is between company A, and its boundary employees, and company B, and its boundary employees, a collective space that is ignored in traditional supply accounts. For the GPs of Chapter 9 maintaining space and distance for their professional identities seems central to how they act, critical to this project is peer-to-peer evaluation and relationships. They have their own very powerful community which makes it harder for the health service to function as an integrated whole without taking into account this community. This space contains close relationships but it is another area that prevents organisations being 'close' as it mediates inter organisational closeness. In Chapter 3 Bledstein was cited as writing of the emergence of specific sites of management spaces, (the court room, the class room, the hospital). Whilst Bledstein (and Foucault) obviously

have a powerful argument, it seems in my data – which is not based on short term relationships – that the sea of connectedness is so apparent in inter organisational interfaces of the car, railway infrastructure and primary health sectors, that sites such as organisations do not have the total dominance of a Foucauldian perspective.

I have carefully used words like decorum and politeness (and complicity) and avoided ‘trust’. I do not see trust as useful in describing commercial relationships (or even communities, I do not think the word solves anything, it does not pin anything down), it suggests more commonality of aims and interests than the deference I encountered or the communities I have identified, need have. One everyday reason for deference in commercial relationships is that it does not always pay to be too close to a customer or supplier. To remove deference would involve removing the distance between buyers and suppliers – and a far greater sharing of risk than western business models provide for. Where relationships are based upon power asymmetry, deference avoids confrontation, a confrontation the significantly weaker party would always lose. There is some novelty in this suggestion in that so much management literature (especially operations management) ignores the huge power imbalances and therefore motive imbalances in some inter organisational relations. If such imbalances are ignored, then deference as a conflict avoidance strategy can be overlooked too, women appear to have known this since before time was measured.

### **10.3.5.3 Deference, Community and Networks**

The car and railway infrastructure data of this thesis shared an engagement with supply chain management, certainly the car industry, a hothouse for new trends, is beginning to look at supply in terms of networks. The health data had a much more network form (non-linear, less top down, more side to side and inter-connected relationships). Deference is associated in business with hierarchical forms, most notably

bureaucratic forms. On one level as the academic focus shifts from supply chains to supply networks (Harland, 1998) it presents networks as coherent and organised in a way that they may not be. If we took another view of networks (devoid of ideology and deference to management literatures ability to in the first place comprehend, and secondly to take ethical responsibility, then a network supply strategy in the PCGs examined, becomes a euphemism for a shabby, under resourced, under equipped, fragmented, but 'local' network. This 'local network' is left to do battle with entrenched central (government) forces, with robust permanence - hospitals, even the self interests of the heavily autonomous GPs. Repeatedly in the observation, it was the PCG Chief Executive Hailey who mentioned, stood up for, and pressed on behalf of those least able to take care of themselves. Who else was there to be concerned over the state of the wards for the mentally ill? Who else was pushing for greater sex education in schools and the wider distribution of contraceptives to prevent unwanted pregnancies? In contrast to research that tends to offer judicial impartiality to one role – in NHS related research that role may be that of doctors or nurses – here the researcher has to be wary of ascribing it to managers – they are paid to work after all.

However the issue cuts across recent developments in purchasing (and the wider management literature) concerning networks; there are a few rare voices in the network literature who have actually questioned the presumption that networks are a 'good' thing. A caution should have been sounded by how 'management' as a discipline has been shown as subject to fashion (Scarborough (1998, Scarborough and Swan 1999, Jackson 1999, Barley and Kunda 1992, Clark and Salaman. 1998).

Bureaucracy is now totally discredited; it is a phrase of reproof. However, the fashionable view - the superiority of networks and networking, throws out some inherent

balances and checks that bureaucracy, however slow, impersonal and paper based permitted. The very groups that the PCG is attempting to help are those that to rearrange Scott's (1985) analogy, are often the weak that have no weapons; stakeholder status, and customer charters, are of not use to these groups. Removing the protection (however slowly or poorly implemented) put in place by bureaucratic structures removes safeguards that function to protect those unable to protect themselves.

In this interpretation, 'networks' replacing bureaucracy becomes a threat to the weakest groups in society. Work such as Jackson's (1999) critique of the work and influence of Stephen Covey and the Effectiveness Movement, and Clark & Salaman's (1998) work on the construction of managerial identity can be used to support this view. The vogue for 'networks' and the destruction of bureaucracy can be seen as linked to selfishness, 'me-ism', and lack of concern for social bonds and fundamental responsibilities. 'Leaving it to the network' may imply an abdication of responsibility by those whose links to national and local(ised) power sources, formerly protected those with least ability to protect their own interests. Chapter 2 argued deference imposed responsibilities on the deferred to, sometimes removing deference may entail removing one bulwark for social justice.

#### **10.4 Conclusions**

Supply work, as performed and mediated by supply personnel, has been observed as far more oral and social than the literature recognises, including identity work and various ritualisations of work. A repeated theme has been that work is not all about work, for example this is seen in the general decorum of the participants in this study, work is not just a technical activity. Business-to-business relationships are much politer than acknowledged (which means employees are utilising skills and behaviours not commonly recognised in supply). Goffman wrote that; '...ritual is essential because it maintains our confidence in basic social relationships. It provides others with opportunities to affirm the legitimacy of

our position in the social structure while obliging us to do the same'. From Goffman it can be seen that individuals seek some basic level of consistency in interactions so as to be able to interact. Other writers have noted that even extreme rudeness from those in authority can be tolerated (Van Maanen, 1988, Weick, 1993), when it is consistent.

Deference is one aspect of 'invisible' social actions, it is civil, it keeps actors apart, it allows for, even encourages identity work. To these conclusions should be extracted from Goffman's observation above, that it is also concerned with social structure – but not the structure of the wider society (this is modern or derived deference) – but that of the local, the society of the inter-actants or parties. Deference has been studied in this thesis at a micro level, and can be seen as rooted in a shared notion – however ridiculous – of some form of community. Part of the theme of invisible work, is the lack of recognition at least in purchasing work of the collective, or community basis of daily work. Community is a participative word, organisations adopt the word teamwork, which whilst also participative, is in the service of the organisation; it is managerialist, which would not be a criticism, as in a defect, were it prepared to announce itself as such.

<i>Part Three- Conclusions derived and how they both link with, and add to, existing knowledge</i>	
10. Interpretation of findings	Interpretation of Findings/Themes
<b>11. Conclusions</b>	<b>What was discovered issue by issue, the contribution to knowledge</b>

## 11 Purpose

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss each research issue with the intention of highlighting what I have discovered and what that putative discovery adds to knowledge in the field of supply

### 11.1 Introduction

On research issue one I have said enough on how I have seen real purchasing work as contextual. It is worth repeating the less developed observations that work practices may involve wisdom, and also (but intimately related) thorough and valid enjoyment of performing work (and/or the work situation). Both these issues are highly relevant in that if a non contextual view is taken of work, then for example, 'change management' initiatives that alter employees work practices may damage or eradicate valuable but unrecognised practices. Conversely, improvement could be sought through better understanding of, and building upon, such a socialised view of work.

Issue two found sanitisation in the reporting of work (both practitioner and academic) and connects with the findings of the previous paragraph in that ontological and epistemological concerns seem now to me central to what is seen as work and how I attempted to examine real work. Issue three, commodification of work, revealed to me at least that the interaction between management ideologies and employees than is two way,

and perhaps less absolute than the critical literature I had read, implied. I do not now subscribe to a view of employees as solely acted upon. I do not see such a clear separation of agency, employees are active in many ways (one of which is see here as deference) that not only resist ideology, but in return shape and redefine it (management practice as 'rhetorically responsive activity', Cunliffe 2001, following Shotter, also Hales 1999 on management as negotiation). This interaction between management (ideology/discourse) and the individual, shapes my response to research issue four, on how subjectivity is affected by work. I have stressed that my 'samples' have been comparatively well off, well paid office workers, and that I have not found a straightforward translation of critical insights into subjectivity fully convincing out of a manual context. It may be that the research methods I used, as noted in Chapter one, underplay structural factors. From my findings I suggest that examining adverse impacts on 'white collar' employee subjectivity, might need to address alternative social structure issues to those co-opted from a literature derived from manual work. An alternative finding to mine is that of Hackley, (2000) who proposes that in a creative media setting a mythical 'way' of supposedly doing advertising creates a powerful and disciplinary discourse.

Issue 5 approached what I saw as an assumption in management that 'closeness' was an undeniable good. There may be a contradiction between the stress I have placed on context, and my espousal of distance, of the maintenance of some otherness, through deference. I have come to believe that a myriad of connections make up the individual's immediate work environment. (This may be one significant distinction between the analysis here, and say that based on a machine operator, who may have far fewer connections. In which case each one may be more fundamental, which could have both positives (co-workers as allies, and negatives), and negatives (management actions can have more impact). If these

connections are not recognised, then they can be destroyed with impunity, what has been destroyed can go unrecorded, a new organisation chart can replace the old. What I personally discovered was that recognising these invisible connections can involve recognising what amount to protections for those least able to protect themselves. I have arrived at a suspicion of networks and networking, in the small part of the health service I examined they appeared to me to hide social injustice and conceal the role and scope, of entrenched powers. I have less direct material to make such claims about the car industry (though the general public's views on the fragmentation of public safety in the rail network are widely known, *What's in it for us?*). However I suspect that as the vogue for supply networks takes off in the automotive industry, the exaggerated claims on behalf of, and the transformative qualities of networks, will be used in ways that satisfy the requirements of major players within established industries and networks of influence. Such networks may in fact create instability and anxiety in other areas, part of which may be a transference of social responsibility from organisational and governmental fields, to being the responsibility of the individual.

## 11.2 Transformation, Management and Purchasing

When management literature writes of inter organisational control and co-ordination, e.g. aligning the interests of supply chain partners, it assumes that control should be a) explicit, b) top down, c) subject to control d) and most importantly in this context, that it does not happen already. Chapter 9 (9.5) concluded that one aspect of the 'system' of primary care provision, is how each level appears able to identify 'undesirable' behaviour in the next level up, but not in their own field. Calls for supply chain management assume very little is being done by boundary employees (calls for supply networks, at least as I observed



in the primary care sector, similarly take no account of any value that might already exist, and be run by, individuals).

It could actually be, as I infer about primary care, that imposing more centralisation over inter organisational relationships can be dysfunctional, in that in some instances employees are dis-empowered. Certainly both the rail research participants and the wider UK general public have drawn this conclusion from the breaking down of the railway industry from a large bureaucracy into a fragmented network of competing organisations. In the 'old' British Rail, with its engineering (pride) led culture, there may have been greater employee commitment to public safety. For example, dividing responsibility for safety by say 12 (companies) may not create 12 one twelfths, of the responsibility and commitment to safety, that there was under the previous, monolithic and bureaucratic regime.

The alternative, pro-centralisation – and more common management view – is put forward by Cialdini (1993:177) who suggests that what he calls directed deference is critical to complex societies. 'A multi-layered and widely accepted system of authority confers an immense advantage upon a society. It allows the development of sophisticated structures for production of resources, trade, defence, expansion, and social control that would otherwise be impossible'. At first sight Cialdini's pro-deference but also pro-centralisation standpoint appears to contradict my own. However what I think is the real issue here is just how deeply sceptical of the capabilities or ambitions or motives of individuals such management literature is. Cialdini it would appear seems to view human beings as existing in order to be 'managed', presumably chaos would reign if there were no management.

What I found novel about the community nurses (9.4.6), and Maisie (1), was that they lived without 'academic' management (Brooks 1999 takes the opposite view, writing of the *dominance* of the managerialist paradigm within the nursing profession in the NHS. It

may be that my 'sample' is less NHS based, being community nurses). It was really striking to me that nurses from a variety of sub fields, were totally at ease with spending time discussing how to pick up bad practice. In fact their profession (and in this scene Hailey) seemed to me a little obsessed with it, but also note, they were discussing how to pick up (i.e. spot and prevent) bad practice, without any 'management' knowledge. I dwelt at length in chapter 4 on the transformative nature of purchasing research, on its whig-liberal assumption of continuous progress. I have to contrast the nurses openness with the reluctance of virtually all the purchasing literature to consider failures of poor practice – and especially to learn from them. Other management academic fields do publish occasional articles on failure, lessons learned *etc.* but the general culture of practitioners is to only talk of success and moves forward, I do not mean 'moving forward' as that includes learning from mistakes.

One aspect might be that the nurses have greater confidence in their roles, buyers have less job security to allow public airing of 'mistakes'. It may be that this inability, forced or otherwise to ever look back, is part or a contributor to, or re-inforcer of, the supply academic culture of transformative 'revolutions'. I return to the impact of unwillingness to look back or reflect on 'bad practice' below. However first I would like to bring out the differing ethical positions between that of the nurses and that described here as purchasing.

From management literature one would expect to gain understanding of the most effective ways of managing. Yet from the examples discussed above of the PCGs and rail safety this may not be the case. What I want to address here is not that management literature is not always ethical, which is not unexpected, but how it fails to address its own failings. Having highlighted how practitioners appear unable to face up to, or learn from mistakes, I have to ask myself why I half assume 'management' is itself ethical, and the answer seems to me that it so rarely admits that it isn't. Thus it seems practitioners don't want to revisit

previous experiences whilst they are written about by a management literature that has the same characteristic (but a more slightly knowing attitude to the latest fad).

One highly ethical (or at least highly conscious of ethics) school of thought is that of critical management. Chapter 10 highlighted the paradox that such approaches rail against management techniques for inflicting integration / closeness, without acknowledging that their argument appears to assume distance between employer and employee in the first place. Taking this view, one can see initiatives such as supply chain management as reactive responses rather than initiatory. If employees are quite adept at maintaining distance, or not fully aligning themselves with employer's interests, then supply chain management could be seen as the latest in an ever shriller employer attempt to capture employee's attention. Certainly this line of argument would account for the rise of such a heavy handed, almost bureaucratic form in an era of pluralism and diversity.

If one cannot look back or learn from previous errors, then it follows that every new day / work practice has to be a revelation. I was extremely struck by the Director of Nursing who spoke of the need for 'unpurchasing' (9.4.13) of fixed assets. How true that must be in so many supply situations I thought, so many times, particularly radical changes in purchasing strategy must involve 'unpurchasing' the current asset formation as well as purchasing a new set. (This may have to be a very radical change to go beyond 'switching suppliers', but it must occur). Then as I sought examples, it soon became apparent that where 'unpurchasing' exists it is done by other functions, especially accountants. Buyers have it appears to me the ideal skill set for such work – and as a profession they do not even acknowledge the need.

The lack of real progress by Purchasing seems to me to be at the heart of academic portrayals and practitioner responses to academic views. There are enough suggestions in the

data that purchasing are still only given the bits to buy that don't really, really matter. The dull parts, the commodities, parts that don't involve strategic appreciation of the business as a whole. Purchasing can be viewed as being delegated or as having to clear up, the activities that nobody else wanted, perhaps because there was so little scope to make a difference. Hailey was a trained buyer, but the provision for the elderly meeting (9.4.13) is an example of the sheer weight of inertia and conservatism that buying in a new way, or even thinking about buying in a new way, would involve. Purchasing may not be important as the process it performs is still not seen as strategic, or alternatively, the un-strategic (in the PCG example above, the unsolveable) processes are farmed out to purchasing.

### 11.3 Management. Purchasing and Epistemology

One line of argument is that deference is a form of 'false consciousness', a lack of awareness or willing to confront how oppressed, driven or manipulated a person is. However it seems to me that whilst that argument has a ring of truth, it also underplays agency and puts some form of debate, opposition, or political engagement as the defining quality of life. This it seems to me, is at the expense of other motives, principally the need for social bonds (one not addressed here would be child rearing). In fact the false consciousness argument says more to me about the person making it, and I can give two supporting arguments that sustain the general thrust of the conclusions of this work. Firstly, Collins's (1994:91) feminist viewpoint sees family, community, male and female, female and female relationships as the significant ones – whereas she believes men see significant relationships as those that involve confrontations, i.e. those relationships outside the community. Secondly I repeat a footnote from Chapter 2. 'Critical Theory is accessible only to a small group of academics devotees who ignore the contribution their own argot makes to hierarchy, empowering only those who

speak in the arcane phrases of European high theory'. ... (Agger 1991:133, cited in Alvesson & Willmott, 1996:213).

I am seeking here to link themes together, to go beyond concluding that supply management is a discourse, often ignored (or sometimes totally ignored) by people actually doing work such as buying. Using what I have learnt about epistemology I see deference as in some way distinct to the academic tradition of debate (I take the centrality of concern with debate from Agger's quotation above). The supply literature, which I have criticised throughout, does not include debate, it proposes. However the authors that I respect tend (as a huge generalisation) to adopt a view of work and reality, as contested – that is as if up to debate.

Where workers defer they are not debating, with the caveat again that workers perform many other roles than deferring in a day, it seems there may be a paradox revealed by studying deference in the nature of management literature. I have argued that work – using as a proxy supply chain management - is not as central to buyers as the academic literature assumes. Workers do not appear to want the kind of knowledge academia puts out (but which I respect and enjoy). On the other hand, where the current and rather 'unacademic' purchasing literature is normative and directive, it is actually, following my logic, more in tune with workers than what I am terming a debating or contested management literature.

Coming back full circle then to Zuboff and what is executive work and what is mere processing, highly 'academic' management material seems to be aimed at those who enjoy the 'debate' style. That is academics surely, and presumably senior management who have been exposed to degree, Masters, *etc.* courses or a maybe a certain kind of upbringing or cultural exposure. If the intention is that there will be a 'trickle down' effect as the highly abstract and referenced material is repackaged in a more accessible form then this seems a

very indirect approach to such a goal. My conclusion is that it might be a better way (not necessarily any less time consuming or costly) to start academic work firmly grounded in understanding what people, buyers, suppliers etc, actually *do*, in actual contexts. Perhaps that would ensure practitioner interest (if that is the motive) in a more meaningful way than inventing (or in Purchasing and Operations Management's case, *chasing*) the latest fad. Such an epistemological stance would connect with the stress in feminist approaches on the importance of connections, in work terms, peer to peer practices, and the recognition of wisdom.

Chapter one began with a brief description of a Material Control function at a major car plant in the early 1990s. It introduced Dean, suggesting some farcical aspects to his appearance and appearances. A fundamental link was suggested between the treadmill like nature of the work, supplying assembly lines that were ultimately indifferent, and social 'factors' like Dean, that gave the work character and characters, things to moan and gossip about, and things, however inconsequential, to look forward to.

In supply perhaps more has been written about the car industry than any other (I think this may be true of all management literature). Some of the critical approaches have ably portrayed the rapacity of assembly lines, less so the social bonds within automotive sites. I conclude that management material is poor at combining the *continuity* of work with the social performance of work. In supply, automotive pieces are written it seems to me, parachute style, the authors fly in and then out, in a manner that cannot account for the social aspects of work (good and often bad). One issue I have really had to grapple with is that so much research – including my own – inherently favours triumphs and disasters – rather than what is ongoing. The drive for 'revelations', 'cock up' led research makes (academic) headlines and neatly bounded research articles. Continuity, and the common and communal

experience of a days work that went quite well, is not what seems to attract publication, which in itself perverts reporting or commenting upon what it is that people do at work.

In Chapter 6 I made a claim to a personal commitment to an agenda of challenging (in some small way) the dominant 'research philosophy' in purchasing and supply. A year ago I could have concluded from these last two paragraphs that I believe in, see a need for more of, say stories or ethnographic research or more longitudinal studies *etc.* I now conclude that it is the epistemology that needs challenge, not the method.

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