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**EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT/ WASTED KNOWLEDGE? A CRITICAL  
INVESTIGATION OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN COMMUNITY  
SERVICES ORGANISATIONS**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from  
the Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Sydney

2006

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## DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, in the Faculty of Business and Economics of the University of Sydney, is my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. This document has not been submitted in whole, or in part, for qualifications at any other academic institution.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Chris Sykes', written over a horizontal line.

Chris Sykes

31<sup>st</sup> October 2006

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## PUBLICATIONS

### Peer reviewed publications in support of this thesis

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>DECLARATION</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>PUBLICATIONS</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>vi</b>
<b>TABLE OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>xii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>xiii</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT/WASTED KNOWLEDGE?.....	1
1.2 ORGANISATIONS, DISCOURSE AND KNOWLEDGE .....	4
1.3 THREE STUDIES.....	6
1.4 ORGANISATION OF THE THESIS.....	7
<b>CHAPTER 2 POSITIONING THE STUDIES</b> .....	<b>10</b>
2.1 MAPPING THE LANDSCAPE OF ORGANISATIONAL STUDIES.....	10
2.2 A KNOWLEDGE-BASED APPROACH TO ORGANISATION .....	13
2.2.1 What is knowledge?.....	13
2.2.2 Organisational knowledge .....	17
2.3 LANGUAGE, POWER AND DISCOURSE IN ORGANISATIONS.....	22
<b>2.3.1 Studies of organisational discourse</b> .....	<b>22</b>



2.3.2	Foucauldian influences .....	24
<b>2.4</b>	<b>MANAGERIALIST DISCOURSE .....</b>	<b>35</b>
2.4.1	What is managerialism?.....	35
2.4.2	Neoliberalism as a driver of managerialism .....	38
2.4.3	Recent intensification.....	39
<b>2.5</b>	<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>CHAPTER 3</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>RESEARCH FRAMEWORK .....</b>	<b>43</b>
3.1.1	Epistemological considerations .....	44
3.1.2	Locating this research .....	45
<b>3.2</b>	<b>PRINCIPLES OF ACTION RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>49</b>
3.2.1	Definitions .....	49
3.2.2	Third-person action research and its application.....	51
3.2.3	Credibility and validity in action research .....	55
<b>3.3</b>	<b>FIELDWORK AND RESEARCH METHODS .....</b>	<b>57</b>
3.3.1	Fieldwork as an insider .....	57
3.3.2	Reflective writing.....	57
3.3.3	Interviews.....	58
3.3.4	Document collection.....	60
3.3.5	Data management.....	60
3.3.6	Ethics/Ethical processes within the fieldwork .....	60
<b>3.4</b>	<b>DISCOURSE ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>61</b>
3.4.1	<b>Definitions, characteristics and models of discourse analysis .....</b>	<b>61</b>

3.4.2	Critical discourse analysis .....	62
3.4.3	A composite model of critical discourse analysis in this study .....	63
<b>3.5</b>	<b>SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS .....</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>CHAPTER 4 A STUDY OF LOSS OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN A</b>		
<b>LARGE COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANISATION.....</b>		
<b>69</b>		
<b>4.1</b>	<b>OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>69</b>
4.1.1	History and background of ACCS.....	70
4.1.2	The study: A regional restructure.....	72
<b>4.2</b>	<b>DATA COLLECTION METHODS.....</b>	<b>73</b>
4.2.1	Undertaking the fieldwork as an insider.....	73
4.2.2	The research process at ACCS .....	74
4.2.3	Document collection and analysis.....	74
4.2.4	Semi-structured interviews .....	75
<b>4.3</b>	<b>CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>75</b>
4.3.1	Client-focussed discourse.....	76
4.3.2	Managerialist discourse .....	79
4.3.3	A discursive shift: from client-focus to managerialism.....	85
<b>4.4</b>	<b>LOSS OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND ITS EFFECTS .....</b>	<b>87</b>
4.4.1	Loss of practice knowledge.....	87
4.4.2	Loss of situated knowledge .....	88
4.4.3	Loss of evaluations of worth .....	89
<b>4.5</b>	<b>IMPLICATIONS AND SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>91</b>

**CHAPTER 5 A STUDY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES NETWORKS AND**

**KNOWLEDGE ..... 92**

**5.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY ..... 92**

5.1.1 Organisations providing services for homeless youth ..... 93

5.1.2 An emergent, reflexive and participatory study..... 94

5.1.3 Referral processes and knowledge use ..... 95

5.1.4 Government Information Systems project: The case for Referral.doc ..... 97

**5.2 DATA COLLECTION METHODS..... 100**

**5.3 CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS..... 100**

5.3.1 Information technology and information systems ..... 100

5.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness as dominant regimes of truth..... 106

5.3.3 Privileging of corporate practices and techniques ..... 111

5.3.4 Governmentality ..... 113

5.3.5 Client-focused discourse and resistances to managerialist discourse..... 114

**5.4 DISCURSIVE SHAPING OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE .....114**

**5.5 IMPLICATIONS AND SUMMARY.....119**

**CHAPTER 6 A STUDY OF CONTRADICTIONARY ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

**IN SERVICE DELIVERY ..... 120**

**6.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY.....121**

6.1.1 Homeless children ..... 121

6.1.2 A service provider: Central Youth Services ..... 122

6.1.3 A service purchaser: Department of Family Services..... 123

6.1.4	A purchased service: State Care of Children program .....	124
6.1.5	Competing knowledges and rationalities.....	124
6.1.6	A disputed referral.....	126
<b>6.2</b>	<b>EMERGENT ACTION RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>126</b>
6.2.1	Data collection methods.....	127
<b>6.3</b>	<b>CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>128</b>
6.3.1	Evidence and interpretation of managerialist discourse .....	128
6.3.2	Client-focused discourse.....	134
6.3.3	Effects on organisational knowledge.....	134
<b>6.4</b>	<b>IMPLICATIONS AND SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>136</b>
 <b>CHAPTER 7 MANAGERIALIST DISCOURSE ACROSS THE THREE STUDIES.....</b>		<b>138</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN THREE COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANISATIONS.....</b>	<b>138</b>
7.1.1	Practice knowledge.....	139
7.1.2	Prioritising local and situated knowledge .....	141
7.1.3	Dispersed and distributed knowledge.....	144
7.1.4	Knowledge and values, evaluations of worth.....	144
<b>7.2</b>	<b>IMPACT OF LOSS OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE .....</b>	<b>146</b>
<b>7.3</b>	<b>MANAGERIALIST DISCOURSE RESHAPING ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE.....</b>	<b>147</b>
7.3.1	Changing orders of discourse .....	148
7.3.2	New corporate/enterprise rationalities and regimes of truth .....	150
7.3.3	Alignment with government strategies.....	152
7.3.4	Normalisation within contemporary society.....	154
<b>7.4</b>	<b>ACTION, RESISTANCE AND AGENCY.....</b>	<b>155</b>

**7.5 SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS ..... 156**

**CHAPTER 8 EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT/WASTED KNOWLEDGE? ..... 157**

**8.1 REDUCED QUALITY OF SERVICE THROUGH RESHAPED ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE ... 157**

**8.2 THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE THESIS ..... 160**

    8.2.1 Theoretical disciplinary contribution ..... 160

    8.2.2 A practical contribution to community service organisations ..... 162

**8.3 AREAS FOR FUTURE WORK ..... 164**

**REFERENCES..... 165**

**APPENDIX 1 DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS .....181**

## TABLE OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Data, Information and knowledge .....	16
Figure 2 Two types of knowledge.....	19
Figure 3 Dimensions of organisational discourse.....	24
Figure 4 Contrasting dimensions from the metatheory of representational practices .....	45
Figure 5 Research as choice-points and questions for quality in action research .....	56
Figure 6 Human Services sector network, client referral & NGO support project.....	98



## **ABSTRACT**

### **Efficient Management/Wasted Knowledge: A Critical Study of Managerialism and Organisational Knowledge in Community Service Organisations**

Managerialism, or belief in the efficacy of management control, language and practices as the quintessential means to improve organisational efficiency and effectiveness, continues to gain currency. However, a growing dissonance exists within many organisations as managerialist knowledge increasingly subsumes and displaces practice knowledge. Drawing upon earlier organisational studies this thesis has as its point of departure the adoption of a discursive and knowledge-based approach.

A theoretical framework is developed from a Foucauldian orientation, enabling critical investigation of complex organisational practices, used in knowledge creation and management. Competing discourses are thereby identified and powerful abstract knowledge shown to be operating within dominant managerialist discourses, through social disciplining processes. Types of knowledge are highlighted enabling analysis of how they are used by practitioners and organisations to make evaluative decisions within complex practices. The politics of power are thus foregrounded in the highly contested area of evaluative decision-making.

A first, second and third-person action research methodology is employed within the empirical investigation located in the domain of human services organisations. Engaging recursively with the research participants in support of social change, three studies of non-government community service organisations are constructed using assembled interviews, documents and observations. Critical discourse analysis is used to analyse symptomatic texts.

The thesis shows how loss of specific types of organisational knowledge is often an unintended effect of discursive conflict. It highlights the values given to different types of knowledge and what counts for knowledge within different discourses. Managerialist discourse is shown to be reshaping organisational knowledge in community service organisations in four ways: changing orders of discourse; the increasing dominance of a corporate enterprise rationality and regime of truth; re-alignment of community service organisations with Government strategy; normalisation of managerialist discourse within society. Such reshaping of organisational knowledge results in crucial practice-oriented organisational knowledge being wasted. Such findings unsettle the imperialism of managerialist knowledge and encourage re-prioritising and re-valuing the organisational knowledge of community services underpinned by strong evaluations of worth. From reflexive engagement with participants in action research, the study supports resistance to discursive change and the consideration of alternative approaches to managing organisational knowledge in community service organisations.

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Efficient management/wasted knowledge?

The incursion of managerialist discourse into a wide variety of settings within contemporary society is made evident by the increasing employment of managerialist language to describe a range of everyday phenomena unrelated to management (Parker, 2002). Rees suggested over a decade ago that managerialism is “the belief that management knowledge can solve almost any problem” (Rees, 1995:23), and more recently the language imbued by this belief has expanded far beyond its origins in the corporate business world. Managerialist language is now found in areas as diverse as sport, education, health and community services. However, it is not only language that is changing. Changes to the use of language reflect both the changing times and context of our late modern society and the operation of new more intensified managerialist interpretations, understandings and practices within many personal and social domains. One particularly sensitive domain is that of non-government community service organisations<sup>1</sup>, noted for their independent governance, social justice values, and services to highly marginalised people.

Community service organisations have developed some unique ways of organising. Typically, they resist more bureaucratic forms of organisation and regulation found in Government Departments and are not driven to profit-making like most corporate organisations. Some community service organisations provide services to specific population groups such as refugees, children’s and women’s groups, indigenous groups or people from culturally and linguistically-diverse backgrounds. Others offer specialised programs targetting problems such as addictions and

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<sup>1</sup>The term community service organisation, as it is used here, denotes not-for-profit, non-government organisations in Australia. There are a large number of community service organisations in the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW). Recent estimates from the State Council of Social Services (NCOSS, 2003) suggest that in excess of 18,000 organisations are involved in providing over 300,000 *funded services*. Substantial mapping of community service organisations has been undertaken by Lyons and Hocking (2000) through their research with the Centre for Australian Community Organisations and Management . As well as these funded services, many thousands of other community organisations operate *without funding* (Lyons and Hocking, 2000).

Further differentiation can be made within those organisations termed community services organisations, by grouping them according to their size and management structures. The largest group, consisting of predominantly small organisations, employs between one and ten staff members, managed by voluntary management committees. A second, smaller group of medium-sized organisations employing diverse management structures have more than ten staff members but are not national or state-wide in scope or structure. The third and smallest group of community services organisations are the large, often national or state-wide organisations, sometimes having many hundreds or thousands of staff members, managed by large management teams and boards.

substance abuse, homelessness, domestic violence, sexual abuse, unemployment and disability. Their distinctive language and ways of doing things are often taken-for-granted by those in the community service sector<sup>2</sup>, but remain largely foreign to those from other fields (Harris, 2001). It is this way of acting and speaking, embedded in both organisational structures and practices, that is increasingly being replaced by the deployment of powerful managerialist discourse within community service organisations (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000a; Darcy, 2002; Rees and Rodley, 1995; Williams and Onyx, 2002).

Current neoliberal reforms of community service organisations by corporate management practice are well-documented (Briskman and Muetzelfeldt, 2002; Clarke et al., 2000a; Considine and Painter, 1997; Rees and Rodley, 1995). The development of 'competitive markets' in the community services sector is tied to the expectation that human services, both public and private, need to be more 'entrepreneurial' and 'enterprising' in order to 'do business', 'competitively' and 'sustainably' in the new 'market place' (Clarke et al., 2000a; du Gay, 2004; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Substantial research has documented how governments no longer want to provide services themselves but prefer to be known as customers who purchase services from community service providers in much the same way as consumers purchase other commodities (Bourdieu, 1998; Clarke et al., 2000a; Hodgson, 2001; Mendes, 2005; Pusey, 1991; Solondz, 1995). Managerialist discourse thereby affords governments the means of embedding neoliberal reforms in corporate style language and practices that are mandated for use within the sector.

Subject to the growing influence of neoliberal policies embedded in managerialist discourse, community service organisations are being shaped and reshaped by a range of economically-driven structures, policies and practices. These include National Competition Policy, whole-of-government approaches, welfare reform, support and endorsement of national and typically church-based charities as megaservice providers, ever-increasing accountabilities and use of increasingly sophisticated information technologies and systems for monitoring and reporting; and the growth of competitive tendering processes for increasingly short-term funding (Keevers, Sykes and Treleaven, 2006).

While the implementation of these policies, structures and technologies is certainly not new, what is new, and of particular interest in this research, is the increasingly naturalised managerialist order

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<sup>2</sup> The field of community services in Australia is commonly called the community services 'sector' or third-sector distinguishing it from the private or corporate sector and the public or government sector.

as the taken-for-granted way of understanding and working within community service organisations. This thesis examines the idea that the naturalising of managerialist language and practices within the community service organisations is very significant and not just happenstance. It is not merely a change of language and its use while practices themselves remain unchanged. On the contrary, it is a clear indicator of a changing discursive order capable of powerfully shaping and re-shaping organisations and their practices. The pace, scope and momentum of the spread of managerialist discourse at this time, make it imperative for research and evaluation to continue investigating its impact in this important social domain.

Within the community service sector, there are widespread concerns about the effects of these changes that may be summarised in four main themes. First, a growing sense of dissonance amongst many staff within community service organisations. Staff are often faced with powerful managerialist demands and accountabilities which seem to compromise their social justice commitments to equity, community and participation. Essential components of their professional and practice knowledges are contested by managerialist imperatives. For many staff, a sense of frustration and tension has developed with the incongruence of this more bureaucratic way of working (Harris, 2001; Williams and Onyx, 2002). While frustrations and tensions about the reprioritisation of professional knowledge are certainly not limited to staff in community service organisations, they are particularly heightened for many highly experienced community workers. Such workers are strongly committed to notions of equity and social justice, having chosen vocations in community services in order to be involved in developing caring and equitable services and providing support for disadvantaged people and communities.

A second area of concern relates to the replacement of longstanding organisational practices, values and knowledge on the basis of their incommensurability with the shift to a more entrepreneurial corporate context. This transition is evident, for example, in the implementation of sophisticated information technology systems, organisational restructures and quality and evaluation processes (Cairns, Harris, Hutchison and Tricker, 2005; Fattore, Galloway-Smith and Turnbull, 2000). While these technologies offer the promise of important practice improvements for community service organisations, significant questions remain unanswered. How is the introduction of these technologies reshaping organisational knowledge and with what flow-on effects to the quality and effectiveness of the community services they provide?

A third area of concern is the adoption of instrumental managerialist techniques and mechanisms. Many organisations feel compelled to adopt these imposed techniques and mechanisms either by complying with tougher funding requirements, or by expediently remaining competitive, despite

the ethical and practice contradictions that the adoption of such structures and practices entail (Darcy, 2002; Fattore et al., 2000; Keevers et al., 2006; Meagher, 2001; Nabben, 2001; Rix, 2005).

The fourth area of concern relates to the implementation of these mechanisms through powerful, top-down processes incongruent with participative practices central to the operations of community service organisations (Clarke et al., 2000a; Mendes, 2005; Williams and Onyx, 2002).

The research aims to take up these concerns, to identify the operations of complex power relationships and to examine how managerialist discourse is shaping organisational knowledge in community service organisations. In order to answer this question other subsidiary questions are also examined. What is managerialist discourse? What are the conditions of its possibility? How does it operate in community service organisations? What are the embedded discursive relationships, operations and mechanisms employed? How are alternative discourses operating and resisting managerialist discourse? In what ways, and for what purposes, is organisational knowledge being shaped in the sector? What are the characteristics of organisational knowledge in community service organisations? How can the research be taken up actively with community service organisations?

By undertaking the research in a way that supports the development of alternative responses, the research seeks to make both a practical and theoretical contribution to what is now a longstanding and vexed problem. For despite the power, ubiquity and endurance of managerialist discourse, its confident and self-assured spread into domains reliant upon complex practice knowledge, managerialism remains contestable.

It is certainly not, however, the purpose of this thesis to defend poor practices and political ideology based upon a conservative call for a return to some former halcyon days of community services. Undoubtedly, there is a need in all areas of community services for continual learning and improvements to support organisational performance. In particular, this is the case in the area of publicly-funded community programs providing important and politically-sensitive community services. Indeed, the ethical obligations of ensuring continued organisational improvements in providing publicly-funded services extend not only to governments but also to the organisational providers of services themselves.

## **1.2 Organisations, discourse and knowledge**

In order to explore the research questions concerned with organisational discourse and knowledge, the thesis develops a theoretical framework drawing upon several strands of



literature. The first area developed in the theoretical framework draws upon knowledge-based studies of organisation, particularly employing the work of Haridimos Tsoukas (Tsoukas, 1996, 1997, 2003a, 2005; Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004; Tsoukas and Vladimirov, 2001). For in what amounts to a significant and interesting anomaly, flying in the face of managerialist assertions about the certainty and capability of abstract managerialist knowledge, recent studies in the area of organisational knowledge increasingly privilege practice knowledge as a key source of organisational capability.

Organisational researchers have recently demonstrated the strong relationship between the creation and use of complex knowledge within communities of practice and enhanced organisational capability (Lave, 1991; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Tsoukas, 2005; Tsoukas and Vladimirov, 2001; Wenger, 2004). Valuable and complex organisational knowledge is embedded both in routines and practices (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002) and in the aggregated practice knowledge, often held tacitly by individuals and distributed across organisations (Tsoukas, 1996, 2003a; Tsoukas and Vladimirov, 2001). It is this organisational knowledge in community service organisations, with its rich and complex practice knowledge and its distinctive ethics-orientation that needs to be named and identified if it is to survive.

The second component part developed in the theoretical framework draws particularly upon Foucauldian epistemological understandings of discourse in the work of Nikolas Rose (Rose, 1998, 1999; Rose and Miller, 1991) and Barbara Townley (Townley, 1993, 1999; 2002a; 2002b, 2004; Townley, Cooper and Oakes, 2003). Such a poststructural orientation suggests that knowledge is located in discourses which are themselves malleable and contestable. Accordingly, knowledge is linked, through language and its uses, to powerful political interests expressed in regimes of truth which permeate public and personal life (Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1979; Rose, 1998, 1999). Despite its appearances, knowledge is not fixed, overarching or certain, but temporal, local and tentative (Foucault, 1965, 1972, 1977). Language and texts mutually constitute knowledge and so have powerful ontological capabilities, creating objects and subject positions (Foucault, 1983, 1984, 1988). Knowledge is employed by governments (Foucault, 1977; Rose and Miller, 1991) through organisations to discipline populations by controlling the possibilities of their actions. In particular, what Foucault (Burchell, Gordon and Miller, 1991) called governmentality is deployed, both within organisations and by governments to manage the conduct of conduct. The conduct or behaviours of subjects are controlled through shaping their subjectivity: how they conceive of themselves, their self image, and the shaping of the self, all in accordance with strategic intentions (Burchell et al., 1991; Gordon, 1984; Rose, 1999). By



developing the theoretical framework to embrace this perspective, managerialist discourse in community service organisations can be identified, its mechanisms, strategies and disciplining processes interrogated and its naturalised way of doing things contested and potentially disrupted.

### **1.3 Three studies**

Three empirical studies are undertaken at contrasting sites which reflect typical differences of organisational structure, size, scope and management approach found within community service organisations. The three sites also reflect the diversity and heterogeneity of organisations, services, programs, practices and structures of community service organisations. At each site, focus on different organisational activities provides evidence of the forms of incursion of managerialist discourse and their shaping of organisational knowledge. These events include a major organisational restructure, the development of an inter-organisational electronic referral form and a critical incident dispute over a client placement in the area of service delivery.

An emergent and reflexive third-person action research methodology is employed throughout the research process. Third-person action research refers to the relationship that the researcher has with both the participants and the community (Torbert, 2001). The approach operates across first, second and third person dimensions, the research undertaken is thus for 'me', 'for us' and 'for them'. In the first-person, the researcher describes his /her own experiences and reflections on the research as part of the research process. In the second-person, the researcher works with participants in recursive and reflective processes. Finally in the third-person, action research involves producing research for a broader audience or community (Torbert, 2001).

By working in a participative way, across multiple levels, it is possible to maximise engagement with community service staff as research participants and colleagues, and to undertake the research in ways congruent with their way of working. As much as is possible in a PhD project, this research, following some earlier feminist approaches (Lather, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1990; Treleaven, 1994, 1998), seeks to work 'with' others, in order to reduce the divide between researcher and researched. Taking up the position of an insider in this research enables close identification with the participants concerns as well as the research issues. Additionally, by adopting a participatory approach with this community of practice, in planning, acting, observing and reflecting the research employs processes of inquiry that are respectful of participants', knowledge and actions. The research thereby aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to new ways of understanding and acting (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Treleaven, 1994). The methodology is therefore emergent and reflexive rather than being

pre-determined in structure, welcoming and embracing input, and shaping the research direction and processes with participants.

Critical discourse analysis is used to identify and analyse texts collected at the three sites. The analyses aim to highlight discursive mechanisms operating in managerialist discourse including regimes of truth, technologies, disciplining processes and governmentality (Rose, 1999). The analysis focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Fairclough, 2001). Further, critical discourse analysis is employed to examine how power is deployed by dominant groups within organisations, why some discourses are privileged and others marginalised (Treleaven, 2004; van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 1996). The specific approach used here draws particularly upon the work of Phillips and Hardy (2002), Fairclough (1992, 2001, 2003) and Treleaven (2001, 2004). It focuses “on how discursive activity structures the social space within which actors act, through the constitution of concepts, objects, and subject positions” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002:25).

Critical discourse analysis is employed as “a means of foregrounding for examination the taken-for-granted factors (historical, social, cultural, educational and political) that shape the language people use” (Treleaven, 2004:5). Drawing upon Fairclough (2001, 2003), the discourse analysis is not only concerned with the texts themselves but also with their means of production, dissemination and reception (Fairclough, 2001, 2003). Different constructions of reality are enabled by alternative readings of texts within particular discourses (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) (Treleaven, 2001, 2004). Critical discourse analysis is therefore usefully employed in the thesis to examine complex texts collected from each site and used as data (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Darcy, 1999, 2002; Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Hardy and Palmer, 1998; Treleaven, 2004; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005).

## **1.4 Organisation of the thesis**

In Chapter 2, the research is positioned as an interdisciplinary study. Accordingly, it draws upon the literature of both organisational discourse and knowledge-based study of organisations. These literatures provide important ontological, epistemological and methodological underpinning for the study. From these perspectives, the chapter grounds the thesis congruently within disciplinary discourses for an informed examination and further contribution to the growing body of work in the field. The literature review has two strong themes: first, knowledge in organisations and its constitution as organisational knowledge; and second, the discursive operations and mechanisms of power in organisations. In the final section of the chapter, the

extant literature on managerialism is examined. In particular, the review focuses on research within the community service organisation context. Drawing upon earlier studies of managerialism, its operations are shown to be embedded in politically-motivated discursive practices of talk and text.

Chapter 3 presents the research approach chosen to answer the research question. After positioning the research epistemologically as poststructural and dialogic, the emergent and reflexive third-person action research methodology is presented more fully. Methods of data collection are discussed including attendance and participation in different types of meetings, briefings, discussions, planning and consultation processes, board, committee and staff meetings. Texts thereby comprise meetings notes, interview transcripts, websites and documents. The last section of the chapter discusses how critical discourse analysis is employed to analyse the collected texts.

In Chapters 4-6 three studies are presented at three different sites<sup>3</sup>. In Chapter 4, the preliminary study is presented. This study focuses on the restructure of a regional office within a large national community service organisation. Responding to changing external conditions within the political, economic and social environments, the organisation undertook large-scale planned changes through internal re-structures and re-organisation. Two contrasting discourses operating within the organisation are identified and analysed. A client-first discourse is shown to be increasingly subjugated by the incursion of a dominant and powerful managerialist discourse. The discursive shift is shown to support a powerful re-shaping of organisational knowledge, resulting in knowledge loss.

Chapter 5 presents the study undertaken at the second site. This study, set within a small, local, Interagency network of community service organisations<sup>4</sup>, examines the processes and practices

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<sup>3</sup> Each of the three studies has been written up as conference papers and presented at three international conferences. Site 1: (Sykes and Treleaven, 2003) Site 2: (Sykes and Treleaven, 2005a) Site 3: (Sykes and Treleaven, 2005b).

<sup>4</sup> Interagency networks are commonly used in the community service sector as a means of information and knowledge sharing and collective action within a geographical region. There are many different forms of interagency groups in operation. For example, groups may be developed on the basis of particular population groups such as youth, aged care, homeless or women's services, or types of services offered such as crisis, early intervention, counselling. In this study, each of the services belonging to the Interagency offered services for homeless youth with funding provided by a specific state government program.

involved in the development of a generic electronic referral form for referring homeless youth to accommodation services. A second much larger state-wide electronic network, simultaneously being developed by government, sought to integrate the smaller project. The investigation identifies and examines managerialist discourse operating through powerful, government electronic communication systems at the macro, inter-organisational level. Specific discursive mechanisms such as changing regimes of truth, disciplining processes and governmentality are foregrounded. The managerialist re-shaping of organisational knowledge in the Interagency through these discursive processes is shown to affect complex, often tacit, practice knowledge and evaluations of worth used creatively and heuristically.

Chapter 6 presents the third study set in the highly-sensitive context of the care of homeless children. The organisational site is a regional, specialist, youth services organisation regarded as best practice in the community service sector. The investigation focuses on a specific conflict at the micro-level between the organisation's management and the state government funding body. The study provides an example of managerialist discourse operating through powerful contractual and regulatory regimes of truth and disciplining processes. Services are commoditised and 'purchased' by a Government Department from community services 'providers'. The resulting changes to organisational knowledge are shown to not only reshape the community service organisation but to also have impacts upon service delivery to highly vulnerable clients.

Chapter 7 discusses the research findings across the three sites and shows that an increasingly dominant managerialist discourse is reshaping organisational knowledge and its uses in community service organisations. The chapter first highlights particular types of practice knowledge that are crucially important to community service organisational knowledge. The effects of changes and losses of community service organisational knowledge are then presented. A discussion of managerialist discourse follows drawing out how, through its embedded power relations, it subjugates other client-focused discourses. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of alternative and disruptive actions consistent with maintaining valued organisational knowledge.

Chapter 8 presents the conclusions of the research discussing the practical and theoretical contribution made by the research, and suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2 POSITIONING THE STUDIES

In Chapter 1, the research was introduced as a study of organisational knowledge in the community service context, focusing particularly upon the shaping effects of a powerful and contemporary managerialist discourse. This chapter positions the research within the relevant research literature in the areas of managerialism, organisational knowledge and community service organisations. By examining the relevant literature and identifying congruent theoretical approaches, an appropriate theoretical framework is developed within which to position the research.

Additionally, a review of the extant literature assists by identifying gaps or un-researched areas, opening a space for the thesis to make a useful, particular and original contribution to the research area. The review does not claim to be exhaustive, rather following (Lather, 1999:3), “it is situated, partial and perspectival, it is a critically useful interpretation and unpacking of a problematic that situates the work historically and methodologically” (Lather in Hansford, Tennent and Ehrlich, 2003). The critical and poststructural orientation of this research approach is therefore developed through the careful selection and examination of related literature, the adoption of which shapes both the methodology and the later empirical studies.

The major sections of the chapter are structured in the following way. First, the research question is introduced and located in the field or discourse of organisation studies. Second, knowledge-based approaches to organisational studies are highlighted, in particular, focusing upon organisational knowledge. Third, the organisational literature concerned with language, power and discourse in organisations is discussed, drawing upon Foucauldian, poststructural orientations. In the fourth section, the elements of managerialism are shown to have strong discursive orientations. The fifth section of the chapter presents a brief summary.

### 2.1 Mapping the landscape of Organisational Studies

The primary research question clearly locates the research as a study of organisations, their knowledge and management, and as such, positions the research within the field of organisational studies. The history and extent of this field, or its topography, (Westwood and Clegg, 2003) has been described and constructed variously and authors have adopted different approaches (see for example: Clegg and Hardy, 1999; Pfeiffer, 1982; Reed, 1999; Westwood and Clegg, 2003).

In their comprehensive and critical overview of the field, Westwood and Clegg (2003) suggest that the field of organisational studies is usefully understood as a discourse in order to highlight

the political and power dimensions inherent within academic fields. They develop a meta-analysis of organisational studies drawing upon the Foucauldian idea of discourse as a body of knowledge. As such, they enumerate several important dimensions of the organisational studies discourse; first, that an organisational studies discourse is an agglomeration or “matrix of texts, theories, concepts, practices and institutional forms and arrangements” (Westwood and Clegg, 2003:1). Second, that as a heterogeneous agglomeration, organisational studies is a political construction that adopts certain positions for various political reasons. Third, the corollary of this political positioning is that organisational studies is a “knowledge-power nexus”. They suggest that “it lays claim to a capacity to talk about organisations and related phenomena intelligibly and authoritatively” (2003:1). This is the claim to knowledge and, in particular, what Foucault called power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) that links language use and knowledge in discourse. Westwood and Clegg enunciate this lucidly:

As all discourses it works through practices of inclusion – exclusion. That is some texts and some claims to knowledge are deemed legitimate, right, proper and are allowed incorporation; others are deemed illegitimate, improper, wrong – or even bad and mad – and are excluded (Westwood and Clegg, 2003:1).

Organisation studies as a discourse is thus said to be productive of certain types of knowledge which are powerfully and authoritatively incorporated. By positioning the field as a discourse and mapping the topography of the discourse in this way, the notion of embedded political and power dimensions within organisational studies serves to orient the critical, discursive approach adopted throughout the research.

Historically, organisations and studies of them have existed in one form or another since ancient times. However, the development of the social sciences in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries provided the catalyst for expansion to the contemporary emphasis on the study of organisational theory and practice (Clegg, Hardy and Nord, 1996). Citing foundational organisational studies works (Barnard, 1938; Fayol, 1916/1949; Gauss, 1936; Gulick and Urwick, 1937; Mayo, 1933; Merton, 1940; Mooney and Reiley, 1939; Roethlisberger and Dickson, 1939; Urwick, 1943), as well as the classics (Taylor, Pareto, Babbage, Adam Smith, Machiavelli and even SunTzu), Westwood and Clegg (2003) argue that the development of this discourse really began from the early twentieth century, as increased attention was given to the importance of the work of Weber and the influence of emergent social science disciplines within organisational studies generally. They also draw attention to the importance of diversity and pluralism within the discourse, a position which is contested, for example in the work of Pfeiffer (1982), who suggests that a



monolithic orthodoxy, built on the primacy of acceptable scientific methodologies, is essential for wider disciplinary credibility and acceptance.

In contrast, critical approaches such as those adopted in this research, reject more traditional positivist, scientific, functionalist theories seeing them as incapable of providing adequate explanations of issues, such as power and politics and complex social dynamics. Instead turning to critical, social-constructionist and postmodern theories which deal with these issues more adequately (Alvesson and Deetz, 2002; Clegg and Hardy, 1999; Clegg et al., 1996; Iedema, 2003; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). Of particular interest, in recent times, are the theoretical approaches originating in the 'turn to language' adopted by organisational researchers drawing upon the philosophy of language and poststructural theory.

A growing number of researchers examining organisational phenomena are drawing upon language-based theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches as a means of going beyond modern, Cartesian and empiricist epistemologies. For example, feminist poststructural works showing the ways that normative gendered approaches to language powerfully position and discipline women in organisations (Lather, 1991; Stanley and Wise, 1990; Treleaven, 2004). Foucauldian studies drawing attention to discontinuity, the political development of discourse as bodies of knowledge and archaeological and genealogical examinations of knowledge in organisations (Carter, McKinlay and Rowlinson, 2002; Knights, 2002; Knights and Morgan, 1991; McKinlay, 1998; Townley, 1993, 2002a); the employment of deconstruction of normative approaches following Derrida (1976); and forms of discourse analysis highlighting and problematising asymmetrical power relations embedded in naturalised discourses (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Fairclough, 2005; Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam, 2004; Grant and Iedema, 2005; Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

Additionally, critical and postmodern orientations also support alternative ontological constructions of organisations, their constitution and work. For example, recently in the domain of organisational change, some researchers suggest the ongoing change processes may be better represented by employing the verb 'organising'. (Brocklehurst, 2001; Clegg and Hardy, 1996; Keenoy, Marshak, Grant and Oswick, 2000; Oswick, Keenoy and Grant, 2000; Weick, 1979). This distinction is crucial, not only in helping research keep pace with the inexorable contextual changes in late-modern society and the changing nature of organisational discourse itself, but most importantly for identifying the ontological relationship between organisation(s), organising and change (Barrett, Thomas and Hocevar, 1995; Orlikowski, 1996; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005). Of course taking this argument to the point of suggesting that organisations don't really exist,

that they are subsumed into the process of organising, may be stretching the case too far (Fairclough, 2005). It can, however, be said that organisations are in a continual state of flux and are not static (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). It is in ways such as these that researchers are adopting alternative, critical, postmodern orientations as they search for more adequate theoretical tools to probe the work of organisations (Tsoukas and Knudsen, 2003).

## **2.2 A knowledge-based approach to organisation**

Closer examination of organisational studies reveals that a central trajectory for this research is the recently developing area of knowledge and knowledge-based studies of organisations. Arising over the past twenty years are changing social phenomena or global technological developments (Galbraith, 1967), the advent of post-industrial society (Bell, 1999), and knowledge as a capital asset linked to organisational capability (Drucker, 1993). Knowledge and the study of it in organisations has emerged as the locus of another rapidly expanding area of Organisational Studies.

Researchers have adopted two major trajectories to examine knowledge and its uses in organisations. One approach is concerned with technological development, storage and transfer of information often termed knowledge management. This area of study draws substantially upon the fields of information technology and information systems and as such is largely beyond the scope of this study (Boisot, 1995; Choo, 1998; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Prusak, 1996; Spender, 1996). A second, approach is concerned with organisational knowledge and areas such knowledge creation, uses, sharing and loss (Argyris and Schon, 1978; Blackler, 1995; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Nonaka, 1994; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas, 2005; Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; von Krogh, Roos and Kleine, 1998; Yanow, 2004). This study is principally concerned with the literature and issues from the second area.

Drawing upon the organisational knowledge literature, the following section first examines the term knowledge, its meanings, differentiations and uses; second, and relatedly, explores the notion of knowledge as *organisational*. Finally, it discusses specific relevant characteristics or types of organisational knowledge.

### **2.2.1 What is knowledge?**

Attempts to adequately conceptualise and understand knowledge in an organisational context, both epistemologically and practically, are many and varied (Alvesson, 2001; Blackler, 1995;

Boisot, 1995; Brown and Duguid, 2000, 2001; Choo, 1998; Choo and Bontis, 2002; Cook and Brown, 1999; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Starkey, Tempest and McKinlay, 2004; Tsoukas, 2005). Inevitably this research draws upon definitions from the long western epistemological and philosophical traditions. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) for example, in their seminal work on tacit and explicit knowledge, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, define knowledge as “justified true belief”. Pointing to the contrasting emphases of Western and Japanese epistemologies, they suggest that the origins of Western epistemology emphasise notions of achieving certainty through rationalism and empiricism. Japanese traditions, in contrast, drawing upon Buddhist, Zen and other Eastern philosophical traditions reject Platonist dualisms, mind and body, idea and matter which led to the rise in the West of rationalism and empiricism. While there may be merit in Nonaka and Takeuchi’s suggestion that some of the works of leading western philosophers have epistemological shortcomings, their overly truncated examination, drawing largely upon Bertrand Russell’s secondary philosophical commentary, glosses over the depth and complexity associated with the philosophical works they cite. Nevertheless, the value of their critique is perhaps in their attempt to develop an alternative theory of knowledge capable of supporting new discourses about knowledge.

In the application of their epistemology, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) attempt to develop a new synthetic view of organisational knowledge creation. Emphasising the “oneness of humanity and nature” they privilege personal, implicit or tacit knowledge in what they term a “Japanese” epistemology. They suggest that western philosophical understanding of knowledge following Plato is “justified, true belief”, their point of departure is to emphasise “justified belief”, not the ‘truth’ component, which is emphasised in western epistemology. Thus they conceptualise knowledge as being personal, separate and distinct from detached impersonal information. Their theory of knowledge can be summarised as follows. First, they argue knowledge is concerned with beliefs and commitment and is the function of a particular perspective or intention. Second, they say, unlike information, knowledge is always “knowledge to some end”; it’s about action. Third, like information, knowledge is concerned with meaning; it is always context-specific and relational (1995:58). The primary importance of their work is the development of a methodology of knowledge conversion building on Polanyi’s important distinction that personal knowledge is both tacit and explicit (Polanyi, 1962). Others such as Tsoukas (2004) have critiqued their work on the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge.

### *The character of knowledge*

Within the literature discussing knowledge-based studies, the terms data, information, knowledge, knowledge management and organisational knowledge are frequently used synonymously or inconsistently, thus blurring and collapsing important distinctions (Alvesson, Karreman and Swan, 2002). Conversation and debate about knowledge in organisations can therefore easily deteriorate into confusion, incommensurability, and ambiguity resulting in knowledge becoming “an all-encompassing but little revealing concept” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou; 2001:974).

Various methods and techniques have been adopted by researchers attempting to circumvent this definitional problem including the development of knowledge taxonomies (Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Spender, 1996) and reductionist approaches that attempt to capture meaning by dividing the term “knowledge” into various constitutive components (Alvesson et al., 2002). While others have developed descriptive metaphors describing, for example, knowledge as an “asset”; knowledge as “network”, “black-boxing” knowledge (Alvesson et al., 2002). Blackler (1995) identifies five types of knowledge in his analysis of earlier studies of knowledge and its uses in organisational learning literature. These include *embrained, embodied, encultured, embedded and encoded* knowledge. This metaphorical approach is capable of providing a useful way of making distinctions in relation to knowledge and its use. Other metaphors include the notion of learning and organisational learning which are usefully employed in related research which is beyond the scope and approach of this study (Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Senge, 1990).

Developing tight definitions can also be problematic for, as Scarborough and Burrell caution, “knowledge is a slippery and elusive concept” (Scarborough and Burrell, 1996:178). Alvesson (2004) prefers to problematise knowledge as an ambiguous concept, while Alvesson, et al (2002) are critical of attempts to slice up knowledge into its various constitutive components. They suggest that many of the divisions used are arbitrary and contain peculiar dichotomies such as tacit and explicit, individual and organisational, personal or codified (Alvesson et al., 2002). While there may be merit in their caution against attempts to capture meaning by developing atomistic divisions, clearly the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.

Despite the seeming plethora of recent research in the area, Tsoukas (2003) suggests that not only does significant work remain to be done here but also that it is vital for studies to further pursue theoretical clarification as the basis for increased understanding and improvement of future practice.





work of Polanyi (1962) and very much 'in conversation with' the earlier work of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995), they synthesise several ideas. First, they emphasise that all knowledge is personal, or put in another way, there is no knowing without the personal, human action of making distinctions. Second, drawing on Wenger (1998), Taylor (1985), and Harre and Gillet (1994), they say that these distinctions are always made in a context or domain of action, "knowing how to act within a domain of action is making competent use of the categories and the distinctions constituting the domain" (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001:978). Knowledge therefore necessarily involves "acceptance of reciprocal understandings of language use and meanings gained through the process of socialisation (Berger and Luckmann, 1984)" (Treleaven and Sykes, 2005:356). Thus Tsoukas and Vladimirou's definition is that "knowledge is the social capability to draw distinctions, within a domain of action, based on an appreciation of context or theory or both" (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001:974). This definition most adequately conceptualises the complexities of knowledge and locates knowledge ontologically as embedded in personal actions.

### **2.2.2 Organisational knowledge**

Moving on from attempts to clarify the term knowledge itself, other questions yet to be examined are concerned with identifying factors or processes that contribute to making knowledge organisational. Specifically, what is organisational knowledge? Is it merely as staff perform work within organisational contexts and "generate, develop and transmit knowledge" (2001:979) that it becomes organisational? While for Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) this may be true in a weak sense, they argue that knowledge is also more than this. They return to the idea that essential to the definition of organisation is the process of generating recurring behaviours through the adoption of rules and generalisations. Drawing on Wittgenstein's ideas of how collective understandings shape the game of language use, they argue that organisational generalisations are made on the basis of collective or social understandings and meanings. Moreover, drawing upon Berger and Luckman (1984), they suggest that context, work practices, roles and structures are defined, developed and promulgated using collectively meaningful language. These generalisations provide the basis for rules defined as "prescriptive statements guiding behaviour in organisations", based on propositions such as "if X, then Y, in circumstances Z". Rules, so enacted then demonstrate organisational knowledge. Accordingly, an organisation is "a densely connected network of communication through which shared understandings are achieved" (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001:981) and organisational knowledge is "the capability members of an organisation have developed to draw distinctions in the process of carrying out their work, in

particular concrete contexts, by enacting sets of generalisations whose application depends on historically evolved collective understandings” (2001:976).

Of course, the danger here is to be overly prescriptive, constructing a static representation which negates the improvisational and situated components of organisational knowledge. Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2001) discussion of heuristic knowledge is especially relevant in the context of organisational knowledge, and its maintenance or loss. Heuristic knowledge is the personal, pragmatic and practice-related knowledge repertoire that is developed by modelling others and improvising in everyday organisational situations as they arise. The significance of heuristic knowledge is that it depends crucially on employees’ experiences and perceptual skills, motivation and social relations. For heuristic knowledge is “sustain[ed] in a spirit of community at work, to encourage employees to improvise and undertake initiatives of their own, as well as actively maintain a sense of corporate mission” (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001:991). This creative dimension of knowledge is clearly related to action and the choices embedded within action. In order to explore this area of the personal, social and action orientations of knowledge and knowledgeable action, additional important distinctions are now examined including practice knowledge, situated and local knowledge, distributed knowledge and those relating to evaluations of worth.

### *Practice knowledge*

A number of studies have shown that the relationship between knowledge, knowing and practice is complex and mutually constituting (Nicolini, Gerhardi and Yanow, 2003; Orlikowski, 2002). These works emphasise that knowledge and knowing cannot be separated and meaningfully discussed apart from practices and routines (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002; Schon, 1983). In other words, the carriers of an organisation’s knowledge are its practices and routines (Tsoukas, 1996, 2004a; Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002). Therefore examining practices sheds light on knowing and knowledge. Pursuit of such understanding does not necessarily suggest, however, that an atomistic dissection of practice is necessarily required. For again, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts: the qualitative, personal and tacit dimensions are easily lost. The emphasis “on the essential role of human agency in knowledgeable performance” must not be overlooked (Orlikowski, 2002:251). For “...knowing [is] not a static embedded capability or stable disposition of actors, but rather an ongoing social accomplishment” (2002:249). Instead, the focus must necessarily be placed upon the practices and routines and how they are shared. “The focus is then on understanding the conditions (human, social, structural) under which skilful performance is more and less likely to be enacted” (2002:270).

*Situated and local organisational knowledge*

Contextualising knowledge in time and space means situating knowledge, locating it in the particular and historical. This is in contrast to abstracted and generic knowledge made at a distance, which lacks what Yanow calls “ [the] mundane...but expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience” (2004:12). Drawing upon interpretive, ethnographic approaches she suggests the term is widely associated with cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1983). Geertz developed an interpretive epistemology in which “theorizing is less about trying to explain phenomenon by weaving them into meta-theories based on cause and effect and more about trying to explain them by understanding local frames and awareness” (Geertz, 1983:6, in Yanow, 2004). Additionally, Yanow draws upon the work of Greenwood and Levin (1998) to develop the distinction between “expert and local knowledge” (Yanow 2004). These are nicely represented in her chart (Figure 2).

‘Expert’	‘Local’
Theory-based	practice-based
abstracted, generalized	context-specific
scientifically constructed	interactively derived
Academy-based	lived experience-based
technical-professional	practical reasoning
explicit	tacit
scholarly	everyday

**Figure 2 Two types of knowledge (Yanow, 2004:12).**

While Yanow (2004) contrasts expert and local knowledge she acknowledges that both have their place and that they are not binarised. The contrasts made in the diagram draw distinctions between locally-developed particular, grounded knowledge and the knowledge often associated with technical and professional expertise, usually gained in academic training (2004:12). However, she also identifies local knowledge as “complex, differentiated and dynamic...in other words [it] is situational but that does not mean that it necessarily lacks specialised expertise. It is the character of expertise that is different: local knowledge legitimates the experiential-contextual



as a type of specialisation equal in value (under certain circumstances) to the scholarly academic” (2004:12). Local knowledge may be technical depending upon the context.

In a similar vein to Yanow, others (Nicolini et al., 2003; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001) emphasise the situatedness of knowledge. Tsoukas and Vladimirou suggest that individuals are always located both within “a collectively generated and sustained domain of action, a practice or community with a shared language of practice” (2001:977). The social development of the nuanced language of a community of practice is considered to be crucial and Tsoukas and Vladimirou’s (2001:977) elegant description is quoted in full,

Through language we name, and constantly bring forth and ascribe significance to, certain aspects of the world (including, of course, our own behaviour) (Schutz, 1970; Taylor 1985; Winograd and Flores 1987). When our language is crude and unsophisticated, so are our distinctions and the consequent judgments. The more refined our language the finer our distinctions. Our attempt to understand and act on reality is simultaneously enabled and limited by the cultural tools we employ – with language being one of the most important (Vygotsky, 1978:23-30; Wertsch, 1998:40).

Knowledge is thus tied to learning language-based distinctions made evident in contextualised action. Some excellent and often used empirical examples in the literature drawn from ethnographic studies highlight language-based distinctions in action: a medical student learning the language-based distinctions to read an x-ray (Tsoukas, 2003a); photocopier technicians going beyond the codified instruction manuals to diagnose problems with particular machines (Orr, 1988; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001; Yanow, 2004); and call centre operators who diagnose faulty telephones based on their customers’ descriptions of particular faults (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001).

### *Distributed knowledge*

As well as locating knowledge in routines and practices, Tsoukas (1996) develops the idea that organisations are knowledge systems and therefore that knowledge is distributed throughout organisations. He suggests six important points in this regard: first, organisational resources are “neither given, nor discovered but created” (Tsoukas 1996:21) and the carriers of a firm’s knowledge are its routines and its members, therefore a knowledge system occurs (1996:21). Second, no single mind can have all a firm’s knowledge. Third, if organisations are distributed knowledge systems, an organisation’s knowledge is inherently indeterminate. Fourth, an organisation’s knowledge is also partially determined by individual, social and industrial contexts.

Fifth, normative expectations, dispositions or habitus, and interactive situations are inevitably in tension. Finally, this view informs understanding both of organisations and management. In conclusion, he maintains that the key to

achieving coordinated action does not lie in those at the top of the organisation gaining more and more knowledge but rather on those lower down finding more and more ways of getting connected and inter-relating the knowledge one has...[In order to do this it is necessary, he says] to appreciate the character of a firm as a discursive practice: a form of life, a community in which individuals come to share an unarticulated background of common understandings (Tsoukas, 1996:22).

### *Evaluations of worth*

Another dimension or characteristic of knowledge that has not, as yet, been fully developed in the research literature of organisational studies is that of evaluations of worth. While Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) allude to this characteristic in their work, the important ethical and values dimension of knowledge is not explored. Taylor's (1985) notion of "language-based evaluations of worth" is arguably crucial for understanding personal and organisational knowledge. Taylor (1985a) suggests that reductionist scientific approaches to the study of humans fail to engage with the complexity associated with areas of human agency. He is concerned to demonstrate the importance of this argument as a means of redressing the inadequacies of behaviourist and natural science views of human agency. In short, this behaviourist approach "shows us capable of achieving a kind of disengagement from our world by objectifying it" (1985:5). This, he says, is linked to Enlightenment and romanticist notions of individual freedom, "the ability to act on one's own, without outside interference or subordination to outside authority" (1985:5).

In contrast, Taylor argues that human agency is tied up with the capacity to make evaluations; first in a weak sense, concerned with evaluating outcomes, a capacity that we share with other higher order animals to make selections and choices. Then in a strong sense, distinguishing the quality of the motivation or evaluation of desires, such a distinction is made with the aid of a sophisticated use of language; "a language of contrastive characterisation... enabl[ing] characterisation at greater depth" (Taylor 1985:19). Rejecting dominant mechanistic utilitarianism, he develops a view of agency highlighting the distinctively human capability to choose values and make ethics-based decisions, emphasising "quality of life" as depth thereby distinguishing possible strong from weak evaluations.

When integrated with Tsoukas and Vladmirou's (2001) idea of organisational knowledge, the notion of evaluations of worth adds an ethical, value-based dimension to the assessment of organisational knowledge by according greater priority to strong evaluations of worth than to weaker evaluations. This personal ethical dimension of knowledge is particularly relevant within the context of human services, and more specifically community services, where decisions and evaluations that profoundly affect and shape peoples lives are often required in day-to-day practices. Such powerful discursive practices are also crucial in the context of community service organisations and the next section examines other literatures dealing with such areas in organisations.

### **2.3 Language, power and discourse in organisations**

Recent approaches to the examination of power and its operation in organisations have adopted language based discursive orientations. More specifically, studies of managerialism draw attention to the operation of power through privileging certain language and practices. This research draws upon studies of discourse as a means of understanding the ways that language and practices are instrumentally employed by management to enable the expansion of managerialist discourse within community service organisations. In the first section the research is located as a study of organisational discourse. The second section then examines Foucauldian influences in the area of discourse studies. In the third section, six mechanisms and operations of a poststructuralist approach to discourse are presented: discourse, power-knowledge, governmentality, regimes of truth, disciplining processes and technologies.

#### **2.3.1 Studies of organisational discourse**

Following the recent turn to language originating in the philosophy of Wittgenstein and Winch (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), discourse is increasingly an area of interest for organisational researchers (Alvesson, 2004; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Grant, Oswick and Keenoy, 1998; Hardy, Grant, Keenoy, Oswick and Phillips, 2004; Keenoy et al., 2000; Oswick et al., 2000, 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). While the concept of discourse as it is used in studies of organisational discourse is principally derived from the work of Foucault, there are many non-Foucauldian approaches to the use of discourse, such as linguistic approaches to discourse analysis (see Grant and Iedema, 2005).

Researchers have developed overviews or meta-analyses which map the range of studies of organisational discourse (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Grant and Iedema, 2005; Grant et al., 1998; Hardy et al., 2004; Westwood and Clegg, 2003). One recent overview is provided by Grant

and Iedema (2005). The chart below (Figure 3) from their work details five distinctions which they make to differentiate the types of approaches used in organisational studies. Importantly, they highlight the reciprocal relationship that exists between recent studies of organisational discourse arising from an organisational studies orientation, and other linguistically-based orientations, a complementarity often overlooked by both groups. They also suggest that studies of organisational discourse must go beyond merely pigeon-holing approaches based on academic discipline or research method. They therefore develop a schema “highlighting [the] philosophical and methodological richness” (2005:37) evident within approaches that straddle different positions. In this way, the complexity of the research is not lost by the employment of overly-simplified representations using tight categories.

Five paired dimensions are developed in Grant and Iedema’s (2005) schema. In the first dimension, *theoretical/empirical* approaches are contrasted. They suggest that theory-centred approaches emphasise the primary positioning of the ontological capabilities of language and discourse which is considered in the research to be “an abstract explanatory construct” and an “organising principle *par excellence*” (2005:44). The theoretical view of discourse is contrasted with other research which prioritises the importance of empirical work (Phillips, 1998) and suggests that discourse is constructed through empirically collected texts within organisations such as documents, stories, memos etc and that these texts provide evidence of various discourses (Grant and Iedema, 2005)

The second distinction Grant and Iedema (2005) make is between *monomodal/multimodal* approaches. This pairing contrasts views of discourse that are primarily concerned with language-based texts such as writing and speaking, and other approaches which are more inclusive of other forms of meaning-making such as those oriented towards semiotics and use of multi-media as discourse (2005:47). The third distinction made by Grant and Iedema (2005) emphasises *discourse as pattern or change*, and focuses on the range of views which either develop patterns of discourse and ordering processes, or alternatively, seek to open new spaces beyond existing patterns through involving change, learning and innovation in organisations (2005:48). Their fourth distinction, *cognition/practice views of discourse*, contrasts “discourse as the effect of thinking with discourse as a form of social practice” (2005:51). The final distinction *discourse research as emancipatory critique/pragmatic analytics* distinguishes critical approaches with other more pragmatic concerns such as organisational performance (2005:56).

## Five dimensions used to map the field of organisational discourse studies

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### Focus On:

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1. Theory/Philosophy (Abstract principles of organisation)	Empirical Data (Empirical facets of organisation)
2. Monomodal discourse (discourse = language)	Multimodal discourse (discourse = semiosis)
3. 'What is' (pattern analysis)	'What could be' (marginal meanings)
4. Cognition (discourse manifests cognition)	Practice (discourse manifests ways of doing and saying)
5. Critique and emancipation (discourse as a critique of power)	Pragmatic intervention (discourse as a mode of intrusion)

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**Figure 3 Dimensions of organisational discourse (Grant and Iedema 2005:43).**

The schema in making these distinctions is useful in this research in several ways. For example, discourse is identified through empirical studies, rather than providing an a priori theoretical orientation. This thesis is predominantly oriented towards language as text, although also accepting the possibility of alternative semiotic use of texts. It draws upon marginal meanings to consider what could be as well as being centrally concerned with practice and action as a critique of their power operations. Use of the schema in this way suggests that, with its multiple and contrasting dimensions, it is not offering binary alternatives as dualistic 'either or' positions but provides a schema capable of capturing multiple and complex dimensions and approaches employed in the study of discourse in organisations.

### 2.3.2 Foucauldian influences

The innovative epistemological approach developed by Foucault in his writings on discourse and power/knowledge is of particular relevance to this research. However, the research does not claim to be Foucauldian in a strict sense but draws from his epistemological orientation eclectically. It follows Rose's more eclectic approach to the application of Foucauldian ideas worthy of quoting at length.

...I do not think there is some general theory of government, politics or power latent within Foucault's writings, which should be extracted and then applied to other issues. There are those who seek to be Foucault scholars. That is their privilege. I advocate an approach to his work that is looser, more inventive, more empirical. It is less concerned with being faithful to a source of authority than with working within a certain ethos of enquiry, with fabricating some conceptual tools that can be set to work in relation to the particular questions that trouble contemporary thought and politics (Rose, 1999:4-5).

It does so particularly through the employment of interpretations of his work by others such as Rose in the areas of governmentality (Rose, 1999), Townley (2002a) in her discussion of abstract knowledge and its origins in modernist Cartesian epistemology, Phillips and Hardy in the area of the discursive construction of social reality (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), and Fairclough in the area of theorising and applying critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Each of these researchers, to a greater or lesser extent, employs ways of examining social phenomenon that are underpinned by Foucauldian epistemology, highlighting discontinuity and disruption, power/knowledge and language use. As such their work, like that of Foucault, goes beyond hermeneutics and structuralist interpretations (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982), challenging the accepted order of things (Foucault, 1970), to disrupt and contest normative contemporary ordering, while highlighting discursively developed power relations embedded in social interactions.

Drawing upon the work of Nietzsche, Foucault emphasised discontinuity within his controversial historiography, challenging accepted modernist notions of continuity such as the Hegelian idea of progressive history and *Geist* (Clegg, 1998; Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Foucault, 1972, 1984; McKinlay, 1998). Throughout Foucault's writings the emphasis is placed upon the "history of the present" rather than history as progressive, homogeneous and an end in itself (Foucault, 1972). His method of archaeology, for example, used in his early works (Foucault, 1970, 1972) is principally concerned with examining the production of truth, the grouping of sets of statements to form discourses which are discrete systems independent of the conscious speaker (Burrell, 1998). The main aim of the method is to "understand the 'archive' — the diversity of autonomous and sometimes amorphous discourses" (Burrell, 1998:10). Thus the archaeological method emphasises discontinuities in various discourses and discursive series as a means to understanding how it is that current discourses are created, develop, operate and change.

Similarly, the genealogical method employed in his later study *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1977) is concerned with understanding how government at-a-distance, or forms of social control,



operate through disciplinary processes. He shows, for example, a transition within the history of French carceral institutions. This change from the traditional system of domination and corporal punishment was exemplified in the traditional public demonstrations of punishment and execution. Serving as a means of social control and discipline, to the emergence and operation of a complex system of hidden disciplinary mechanisms exemplified in the panopticon. This is a disciplinary process in prisons for which Foucault drew upon Jeremy Bentham's notion of a prison system where prisoners could be constantly observed without ever knowing whether they were being observed. Foucault argues that such disciplinary mechanisms operate through surveillance and control of the body or bio-power (Foucault, 1977).

Foucault maintained that modern society is controlled in much the same way as 'carceral' institutions such as prisons and psychological institutions. Surveillance, disciplinary power and social technologies of the self are employed through institutional controls in areas such as education, judicial systems, health and welfare in order to discipline society.

The judges of normality are present everywhere. We are in the society of the teacher-judge, the doctor-judge, the educator-judge, the social worker judge. It is on them that the universal reign of the normative is based; and each individual, wherever he may find himself, subjects to it his body, his gestures, his behaviour, his aptitudes, his achievements" (Foucault, 1977:304).

This epistemology is further elaborated through discussion of key Foucauldian concepts of discourse, power/knowledge and governmentality. These poststructural tools are shown to be extremely useful for the examination of the primary research question concerning how managerialist discourse shapes organisational knowledge in community service organisations.

After Foucault, others have developed and refined his ideas. Drawing upon Foucault's epistemology Townley (2002a), for example, critiques the ordering processes that occur within modernist normative epistemology. She maintains that the positivist/modern epistemology gives rise to five principal ordering categories commensurate with modernity's foundations and appropriations of knowledge: rationality, causality, agency, certainty, and sovereign power (Townley, 2002a). Furthermore, she emphasises the limitations of this ordering system alone to deal with the contemporary context of organisational uncertainty, ambiguity and plurality. Finally, she employs a critique of managerialism, or what she calls abstract management, in which she contests the supposed rationality of a normative approach based upon the five principal ordering categories. Drawing on the work of Toulmin (1990), Bloor (1991) and Foucault (1970),

Townley challenges the rationality associated with modernity. She suggests that the Cartesian project rejects centrally important areas of qualitative knowledge, or what Toulmin (1990) termed practical reason, for not fitting the closed rationalistic epistemology.<sup>5</sup> Such an approach informs this thesis by emphasising the limitations of abstract managerialist knowledge to adequately organise the complexities of late modern organisational discourses with all their uncertainty, ambiguity and plurality. Drawing upon these works influenced by a Foucauldian epistemology enables this thesis investigate the operations of power and knowledge at the micro level within the three organisations studied

Of particular importance and interest within this thesis and for this research question, are the concepts drawn initially from the work of Foucault and then developed by others such as discourse, power/knowledge, governmentality, regimes of truth, disciplining processes and technologies of government. Each of these terms employed by Foucault denote distinctions within the operation and mechanisms of power, they are inter-related and their workings embedded in complex social operations and interactions often at the micro level. It is these workings of power that shed light on how it is that discourses such as those examined in this thesis are able to operate within organisations.

### *Discourse*

The concept of discourse used by Foucault (1988) is concerned with language use and orders of classification that identify or locate 'individuals' and groups within particular fields or domains (Foucault, 1977, 1979, 1984). Discourses are related to, and produced by, accepted or privileged bodies of knowledge that govern, constrain and motivate individuals and their practices within particular fields (Foucault, 1977). Discourse for Foucault thus went far beyond its linguistic sense, and was closely related to the systemic nature of power. Knowledge too is linked inextricably with power and involves historical, social and political conditions and is concerned with the historical limitations of what can be said (Foucault, 1980; McHoul and Grace, 1993).

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<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, other centrally important philosophical works also reject the application of overly Cartesian, abstract rationality (Habermas, 1984, 1987; Taylor, 1985, 1985; Toulmin, 2001). These important and diverse, philosophical and theoretical works written in recent times, share a common concern to move beyond the limitations and inadequacies of modernist epistemology to more clearly theorise contemporary issues, whether through a philosophical hermeneutic (Taylor, 1985, 1985), communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987), feminist praxis and poststructural ordering of knowledge (de Lauretis, 1984; Lather, 1986).



Thus discourse involves not only a body of knowledge but also what can be said and thought within it.

Discourse has a powerful epistemological dimension, by determining what counts for knowledge, under what conditions, in what historical power relations and under what social and political constraints and freedoms (Foucault, 1983, 1984). Discourse also contains powerful, creative ontological capabilities. Views of the 'reality' of the social world are shown to be discursively constituted and constructed (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1972, 1977; Grant, Oswick and Keenoy, 2001; Hardy, 2001; Keenoy et al., 2000; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Westwood and Clegg, 2003).

Discourse therefore is not just another abstract term but specifically denotes a body of knowledge, "an embodied, practice-oriented, political, power-vested knowledge that is inherently changing and unstable. Such discourses 'broaden, develop, and strengthen, wither, decay, and die and are reconstituted as they synthesize, bifurcate, coalesce, and fragment'" (Westwood and Clegg, 2003:2). Likewise the subjectifications which result from discursive formation are not fixed; individual and organisational identities are created and re-created as discourses change.

The complex and mutually constitutive relationship between discourse and power within organisations is taken up by Hardy and Phillips (2004) in the development of their framework. They show that while discourse shapes the operations of power, decision making shapes discourse and their operation (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). They suggest that discourses are first held in place by "structured collections of texts and associated practices of textual production, transmission and consumption – [that] shape the systems of power that exists in a particular context by holding in place the categories and identities upon which it rests" (2004:299). Then, that as "this system of power privileges certain actors enabling them to construct and disseminate texts" (2004:299), discourses evolve and change. Hardy and Phillips' (2004) framework thus highlights that discourse and power relations are mutually constituting and that discourses are both fixed and evolving – a theme that is practically explicated within the later case studies in chapters 4-6.

### *Power/ knowledge*

A centrally important dimension or characteristic for this study, and often overlooked in recent knowledge-based studies, relates to power and knowledge. According to Foucault, they are

mutually constitutive. The power/knowledge nexus suggests that “not only is knowledge the effect of a particular regime of power but forms of knowledge also produce the social realities which they describe and analyse” (McNay, 1992:27). Thus, Treleaven (2004)<sup>6</sup> suggests that rather than power being an object or a resource, which some people possess and others do not, Foucault sees power (1983) as pervasive in everyday life, embedded in our language (what we think and what we say) and practices (what we do). The micro-processes of power are exercised through its effects on people’s actions: “what defines a relationship of power is that it is a mode of action which does not act directly and immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions: an action upon an action, on existing actions or on those which may arise in the present or the future” (Foucault, 1983:220). In the Foucauldian sense, power is diffuse and ubiquitous, shaping what we see and how we come to know the world (Treleaven, 1998). Thus Foucault's formulation of the power/knowledge nexus opens up questions for investigating the dynamics of power relations and the ways in which organisational knowledge may be excluded, overlooked, disrupted and lost.

The inextricable intermingling of knowledge and power gives rise to the construct of power/knowledge and highlights the fact that before something can be controlled, managed, or governed, it must first be known. Knowledge thus plays a fundamental role in rendering phenomena visible, thinkable, calculable, and amenable to intervention. In other words knowledge makes things manageable (Burrell, 1998; Rose and Miller, 1991).

A useful illustration of knowledge and its powerful effects are presented in Townley’s (1993) work in the area of Human Resource Management. She shows how research studies in this area have been implicitly dominated by functionalist and systems maintenance perspectives driven by managerialist concerns for efficiency. Such deployment of managerialist technique has, in turn, produced Human Resource Management practices which themselves are all too frequently technique-oriented and ultimately fail in the attempt to impose definitive and unambiguous meaning to the general rules of managing. Townley shows how Foucault’s work of suggesting, re-ordering and re-classifying dispels self-evidencies and exposes power/knowledge “that is, to indicate that although elements form part of a familiar landscape, they are not ‘natural’ or part of

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<sup>6</sup> This paragraph draws substantially upon earlier publications (Sykes and Treleaven, 2003, 2004; Treleaven, 2004; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005).

a naturally existing order” (Townley, 1993:519). Moreover, her analysis of power/knowledge shows the discursive construction of certain accepted and naturalised orders and thus helps to “dispel some of the self-evidencies, that are frequently accepted as part of the familiar landscape” (1993:519), or regarded as occurring naturally, rather than being clearly identified as part of an imposed order or structuring of reality (Townley, 1993).

### *Governmentality*

Of particular interest for the later discussion of managerialism, and its complex discursive operations, are Nikolas Rose’s penetrating insights arising from what Foucault termed governmentality (Burchell et al., 1991). This term includes various technologies employed to foster what has been called the paradoxical relationship of simultaneous “empowerment and manipulation” (Hodgson, 2001). Analysis of governmental strategies were of particular interest to Foucault in the lectures given over his last two years, identifying and analysing “contemporary neoliberal forms of governance – premised on the active consent and subjugation of subjects, rather than their oppression, domination or external control” (Clegg, Pitsis, Rura-Polley and Marosszeczy, 2002:1).

Although Foucault only wrote one specific article on governmentality, he was interested in the problem of “how to be ruled, how strictly, by whom, to what end, by what methods” (Foucault, 1991). The approach taken was not a study in State theory or the sociology of government but was primarily concerned with what he called “governmental rationality or in his own neologism, governmentality” (Gordon, 1984:1). Government, in this Foucauldian sense is not just political rule but involves “...all endeavours to shape, guide, direct the conduct of others, whether these be the crew of a ship, the members of a household, the employees of a boss, the children of a family or the inhabitants of a territory” (Rose, 1999:3).

The primary work dealing with this complex notion is that by Burchell, Gordon and Miller (1991). However, Nikolas Rose has written an astute and insightful exploration and analysis of the term in his work *Powers of Freedom* (Rose, 1999). Rose argues that what “distinguishes studies of governmentality from histories of administration, historical sociologies of state formation and sociologies of governance is their power to open a space for critical thought” (1999:19). This potential is due to what Rose suggests is

the preoccupation of the study with a distinctive group of questions concerned with the history of the present. As Governmentality doesn’t begin by asking what happened and why? But by asking what various authorities wanted to happen, in relation to what

problems, defined how, in pursuit of what objectives and through what strategies and techniques? (Rose 1999:20).

Rose also suggests that regimes of truth, or particular ways of rationalising, are developed, linked and “lashed together” through complex social processes and political strategies, in order to govern the actions of individuals and communities. The notion of governmentality may then be employed generally “as a kind of catch-all to refer to any strategy, tactic, process, procedure or programme for controlling, regulating, shaping, mastering or exercising authority over others in a nation, organisation or locality” (Rose, 1999:15).

Accordingly, studies of governmentality have been employed to investigate a variety of contemporary phenomena, for example: notions of community and citizenship (Barnett, 2002; Rose, 2000); governing risk in juvenile justice settings (O'Brien, 2001); clinical governance (Flynn, 2002) “pathwaying” (Iedema, 2003) and use of enterprise culture in health settings (Doolin, 2002); school conduct codes and the production of docile citizens (Raby, 2005); agency and responsibility in social housing (Flint, 2004); team-working as a technology of managerialist control (Knights and McCabe, 2003); marketisation of aspects of tertiary education (Olssen, 2002); spatial governmentality and social order (Merry, 2001).

Governmental studies offer useful insights for this research question in particular areas concerned with the powerful operations of managerialism. For example, Barnett (2002) suggests that neoliberal appeals to the widely-held community notion of responsible citizenship enable the control of citizens by aligning the subjectivity of being a free, responsible individual with a sense of obligation and duty to the state or community. The re-shaping of the self is shown to be a central component of neoliberal ideology. Several dimensions have been identified as forming or contributing to the governmental process, the various and diverse apparatuses employed in the service of governmentality. Rationalities or regimes of truth, disciplining processes and technologies combine to shape the subjectivity of the self and thus provide an internally-driven self-control mechanism. Thus this thesis identifies and examines these governmental operations within community service organisations. The development and use of these conceptualisations, or conceptual tools, enable this thesis to make distinctions in the area of the operations of power in organisations where powerful discursive operations shape organising structures, roles and practices.

## *Regimes of truth*

To enable discourse to be authoritative, various means are employed to invest authority in particular knowledge and forms of knowledge. Rose (1999) argues that

...in the West since the middle of the eighteenth-century those seeking to exercise power have sought to rationalize their authority. Whether in the name of the market, in the name of the social, in the name of the liberty of the individual ...a strategy to intervene, whether in thought or in reality, upon a set of messy, local, regional, practical, political or other struggles in order to rationalize them according to a certain principle (Rose 1999:28).

Linking with Foucault's earlier work, Rose presents heterogeneous rationalities or regimes of truth and their strategic and political orientations. Regimes of truth consist of constructed, authoritative, legitimised, normalised, knowledge systems, immanent to certain discourses where they exert control or constitute the "discursive order" (Fairclough, 1992), whether moral, scientific, social or economic. Examination of the creation and development of these specific, authoritative truth systems, or what Rose calls "contingent lash-ups of truth", provides insight into the type of 'logic' or 'rationality' by which a particular discourse operates (Rose, 1999:27). He suggests, for instance, that Margaret Thatcher did not start out with a complete neoliberal philosophy, or truth regime, but that this was developed contingently and responsively through linkages between Hayek's economic theories, political expediency, economic constraints, balancing social milieu and policy, international agendas and trends. Rose suggests government (or in this case, management) continually seeks to "give itself a form of truth — establish a kind of ethical base for its actions" (1999:25). Inevitably, these ethical bases are appropriated as being more or less rational and therefore normalised and accepted as common sense.

Further, Rose (1999) following Foucault suggests that these regimes of truth can be identified and problematised by asking historical questions and disrupting their taken-for-granted status. He suggests an order of questions for examining these regimes of truth such as:

How did it become possible to make truths about persons, their conduct, the means of action upon this and the reasons for such action? How did it become possible to make these truths in these ways and in this geographical, temporal and existential space? How were these truths enacted and by whom, in what torsions and tensions with other truths, through what contests, struggles, alliances, bribes, blackmails, promises and threats? What relations of seduction, domination, subordination, allegiance and distinction were thus made possible? (Rose, 1999:19).

Examination of regimes of truth within the studies undertaken in this research enables the underlying rationalities of various discourses to be made explicit and thus contestable.

### *Disciplining processes*

Social and governmental control operates through various disciplining processes as truths and rationalities are deployed, accepted and naturalised to achieve various strategic agendas and purposes.

Control is exercised through the management of freedom, or self regulation. An emphasis upon power as a mode of action which serves to act upon the actions of others reveals a mode of government which utilizes practices and relations which link the subjectivity of subjects to their own subjection (Barnett, 2002:314).

A persons' subjectivity, their choices concerning identity, self and agency, are in this way politically controlled by the construction of mechanisms designed specifically to shape that self, identity or subject position. "Personal autonomy is not the antithesis of political power, but a key term in its exercise, the more so because most individuals are not merely the subjects of power but play a part in its operations" (Rose and Miller 1992:1).

Discipline of populations is achieved through shaping the subjectivity of individuals, rendering them docile through the implementation of authoritative and pervasive self-knowledge processes or technologies of the self (Rose, 1998). Links are made through what Rose describes as "...a complex set of strategies, utilizing and encouraging the positive knowledges of economy, sociality and the moral order, and harnessing already existing micro-fields of power in order to link their governmental objectives with activities far distant in space and time" (Rose, 1999:18).

Government is thus achieved from a distance by an internalised disciplining process drawing upon a variety of heterogeneous knowledges and truths, which are "lashed together" in a more or less rational process. Rose describes this as

... the complex of notions, calculations, strategies and tactics through which diverse authorities – political, military, economic, theological, medical, and so forth have sought to act upon the lives and conducts of each and all, in order to avert evils and achieve such desirable states as health, happiness, wealth and tranquillity (Rose, 1998:152).

In other words, the penetration and intrusion of the disciplining power of the State in the lives of individuals occurs by the creation of links to existing systems, technologies, institutions, organisational structures and practices which permeate the everyday world. Importantly, these



links are often not stable or continuous; rather they are tenuous and heterogeneous, changing inexorably as discourses interact in time and space. And so, in this thesis governmental disciplining processes within organisations and their links with the disciplining power of the State are foregrounded for examination.

### *Technologies of government*

In order to achieve these governmental agendas various technologies of government are employed. Rose and Miller describe these as:

...the humble and mundane mechanisms by which authorities seek to instantiate government: techniques of notation, computation and calculation; procedures of examination and assessment; the invention of devices such as surveys and presentational forms such as tables; the standardisation of systems for training and the inculcation of habits; the inauguration of professional specialisms and vocabularies; building designs and architectural forms – the list is heterogenous and in principle unlimited (Rose and Miller, 1991:13).

This heterogeneity includes collective or social technologies such as meetings, communities, neighbourhoods, networks etc and individual technologies, or technologies of the self,

self-steering mechanisms...the conduct of one's relation with oneself, for example requiring one to relate to oneself epistemologically (know yourself) despotically (master yourself), or in other ways (care for yourself). They are embodied in particular technical practices (confession, diary writing, group discussion, the twelve step program of Alcoholics Anonymous) (Rose, 1998:29).

Additionally, Rose (1999) develops the idea that creating both mental and physical space opens governmental territory; it is a space with boundaries and limits which he terms topography. He goes on to say one can also think in these terms about the spaces of enclosure that governmental thought has imagined and penetrated: schools, factories, hospitals, asylums and museums, now even shopping malls" (1999:35). In this research, these spaces include community and social territories such as those operating in and through community service organisations such as youth refuges and family support centres. This metaphor may be further developed by using the idea of governors and governable spaces and then extending the metaphor to mapping the social spaces of populations, for example, by the use of opinion polls to develop "public opinion" (Rose 1999). These constructions can then be represented as images, in an organisational context these may be

organisational structures, flow charts, graphs or other representations which may be employed to map organisational territory.

## **2.4 Managerialist discourse**

This section following the discussion of organisational knowledge and the discursive mechanisms examines the literature in the area of managerialist discourse and critiques its neoliberal drivers and rationality. Questions specifically addressed below include: What is managerialism? How has it been defined in earlier literature? How is the term used in this thesis? What is a managerialist discourse? What is new and changing that requires the analysis in a thesis such as this? What are the characteristics of managerialist discourse? What are the conditions of its possibility? What is managerialist knowledge? The section is structured as follows. First, the term managerialism is defined and earlier research in the area is presented. Second, neoliberalism as a principal driver of managerialist discourse is critiqued. Third, the recent intensification of managerialist discourse is discussed, opening a space for this study to investigate the discursive shaping of organisational knowledge in community service organisations.

### **2.4.1 What is managerialism?**

Many definitions of managerialism have been developed (Berle and Means, 1932; Grey, 1999; MacIntyre, 1981; Parker, 2002; Townley, 2002a, 2004,) including a number specific to community service discourse (Considine and Painter, 1997b; Rees and Rodley, 1995; Fattore, Galloway-Smith, and Turnbull, 2000; Clarke, Gewirtz, and McLaughlin, 2000b; Jones and May, 1992). The term was first used in the 1930s as corporations were increasingly run by managers who did not own them, this new and growing management phenomenon was given the term managerialism (Berle and Means, 1932; Grey, 1999). Later in the 1980s, within the public sectors of a number of countries including the UK<sup>7</sup>, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, a new group of managers in contrast to professional bureaucrats developed and this phenomenon was also named managerialism or the new managerialism (Considine and Painter, 1997; Yeatman, 1999).

The term managerialism was also used to refer to the widespread development and application of abstract management principles (Parker, 2002). Grey examines the notion that all society is

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<sup>7</sup> For an excellent overview of the development of Managerialism and the New Public Management in the UK see Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin (2000b).



involved in management in some form (Grey, 1999). Townley (2002), suggests that abstract management principles are “disembedded and disembodied” (2002:551) and are applied to organisational problems devoid of context. She goes on to deconstruct abstract management. “Following Armstrong (2001) the distinction has to be drawn between expertise in a process or practice that informs its coordination and management, and an abstract and generalised concept of management to be applied to any process” (Townley 2002:550).

In Australia, political changes by the Federal Government during the Hawke and Keating era<sup>8</sup> led to the neoliberal expression of organising gaining significant impetus. In more recent times, during the conservative Howard<sup>9</sup> agenda, further expansion occurred through endorsement of the National Competition Policy (Considine and Painter, 1997) by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)<sup>10</sup> 1995.

Australian Governments, at both Federal and State levels, have followed international trends favouring neoliberal marketisation as a means of making the Australian economy more internationally competitive. The National Competition Policy<sup>11</sup> provided a regulatory framework through which to restructure many sectors of the economy. The public sector including Human Services and Welfare were high on the list for reform.

A key element of this approach has been the consistent advocacy of all [Australian] Governments of microeconomic reform. This is the term commonly used to describe the changes that have taken place in the structures and functions of Australia’s domestic economy since the mid 1980’s. Examples of these changes include the corporatisation and/or privatisation of public utilities, the contracting out of programs, the winding back of regulatory functions and the introduction of competition into the provision of services. (Moore, 1996 cited in Keevers et al, 2006).

The resulting changes of practice and policy in the Australian public sector were so widespread and fundamental that Considine and Painter (1997:2) suggest that “managerialism is the term

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<sup>8</sup> Bob Hawke and Paul Keating were successive Labour Prime Ministers in Australia between 1983 and 1996.

<sup>9</sup> At the time of writing the conservative, Liberal party is in its third term led by Prime Minister John Howard since 1996.

<sup>10</sup> COAG is a bi-annual meeting of all Australian State Premiers with the Prime Minister.

<sup>11</sup> For further information and sources regarding the National Competition Policy, see Keevers et al (2006).

used to describe all the organisational changes achieved in the public sector since 1979.” They go on to list these changes as:

comprehensive corporate planning based on centrally determined goals; comprehensive program budgets; management improvement programs in which private sector management theories and private sector managers were identified as the model for public sector improvement; creation of a defined rank of senior managers subject to forms of contract employment which limited their tenure...increased accountability for financial management through new forms of central audit... performance monitoring of individuals and organisations (Considine and Painter, 1997:3).

These changes resulted from the implementation of the neoliberal political agenda and the subsequent reordering and reorganising of public institutions and led to a reduction in the control of professionals and their knowledge within the bureaucracy (Clarke et al., 2000b; du Gay, 2004). Additionally, the application of this new political agenda supported the growth of managerialism in the public and not-for-profit and community service sector.

In the community service context, Rees defines managerialism as:

an ideology with two distinct claims: first, that efficient management can solve almost any problem and second, that practices which are appropriate for the conduct of private sector enterprises can also be applied to public [and community] sector services (Rees, 1995:23).

Jones and May further this understanding by highlighting the political dimension that “...it also needs to be viewed as an element of a political programme and campaign to curtail the role of the State in society” (1992:362). Further, they suggest that contemporary managerialism has developed from the roots of scientific management or Taylorism (Taylor, 1911) and is essentially “a management ideology embedded in a set of management techniques” (Jones and May, 1992: 386). In their seminal work on Australian community service organisations, Jones and May advocate a response to managerialism based on political economy (1992). They argue for the alternative applications of the language and techniques of managerialism such as notions of efficiency and effectiveness in ways that are consistent with community service practices and are equitable for services and their users (1992:386).

### *Critiques of managerialist rationality*

A number of well-known critiques of managerialism have been developed, including that by Alisdair MacIntyre (1981), which accord well with a community service orientation towards

prioritising human dignity and value. MacIntyre shows considerable foresight when, almost thirty years ago, he designated the manager as the typical role or “character” of the late modern era. MacIntyre suggests that each epoch has characters that are representative embodiments of various normalised practices, their rationalities and moralities. He argues that in the “character” of the manager, the personality and the role merge in a way unlike that of other social roles (1981).

First, MacIntyre (1981) critiques the rationality underpinning the managerial character on a number of fronts. He is particularly critical of claims by management of their managerialist expertise, challenging on the one hand, the notion of the superiority of managerialist effectiveness, which, he suggests, is a fiction but has become accepted as a reality, and on the other hand, claims of managerialist capability of prediction. By tracing the philosophical foundations of rationalism, he contests the basis of managerialist instrumental knowledge presented in abstracted generalisations claiming it to be untenable and spurious. Adopting the position of a virtue ethics, he contests the notion of effectiveness, so essential to the managerial character, by showing that both short-term and long-term attempts to measure effectiveness failed (MacIntyre, 1981).

Second, MacIntyre (1981) shows that there are strong grounds for rejecting the grounds of moral neutrality. “Managers conceive of themselves as being morally neutral whose skills enable them to devise the most efficient means of achieving whatever end is proposed” (MacIntyre, 1981:74). He suggests that the manager as character “obliterates the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations ...the manager treats ends as a given as outside his (sic) scope; his concern is with technique, with effectiveness of transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labor into skilled labor, investment into profits” (MacIntyre, 1981:30). Third, the Weberian idea of bureaucratic effectiveness embedded within the managerial character is shown to be a manipulative process through which effectiveness is decided. He concludes that effectiveness is “part of a masquerade of social control rather than a reality.”(MacIntyre, 1981:75).

#### **2.4.2 Neoliberalism as a driver of managerialism**

By advocating the neoliberal position that ‘smaller government is good government’, Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) *Reinventing Government* provided a theoretical impetus for neoliberal and conservative politicians to spread managerialism within the public sector. Osborne and Gaebler’s (1992) work prescribes the use of market mechanisms such as the purchaser/provider split, tight contracted outcome requirements rather than emphasis on inputs, use of performance contracts

for all staff in place of notions of permanency and tenure, and opening and creating markets in traditionally public funded areas such as health, education and welfare. Further, they suggested that employment of these corporate practices and strategies to stimulate entrepreneurial activity would, in turn, provide greater efficiencies by reducing bureaucratic encumbrance resulting in the transformation of both public and non-government human services domains (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

In the politically sensitive area of welfare expenditure, the area of community services was targeted as an area requiring overhaul by the market mechanisms described by Osborne and Gaebler. In concert with the National Competition Policy, mechanisms such as those prescribed in Osborne and Gaebler's (1992) work were employed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of services (Jones and May, 1995). The practical outworking of these neoliberal policies resulted in the mandated application of managerial practices embedded in funding and accountability contracts (Jones and May, 1992). Within Australia, substantial research has already underscored the effects of these policies on community service organisations and their practices (Bryson, 1992; Darcy, 1999; Hough, 1995; Ife, 1997, 2001; Jones and May, 1992; Meagher, 2001; Meagher and Healy, 2003; Mendes, 2005; Nabben, 2001; Rawsthorne, 2004, 2005; Rees and Rodley, 1995; Rees, Rodley and Stillwell, 1993; Rix, 2005; Solondz, 1995). In summary, these effects show the introduction of a range of managerialist technologies employed to discipline community service organisations and reposition them in new neoliberal, market-oriented organisational configurations.

However, neoliberalism is not without its critics and many insightful critiques of neoliberal forms of governance are available (Davies and Bansel, 2005; Davies, Gottsche and Bansel, 2006; du Gay, 2004; Rose, 1999, 2000). The penetrating analysis and critique by Bourdieu (1998) unveils the drivers of neoliberal ideology and its governmental rationality based upon the primacy of individualism.

### **2.4.3 Recent intensification**

While many managerialist reforms began over thirty years ago in community service organisations, of particular interest for this research at this time is the ubiquitous spread and intensification of managerialism. Parker (2002) for example, writing within a management discourse, suggests that use of the term management is

almost everywhere nowadays. It has become one of the defining words of our time and both a cause and symptom of our brave new world. It directly employs millions, and indirectly

employs almost everyone else. It is altering the language we use in our conceptions of home, work and self, and both relies on and reinforces deeply held assumptions about the necessary relationship between control and progress (2002:9).

He concludes that managerialism has become “the narrow application of management as a generalised technology, of control of everything – horses, humans, and hospitals. This is management as the universal solution, not a personal assessment of a local problem” (2002:9).

Clearly the phenomenon of managerialism is enormously compelling, or even seductive, not just in the world of management and organisations but more generally in societies through its employment in marketing and media, as a type of international *lingua franca*, shaping public language and social practices (Parker, 2002). For changing social and political conditions, in particular, an increasingly globalised neoliberal political agenda is resulting in the unquestioning acceptance of the marketisation of public and private domains which, in turn, provide the requisite conditions for the possibility of the expansion and intensification of managerialist discourse (Parker, 2002).

Other recent works point to more generalised changes to organisational forms that are also muddying the personal and private domains within society. Iedema (2003) develops the idea of a post-bureaucratic reconfiguration of organisations under the influence of changing discourses. His main thesis suggests “that post-bureaucratic organization is a complex dialectic that seeks to balance interactive participation, self-steering and self-fashioning workers, and the formalization of aspects of work” (Iedema, 2003:3). He goes on to show how individual workers are made more “visible” in organisations and work itself is made more “transparent” (2003:21). The results of these changes, what he terms textualization, occurs as the “worker self is organizationalised, and the organization is self-ed” (2003:3).

Underpinned by an ideological and abstracted approach to knowledge and changing organisational forms, managerialist discourse contests and replaces other discourses, for example, those in human services organisations relying upon professional knowledge: in medicine (Iedema, Degeling, Braithwaite and White, 2003; Iedema, Flabouris, Grant and Jorm, 2006), social work (Osmond 2004) and education (Davies 2004, 2005). Clarke et al describe this discursive expansion as a “concerted effort to displace or subordinate the claims of professionalism... It can no longer be accepted that professionals know best rather we are invited to accept that managers do the right thing” (2000b:9). They go on to suggest that managerialism “...like professionalism defines a set of expectations, values and beliefs. It is a normative system concerning what counts

as valuable knowledge, who knows it and who is empowered to act in what ways as a consequence” (2000b:9).

Recent research on managerialism in the area of community service organisations has examined the effects of changing government policy leading to increased reliance on managerialist mechanisms and technologies. Some examples include performance management and contracting out (Meagher and Healy, 2003), quality systems (Cairns et al., 2005), as well as the effects of management discourse on participation (Darcy, 1999), charity organisations (Harris, 2001), community development (Rawsthorne, 2005), inclusive communities (Demos, 2003), and professional knowledge (Muetzelfeldt, 2002).

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter examines the literature in the area of the research question which asks how is managerialist discourse shaping organisational knowledge in community service organisations. By undertaking this examination, the research has been positioned, first as employing a knowledge-based approach, second within studies of organisational discourse and third, within the particular context of community service organisations. Thus the theoretical framework, will enable the investigation of particular characteristics of organisational knowledge in the context of community service organisations highlighting important local, situated, practice oriented knowledge drawing upon evaluations of worth. Moreover, the employment of a Foucauldian orientated approach will enable the dynamic governmental power relations operating through managerialist discourse in community service organisations to be more clearly examined. The following chapter presents the action-oriented methodology employed in the research which enables the research to contribute to the ongoing response by community service organisations to the challenges posed by the expansion of managerialist discourse.

This investigation draws upon the four major strands or areas of literature: organisational knowledge, discourse, managerialism and community service organisations. Although the phenomenon of managerialism has been explored in the literature there remain significant questions as to how managerialism is shaping organisational knowledge in community service organisations. What are the consequences and effects of changing organisational knowledge in community service organisations? Is managerialist knowledge contributing to the loss of organisational knowledge in community service organisations? What are the intended/unintended effects of this knowledge loss within community service organisations?



Finally, other questions remain unanswered in relation to the powerful operations of the managerialist discourse and different types of community service organisations. What are the specific characteristics of managerialist discourse situated in such organisations? How and by what mechanisms does managerialist discourse operate in particular organisational contexts? And in relation to organisational knowledge, what are the specific characteristics of organisational knowledge in community service organisations? In what ways, and for what purposes, is organisational knowledge being shaped in the field? What are the embedded discursive relationships, operations and mechanisms employed? How are alternative discourses operating and resisting managerialist discourse? Such questions are beginning to be asked of some mainstream private corporations but as yet such work has not extended to community service organisations. By addressing these questions, the thesis aims to contribute to the research in this important area.

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The previous chapter developed a theoretical framework from which to address the research question in this thesis. Specific research questions were framed as: What is managerialist discourse? What are the conditions of its possibility? How does it operate in community service organisations? What are the embedded discursive relationships, operations and mechanisms employed? How are alternative discourses operating and resisting managerialist discourse? In what ways, and for what purposes, is organisational knowledge being shaped in the area? What are the characteristics of organisational knowledge in community service organisations? How can the research be taken up in the actions of community service organisations?

The objective of this chapter is to describe and justify the research approach chosen to answer the research questions. The questions aim to produce specific, in depth knowledge about the central phenomena requiring investigation: managerialist discourse and its shaping of organisational knowledge in community service organisations. Additionally, this requires explanation of the approach adopted to examine the research question. This chapter therefore begins by identifying the epistemological order of the phenomena under investigation to ensure the compatibility of the methodology with the philosophical and theoretical framework.

The first section presents the research as poststructural and dialogic and therefore discusses epistemological considerations. The second section introduces action research and defines and describes the third-person action research methodology employed in the research. In the third section, data collection methods are discussed and include open-ended interviews, meetings, discussions, and document collection. In the final section of the chapter, critical discourse analysis is presented as the method used to analyse the selected illustrative texts.

### 3.1 Research framework

The purposes of the research developed in Chapter 1 include making a contribution in two domains first, to the community service organisations within the community service sector, and second, to the academic body of knowledge in the area of organisational studies. In order to do this, the chapter incorporates both substantive considerations, such as how the research questions about the particular phenomena under investigation can be most clearly answered, as well as epistemological considerations such as how is knowledge to be obtained and incorporated into a community of practice? The brief but important discussion of the epistemological considerations



provides the logical basis, or epistemological justification, for the choice of the research approach.

### **3.1.1 Epistemological considerations**

The ontological and epistemological order of the organisational phenomena requires the development of a congruent research perspective. The research questions involve investigating complex, discursive mechanisms and operations of power in managerialist discourse. The most appropriate research perspective and methodology must, therefore, have the capacity to engage with the people or actors within community service organisations in ways that foreground complex power relations. Moreover, a Foucauldian view of power/knowledge, developed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2, shows that power operates through the complex web of actions and social relations as well as in the construction and dissemination of powerfully operating texts. Therefore the research perspective must be capable of interrogating the construction of texts within dominant social discourses and of analysing knowledge creation, types and uses in organisations.

The context of community service organisations is one in which highly complex social interactions are part of the day-to-day interventions between workers and their clients. Knowledge in this context is often tacit and difficult to identify. If this research and its findings are to be actionable within community service organisations, then the methodology needs to draw upon the ways that community service organisation operate. Knowledge of these practices needs to be included within the research approach through an appropriate methodology.

Therefore, the process of knowledge creation or construction within the thesis is not regarded as the work of one individual but is understood to be co-constructed in webs of relationship and action (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). The intention of this PhD research is to produce knowledge for and in action; it moves beyond description and observation by engaging in the “turn to action” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Treleaven, 2001). In this way the research may fulfil its dual purposes of contributing to the body of knowledge in academic discourse and, at the same time, better identifying organisational knowledge within the community service sector.

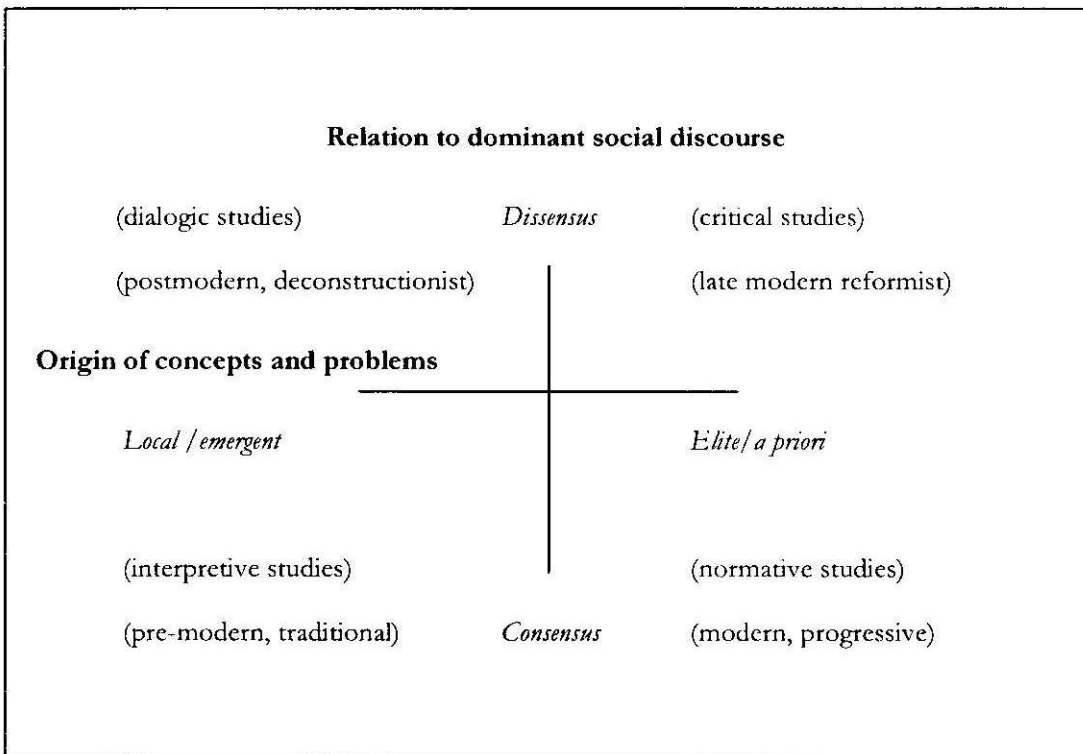
The epistemological focus of the research and the nature of the research questions collapse the subjective/objective divide associated with a positivist epistemology (Reason and Torbert 2001). In this research, the ‘in here’ world of the researcher and the subjects/participants and the external ‘out there’ world of the phenomenon under investigation are integrated. Accordingly,

the phenomena – discourse, knowledge and community service organisations – are understood as being socially and discursively constructed (Hardy and Phillips 2002).

Many classification schemes have been developed for identifying research philosophy. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1994) develop four paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory and constructionism. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) develop a historical approach to qualitative research containing seven “moments”. However, the most useful approach in terms of this research, for identifying its epistemological and methodological position within the organisational studies discourse, is that developed by Alvesson and Deetz (2002). It provides a recent and relevant framework which highlights further epistemological considerations and helps to present the logic associated with the choice of the most suitable methodology.

### 3.1.2 Locating this research

Alvesson and Deetz’ (2002) work presents a study which covers the types of research approaches within organisation and management studies. It makes clear the distinctions between normative, critical, interpretive and dialogic or postmodern approaches.



**Figure 4** Contrasting dimensions from the metatheory of representational practices (Alvesson and Deetz, 2002:24).

Their diagram re-presented in Figure 4 has two dimensions. First, they locate the discourse dimension on the vertical axis. Here the relationship of any particular research work to the dominant social discourses is made visible. The dissensus of approaches employing postmodernist/dialogic and critical theory are in contrast to those using normative and interpretive approaches which from their location in the diagram, are considered to have greater congruence and consensus with dominant social discourses. The horizontal axis of their framework is epistemological and emphasises the origin of the research problem under investigation and its related concepts, as part of the constitutive process within research. In other words, how was the problem defined, by whom, and for what purposes? A brief discussion of each of the four research approaches normative, interpretive, critical and dialogic follows and their relationship to this research discussed.

### *Normative Studies*

Normative approaches include the positivist and post-positivist perspectives originating from Durkheim, Comte and Frederick Taylor (Donaldson, 1985, 2003). These approaches are still dominant within management and organisation studies (Alvesson and Deetz, 2002:49) and are characterised by traditional notions usually associated with modernity that draw upon a representationalist epistemology (Taylor, 1985; Toulmin, 2001; Tsoukas, 1998). Such representationalist views claim that "...our knowledge represents the world as it is" (Tsoukas, 1998:781). Such a view supports the notion that the use of research techniques drawn from the physical sciences provides the basis for the development of a higher-order, scientific, reliable knowledge (Donaldson, 2003).

The corollary of this position is that the knowledge of the human, personal and social world developed using this understanding provides epistemological and ontological certainty (Donaldson, 2003; Taylor, 1985). Furthermore, positivism seeks to develop causal laws that enable the development of generalisations based on empiricist methods that produce reliability and repeatability. This view often supports dominant discourses, is naïve to the politics of knowledge, overlooks the importance of language and meanings and presents face value understandings of the 'in here' world of meanings and social action.

### *Interpretive studies*

The second quadrant discusses the interpretive school of thought which draws upon the German neo-Kantian intellectual tradition (Dilthey, Ricket, Windelband, Simmel, Weber) of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Schwandt, 1998). This tradition developed as an alternative to the accepted natural

science approach of the study of human sciences. Natural science was, according to this view, unable to adequately explain human action and its complex social meanings, *Verstehen*, or interpretive understanding. Interpretive research follows Gadamer and draws on his work in the area of hermeneutics and the pursuit of the attribution of meaning to phenomena. “What distinguishes human social action from the movement of physical objects is that the former is inherently meaningful” (Schwandt, 2000:191). The focus of interest is then “the particular, actors, places, times etc and how they fashion meaning out of events and phenomena through prolonged, complex processes of social interaction involving language, history and action” (Schwandt, 1998:221-222). Methodologies identified with the study of *Verstehen* through interpretive approaches include phenomenology, ethnography and hermeneutics (Schwandt 1998).

Interpretive studies are located by Alvesson and Deetz (2002) in the quadrant associated with local/emergent origin of knowledge and in consensus with dominant social discourse. The local emergent orientation of knowledge matches that adopted within this research. However, the capacity of the researcher to participate within the research as an actor as well as consensual positioning in relation to the dominant discourse is precluded.

### *Critical studies*

The critical approach is located by Alvesson and Deetz (2002) in the elite/apriori relationship to knowledge and in dissensus with the dominant social discourse. This positioning suggests that critical approaches contest dominant social discourses and their interpretation of how the world is, by drawing upon alternative meta-theories of how the world should be. The Frankfurt School<sup>12</sup> provides the main departure from the developing positivist orthodoxy by challenging the unquestioning acceptance of a “post-Enlightenment culture nurtured by capitalism” (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000:280). Drawing on Marxist theory and first-hand experience of the ideological use of what the positivists claim is a ‘higher order knowledge’ both in post-WW1 Germany and

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<sup>12</sup> Historically, the positivist approach to knowledge development adopted within the normative discourse has been challenged and refuted on a number of fronts; in particular, by the Frankfurt school (called in German the Institut für Sozialforschung- the Institute of Social Research). The work of the Frankfurt School is closely associated with the development of the critical studies movement. Membership of the school included Horkheimer, Marcuse and Adorno and later Habermas. (The standard reference on the Frankfurt School, according to Carr (2000), is Jay’s (1996) work *The Dialectical Imagination*).

then later from within the USA, these early critical writers sought to uncouple academic work from these forms of power (Carr, 2000; Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000).

Within the critical school, knowledge is thought to be socially and historically constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1984) and supporting “power” issues of domination, asymmetry and distortion. (Alvesson and Deetz, 2002). Following Marxist concerns about class and the ownership of capital, questions about whose interests are being served and who benefits are prime areas of concern within critical studies. Theory is concerned with power, domination, ideology and hegemony (Gramsci, 1971), particularly within social structures. Social action is presented as the necessary and rational response to asymmetrical power structures in society (Habermas, 1984).

#### *Postmodern or dialogic studies*

The fourth area of studies in the Alvesson and Deetz (2002) framework, and the one of most significance for this research, is dialogic or postmodern studies. Dialogic approaches are similar to critical approaches in their dissensus from the dominant social discourses. However, epistemologically their identification with locally and emergently-developed knowledge and concepts places them at odds with both the critical and normative approaches and their attempts to develop a-priori knowledge and meta-narratives.

Postmodernism is broad and heterogenous and, arguably, only really comprehensible in relation to modernity (Clegg and Kornberger, 2003). Postmodern authors usually refer to the ways that postmodernism deviates from the norms of modernity. This is evident for example, in their rejection of totalising metanarratives, privileging of locality, an emphasis on change and emergence rather than globality, control and fixity, diversity not uniformity and so forth (Clegg and Hardy, 1996). Postmodernism has caused significant angst amongst its detractors in modernity, for its very claim to existence means that modernity with all its certainties is called into question. Yet, despite its many criticisms, particularly for its obscure and difficult writings, postmodern work is far from a mere exercise in obfuscation. Foucault, Lyotard, Derrida and others offer penetrating poststructural critiques or deconstructions of the contemporary era including insights into power/knowledge, or discourse, and the failure of structuralist and modernist metanarratives (Foucault, 1980).

In summary, Alvesson and Deetz’s research framework is useful for this research for a number of reasons. It covers the full spectrum of research perspectives, the two axes locate the relationship of the work to discourse and epistemology as well as the research’s use and relationship to

knowledge. In this way the framework enables this research study to be located and contextualised as part of organisational research.

From the research questions presented at the beginning of this chapter, the research approach must clearly enable the examination of knowledge and discourse in the context of community service organisations. The research approach is therefore appropriately positioned within the dialogic quadrant for a number of reasons. Locating the research perspective in the dialogic quadrant positions the research in dissensus with dominant social discourses while incorporating local and emergent knowledge. A congruent research methodology must therefore, enable and include local knowledge to be brought forward emergently and reflexively, through forms of participation in the research. The positioning of the research in dissensus with the dominant social discourses highlights the critical orientation of the research and its reliance upon postmodern, discursive approaches. Employment of this poststructural approach, using critical discourse analysis of texts, is therefore most consistent with the dialogic approach.

In the light of the careful consideration in the foregoing discussion, the selection of the methodology was narrowed to several possibilities, including critical ethnography and a form of action research. Action research was preferable, however, for two main reasons. In relation to my reflexive participation in the research, issues were raised about the ways that I would influence areas such as participant observation. Additionally, the research aimed to change and integrate social actions and as such was difficult to reconcile with interpretive positions. In the next section, action research is therefore discussed in detail, followed by its specific application within this research.

## **3.2 Principles of action research**

### **3.2.1 Definitions**

While Cairns et al (2003) are correct in suggesting that no general consensus exists within the research literature about the specific definition or method of action research, Reason and Bradbury's comments in the *Handbook of Action Research* (2001) provide widely-accepted principles within action research including "...a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing ..." (2001:1). The ideas of joint or participatory research processes, oriented towards action, are concepts generally found in action research approaches in their many forms (Dick, 1991; McTaggart, 1991; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Zuber-Skerritt, 1996b). These processes of participatory enquiry have traditionally been represented diagrammatically in the



action research spiral involving planning, acting, observing and reflecting (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2001).

Action research is often creatively adapted to particular disparate, theoretical and philosophical sources, for example, Aristotelian ideas of practical knowledge or 'phronesis' and Deweyan notions of pragmatism. Other more critical orientations draw upon Marxist notions of praxis and critical thinking such as the emancipatory action research associated with the work of Freire (1970), feminist praxis (Lather, 1986, 1991) and liberation theology (Gutierrez, 1973).

Action research has developed multiple applications drawing upon diverse schools of thought and approaches such as: action learning (Argyris and Schon, 1978); participatory action research (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2001); co-operative inquiry (Heron and Reason, 2001; Holly, 1996); and action science (Argyris, Putnam and Smith, 1985). Such an eclectic group of theories and practices indicate that the range and scope of action research applications and practices are extremely diverse and multi-vocal. Moreover, the diversity and hybridised versions of action research suggest that there is scope to creatively apply action research in social research such as in this study, while at the same time maintaining rigour. Applications of action research have been employed by qualitative researchers intent upon producing action-oriented studies, generating new transformative knowledge (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2001; Park, 2001; Reason and Torbert, 2001).

Within organisational studies, the work of Lewin (1946) and Argyris and Schon (1978) in action science and learning within organisations respectively, provided early significant theoretical and methodological contributions. They developed participative approaches involving "learning laboratories", participatory groups within organisations employing "learning loops", and reflection upon practices led to action responses that, in turn, created new processes structured into cycles of learning. In more recent times, action research has been used extensively in organisational studies, for example, in professional development (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996a), innovation (Holly, 1996), networks (Chisholm, 2001) and information systems (Checkland and Howell, 1998) as well as in thesis writing about organisation studies (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002)

Applications of action research have been adopted for use in many disciplines and contexts such as education (Grundy and Kemmis, 1982), health organisation and management (Zuber-Skerritt and Perry, 2002). Action research has been particularly well used within research in community service organisations (Cairns et al., 2003; Wadsworth, 1991).



### 3.2.2 Third-person action research and its application

The methodological approach adopted to investigate the research question of this thesis may be broadly termed third-person action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). This term was initially introduced by Torbert (Torbert, 1991, 2000), and is aligned with the earlier work of Marshall and Reason who suggested that:

All good research is *for me, for us* and *for them*: it speaks to three audiences... It is *for them* to the extent that it produces some kind of generalizable ideas and outcomes... It is *for us* to the extent that it responds to concerns for our praxis, is relevant and timely... [for] those who are struggling with problems in their field of action. It is *for me* to the extent that the process and outcomes respond directly to the individual researcher's being-in-the-world (1994:112-3).

Third-person action research refers to the relationship that the researcher has with three audiences: self, participants and the community. Whereas in the first-person action research the researcher describes his/her own experiences and reflections on the research as part of the research process, in second-person action research the researcher relates to the group of participants in a reflective process involving the personal reflections of the researcher and the other participants. Third-person action research involves the incorporation of the earlier two stages as part of the process and then involves the leadership process of fostering the reflective processes of first and second person action research in the organisation or institution (Torbert, 2001).

This integrated approach of third-person action research provides a useful way of viewing how this research is related to, and at the same time, impacts and influences different audiences. In particular, an inclusive orientation supports the epistemological approach developed earlier, that there were three dimensions within the research: the place of the self as researcher, the involvement of participants in the research, and the location of the research in both organisational studies discourse and in the community services sector. This type of inquiry also incorporates the action research spiral – plan, act, observe and reflect – in some form at each level of inquiry.

Importantly however, the research does not claim to be participatory action research in its entirety. The approach adopted is in some ways participatory. Yet as with all research, the researcher began and developed the research with certain theoretical assumptions and concerns about the nature of changing knowledge practice. These concerns and assumptions were

discussed openly and tested with community sector colleagues and their views sought and discussed. These colleagues brought different theoretical perspectives to these discussions. Some held orthodox Marxist views emphasising the place of structural inequality, the role of class and political economy within managerialism, while others were concerned with a lack of participatory democracy, and the loss of social justice values. In particular, feminist colleagues highlighted the gendered nature of the issues surrounding the introduction of managerialism in community services – a field dominated by women. In these participative engagements situated within particular organisational contexts the third person action research was developed.

### *First-person inquiry*

The place of the self, often negated, overlooked or embarrassingly acknowledged in social research is, in this first-person inquiry approach, brought into the foreground and viewed as being inextricably embedded and constitutive of the research practices. Research is in some form *for me* and influenced by ‘where I am coming from’.

First-person research/practice skills and methods address the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, to act awarely and choicefully, and to assess effects in the outside world while acting (Reason and Torbert, 2001:23).

The work of Argyris and Schon (1974) on espoused theory and theory-in-use provides an example of the importance of understanding critical reflection on one’s practice. Methods for developing reflective practices include reflective and journal writing, autobiography. Issues concerning identifying good research in this area without succumbing to a subjective relativism are resolved by linking the research back into action/practice (Reason and Torbert, 2001).

Within research of community service organisations the “location of the self” is often problematic (Harris, 2001). Employing this methodology enables complex issues to be addressed. In particular, by including the *for me* dimension of research as a legitimate dimension, third-person action research provides a useful opportunity to incorporate the reflexive understandings of the researcher within the research. The benefits of locating myself as an organisational insider and participant, are threefold and included drawing upon existing networks within community service organisations to site the three studies, identifying the most relevant types of organisation and their specific issues and avoiding spending valuable time building new networks in pursuit of access to unfamiliar organisations. At the same time, this position increased my reliance upon input from others, such as my colleagues and supervisors, for guidance, feedback and reflection that were all necessary to rigorously develop the emergent research process.

Careful consideration was given to my orientation and position as a student/researcher within the research process itself. This orientation ought not to inappropriately position me as a somewhat detached outsider. Rather the adoption of a different positioning was necessary in which I identified myself as an insider (former employee, manager and board member of various community service organisations) working with a group of colleagues belonging to a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). These colleagues were also working in community service organisations and were themselves also concerned with similar issues. This reflexive process was soon established, in which I joined in a process of reflection within groups of community service colleagues throughout the duration of the research. As extensive networks already existed, it was therefore fitting to request colleagues to participate with me, and at the same time to address the research issues that were of mutual concern.

### *Second-person inquiry*

The crucial second-person dimension requires the use of some form of integrated relationship between the research participants as co-researchers. “Second-person research/practice starts when we engage with others in a face-to-face group to enhance our respective first-person inquiries” (Reason and Torbert 2001:28). Reason and Torbert (2001) suggest co-operative inquiry as one way of undertaking this research *for us* while others encourage the use of collaborative inquiry (Treleaven, 1998) and participatory action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

In this research, second person inquiry is undertaken as a form of participatory action research in chapters 5 and 6. Throughout the study, several groups of participants emerged and their collaborative involvement included, planning, data collection and analysis and co-theorising. For example, the complex nature of the processes involved in planning and locating research sites is often glossed over in reconstructing the research account. In developing the sites in chapters 5 and 6 I met informally for over twelve months with several community service colleagues, including Board members and managers, to discuss various issues impacting community service organisations within this state. We also discussed my research proposal and they provided informal feedback on aspects of the developing research. Although the process was not formalised, my colleagues participated with me in the sense that our reflections and experience, understandings of theory and practice informed both the research and the ongoing practice of my colleagues. Additionally, the contribution of my colleagues was taken up in the research process. As a consequence of these discussions and the common commitment colleagues’ volunteered organisations as sites for the research studies.

Research was undertaken with participants in the three organisational sites. In the initial pilot project presented in chapter 4, the positioning of some of the participants outside the organisation limited their capacity for participation. In chapter 5 and 6 the knowledge gained in the earlier study and preliminary findings from it provided part of the starting point for the second and third studies.

### *Third-person action inquiry*

The research is also *for them* in the sense that as the work progressed others became interested, including the coordinator of an Interagency group consisting of approximately twelve organisations and the manager of a regional peak community service organisation representing over two hundred local community service organisations. They were interested in the research, its findings and implications, for their members and worked collaboratively after phase one to develop grants and disseminate findings within the broader community service sector. “Third-person research/practice aims to create a wider community of inquiry involving persons who, because they cannot be known to each other face-to-face (say, in a large, geographically dispersed corporation), have an impersonal quality” (Reason and Torbert 2001:33). This form of research is more commonly termed as the research *for them*. It necessarily generalises and abstracts research findings and actions within and across a collective audience or community.

This study is third-person action research in the sense that it involved working with and for a community, in action cycles at the first-person level. I reflected on the research process as I participated. At the second person level we, including other stakeholders, incorporated action cycles in our practice. Finally, we engaged in reflexive processes in which the research itself served to encourage other community projects to involve participatory action cycles. The research thus developed through a series of emergent stages involving the action inquiry at each of the levels: research *for me, for us and for them*. Importantly, although the differentiation can be made between the first, second and third-person dimensions or levels, in practice the lines were much more blurry, less strategic and messier. The research is thus truly emergent and reflexive; containing action spirals integrated and overlapping rather than, separate and discrete processes.

Emergence, reflexivity, recursivity and feedback cycles, are therefore characteristic of this type of research, and in this study have been drawn upon extensively by engagement and re-engagement with both practice, theory and context (Argyris and Schon, 1978). Research questions are explored as the study developed contextually, through involvement with practitioners and practice issues within community service organisations. For example, my discussions with former

community service colleagues who were made redundant in the re-structure of a major community service organisation, soon led to the suggestion that the organisation would make a suitable site for the pilot study. These early discussions suggested for example, that managerialist practices had common characteristics such as the use of a specific abstract language and the ascendancy of accounting and marketing knowledge and practices above other non-managerialist practices. Further engagement in the early stages of the research with theoretical works, such as those by Rees and Rodley (1995) in the area of managerialism in community service organisations and Foucauldian discourse and its effects, led to new critical reflections. A spiralling, reflexive and emergent process is characteristic of the way that the research developed and also consistent with the third-person action research methodology.

### **3.2.3 Credibility and validity in action research**

In action research approaches the epistemological emphasis is on the integration of theory and practice knowledge (Greenwood and Levin, 1998). Practice knowledge or knowledge in action is brought forward and not dismissed on the grounds of subjective involvement. Reason and Bradbury (2001) suggest that questions concerning the quality of action research, while crucial, ought not to be determined by the generation of a new action research oriented “criteriology” (Reason and Bradbury, 2001). They suggest what they call “choice-points” and questions which may be emergently and reflexively considered in order to construct the best-fit for action research in a particular local context (Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

*Research as choice-points and questions for quality in action research*

Is the action research:

- Explicit in developing a praxis of relational participation?
- Guided by reflexive concerns for practical outcomes?
- Inclusive of a plurality of knowing?
- Ensuring conceptual- theoretical integrity?
- Embracing ways of knowing beyond the intellect?
- Intentionally choosing appropriate research methods?
- Worthy of the term significant?
- Emerging towards a new and enduring infrastructure?

**Figure 5 Research as choice-points and questions for quality in action research (Reason and Bradbury, 2001:454).**

The approach suggested by Reason and Bradbury (2001) relies upon the researchers developing a relevant and congruent application of choice-points as determined by the context. Greenwood and Levin adopt a similar view suggesting that the success, or otherwise, of an action research methodology may well be determined by the community of practice in which the research is undertaken and ought therefore to be evaluated by “whether a specific understanding is worth believing enough to act on it” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:80). This accords with what Lather terms catalytic validity (Lather, 1991). “Catalytic validity represents the degree to which the research process reorients, focuses and energises participants toward knowing reality in order to transform it” (1991:68). In other words, whether the research is incorporated or catalysed within further practices and actions by the participants.

The credibility of an action research is related to the “arguments and the processes necessary for having someone trust the research results” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:80). They assert that credibility has both internal and external dimensions. Internal credibility relates to the collaborative group generating it. “Members of communities or organisations are unlikely to accept as credible the “objective” theories of outsiders if they cannot recognise the connection to the local situation, or because local knowledge makes it clear that the frameworks are either too abstract or simply wrong for the specific context” (Greenwood and Levin, 1998:81). External credibility is “knowledge capable of convincing someone that did not participate in the inquiry



that the results are believable” (1998:81). They suggest this is much more complex due to the action research process itself which involves the “conjugation of reflection and action” (1998:81).

Whereas other social science approaches require findings to be generalisable, action research proposes that the knowledge created through a particular contextual process be taken up in action; it requires therefore that theory reflexively incorporate the new knowledge (Greenwood, and Levin, 1998:81). Greenwood and Levin conclude that “This is the crux of the credibility – validity issue in action research. The conventional social science research community believes that credibility is created through generalizing and universalizing propositions of the universal hypothetical, universal disjunctive, and generic types, whereas AR [action research] believes that only knowledge generated and tested in practice is credible” (1998:81). In this study emphasis was placed upon identifying and understanding the operations of contextualised knowledge, and where possible, engaging participatively with organisational staff.

### **3.3 Fieldwork and research methods**

A range of qualitative research methods was used iteratively to collect texts throughout the fieldwork. Each of the methods: interviews, meeting attendance, observation, document collection were employed both to collect background information about each organisation and to collect texts for the critical discourse analysis.

#### **3.3.1 Fieldwork as an insider**

In each of the three sites I was an insider in some form. This positioning varied depending upon my relationships at the individual site. In one site, I was a former employee and in the others I had existing relationships with senior people in the organisations. I was thus had access to attend a wide range of formal and informal meetings and discussions. Data collection was undertaken for three months in the first site, over two years in the second study, and over eighteen months in the third study. My insider status as a former practitioner and manager supported the utilisation of ongoing networks within the research inquiry.

#### **3.3.2 Reflective writing**

My reflections on the process, theory and implications of what I observed were recorded as research notes. These interpretations and understandings were discussed with my community service colleagues and my theorising and planning refined. As this process developed at the three sites, themes emerged and the focus of the data collection became more specific around these themes.



### 3.3.3 Interviews

Interviews or “individual face to face verbal interchange” (Fontana and Frey, 2003:62) is the most common means of attempting to understand other human beings and their situations. It can take many forms: open-ended, closed, semi-structured, individual, group, phone, video, mailed survey etc (Fontana & Frey, 2003). According to Gubrium and Holstein (2001), interviews are commonly used and many alternative methods employ formal and informal formats or a combination of both. A series of questions may be developed, and used as prompts to encourage the interviewees to engage in a dialogue with the researcher about their views on particular issues. Or alternatively, a conversation may be developed with participants in which the structure of the questions is not planned but roles of the participants, both interviewer and interviewee, are clearly understood (Gubrium and Holstein, 2001).

In this research, a number of very important issues were considered and managed relating to the use of interview. First, care was exercised to ensure that interviewing was consistent with the epistemological position of the theoretical and methodological framework. Second, interviews provided a different order of texts than other organisational documents and this difference in genre and style is an important distinction for later use of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). Third, more practical questions relating to how many interviews, with whom and for what purposes were discussed (Silverman, 2003).

Adopting a critical and discursive approach to the use of interviews again necessitated caution to ensure that interviews were not appropriated in the same way that they are used within other realist frameworks. For the use of semi-structured interviews enabled participants to offer their individual sensemaking, shared meanings and concerns. However, care was taken to prevent the uncritical acceptance of the interview as techniques for arriving at ‘the truth’ (Silverman, 2003). Silverman’s comments have resonance here particularly in the light of the contemporary situation where interviews are increasingly ubiquitous. He suggests that within the media the term “interview society” might accurately describe our current state (2003). He questions the capacity of the “...open-ended interview as apparently offer[ing] the opportunity for the authentic gaze into the soul of another, or even for a politically correct dialogue in which researcher and researched offer mutual understanding and support” (2003:343). He goes on to say that there is the tendency to fall into the “stubbornly resistant romantic impulse in contemporary sociology: the elevation of the experiential as the authentic...” (Silverman, 2003:343).

Gubrium and Holstein (2001) also deconstruct romantic notions that suggest interviewees can provide a window into reality as they see it and that such a window provides an authentic view of reality. Importantly then, the use of interviews for producing text needs to consider how the response to a particular question might be shaped by the terms used, the genre, or other linguistic, social, discursive or contextual prompts. Interviews in this study are thus presented as being discursively constructed and creating subject positions which may be contested.

Further, Gubrium and Holstein (2001) note that the interview process frequently involves the linguistic construction and re-construction of objects, social practices, identities or subject positions. Claims are made and supported (or not), actions attributed to various actors, power allocated and developed, positions established and others deconstructed, rationalities created and justified, certainties, truths or doubts supported or contested. Drawing upon Foucauldian analysis they suggest that the production of subjectivities and available subject positions enables governmentality thus positions of interviewer and interviewee are emergent, constructed and transient (2001).

The second important consideration in relation to the use of interviews in the research is whether the data sufficiently provides the weight of support for, or the grounds for effectively answering, the research question (Silverman, 2003). The research approach in this thesis does not assume a direct relationship between the interviewee and the text production as discussed above, for the relationship between the reality represented and the interviewee is understood to be mediated and socially and discursively constructed by both interviewee and interviewer in concert. Access to the truth or “realist tale” (Van Maanen, 1988) of the situation is not the issue or focus of concern so much as the discursively constructed processes themselves. The concern is more how and why it is, that the interviewee constructs their account using particular language within social contexts, what are the discursive systems of power/knowledge in operation, and how such systems gain acceptance and become dominant discourse?

The third important consideration in the use of interview relates to interview as a genre. Interviews also paint a picture, derived both through the form and content of responses of the actors interviewed. Importantly this highlights other levels of diversity within the group of actors drawn from various organisations and levels within them. For the range of effects generated by the managerialist discourse are diverse and dispersed and interviews provide evidence of taken-for-granted norms and values associated with managerialist discourse.

Finally, the use of interview is only one technology of several employed for the collection of data in this thesis. Other approaches provide different forms of text, or as Fairclough (2001) terms it, different “genres” containing other “textures”. This use of diverse elements of data collection, or variation of genre, enables the development of a type of bricolage “that is the piecing together set of representations that are fitted to the specifics of a complex situation” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003:5) rather than a closed attempt at a factual account or scientific realism. For a discursive construction of reality is perhaps best understood in such terms that suggest the multiplicity of perspectives and meanings patched together “as an emergent construction” (Denzin and Lincoln 2003:5).

### **3.3.4 Document collection**

Documents gathered within each organisation included annual reports, website information, program contracts as well as organisational policies. These organisational records provide historical, background and contextual information. Additionally, non-confidential and de-identified correspondence such as emails and notes of meetings were obtained to enable social interactions to be traced.

### **3.3.5 Data management**

Interview data was collected, transcribed, de-identified and checked by participants. Other documents were all also de-identified and collated. The data was stored in its original de-identified forms. Multiple forms of data were collected at different sites to ensure academic rigor.

### **3.3.6 Ethics/Ethical processes within the fieldwork**

Ethics approval was obtained from the University Human research Ethics Committee. While collecting the data, particular care was taken in the areas related to gaining informed consent from the research participants and maintaining confidentiality. Care was taken when analysing data and reporting the findings of the research to ensure that all reporting was de-identified and confidential. Care was also taken not to interrupt staff working with clients, or other important work in order not to disrupt organisational scheduling and minimise potential disruption. Permission was gained to discuss findings with other organisations and in other contexts in order to negate any potential harm to the organisations and their staff and clients. As a former community services practitioner I was aware of the areas of sensitivity in these organisations around client and worker confidentiality, child protection issues, access to files and other sensitive documents. This insider knowledge was particularly helpful in gaining worker trust and confidence.

### **3.4 Discourse analysis**

Three sections follow which present the method of discourse analysis used in the study. First, different types of discourse analysis and their characteristics are discussed. Second critical discourse analysis and the reasons for its use in this study are briefly presented. Third, the particular model of critical discourse analysis is outlined in detail.

#### **3.4.1 Definitions, characteristics and models of discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis is a qualitative methodology that covers a variety of approaches to the study of language and texts (Fairclough, 1995; Hardy et al., 2004; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; van Dijk, 1993; Wodak and Meyer, 2001). Like other methodological approaches, it is a means of asking questions about what counts for reality. As discussed earlier approaches and applications of discourse analysis are diverse and encompass many epistemological and methodological positions (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000; Fairclough, 1995; Grant, Hardy, Osrick and Putnam, 2004; Grant and Iedema, 2005; Iedema et al., 2004; Iedema et al., 2006; Phillips, 1998; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; van Dijk, 1993, 2003; Wodak and Meyer, 2001; Wood and Kroger, 2000).

Phillips and Hardy (2002) writing in the context of organisation studies describe some defining features of discourse analysis:

Discourse analysis shares the concern of all qualitative approaches with the meaningfulness of social life (Winch, 1958) but it attempts to provide a more profound interrogation of the precarious status of meaning. Traditional qualitative approaches often assume a social world and then seek to understand the meaning of this world for participants. Discourse analysis, on the other hand, tries to explore how the socially produced ideas and objects that populate the world were created in the first place and how they are maintained and held in place over time. Whereas other qualitative methodologies work to understand or interpret social reality as it exists, discourse analysis endeavours to uncover the way it is produced. This is the most important contribution of discourse analysis: It examines how language constructs phenomena, not how it reflects and reveals it (Phillips and Hardy, 2002:6).

The focus of discourse analysis on language, its interpretations and meanings, or in other words as a means of investigating the social effects of discursive construction, makes it particularly amenable to investigations of how language and its uses shape practices and knowledge in community service organisations. Phillips and Hardy (2002) describe the work of discourse analysis as “explor[ing] the relationship between discourse and reality” (2002:3). They list a

variety of approaches that researchers have employed to achieve this goal. These emphases can be grouped into four categories: interpretive structuralism, critical discourse analysis, social linguistic analysis and critical linguistic analysis. Each of these will be dealt with briefly:

*Social linguistic analysis* is primarily concerned with text and the ways that it is socially constructed. According to Phillips and Hardy “the goal of this work is to undertake a close reading of the text in order to provide insight in to the organisation and its construction” (2002:22) By focusing on the text, specific social phenomena are shown to be constructed through discursive involvement of particular actors (2002).

*Interpretive structuralism* focuses more on the social context and the ways that discourse works at this level. The discursive production of societies or organisational contexts is a key notion and focus of this approach. Text is collected but may form the background material to the study as the focus is on the broader, distal context rather than the texts themselves (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

*Critical linguistic analysis* as with social linguistic analysis, this focuses on individual texts but there is also a strong interest in power as in critical discourse analysis. It is more focused on texts than critical discourse analysis as “individual pieces of text are examined to explain how the structures of domination are implicated in the text” (2002:27). Thus critical linguistic analysis helps to explain how specific discourses are related to power structures at the local level (Phillips & Hardy 2002).

*Critical discourse analysis* focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Van Dijk describes critical discourse analysis as being “dialogical struggle or struggles as reflected in the privileging of a particular discourse and the marginalisation of others” (1996:84). Critical discourse analysis helps to explain how power abuse is enacted by dominant groups in organisations (van Dijk, 1996). It examines why some discourses are privileged and others marginalised (Keenoy et al., 1997; Mumby & Stohl, 1991).

### **3.4.2 Critical discourse analysis**

An examination of discourse logically requires the use of a form of discourse analysis. Moreover, the critical nature of this research necessitates the employment of a system of analysis capable of answering the critical research questions. It is for this reason that the use of critical discourse

analysis is adopted and is considered the most appropriate method of analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Wodak and Meyer, 2001; Wood and Kroger, 2000).

Critical discourse analysis enables deconstruction of normalised and taken-for-granted language and practices and at the same time draws upon the critical tradition which foregrounds asymmetrical power relations, hegemony, ideology and their place in discourse (Fairclough, 2001). The analysis focuses on the role of discursive activity in constituting and sustaining unequal power relations (Fairclough, 2001). Further, critical discourse analysis is employed to examine how power is deployed by dominant groups within organisations, why some discourses are privileged and others marginalised (Treleaven, 2004; van Dijk, 1997; Wodak, 1996).

Critical discourse analysis is employed as “a means of foregrounding for examination the taken-for-granted factors (historical, social, cultural, educational and political) that shape the language people use” (Treleaven, 2004:5). Drawing upon Fairclough (2001, 2003), the discourse analysis is not only concerned with the texts themselves but also with their means of production, dissemination and reception (Fairclough, 2001, 2003). Different constructions of reality are enabled by alternative readings of texts within particular discourses (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) (Treleaven, 2004). Critical discourse analysis is therefore usefully employed in the thesis to examine complex texts collected from each site and used as data (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004; Darcy, 1999, 2002; Fairclough, 1995, 2003; Hardy and Palmer, 1998; Treleaven, 2004; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005).

In this research, critical discourse analysis draws particularly upon the work of Fairclough and focuses on “how discursive activity structures the social space within which actors act...” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002:25). Thus the approach used here draws heavily upon the Foucauldian tradition. Examples of the application of the critical discourse analysis approach are evident in Phillips and Hardy (1997), Wetherell and Potter (1992), Lutz and Collins (1993), Covaleski et al (1998).

### **3.4.3 A composite model of critical discourse analysis in this study**

The approach developed and used by Phillips and Hardy in the area of organisational discourse studies is explicitly linked in this study with the work of Fairclough. Fairclough’s work in critical discourse analysis is increasingly used in the area of organisational studies (Grant et al., 2004; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). His approach commits to integrating the more formal areas of textual analysis with an adequately grounded social analysis. The success of this endeavour is evident in



his work being taken up and drawn upon in a number of fields including areas of the social sciences and humanities as well as in organisation and management studies.

Fairclough's work has particular resonance with this study for a number of reasons. First, the commitment within the thesis to areas related to power and its analysis (Fairclough, 1992, 2001). Second, interest in social and community issues and balanced integration of the complex problems associated with the issues of structure and agency (Fairclough, 1992, 2000, 2003). Third, his framework for using critical discourse analysis provides a practical model for integrating different levels or areas implicate within the study.

The first area taken up by Fairclough, and important for this research, is in relation to power. The work of a number of important critical theorists is evident in Fairclough's approach. He draws upon Althusser, Gramsci and Foucault and their work on ideology and hegemony and discourse, power/knowledge respectively. Fairclough's work emphasises the influence and linguistic practices associated with ideology and in this area he drew substantially from the work of the French Marxist and structuralist Althusser (Fairclough, 1995, 2001). Althusser shows that the most effective use of ideology is when it is naturalised so that it appears as common sense and is thus taken-for-granted (2001). He maintains that it is when ideology is hidden that it is most effective in achieving its end of social control. This use of ideology is shown to be ubiquitous as powerful actors and social structures struggle for dominance and control.

As well as ideology, other ideas drawn from critical studies include the role of class and power in capitalist society, an ongoing concern of Fairclough's drawing upon earlier Marxist thought. Importantly, his work on ideology has a strong emancipatory subtext which he furthers by developing the Gramscian notion of hegemony. Put very simply, hegemony involves the idea that power and domination can be achieved by gaining acquiescence and acceptance to create subservience in subjected actors by subtle and deceptive use of ideology (2001).

Certainly, the most dominant theoretical influence on Fairclough's work is that of Foucault. Foucault in his archaeological and genealogical work (Foucault, 1977) proposes that language develops and sustains unequal or asymmetrical power relations. Discourse in its Foucauldian sense includes the conditions of possibility, the rules of formation that define objects (Foucault, 1977, 1984). Foucault emphasised the power of discourse to constitute and construct social reality including social relationships, social subjects and identity (Fairclough, 1992; Foucault, 1972, 1977, 1984). These three areas of power relations are important in this study for the later examination of powerful discourses operating within community service organisations.



The second, important area of the work of Fairclough for this study is most clearly explicated in his most recent work *Analysing Discourse and Text: Textual analysis for social research* (2003). Fairclough states that there are “three analytically separate elements in the processes of meaning making” (Fairclough, 2003:5) which are unpacked in critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001, 2003) text production, the text itself and text reception.

He highlights three dimensions of analysis of texts: “genre or ways of acting, discourse or ways of representing and style or ways of being” (Fairclough, 2003:26). Each of these will be dealt with in turn. First, genre relates to ways of acting such as interviewing, reporting and meetings of various types. “A genre is a way of acting and interacting linguistically – for example, interview, lecture and news report are all genres. Genres structure texts in specific ways – for instance, news reports have a characteristic generic structure of: headline + lead paragraph (summarizing the story) + ‘satellite’ paragraphs (adding detail). Fairclough divides genre into several main areas including difference which relates to an openness and recognition of difference or an accentuating of difference” (Fairclough, 2003:66). Additionally, general questions in relation to genres generally include what genres does the text draw upon? Does the text contain a mix of genres?

The second dimension Fairclough develops here is that of ‘discourse’:

a discourse is a particular way of representing some part of the (physical, social, psychological) world - there are alternative and often competing discourses, associated with different groups of people in different social positions...Discourses differ in how social events are represented, what is excluded or included, how abstractly or concretely events are represented, and how more specifically the processes and relations, social actors, time and place of events are represented (Fairclough, 2003:17).

This level of analysis serves to represent social events and can be divided into meta-level, capital d *Discourses* and other smaller discourses that may intersect and overlap within the larger ‘Discourses’.

Third, style is the area or mode of discourse and according to Fairclough (2003) it may be divided into styles, modalities and evaluations (Fairclough, 2003:160). Text as identification, i.e. texts in the process of constituting the social identities of the participants in the events they are a part of (chapter 9). One aspect of identification is what people commit themselves to in what they say or write with respect to truth or factuality, and with respect to obligation and necessity - matters of ‘modality’. Another is evaluation and the values which people commit themselves to. Questions here are what

styles are drawn upon? What modalities are employed and how? What values are prioritised by whom and in what ways and for what purposes?

This research locates texts as the basic unit or components of discourse and are also designated as social spaces (Fairclough, 2001). Language in texts always has “several simultaneous effects: ideationally, interpersonally and textually, tying texts to particular contexts” (Fairclough, 2001:18). Texts are designated as being “relationships between form and context and involve presence and absence, implicit and explicit meanings that may carry ideological or hegemonic clues; relative foregrounding or backgrounding of text and context; pre-constructed text or text that has already been said elsewhere” (Fairclough, 2001:19).

On this basis he argues that textual analysis requires multiple foci. “Analysis of texts should be artificially isolated from analysis of the institutional and discursive practices within which texts are embedded” (Fairclough, 1995:9). He argues that interpretation is a dialectical process involving multiple interpretive resources, other resources that interpreters bring to the text context and the properties of the text itself (1995). It is this capability of critical discourse analysis to highlight or foreground the taken-for-granted aspects of a text, while reprioritizing the obvious to the background, that enables alternative “readings” of texts. Alternative readings of symptomatic or illustrative texts are therefore shown to be far from arbitrary, being developed on a careful theoretical foundation. Such readings are important for the work of foregrounding alternative interpretations and thus creating the space for alternative ways of being and acting.

Furthermore, Fairclough makes important analytical distinctions by employing the terms interdiscursivity, intertextuality, assumptions and orders of discourse. Interdiscursivity involves the adoption of a genre or style particular to one discourse within another (Fairclough, 2003:35). Intertextuality is the interrelationship between texts in various discourses, or the employment of texts from one discourse in a different discourse. Intertextuality relates to “relevant other texts or voices” (Fairclough, 2003:39). Questions which may be asked of texts may include: are other texts incorporated or other voices within this text; if so, for what ends? Assumptions within texts may also be implicit or explicit. Questions that may be asked to identify assumptions include, what assumptions are made and at what level, are they value laden, ideological and normalised? Orders of discourse are the conventions that have an overarching control on a discourse. They are the “sets of conventions associated with social institutions” (Fairclough 2001:14). Orders of discourse provide the limitations and homogenizing controls through which discourses operate. Again, these clear distinctions associated with the linguistic mechanisms at work in discourse enable depth of analysis within this study.

Use of the work of Foucault in the area of discourse frequently raises the alleged weakness of Foucault's position in this area of balancing the structure/agency issue. Fairclough has sought to address this issue both theoretically and practically in his work by identifying verbal interaction as a form of social action. Thus in the process of discourse production, he suggests there is a practice or action component or evidence of human agency. Social structures are the product of action – and actions reproduce structures. This is consistent with the structuration theory developed by Giddens (1984) in which he undoes the binary of subject and object, action and structure, by showing that they are in fact interrelated in a “duality of structure”. Fairclough's identification and critique of what he regards as Foucault's over-emphasis on structure is thus a central tenet of his work.

Finally, Fairclough's system is of particular interest as it puts these complex theoretical notions together in a practical system capable of identifying the essential components or dimensions which need to be examined in critical discourse analysis. His model is adapted in the work of others, for example Phillips and Hardy (2002) also suggest a tri-partite model based on Fairclough's work. As mentioned earlier his system is reliant upon a strong foundational theory of language and its use which necessitates a reciprocal or dialectic relationship between the idea that language is socially determined – characterised by diversity and power struggles, and that society is linguistically-determined, constructed and constituted through discourse. He maintains that other systems, particularly linguistic or language-based systems, neglect the discursive and social system dimensions of language. So he addresses these in his tri-partite focus on text, discourse and social system (Fairclough, 2001). Put another way, text interaction and context form a comprehensive and integrated system. Noticeably, he uses his critical theoretical approach and orientation to draw out the power asymmetries at all three levels.

While Fairclough's model is not used rigidly or exclusively in this research, it is a useful framework for the critical discourse analysis at three levels. His model offers an opportunity for multi-level analysis of the texts, contexts and social conditions which combine to form discourses.

### **3.5 Summary and implications**

The employment of a third person action research methodology in this thesis was useful for several reasons. First, in addressing the research questions it was necessary to clarify and compare my own (first-person) views and position as an insider, as well as testing this data against the views and sensemaking of others in the sector (second person). As these views were developed

and disseminated to others interested in the work, action and change is encouraged. Second, the action research methodology accords with a democratic, inclusive and participatory approach to working that is common in the community service sector. Such an inclusive methodology opened opportunities and promoted participant interest in the research. Third, and perhaps most importantly, as *action* research, the thesis supports a clear commitment to change and contributes to an emphasis on local knowledge and practice.

The use of critical discourse analysis is similarly appropriate within the research as a means of analysing the central research questions. Critical discourse analysis focuses attention on talk and text and their relationship to the operations of power within the complex social and organisational spaces operating in community services organisations. Changes to organisational knowledge may also be identified by critically examining the language used to describe practices and identifying the links to alternative managerialist language.

After locating the research epistemologically, this chapter presented and justified the use of the third-person action research methodology throughout the research process. The specific methods and approach to the fieldwork were presented, followed by a detailed discussion of critical discourse analysis and its employment within the studies.

The following chapters' 4-6 begin with background narrative describing in detail the situated, emergent and reflexive third-person action research processes. Thus engagement in the participative and formative actions of the methodology are emphasised and shown to be inseparable from the methods of fieldwork and text analysis. Knowledge development in the studies is considered to be embedded in practice and action. Additionally, the detailed description of three separate studies highlights, both the diversity in the sector associated with contrasting organisational forms and approaches, as well as some typical and common issues associated with knowledge and changing discourses.

Each chapter presents the critical discourse of organisational texts. The levels of analysis presented above are applied to the texts and contexts of each of the organisations. The collected documents are analysed illustratively using the three dimensions or levels of the Fairclough model: textual analysis such as genre, structure and mode; the contextual elements of each organisation and its context, location, history and intertextual dimensions; finally the social conditions, production and consumption of the dominant and subjugated discourse(s) such as managerialist and community service discourses are examined.

# CHAPTER 4 A STUDY OF LOSS OF ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN A LARGE COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANISATION

This chapter presents the first study undertaken within the doctoral research project. The study examines and contrasts two discourses operating within the context of a large national community service organisation, Australian Christian Community Services (ACCS)<sup>13</sup>. A client-focused discourse is first identified and then shown to be increasingly subjugated by the incursion of a different more powerful managerialist discourse. This discursive shift is shown to support a powerful re-shaping process within the organisation resulting in changes and losses of organisational knowledge.

The chapter is arranged as follows. First, the study setting, as a major restructuring of a regional office within ACCS is introduced. Second, the data collection methods drawing upon insider knowledge, interviews and collected documents are discussed. Third, critical discourse analysis highlights the operations of two major discourses within the organisation. Fourth, the effects of changing discourses on organisational knowledge within ACCS are discussed. Fifth, a brief summary concludes the chapter.

## 4.1 Overview of the study

In order to develop an overview of the study setting, various sources are drawn upon. For example, documents located on the website that presented the formal organisational history or narrative of the organisation. This account is integrated with other formal accounts such as the biographical account of a former CEO and notes from Annual Reports. Formal or accepted accounts, what Sims (1999) calls the “canonical” stories are augmented by less authoritative, insider knowledge, the history or what Sims calls “apocryphal” narratives and “pious myths” (Sims, 1999). The inclusion of informal accounts constructed by workers within the organisations as part of their individual and collective sense-making, provides a less institutionally sanitised account (Weick, 1995). The following account of the organisational background weaves together

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<sup>13</sup> The name of the organisation has been changed to preserve anonymity.

various strands of narrative relevant to the study focus of managerialist discourse and organisational knowledge.

#### **4.1.1 History and background of ACCS.**

The organisation has its origins in philanthropic, non-denominational, independent Christian missions (some dating back 130 years) in a number of Australian cities (Chambers, 2000). Their purpose was to assist “the poor and the down and out” with both practical and spiritual help. The name of the organisation became identified with the work and care of people who faced challenges such as homelessness, youth delinquency, drug and alcohol dependency and unemployment. Recent amalgamation into one large national organisation, with a new name, emphasised the changing more corporate provision of community services, whilst maintaining its Christian heritage.

While organisations and charities providing welfare services have progressively accommodated changing conditions throughout the past thirty years, comparative analysis of pre and post 1998 ACCS Annual Reports shows that ACCS has changed radically since its amalgamation into one large national organisation six years ago. In 1999 ACCS experienced substantial expansion when it gained a major Government employment services contract, thereby increasing its Government-funded income from 61% of its annual budget in 1994 to 84% in 2003. Annual turnover was boosted from \$27.5 million (Annual Report, 1994:22) to \$167.7 million (Annual Report 2003:43), while employing more than 3,000 staff and 700 volunteers (a growth of over 200% in 12 months). To facilitate the new Job Network<sup>14</sup> program, the organisation underwent extensive restructuring.

As government policy shifted in the late 1990’s towards out-sourcing social welfare services to a range of private and church-based agencies through a sophisticated, open-tendering process. ACCS positioned itself to assist the conservative Australian Federal Government in its reform agenda: “ACCS is committed to taking the journey with corporations, organisations and governments in a partnership approach to addressing human need” (Annual Report 2003:45). Traditionally associated with organisations taking a strong stance on social justice and solidarity with the poor, this new alignment by ACCS leadership is evident in several ways; reporting visits

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<sup>14</sup> The Job Network program is the federally-funded national employment program in Australia. Organisations are contracted to provide services to specific regions.



by government ministers and senior bureaucrats to ACCS programs and annual conferences; ACCS Social Policy Unit and senior managers acting as advisors to Government on policy issues; and the CEO's appointment to chair the Government's Reference Group on Welfare Reform that produced the McClure Report (McClure, 2000).

The new national organisation required experienced, capable management to maintain stability and credibility, as well as charting and navigating its new future strategic directions. From its foundation, Board members were predominantly devout, evangelical Christian businessmen (Chambers, 2000). The retirement of the long-serving and conservative President of the Board opened the way for the election of a new, more corporately-oriented President, formerly a partner in a major accounting firm and director of a well-known Australian insurance company. At the same time a new CEO was appointed to head the national organisation.

The new CEO formed a national executive team and a complex matrix management structure. A centralised corporate services Department was established to manage the national infrastructure for IT, human resources and finance. New branding and logo emphasised a new corporatism and professionalisation of service and management (Chambers, 2000:153). In 1994 the aim of management was "efficient management and financial accountability ensure that every dollar given is used effectively to meet the needs of people in crisis (Annual Report, 1994:1). Whereas by 2003, the new ACCS orientation was articulated in a neoliberal discourse of 'empowerment', 'mutual responsibility' and 'obligation' for both the providers and recipients of social welfare: "The face of charity is changing. No longer are we content to simply rescue people from difficulty: now we aim also to empower them with the support, skills and self confidence they need to dive into their lives" (Annual Report, 2003:2).

Changes in organisational discourse are suggestive of changing welfare policy largely beyond the scope of this thesis. However, the adoption of specific corporate language and accompanying practices driving the welfare reform process indicate the new priority accorded to neoliberal policies (Darcy, 2002; Keevers et al., 2006; Meagher and Healy, 2003; Mendes, 2005; Rix, 2005). The newly emerging discourse produced new ways of thinking and talking about social welfare that quickly gained currency in ACCS. These changes to language are evident in texts within ACCS, such as policies, reports and contracts and were employed in restructuring organisational processes, structures and practices.

New large contracts were particularly associated with the federally-funded Job Network program and had central and regionally managed components. Organisations were required to tender for



government contracts based on various zones including regional and urban areas. Within ACCS this necessitated the formation of regional management structures to manage the day-to-day operations of groups of local centres and their respective subcontracts. Contracts were administrated and funded by government who monitored the attainment of agreed numbers of outcomes; payment was made to the organisation once these were achieved.

At the same time as managing and facilitating the large Job Network contracts, ACCS also provided a wide range of other community services: homeless services, training programs, youth services, gambling and drug services etc. These smaller contracts, funded by both state and federal departments, were regionally or locally specific, and many of these programs had long histories of service within their community settings.

#### **4.1.2 The study: A regional restructure**

The study is set in the context of one of the seven ACCS regions. Initially within the new national organisation, a matrix structure operated in each region managed by a Regional Manager. Each Regional Manager provided supervision for the managers of the local centres in the region and reported to one of two General Managers responsible for all service delivery and operations; in turn these General Managers were accountable to the CEO. Within this particular region, services spread over more than twenty-five major towns and cities encompassing both rural and urban areas. Prior to the organisation becoming a single national identity, local centres had, for many years, operated largely independently. Their existence and viability was contingent upon the receipt of government funding but was also dependent upon local community donations and support. In the new regionalised structure, management systems such as IT, financial management, human resources and marketing were provided for the centres and the region by the National Central Office. The management structure aimed to provide increased coordination, sharing of resources and staff and networking and management for the effective operation of local centres and their work of providing community services.

After approximately four years of operating in this structure, a major restructure of three regions was initiated by the National Executive as a rationalisation of resources. Three regions all located within one state were rationalised into one large region, under the direction of a newly appointed State Manager. The three regional management teams were collapsed into one new structure, operating from the State Office and requiring significantly less staff to operate. Redundant staff were eligible to apply for a smaller number of new positions within the State Office and others 'paid out' under redundancy processes.

The study focuses upon the changes that occurred within the organisation over a period of several years culminating in the restructure of the region. The discursive nature and effects of the changes are examined, as well as the specific language and practices involved in the change process and the resulting effects on organisational knowledge. For these changes suggest increasing subjection of long-standing core values and practices to a different more managerial body of knowledge or discourse. New corporate practices, language and structures were being emphasised in the changing organisation and many staff (and community members) reacted with an increasing dissonance. On the one hand, the organisation continued to present itself within organisational texts as strongly Christian, promulgating a Christian Values Statement emanating from its evangelical Christian roots, while on the other hand, being increasingly constrained by the need to comply with tight government contracts, along with efficiency improvements required by new corporate management styles.

## **4.2 Data collection methods**

### **4.2.1 Undertaking the fieldwork as an insider**

In order to obtain triangulated data, several methods were employed. Interviews, organisational documents and insider knowledge provided complimentary types of information for the construction and presentation of the study. As a former manager within ACCS prior to commencing this research process, I was immersed within the discursive context. This period of employment was in many ways the catalyst for this doctoral research undertaking that emerged later after I left the organisation. Day-to-day issues, which I encountered in the organisation, led to fundamental questions about the changing nature of community service organisations, their management, work processes and structures.

During the time that I was employed as a manager<sup>15</sup> in the organisation, I became acutely aware of the enormity of the general changes which the organisation was undertaking and the effects of these changes on staff, practices, clients and service delivery. In particular, I became increasingly

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<sup>15</sup> After commencing this doctoral program as an action research project, it was apparent that my earlier immersion in the community service organisations context could be drawn upon in ways that were methodologically sound (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). As a former employee over a period of seven years, and at various levels of this organisation (from front-line youth worker to Regional Operations Manager), I had developed considerable insider knowledge. Returning to the organisation to undertake the research for this study, I related to the experiences and meaning-making of individuals interviewed (taking up a particular subject position as a former employee) as well as being identified (with another subject position) doing this doctoral research (Habermas, 1984). So the initial research process began with conversations and meetings with former colleagues and then open-ended interviews.

concerned at the shift in the organisation from its traditional values-driven policies and practices, to more instrumental approaches and the effects of this new positioning for knowledge and its uses in the organisation.

The changing nature of the external environment contributed to the pressure for internal change within the organisation. Major environmental changes were occurring globally and nationally, in areas such as politics, social services and economics which, in turn, re-shaped the policy and provision of welfare (Jamrozic, 2001). Within ACCS responses to these changes were inevitable, however, the nature and scope of the changes and their contentious effects both on staff themselves and their work practices attracted my attention as a major problem for the field of community services and, in particular, for knowledge use in community service organisations.

The next section of the chapter develops an account of the formal research process within the organisation which included meeting with and interviewing managers, and former managers of the organisation, and collecting organisational documents. With the benefit of hindsight, there exists a clear order to what was at the time an emergent process, for the process of this research has at times been 'messy', in the sense of being emergent, iterative and reflexive (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001; Reason and Torbert, 2001).

#### **4.2.2 The research process at ACCS**

The site was chosen for an exploratory investigation. The emphasis was on the first person action research process as I engaged with practitioners in planning and reflecting upon their responses to interview questions and discussion with them of organisational issues and collected documents. The process allowed my own reflective 'data' as an insider to be tested against the views of others who were working, or had worked at ACCS, over an extended period. From this dialogue the research questions were able to be more clearly focused in the area of organisational knowledge.

#### **4.2.3 Document collection and analysis**

National and regional level documents such as policy documents, marketing publications, strategic plans and annual reports were gathered for comparison of the periods before and after the organisational change process. Other public documents, such as the biographical account of ACCS, written by a former CEO, President and longstanding Board member (Chambers, 2000) and the ACCS website were examined for historical context.

#### **4.2.4 Semi-structured interviews**

After holding a series of informal preliminary discussions, semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted with four managers, two of whom were current managers and two who had been retrenched during the substantial restructuring. The interviews were of forty-five minutes to one hour in duration and were voice-recorded. Transcripts were made of the taped interviews. The four staff were selected for their long history of employment with ACCS (10-20 years) and, consequently, experience throughout the organisation and their knowledge of the organisation's practices. Drawing on a range of trade and professional orientations (social sciences, education, health and social welfare) each of the managers had moved from small part-time positions in the helping field to managerial and senior positions with considerable regional responsibilities. Two had worked in the local region for over fifteen years and had seen the organisation grow in the region from two to several hundred staff members.

Additionally, the managers had very significant roles and responsibilities within the organisation. The Regional Manager was responsible for the operations and staff of approximately twenty five centres providing over one hundred programs and services and was a member of the National Management Team. She had also developed excellent relationships with key Board members over an extended period. Other managers interviewed had specific areas of regional responsibility and were accountable for programs and operations throughout the region enabling each to have an excellent grasp of how the organisation operated its services and management processes. Three of the managers interviewed were formerly members of the regional management team, and included the Regional Manager, the Manager of Social Enterprise and the Regional Chaplain, while the fourth manager was the Manager of Family Support Services at a major city centre. The semi-structured interviews were conducted after the regional restructure and two of the managers had by this stage left the organisation. Two remained within the new management structure reporting to the manager of the newly formed State Office.

### **4.3 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Examination of the documents initially involved preliminary readings of the documents and identified texts containing 'rich' and useful illustrative content. The documents were coded to themes arising from within the data using an iterative process (Treleaven, 2004; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005). Themes included: Changing community services practices; intertextual use of managerial language; use of neoliberal language; client focus; changing emphasis of process and outcomes; knowledge use; knowledge loss; changing organisational values; changing communities of practice.

The initial reading of the interview transcripts and organisational documents enabled selection and coding of rich illustrative texts (Treleaven, 2004; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005). Coding these selections highlighted the use and forms of language and suggestions within the texts of assumptions or taken-for-granted meanings and practices (Fairclough, 2003). Intertextuality, or drawing upon the language of one discourse or context and employing it in a new discourse or context, was also identified (Fairclough, 2003). Such accepted uses of language and shared meanings are often tacit and overlooked, located implicitly in shared background context and practices.

In this way managerialist language, practices and structures were foregrounded and contrasted with alternative community service organisation discourses. In order to draw attention to the discrete and discursive operations of power, Foucauldian concepts suggesting discursive activities such as regimes of truth, disciplinary processes and changing subject positions were identified (Rose, 1998, 1999). In the data analysis, text selections of discursive activities were highlighted and foregrounded, drawing upon levels of analysis from the theoretical framework in Chapter 2. Analysing texts in this manner enables new, alternative readings to be made of the documents. Discourses themselves are thus made more explicit and their methods of production and operation able to be examined (Fairclough, 2001, 2003).

The next section of the chapter presents the analysis in detail and is ordered as follows. First, analysis of the texts identifies and analyses one dominant community service discourse which is named in the study as the 'client-focussed' discourse. Second, the expanding managerialist discourse is identified and analysed drawing upon signifiers from the literature examined in Chapter 2. Third, texts are examined for evidence of the change process or a discursive shift within the organisation. Finally, the effects of the discursive shift on organisational knowledge are more specifically examined.

### **4.3.1 Client-focussed discourse**

Strong evidence of a client-focused discourse exists in the interview texts. Each of the four long-serving managers interviewed identified the emphasis placed upon client service when they first joined the organisation. One manager suggested that the organisation formerly had a 'Christian focus', describing how the organisation once adhered closely, both in culture and practices, to the Christian Values and Mission Statements of the organisation. This is echoed by each of the other managers in different ways. Several managers suggested that the main aim of the organisation

and its staff was to “serve the poor and disadvantaged” and that this sense of mission and purpose within the organisation acted as a prime motivator.

Analysis of the texts foregrounds the methods of production of this powerful organisational driver. The application of Foucauldian concepts to both interviews and documents suggest that this notion of client-focus operated discursively as a truth regime, a disciplining process operating upon individuals both internal and external to the organisation (Rose, 1999). The client-focus discourse operated powerfully in earlier times as part of the organisational culture. If viewed critically, this culture could be described as having developed for ideological and hegemonic purposes carefully embedded in organisational texts, such as the Christian Values and Mission Statements, and furthering the identification of the organisation as a Christian mission. The Christian and altruistic philosophy operated discursively providing mechanisms by which the organisation was disciplined.

So it was out there and well known that it was a Christian organisation, so that staff who came to the organisation either were Christian and liked that, or had Christian values and liked it, even though they may not have been church goers or such, or people who you know practised Christianity like the President did, they very much believed that those values were important and they wanted to be part of the organisation and believed in it (Interview 3:5).

The effects of the discursive positioning of the organisation is evident in prevailing perceptions of the organisation’s mission as being principally organised and motivated by Christian and altruistic purposes. This perception existed within the organisation and in the environment external to the organisation, both within the community, the corporate sector and the government. The theme of paternalistic Christian benevolence is strongly articulated in the book written by the former President and CEO of the organisation (Chambers, 2000). He describes the relationship which the organisation had with successive governments’ both Labour and Liberal, Federal and State, as well as with benevolent individuals and corporations who gave generously to ACCS fundraising events to support the poor and disadvantaged. Organisational documents describing these earlier times show that the organisation positioned itself as strongly client-focused.

One manager elaborates that the client-focussed discourse was attractive and inspirational to both insiders such as staff, volunteers and Board members, as well as to others outside the organisation who frequently left better paid positions, in both the corporate and public sector, to work within ACCS. The Regional Manager suggests that



staff articulate that, most of them say I wanted to do something meaningful, I wanted to give back to the community, I wanted to make a difference to somebody else's life, I wanted to know when I help someone that that makes their life better. They're the sort of standard comments that you get (Interview 2:19).

Staff describe their sense of purpose, altruistic intentions and subjectivity, that working for such an organisation afforded them. However, loss of this sense of purpose by the managers is evident within each of the interviews undertaken, and was keenly felt by a significant number of staff. These staff members described a sense of betrayal which they felt as the gap widened and became more pronounced between what Argyris and Schon (1978) called 'espoused theory' and 'theory-in-use' within the organisation, thus creating dissonance for many staff. There are many examples of staff disillusionment expressed within the interviews. One manager suggests that "other issues are driving us, that disillusions and disappoints staff, and certainly does that for me, we are miles from where we were as in a serving heart, people in need, and I think that's a tragedy" (Interview 3:30).

Such dissonance was an emotional response to the sense of incongruity between what the organisation said, and what it did. Indeed, the organisation continued to espouse the client-focus language using it instrumentally as a technology, for example within the organisational marketing strategy. The managers interviewed thus suggested that the marketing value of the client-focussed emphasis was well recognised by management and used instrumentally both to manipulate sentiment and to create support both internally and externally.

Other texts show that the manipulation and strategic utilisation of the client-focussed discourse afforded multiple opportunities for alternative deployment as part of managerialist discourse. Many employees were recruited on the basis of altruistic or Christian intentions and motivations that were increasingly marginalised in practice. Yet these motivations were used by management in ways that Rose (1999), describes as governmentality. Technologies of the self (Rose, 1998) were employed by new meanings given to language and shaping and re-shaping staff subjectivities. In other words, the language and practices of client-focused discourse enabled management to engage staff in achieving their managerialist outcomes. Thus notions of being client-focussed were re-deployed instrumentally by a new regime of truth and managerialist discourse.

The client-focused discourse provided a shared vision of ACCS' mission for two, somewhat contradictory, ethical and political orientations. One was traditionally taken up by those whose

religious convictions or morality aligned them with the sentiments of the Christian Values Statement of compassion, care, concern and justice for the poor, thereby championing the organisation's long faith tradition. This is clearly illustrated in pre-1998 ACCS documentation and forms a dominant theme in ACCS history (Chambers, 2000). Another position, within the same client-focused discourse, was taken up by community service workers less concerned with issues of faith, and whose formal social welfare training and social constructivist approaches to knowledge, prioritised values of social justice, equity, workers' and human rights. Both positions are clearly examples of Taylor's (1985) notion of evaluations of worth where priority was given by each group to these higher-order human needs.

#### **4.3.2 Managerialist discourse**

In this study, insights drawn from organisational documents and interviews with the managers themselves provide substantial evidence of extensive change processes within the organisation, they also point critically to the increasingly powerful of managerialist discourse. The collection of documents for textual analysis provides a view of how the organisation positioned itself through its codified history and used this for marketing and communications with both government and community. Interviews provide additional evidence both of changing language and practices as they were experienced by the managers themselves and as they sought to make sense of these changes. Or, put differently, in the interviews the managers' experiences of the changing discourses are articulated. The older client-focused discourse of community service and charity are shown to be redundant, being progressively replaced and changed by newer more corporate structures, language and processes.

When I joined ACCS 10 years ago ...[the organisation] they were very practical, hands on, earthy, out there with people and where there was a need we'd be, sadly I don't think that is the case today...other issues are driving us, that disillusion and disappoints staff, and it certainly does for me, we are miles from where we were as in a serving heart, people in need and I think that is a tragedy. Yes, its come from management, it's been influenced in part by government contracts...toady you've got a business plan to work out on, it's the economics, the budget lines...' (Interview 3:4).

The voice in the interview texts is not the official organisational voice speaking about itself, but is critical, and at times vitriolic. However, this analysis does not preclude these texts but draws attention to how they provide an alternative, albeit critical voice. In other words, the interviews highlight an informal account of the organisation and its changes expressed in texts which can be usefully contrasted with other more formal organisational texts.

Five indicators from the literature on managerialism (Adler, 2004; Briskman and Muetzelfeldt, 2002; Clarke et al., 2000a; Jones and May, 1992; Rees and Rodley, 1995; Solondz, 1995) are used in order to identify and examine features of managerialist discourse within the texts. They include first, the language of accounting and marketing; second, introduction of new managerialist practices; third, new managerialist organisational structures; fourth, increasing emphasis on competing in the market and fifth, changing understandings of successful outcomes. This simple analytic framework identifies themes from the literature showing various elements, processes and dimensions of the managerialist discourse. Thus, managerialist discourse is clearly identified and contrasted with the client-focused discourse.

#### *Managerial language drawn from accounting and marketing*

The language of accounting and marketing is clearly identified both in interviews and documents as being the preferred and dominant language within the organisation. The CEO asserted his optimism in the new corporatism within the organisation. “When I look at the new corporate identity that we are launching it will unite our organisation in serving the community” (Chambers, 2000:157). Relatedly, the selected texts show that financial management and financial outcomes are accorded the first priority for managers and staff. In addition, one manager particularly emphasised the increasing use of the language of marketing, branding and public relations in organisational communication, perceiving this as reflecting a growing concern by senior management with the organisational image or brand.

There is no doubt that there has been that shift, and it’s been spoken about at all times from a National level... there seems to be an over emphasis or highlight ...[on] marketing, branding, PR, er, it’s not that we can’t damage it, we’ve got to lift that up, we’ve got to consider that before we consider what service we are going to render (Interview 3:28).

This claim is supported by the increasing priority accorded to marketing and branding within annual reports. For example, the 2003 annual report shows expenditure of approximately \$7 million dollars on fundraising and marketing during the 2002-2003 period. The manager goes on to suggest that image considerations preceded social action within the organisation. In other words, social concerns and actions were being considered in the light of how involvement by the organisation in the social concern or action might be portrayed, in and by, the media. This perception held by all of those interviewed, that the organisation increasingly employed language and practices from other discourses is also evident in the intertextuality within organisational documents such as annual reports, marketing brochures and policies. It also points to changing organisational practices which accompany the changing language such as that described earlier by

the manager, where he describes the imperative to promote a positive organisational image as taking precedence over services offered by the organisation.

### *Introduction of new managerialist practices*

ACCS had formerly been associated with practice communities of faith and welfare, emphasising the pursuit of social justice and charity (Annual Report 1996). In more recent times, interviews strongly suggest the dominance of the norms and practices of management and corporate communities. Interviews and documents show changing language, values, dress and mores, which in turn, create new and changing identities, blurring boundaries, and producing new cultural practices within the organisation.

Ummm I truly believe with what's happened with all the changes in the place, becoming more professional, you know, having a national focus all these things, you know the income sustainability, the budget, all this has contributed to a workplace where there is no interaction or very little interaction between people.... and worrying about budgets and making sure that this is done for central office and that, we've lost, we've lost a lot in respect to umm, you know having relationships within our organisation (Interview 1:12).

While the managers raise their concerns about changing priorities, in primary organisational practices and ethical positioning, the annual report representing the view of senior management, intertextually employs language and assumptions from a different neoliberal discourse and a welfare reform agenda of prioritising self-help, empowerment and mutual obligation.

The face of charity is changing. No longer are we content to simply rescue people from difficulty: now we aim also to empower them with the support, skills and self confidence they need to dive into their lives (Annual Report, 2003:2).

Furthermore, interviewees state that a new strong emphasis placed by the organisation on modelling business practices was prioritised. This reprioritisation meant that any programs which were not financially profitable for the organisation were evaluated or audited and if found unprofitable they were closed. One manager's account illustrates the changing priorities within the organisation, she describes the closure of long-standing and high profile family support and youth services within the region. Her use of strong metaphors and description emphasises the disappointment and anger at the changing discourses.

all these people think that Mission has gone to the dogs. We had a huge youth services program that has now gone to the dogs, a big beautiful house, young people were walking in and out of that place, you know, that's all gone to the dogs, you know like I can tell you now

that the other organisations think what is happening to ACCS, they are quite disgusted and they think that we've sold out to the business side of town and that's sort of very disgusting (Interview 4:45).

Interviewees also point to alliances with the government and the corporate sector were prioritised in the new regime, where once the identification of the organisation was with the poor it now became an organisational imperative to develop such partnerships with corporate entities.

...I'm sure the senior executive would say bigger is better, it seems that way, maybe it's my cynical side, but it also means that there can a financial gain that's increased because of bigger, they would say I think we are more business like and we are seen with greater favour in the business sector (Interview 2:18).

### *Managerialist organisational structures*

The CEO asserts the strengths of ACCS' management structure, ascribing confidence in the capability of senior management:

Other good signs for the future include the national structure that we've set in place, where we now have a structure of general managers, regional managers and national managers across Australia and can meet any growth or development that takes place (Chambers 2000:157).

In contrast, interviewees assert that the complex matrix structure and increasing centralisation required to operate a national office resulted in increasing levels of bureaucratic red tape for the staff working at the coal-face. The CEO is confident in the capabilities of the organisations' management to meet any challenge of growth or development (Chambers, 2000). His assertions of confidence are not shared by other managers who as the interviews attest became increasingly cynical and disillusioned by organisational responses.

The organisation is also described as being 'top heavy' by one manager, as new levels of management were introduced. Perhaps inevitably this contrast in view develops as a hierarchical and bureaucratic structure is introduced to provide control and governance for a large organisation such as ACCS.

...the increase that just seems to be so top heavy in terms of the administration, um, the expectations and demands of National Office, it's like, they're not really there to help us they're there to hinder us, they're obstructive in terms of responding promptly for needs that services have... (Interview 3:24).

Negative staff reactions to the increasing bureaucracy are said by the interviewees to be widespread, believing the systems to be a hindrance for many areas of service delivery. Staff also considered that the 'tail was wagging the head', as one manager stated, for the organisation seemed to have become skewed in on itself, so that the front-line operational staff spent large amounts of their time undertaking accountability requirements to satisfy the corporate requirements of the central office bureaucracy. At the same time, staff complained that the corporate services Department were 'resistant' to their requests for help. Thus increasing bureaucracy and hierarchy with their accompanying mechanisms of control and power resulted in a corresponding drop in community, and therefore trust, within the organisation (Adler, 2004).

#### *Increasing emphasis on competing in the market*

The CEO asserts that ACCS must be competitive and that its competitive advantage is related to its size. He asserts that the competitiveness of markets linked are embedded in what he terms globalisation and that many small organisations will be forced out of the sector due to their inability to compete.

My confidence rests on a number of factors. One is the growth of ACCS over the past two years...I think that's particularly important because you'll find, increasingly, that many smaller organisations will not be able to survive in a competitive environment. However, a large organisation, like ACCS can survive because of its infrastructure, professional management IT as well as staff... (Chambers, 2000:153).

He develops his point further employing metaphorical language:

One of the major changes that are sweeping across the world is globalisation. The image that I use in talking to our staff is of a great tidal wave sweeping across the world. Some small boats have already encountered this and have been overwhelmed. I think we see that in the community sector where many small organisations, for instance in Job Network, weren't able to survive... Using this analogy I see that we have a large ship, ACCS, and my role as CEO is skipper of this ship. What we are doing at the moment is trimming the sails, training the crew, providing adequate resources and ensuring that the ship is going to be able to ride the wave of globalisation. Globalisation will mean in very real terms that small organisations won't exist and will not have the resources to compete for government tenders nor be able to competing for a shrinking charity dollar (Chambers, 2000:158-159).

In practice, the organisation was strongly influenced by Federal Government moves to link service provision to a competitive tendering process and away from a system of recurrent



funding. Formerly, if an organisation achieved its targeted service numbers in the required time-frames, then the funding was continued annually. New notions of competitive tendering developed as the Federal Government opened the services for unemployed, formerly, Commonwealth Employment Services<sup>16</sup> to a market-driven system in which organisations bid for sections or areas. Price was linked to outcome and for-profit organisations also competed. Other neoliberal concepts were also being introduced by the government, including the notion that communities should be more self-sustaining and not reliant upon government welfare handouts. The welfare state was challenged and said to be redundant. In its place terms like ‘mutual obligation’, ‘sustainability’ and ‘enterprise’ (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992) were introduced pushing the direction of welfare away from government funding towards competitive markets and individual enterprise (Clarke et al., 2000b; du Gay, 2004; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992).

And I would say that was the big difference ... in the olden days if I can say it that way, the key focus was the client and in the last three years the focus has been money, and most people in the organisation have seen that shift especially people like me who have been there for a long time (Interview 3:24).

#### *Changing understandings of successful outcomes*

Formerly the organisation had prioritised Christian values such as justice, compassion, equity dignity and, in particular, emphasised the understanding that the organisation existed to serve the poor and disadvantaged (Chambers, 2000). According to one manager, outcomes in the former regime were linked to ideas of successfully fulfilling a sense of mission and staff were modest and humble about their achievements:

it was about what we do has to measure up with the outcome, you know like there has to become outcomes...like I could tell you fantastic stories about someone moving an inch in their personal world, that for me, just brings tears to my eyes, and for them could make them turn over a new leaf, but how do you measure that outcome, I don't know how you measure those, it's you can't measure it on a scale (Interview 4:36).

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<sup>16</sup> The Commonwealth Employment Service was the government organisation that operated prior to the Job Network.

In the manager's view, qualitative outcomes linked to assisting clients to improve their lives were now being replaced by other outcomes within the new regime. In the language of the CEO, the organisation now delivered outcomes for the government for the government had increasingly become the organisations' business 'client'. This corporate use of the term client contrasted with the notion of 'client' in service provision which identified the organisation's relationship to its disadvantaged and poor service users.

The federal government has confidence in us. They know we are reliable, we're effective and we deliver outcomes for them, and so they're happy to deal with us (Chambers 2000:155).

Here the new CEO expresses his consensus (Fairclough, 2003) with the Federal Government and their discourses. He naturalises this re-identification with managerialist discourse and expresses this change as a significant achievement for the organisation.

The above analyses clearly demonstrate the expansion and operation of a powerful managerialist discourse within ACCS. Use of market mechanisms, hierarchy, accountabilities, language drawn from accounting and marketing, bureaucratic structures, practices of utility and control, as well as managers' personal preferences, whim and attempts at strategy, are all heterogeneously and expediently "lashed together" (Rose, 1999) in managerialist discourse. This discourse is shown in the next section to be subjugating the former client-first discourse.

#### **4.3.3 A discursive shift: from client-focus to managerialism**

In the previous section, evidence both in documents and interview transcripts, shows a radical change in organisational emphasis: from charity, welfare work of supporting, caring, giving and helping clients to an increasing emphasis on corporate and bureaucratic responses involving increased accountabilities, financial management, administration and the management of clients as 'outcomes'.

In contrast to the client-first discourse, the more recent corporate managerialist discourse emphasises the attainment of numerical and financial outcomes, that Taylor calls "weak evaluations" (Taylor, 1985). The National Executive Team's strategic imperative to manage the enormous growth within the organisation professionally in individual contracts, to be financially accountable and to deliver a surplus, conflicts with the previously explicit accountability to Christian values (Annual Report 1996). Driven by the utility of organisational resources (including staff) now directed towards contracted outcomes with Government, the attainment of performance indicators with tight timeframes and contract compliance were vital to

organisational viability. As new procedures were introduced to formalise work, the social relations embedded in the former client-focused discourse were disrupted:

we [were] here for the down and out...[now] we are subservient, we are there to serve Head Office, you know, and what happens to the client anyway... and it's like we've got to follow our procedures, it doesn't matter if people are hurting, they can wait (Interview 3:28).

The organisation's shift was represented as one moving from "faith to finance" and from "serving the down and out to serving Head Office",

...we [were] here for the down and out...[now] we are subservient, we are there to serve Head Office, you know, and what happens to the client anyway... and it's like we've got to follow our procedures, it doesn't matter if people are hurting, they can wait so rather than being supportive and saying OK here's another perspective, it's like do it for us, it's an edict rather from relationships and the experience to work it through .....so the person just becomes a rebel, they'll do what they do because they're told to and that takes out the meaning and purpose of their work... people who have joined ACCS accepted a lower salary and different conditions, and all the rest of it, because they like helping people from emergency relief... to big business [and] the world stage (Interview 3:32).

Interviewees show how their everyday practices, embedded in a complex web of social relationships in the client-focused discourse are disrupted. Gradually through corporate managerialist discourse, work practices were re-organised through new institutionalised systems of budgeting, performance and case management. As the organisation adopted the governments' policies embedded in the managerialist language of funding agreements, organisational practices and knowledge were increasingly aligned with the government's neoliberal approach. "...the government is now feeding us, we need to rely on government funding, we need to speak this new language, so we've got to get organised that way" (Interview 4:44). There is considerable ambivalence in the metaphoric use of "feeding" and having to now "rely", not on faith and charity, but on government to fund their work. Other interview data also reflects how this new language created a range of re-organising that transformed practice knowledge "...the organisation has lost sight of the individual and their meaning in wanting to work for the organisation" (Interview 4: 44) and reduced organisational commitment and pride.

Relatedly, the shift in organisational priorities raised consistently in interview data about what was "good for business" and by whom, is indicative of the conflict between the two discourses.

Taken-for-granted practices, for example funding of deficit programs from those 'successful' programs that were able to "make a surplus", were discontinued.

[The priority of the organisation is now]...Basically making a surplus. I think that the organisation became obsessive about finances to the point where, when you'd go out and you were talking to staff, and staff who in my mind wouldn't even, and shouldn't even be concerned about finance because they were relating to the clients, and that's their job, even those staff would express disillusionment about why the organisation was so focused on money...I'm sure the senior executive would say bigger is better, they would say I think we are more business like and we are seen with greater favour in the business sector (Interview 2:19).

Thus, a depot that received donations of clothing, household goods and even food that were distributed as aid to needy people or sold to subsidise other local activities was closed because it was not making a profit. Even with an operating surplus of \$1.9 million dollars and an increase in accumulated funds from \$18 million in 2000 to \$41.2 million (Annual Report 2003:43) many of the community service programs were closed. For example, in one region with high levels of poverty and a significant youth homelessness problem, ACCS closed two deficit programs: a highly accessed family support program and its youth accommodation program.

This analysis of interview data employing critical discourse analysis clearly shows within ACCS the subjugation of the historical client-focused discourse, by an increasingly dominant managerialist discourse through the impetus of corporate growth and government partnership.

#### **4.4 Loss of organisational knowledge and its effects**

As well as highlighting the discursive shift, analysis of the interview narratives and corporate documents points to substantial evidence of the loss of organisational knowledge.

##### **4.4.1 Loss of practice knowledge**

One manager related the story of how a key counsellor "... left with all of her knowledge of post abortion counselling ... [from] seeing so many clients a year and the grief and loss associated with that, she could write a paper on it, but that's all gone" (Interview 4:49). This personal practice knowledge was developed progressively over time through the application of professional training experience and social interactions within the field. New management appointments trained in accounting and other administrative and corporate knowledge, were unfamiliar with the value and

use of practice knowledge, and therefore incapable of facilitating staff to reflexively draw upon its use within services.

The organisation also lost the practice knowledge of experienced front-line managers. In programs for highly marginalised people, staff with social welfare training and direct responsibility for development, provision and staffing, were made redundant. One former manager attempted to explain the complexity of providing services and opportunities for their clients:

nothing can replace the hands-on experience that you get, you know, working with young people who are homeless, who have been traumatised ... it's all skills that you develop on the job, you know someone can show you how to drive a screw into a lump of timber, but to actually get alongside someone and to encourage them and to impart some of yourself to that person is a totally different scenario (Interview 1:13).

Here the manager describes his development of practice knowledge in his capacity to engage meaningfully through social-interactions with clients. Giddens (1984), drawing on Goffman (1972), shows that such understandings are developed through complex processes such as “turn-taking”, body positioning and facial expression. Collectively, these skills produce tact and trust in the workers which enable effective engagement with clients and are vital for effective operation of services. The loss of such practice knowledge clearly impacts the organisation’s knowledge and capability to offer community services (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001).

#### **4.4.2 Loss of situated knowledge**

Loss of trust is also linked to loss of other situated organisational knowledge developed through the social interactions of staff situated in their local community. Managers described developing local and situated knowledge of communities in their practices and routines (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas, 1996). They emphasised that this process, developed as part of the relationship with community members, though gaining respect and rapport with client groups, is often a slow and arduous process, collectively and relationally undertaken. The Family Support Service Manager drew attention to her clients’ identification with a particular service in her comments relating to a homeless young person saying:

...like I've got nothing, I've found I'm really coming to you for help. [The worker] really wanted people to feel welcome, and it was a warm sort of environment, and so many clients would say to us, you know, oh you're the only people we want to come to (Interview 4:42).

Organisational knowledge of how to provide a welcoming service to help distressed people was built up experientially, frequently tacitly, through shared meanings (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Managers described the erosion of services within the organisation as staff turnover grew and other staff became demoralised, and withdrew their organisational commitment. Of particular concern to the Family Support Manager was the increased organisational and personal risk associated with service provision, as experienced staff left the organisation and newer inexperienced staff replaced them. Access to generalisations of how to provide services decreased and potential for crises increased, as inexperienced staff are called upon to deal with difficult, and sometimes violent, clients. Moreover, the managers interviewed expressed their dismay at the disregard, by senior management, of the seemingly obvious rise in costs incurred by the organisation through the loss of valuable knowledge of community capabilities, loss of referrals and duplication of services.

#### **4.4.3 Loss of evaluations of worth**

The values of the organisation were taken very seriously by many staff within the organisation as reflected within some interview comments,

ACCS, it is an ethical organisation it has values, these values are they really want to help disadvantaged people, they will go the extra mile, other organisations will give them \$5, we'll give them \$5 and talk to them for 10 minutes and listen to them, so this is the pride we had in working for an organisation like ACCS (Interview 2:19).

The manager describes the deep identification that many staff formerly had with the organisation's ethics and values discourse. Thus the organisation is shown to have had a particular ethical discourse that prioritised evaluations of worth made by staff at the individual level. In turn, staff took up this discursive positioning offered by the organisation in ways that shaped both their roles, and more deeply, their ontological identification, through what Fairclough (2003) calls "style". Formerly a different internalised disciplining process operated through a governmentality within the organisation (Burchell et al., 1991; Rose, 1999) and willingly adopted by staff.

The managers highlight how evaluations of worth shaped organisational actions. Routines and practices were developed to deal with complex issues involving strong commitment to values embedded in practice knowledge (Feldman, 2000; Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Orlikowski, 2002; Taylor, 1985; Yanow, 2004). A substantial body of organisational knowledge existed across



ACCS embedded in collectively developed understandings by those variously positioned within the client-focused discourse.

Another manager discussed his involvement in developing a business enterprise, recycling second-hand clothes and household items in order to raise finance for the organisation's work with homeless youth. This development of business enterprises within ACCS was formerly oriented strongly to employing and supporting young clients and differed from later more instrumentally-orientated profit-making ventures.

I built up an enterprise, a business enterprise for [ACCS] because one of the things I found in my time managing the unit was that the young people weren't exposed to any kind of work, to ahhh a work ethic I guess ... (Interview 1:2).

For these managers organisational knowledge was grounded in higher order evaluations of worth (Taylor, 1985) – the whole client mattered, not just accommodation provision – this prioritising of clients was part of a shared and embedded value system. However, the interviews show the major priority within ACCS shifting to the attainment of targeted and contracted client outcomes. Sophisticated and expensive IT systems were introduced by ACCS to record client data and outcomes, and long-term staff were replaced with newer staff to fulfil different managerialist emphases. The New Executive Team took decisions strategically to attain their “performance indicators” albeit from weaker evaluations of worth based on utility and expedience (Taylor, 1985). In consequence, organisational knowledge – generalisations of how to weave in the priority of diverse client needs into practices driven by higher order evaluations of worth – was increasingly lost.

The shift in evaluations of worth, raised consistently in interview data as to what was “good for business”, and for who, is indicative of the contestation and struggle to keep the client-focused discourse with its strong evaluations of worth as the guiding principle of ACCS service delivery. Although these values were documented in its mission statement (Annual Report 2004), much of the organisational knowledge in action – behaviours which were spontaneous and organisational generalisations held tacitly as ‘knowing’ across the organisation – was un-codified (Feldman, 2000; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). As such, this organisational knowledge relied strongly on transmission through action, mentoring, social interaction between staff and community, relationships and an informal culture of story telling and sharing “...if there was a need and it was genuine we responded to it and we'd start off scratching and eking out just to meet it in some shape or form, and we'd do it” (Interview 3:30).

## **4.5 Implications and summary**

First, the loss of organisational knowledge during this change process focuses attention on the increasingly powerful managerialist discourse. Second, changing and competing discourses are identified within ACCS and the emergent and dominant managerialist discourse is shown to subjugate the client-first discourse resulting in changes to and loss of organisational knowledge. Third, these losses of organisational knowledge and practitioner knowledge include difficult to identify, often tacit, practical, heuristic knowledge that relies upon deep evaluations of worth.

## CHAPTER 5 A STUDY OF COMMUNITY SERVICES NETWORKS AND KNOWLEDGE

This chapter is set in the organisational context of two distinctive networks within the community service domain. Organisations belonging to a small, local, interagency network providing services for homeless youth and a much larger state-wide government network are contrasted and the different electronic processes used to generate a client referral form are compared. After examining the findings of the first study, in particular the contrasting managerialist and client-focused discourses and their uses of organisational knowledge, these sites afforded the opportunity to examine whether and how these discourses operated in other types of organisations. In this way, the chapter further examines organisational knowledge and how managerialist discourse operates through powerful, electronic communication systems at the macro, inter-organisational level. Deployment of new, more sophisticated electronic practices is often claimed to provide organisations with technical mechanisms capable of substantially improving the efficiency and effectiveness of their services. This claim is examined, particularly in relation to the effects of integrating a managerialist deployment of new electronic communication systems.<sup>17</sup>

The chapter is structured in the following way. First, the background to the emergent and reflexive development of the study is presented. Second, the methods and processes of fieldwork and critical discourse analysis are discussed. Third, the effects of the discursive influence on changing and shaping organisational knowledge are discussed.

### 5.1 Background of the study

After introducing the specific context of two networks of community services organisations providing services for homeless youth, this section presents the emergent processes that contributed to the development of the study. This is followed by a discussion of the contrasting referral processes themselves that in this context involve knowledge development and sharing within and across organisations.

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<sup>17</sup> An earlier version of this study was published in the conference proceedings at the European Group of Organizational Studies (EGOS) Berlin 2005 (Sykes and Treleaven, 2005a).

### **5.1.1 Organisations providing services for homeless youth**

Services for homeless youth in this Australian state are currently funded and administered within the Housing Support program by the state Department of Family Services Housing Support<sup>18</sup> programs are then auspiced by a range of community organisations which are contracted to deliver a variety of services to young people aged fourteen and older, who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless. The community services organisations providing the program are then accessed by young people with a range of very complex needs and challenges, including issues associated with health, education, the legal system, sex and gender, drug, alcohol, mental health, financial, sexual and physical abuse, racial, language and ethnicity issues.

Organisations providing services such as these require systems and staff that are able to respond flexibly and sensitively to their young and often highly disadvantaged clients. Organisations are shaped by their situated community context and factors such as the availability of community support and the existing service system, sources of funding and funding limits, the local level of complex social and structural issues, unemployment, poverty, politicisation of “youth homelessness” and competition with other service providers. Accordingly, organisational knowledge is a highly specialised area as organisations are required to be, on the one hand, administratively and management savvy, and on the other, capable of providing caring, professional assistance to their young clients often within very challenging social contexts.

Youth Interagency is an interagency group for community service organisation’s auspicing the Housing Support Program. Facilitated by the Youth Interagency Resource Coordinator, it consists of twelve, mainly small member organisations operating with fewer than ten staff members. The coordinator is funded by the Housing Support Program under the auspices of one of the larger participating agencies and is directed by a Reference Group of Housing Support programs in the area. The Youth Interagency Resource project has as its goal “to work with Housing Support program funded agencies in the design, development and implementation of a service system network” (Interagency Coordinators job specification). The service users or client group are homeless young people within the outer city suburbs of a major city.

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<sup>18</sup> All names of organisations mentioned in this study have been changed to provide anonymity.

### **5.1.2 An emergent, reflexive and participatory study**

A discussion occurred between the Youth Interagency Coordinator and me about the earlier study at ACCS. This discussion of the findings of the preliminary study led to the idea of undertaking a second study situated in the Interagency. Our informal discussions included the increasing use of information technology and information systems within community service organisations as a means of sharing knowledge. The Coordinator mentioned the youth Interagency's planned creation of a common referral form and we discussed the idea of developing a research project using an action research methodology. This idea progressed further as the Coordinator introduced the idea of investigating a similar, but much bigger and more ambitious project being developed and implemented at the time by the State Government called the Government Information Systems (GIS) project. We then began to develop ideas for a research project comparing aspects of the two systems. Although the projects had many differences, we considered that researching the contrasting development processes would provide important insight and understanding of the different approaches to knowledge and its uses in the two inter-organisational networks. Further meetings occurred with interested stakeholders to discuss the substantive issues of what was required for the development of an electronic referral process.

An action research methodology was implemented from the start of the project similar to that of Reason and Torbert's (2001) three stages: individual reflection linked in turn to reflexive action, joint reflection informing collective reflexive action and finally, the product of individual and collective actions shaping action more broadly within the community. The plans for the development of an electronic referral process within the Interagency had developed reflexively from within the organisational context at these three levels: driven both from the Interagency need to refine service practices and as an excellent site for a study within this doctoral research. The Coordinator was particularly interested in organisational knowledge and knowledge sharing in relation to the Interagency network and how this might be improved by participating in the research project. The Coordinator also expressed the concerns of the Interagency that an additional more covert government control agenda may be introduced within the development of the referral process. His interests were in contrast to mine which was heightened further by the prospect of involvement within a parallel government project as a contrasting network. The sites provided an excellent opportunity to examine questions relating to how organisational knowledge might be shaped by a centrally generated managerialist discourse, this time in the context of community organisation networks. Important questions could be thus addressed such as: How does managerialist discourse operate in dispersed community organisations and with what effects

on organisational knowledge? How might the knowledge sharing processes within the referral processes reflect on how knowledge is used more broadly in these contrasting organisational systems? How does the management requirement for electronic submission and monitoring of accountability shape practice knowledge and subsequently, organisational knowledge in community service organisations?

An important methodological issue within this research earlier identified was the place of the self in the research. How was I to locate myself as the researcher in this study? Again I was positioned as an insider, as the study was set within the community service context. However, unlike in the earlier study discussed in Chapter 4, I was not and had not been employed in the organisations involved in the study. My involvement in the study was again reflexive as the roles of 'researcher' and 'participant' entailed meeting with the Youth Interagency colleagues within the field. Additionally, I met with other researchers involved in the technical aspects of developing the referral form as part of a concurrent Information Systems research project. This secondary project was largely beyond the scope of this doctoral research project but provided another action research opportunity to reflect and discuss more technical requirements in the process of developing the referral forms with members of the Government Information Systems project, The Council of Social Services staff and local community organisations. Meeting regularly with a range of different colleagues and groups of colleagues over a period of two years, allowed us to discuss the developing project and receive feedback, which enabled the action research process to develop reflexively. By employing an action research methodology the research moved past description and explanation, in order to more actively engage in the knowledge creation of the development processes themselves (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Torbert, 2001).

### **5.1.3 Referral processes and knowledge use**

Within most community service organisations, client referral is a primary and essential process. It is particularly important in organisations providing Housing Support Program for homeless youth, when there are often more referrals than rooms and beds. Care and protection issues of accommodating vulnerable young people are compounded by complex social issues, such as drug use and mental illness (Housing Support Program Guidelines, unpublished). When assessing a referral application, for example in an organisation providing crisis accommodation<sup>19</sup>, staff

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<sup>19</sup> Services for homeless youth in this state jurisdiction are provided through a number of projects. These include targeting different stages of the homeless cycle in the provision of supported accommodation services. Types of



consider a range of issues relating to the suitability of the service for the applicant and vice versa. Considerations may include the number of young people already living in, or using the program and the levels of care they require; the compatibility of the program focus (crisis, drug and alcohol or cultural background) with the young person's need(s); the level of staff skills and the suitability of housing premises. Issues relating to the availability and coordination of other workers and support for the young person are usually mapped and agreed upon in the process of developing a case-plan. The challenges associated with working with those who use the services are further complicated by the need for compliance with complicated legislative, political and regulative issues, both individually (care and protection issues) and organisationally (OHS insurance, workers compensation and media issues). Within these complex practices, the tacit social skills and practices of workers are critical to the quality of service provision. Examination of these skills and practices as well as routines and structures afford a useful knowledge analysis in this community service organisation context.

Mutual support and networking in local interagency groups traditionally have a strong pattern of knowledge sharing practices and meetings are often semi-formal and allow for discussion "around a cup of coffee". Youth Interagency wanted to go further than this, by employing a full-time coordinator to resource best practice and where possible streamline the service system in that local area. Discussions were held concerning the feasibility and practicality of having one common referral form within the Interagency. It was proposed that such a referral form could simplify the referral process across the network by addressing some of the following issues:

- better meet the needs of the service user by shortening waiting lists
- allow for easy access to vacancies
- link to the existing Housing Support Program data base to reduce separate data entries, to aid background check processes (Meeting notes dated 15 Sept, 2002).

If "developed from the ground up", a common referral form would potentially enhance service information and knowledge sharing, and "reduce the duplication of form completion for service users" (Meeting notes dated 15 Sept, 2002). Although the services were part of a well-developed collaborative group, significant issues arose relating both to specific service types and needs, and various interagency members' organisational differences.

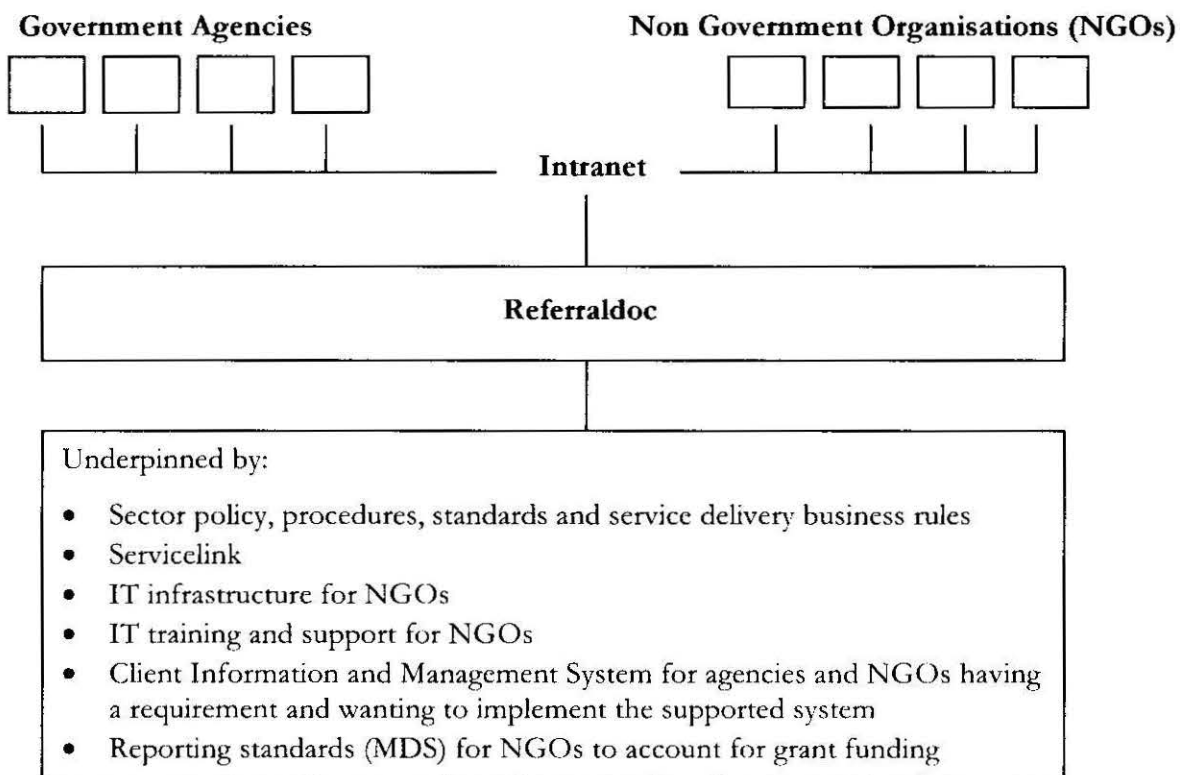
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services include areas such as early intervention, crisis services, supported care in medium and long-term placements, semi-independent and independent living.

During the development process of the Interagency referral form, the Youth Interagency Resource Coordinator also undertook a preliminary investigation of the government project. Although the scope of the government project was much larger, developed through its Office of Information and Technology (O.I.T.), the projects had many common aims. The Coordinator, therefore, had further discussions with Government Information Systems Project staff about the Interagency specific plans to develop their smaller, local electronic referral form. Subsequently, attempts were made by a staff member from the Government Department, to discourage any further development of the Youth Interagency referral form on the basis that the government project would make the smaller project redundant. As part of the comprehensive aims of the Government Information Systems Project it was claimed that *Referral*doc, the referral component of the Government Information Systems Project, would have the capability to encompass all of the associated sensitivities and complexity, not only for Youth Interagency services, but for all Housing Support Program services in the State. Despite these assurances, the Youth Interagency group chose not to participate with the developers of *Referral*doc, based on their considerations that there was no real need or benefit from participation in the large program and suspicion about ulterior bureaucratic intentions for control.

#### **5.1.4 Government Information Systems project: The case for *Referral*doc**

The Government Information Systems Project was established by the State government with the major objective stated in its Business Case “as coordinated, high quality and professional client services across the [Human Services] sector, with minimum inconvenience to clients, by the implementation of the *Referral*doc underpinned by the related processes...” (O.I.T., 2001:7). These are outlined in the model below (Figure 6).



**Figure 6 Model of Human Services sector network, client referral & NGO<sup>20</sup> support project (O.I.T., 2001:5).**

In this model, human services sector agencies have responsibility for the provision of welfare services on behalf of government. These services are provided by a combination of government agencies, for example, housing, welfare, health and community services and contracted services by non-government organisations.

The stated aims of the project were to:

- improve communication and information management for government and non-government agencies in the State human services sector
- assist human service agencies exchange information, make referrals to others and provide the best possible service to their clients

<sup>20</sup> NGOs are Non Government Organisations and is the term used by the State government to refer to what I have referred to in this thesis as community service organisations.

- help people get the services they need by making it easier to find information about services locally and across the State (O.I.T., 2001:7).

The primary rationale for the development of the large government project, presented in the introductory sections of both the Business Case and the Scoping Study<sup>21</sup>, was with improving efficiency and cost management in order to maximise the utilisation of increasingly contested public funds. Accountability and management issues in the area of community services have become especially difficult for the government to manage in the current political climate, where government welfare services are being increasingly devolved to the non-government sector. For example, recent Council of Social Services estimates suggest up to 50,000 community organisations work with some 300,000 funded services across the State. This emerging problem can be framed as the gap in understanding between governance and funding on the one hand, and the requirement for effective and efficient service provision on the other. Government attempts to breach this gap provide powerful impetus for greater community service organisation accountability and in turn, the drive evident in this project, for more efficient provision of services.

Approval by the State Government of the initial Business Case, subject to a further scoping study, resulted in \$13.9 million made available for the development and implementation of the Government Information Systems Project, to be implemented across human services organisations within the state. The four component parts of the project included: a human services database, a link between services, ReferralDoc, and a client information management system. The Department adopted a collaborative approach by inviting the NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS), a state peak community service organisation, to be involved in planning and implementing the project. A rollout of the common referral system, with change management assistance from the Council of Social Services, was planned for delivery across the state to all government agencies and as many community service organisations as could be encouraged to participate by offering the incentive of a computer to participating organisations.

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<sup>21</sup> The Business Case and the Scoping Study documents were made available by O.I.T. for use in the research project.

## **5.2 Data Collection Methods**

Texts examined include the Government Information Services preliminary Business Case and Scoping Study documents used to justify the design, and funding of the project. Additionally a range of other documents were collected including marketing and advertising documents such as e-bulletins, brochures and website documents; meeting notes, emails and interview transcripts. Both semi-structured interviews and meetings undertaken with members of the Youth Interagency and meetings attended with Department managers were taped and transcribed.

Second person action research was as a vital part of the research at this site encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment of the coordinator for the project. The interviews and documents collected from the Government Information Services were discussed with the Interagency Coordinator. Attention was then focused on responding to the needs of the Interagency in the light of what were considered the key issues for its development. The Interagency coordinator participated in informal reflection and analysis as well as planning the subsequent steps of the third-person action research process.

## **5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis**

The critical discourse approach described in Chapter 3 and applied in Chapter 4 was also used to analyse the data in this study (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2003; Treleaven, 2004). Critical discourse analysis was undertaken of texts collected from organisational documents as well as conversations and interviews with staff from both projects. A similar coding method is used to that in Chapter 4 (See Appendix on pages 182-186). Texts were coded according to substantive themes based on both managerialist indicators and knowledge and its creation and applications. This analysis presents illustrative texts from the large number of those coded and analysed. Textual analysis is particularly concerned with the identification of textual devices (Fairclough, 2003) such as intertextuality, naturalised assumptions and changed genre as they suggest the development of new regimes of truth and discipline processes discursively employed as managerialist technologies (Rose, 1999).

### **5.3.1 Information technology and information systems**

This section of the chapter presents the analysis structured according to the substantive themes derived from the texts analysed drawn from the literature in Chapter 2 and used when coding the documents. First, the analysis of the shaping and alignment of both projects by the intertextual use of IT language is presented. Second the analysis of the ways that each project dealt with notions prioritising efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism and their use are discussed.

Third, the prioritisation and privileging accorded to corporate practices embedded in accounting and economics language are analysed; and fourth, a brief analysis of the ways of alignment with practices and language emanating from powerful government bureaucratic regimes of truth concludes the analysis.

### *IT and IS deployed by Referral doc developers*

Technical terminology and jargon is necessarily employed by those involved in the development of electronic systems. For example, the language and terms associated with producing the necessary hardware, software and networking processes, needed to be universally understood by all those concerned with the project. However, the different organisational contexts on the ground in which the referral systems were being developed meant that the projects employed different terms and interpretations.

Developing a common language, both for the program producers and administrators as well as those named as the “end-users”, was critical within the government project. In texts developed for planning the processes and other specification, language is used intertextually to describe the IT and IS project requirements in the context of the needs and practices of the community service organisations and their end-users. To this end a number of strategies were employed to communicate across disciplines or discourses. To create this intertextuality (Fairclough 2003) new formats, or what Fairclough called genres, were developed. Monthly e-bulletins were posted on the project’s website providing up-dates on the project’s development from the perspective of the Government Department. A “dictionary” of terms was developed and frequently asked question’s (FAQ’s) were addressed.

Our website will carry our e-bulletins, answers to frequently asked questions and up-to-date information on the whole program. There is a discussion forum where you can make a comment about the program, ask a question or send us feedback about the site (O.I.T., 2003:3).

In this way community service organisations were addressed using the same naturalised language and terms employed in IT and IS discussions of more corporate enterprises.

The new genre was heavily promoted by the Department and organisations were encouraged to ‘log on to the website’. Additionally, the Department initiated a consultation process for the collective development of categories, identification of processes, types of services, different users and their needs and capabilities. Here the order of things was established and common categories developed based upon the data dictionary. Employment of language used by the IT



developers was, in this way, naturalised and the IT capability provided the limits as to what could be produced – what sort of referral system was possible or able to be produced, and what constituted an electronic referral. Referraldoc, once operational, was itself to be a means of text production, producing and disseminating referrals.

Based upon IT and IS practices, a new rationality began shaping both what constituted a referral and how referrals were to be made. Types and categories of clients and services were developed. Generalisations and reductions were made of information from multiple, miscellaneous and diverse systems and services, from community service organisations and government human service departments, to ensure compatibility and accommodation with the new generic system. This shaping process necessarily abstracted specific services and their different client-groups into language and categories acceptable to the IT system. The abstraction process was linked, in turn, to notions that increased capacity to achieve multiple referrals with increased speed, equated to increasing professionalisation of services.

The new rationality was articulated in text production by the Government Department both in written and spoken texts for example, from the Scoping Study:

[in] developing and implementing Referraldoc it is essential to explain that it should be seen as an enabler to ensure that professional referral practices are faster, contain validated information and are tightly monitored” (O.I.T., 2001:57).

The speed, accuracy and monitoring capabilities of the referral process are highlighted here. Texts such as this, suggest a new un-stated or assumed rationale for community service staff within the Youth Interagency, in which their professional competence is related to speed and capability of using the IT system. The text thus points evaluatively to the subject position or what Fairclough (2003) calls the identification of the community service staff. Professional competence for community service organisation staff is thus given a new IT and IS capability component.

Other texts developed by the Referraldoc developers show the development of a second and related rationality which suggests the essential and innate efficiency of IT and IS. In short, this rationality proposes that the employment of IT and IS in the referral system will axiomatically increase effectiveness and efficiency, not only of the referral systems, but systems within the organisations more generally. Additionally, there is further evidence of intertextuality as language is taken from neoliberal globalisation discourses, for the naturalisation of an increasingly

electronic and competitive environment strengthens the imperative for community service organisations to be involved.

The aim of the project is to define a common approach to collecting client information and making referrals seamlessly to appropriate agencies and NGO's for the delivery of services that meet client needs. It will achieve effective communication, interaction and referral of clients across the Human Services Sector including NGO's and provision of [IT] training and support for NGO's to operate successfully in an increasingly electronic and competitive environment (O.I.T., 2001:3).

This rationality can be summarised in the common sense notion of employing technology in order to "do more with less". The Department documents strategically adopt and naturalise this taken-for-granted rationality and reference is not made to other evidence within other significant research in the area that makes such a rationality problematic. The failure rate of IT and IS systems as identified in research and practice of other similar programs is never mentioned or discussed explicitly (see for example Clark and Henderson, 1990; Dalcher and Drevin, 2003). Such omissions may be oversights, however, given the size, cost and scope of the project, the responsibility for use of taxpayer funds and their own professional practice, preliminary research by the government developers may have been reasonably expected to prompt investigation of these issues. Nevertheless, the developers of the government network maintained strong confidence in the planned use of these IT and IS systems to positively reform community service practices.

#### *IT and IS deployed by Youth Interagency*

Initial discussions with the Youth Interagency Coordinator and members emphasised that client needs and services were of primary concern in developing a common referral form. The major aims and objectives of the Youth Interagency network in developing the common referral form was summed up as "providing a more streamlined referral process" for their clients. A client-focused discourse, similar in many ways to that describing ACCS in Chapter 4, is evident in many of the texts collected. Accordingly, staff demonstrated the care and support offered throughout sensitive, and at times complex, referral processes and assessment procedures in which staff advocated for the role of their young clients in the processes. The client-focus discourse is evident in texts that show staff concerns for their clients "clients often had to provide background information on many occasions in referral processes, as their status of homelessness meant they were transient and moved throughout many services" in a particular region (Meeting notes dated November, 2002).

Discussions within the Youth Interagency about the use of an electronic system highlighted a range of different views. Views of larger organisations, which already used IT and IS networks, were in contrast to the views of other smaller organisations that had less access to computers and which still had to dial-up for internet connections. Similarly, in contrast to Referraldoc, the development of the Youth Interagency referral form was constrained to employ simple, cheap and easy-to-use hardware and software. For this reason, considerable attention was given to the idea of using existing databases and reporting mechanisms as part of the system to reduce any duplication of data entry by workers. Interestingly, Referraldoc could not utilise existing systems as the size and scope of their inter-dependent and inter-disciplinary system precluded the use of incompatible equipment.

Text production capabilities of the Referraldoc itself were also in contrast. For the utilisation of an electronic referral form to facilitate a streamlined referral process is identified by the Interagency as important in the construction of the referral process (text production) itself. The Interagency is concerned to shape the capacity of the electronic referral process in line with its client-focus orientation. While the capacity of Referraldoc to make multiple electronic referrals appears to provide efficiencies in terms of data entry, youth workers in the Interagency had different priorities. They were apprehensive about Referraldoc and the imposition of one generic set of forms that glossed over local variations in information.

I appreciate your aim of having one set of forms for all, but I'm not sure how this could work, given that each service has governance over its referral criteria, and often have slightly different forms and questions to ask as a result" (email dated October 9<sup>th</sup> 2002).

In contrast, the priority of Referraldoc was for consistency in service delivery standards across the whole human services sector. The Coordinator noted the resistance that he had encountered, not only in the small-scale development of the localised database and electronic referral form but also the impact of a state-wide rollout that would have less flexibility.

I've been finding it difficult getting a consensus just amongst Housing Support Scheme services, for instance, there is a concern that this will be seen as a set of systems/tools and practices etc that will be imposed on us, rather than made to fit our needs and fairly self-determinist principles, and that it is designed to benefit referrers rather than receivers of referrals or clients (Meeting with Youth Interagency Coordinator, May 2003).

The importance of maintaining independence and autonomy for the community service organisations in the Interagency, and their individual approach to service delivery, is evident in the Interagency texts . Each contracted service differs and operates independently. For example,

Each service had their own referral form which was integrated into how they worked. For example, a crisis service which didn't need to know a whole lot of depth information, just their basic needs and 'can they provide those?' and 'are they safe?' The medium term services really wanted to have quite a thorough assessment prior to the young person coming in. 'What are you going to be doing here?' So adopting a system that somebody else had developed would mean that they would have to change the way that they worked and reshape everything else they did as well (Interview with Interagency Coordinator dated 19/5/04).

These organisational practices are historically and contextually developed and ensure individualised services are provided to service users. "I'd like to be part of developing a system which can take the personalities of individual agencies into account, rather than one giving the feeling that they'll be told how to work" (Interagency member, November 2002). However, such organisational practices are also identified as being problematic in relation to "enabling more seamless service provision" and integration with other similar organisations, hence the interest among the organisations in a common referral form.

The Interagency Coordinator suggested that the electronic referral process must consider situated and local knowledge developed participatively and allowing flexibility and adaptability to the needs of individual services and their clients. The proposed benefits of a streamlined electronic system were tempered by their concerns about a possible lack of congruence with their carefully developed practices and individual organisational needs.

Here the youthworker identifies the text production capabilities of the electronic referral process and thus its capability to shape knowledge and its creation. By employing generic IT and IS applications the referral form itself is clearly capable of being employed as a powerful disciplining mechanism. This disciplining capability of the new electronic referral processes to re-shape both what is done and how it is done within programs is also prescribed in texts from the government project, for example,

Consistent professional standards of service across the Sector will be facilitated by the training and support components of the project and the requirement to develop Sector policy and standards in relation to client initial assessment and referral (O.I.T., 2001:9).

The Department had clear intentions to regulate professional standards within the sector through the deployment of the IT and IS systems within community service organisations.

### **5.3.2 Efficiency and effectiveness as dominant regimes of truth**

The ways that each project deals with language and practices prioritising efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism point indicatively to what counts for truth, and who decides, within the organisational networks.

#### *Within ReferralDoc*

The politically-motivated imperative to improve efficiency and effectiveness of community services is evident within both the Business Case and the Scoping Study. This rationality is premised on notions of the expected capability,

of more informed decision-making across the sector achieved by cost effective investment in technology and [producing] higher productivity of professional services by elimination of duplication of client assessments [which] will result in improved service delivery to clients [...and] policy advice founded on better quality information and rationalisation of databases leading to improved integrity...It aims to make maximum use of specialised services and optimise resource allocation across the Sector to improve client services and flatten workload peaks and troughs (O.I.T., 2002:10).

The authors of the Business Case point to the inefficiencies of the community service organisation systems and operations. The assumption embedded in the text, is that there is a major shortcoming relating to efficiency within the community service sector, yet there is no evidence provided within the Business Case in support of these claims. A salient theme and textual device within the initial Business Case document is the repeated emphasis both of the inefficiencies of the current community service organisations and the capacity of ReferralDoc and the Government Department to rectify the problem. This type of criticism both directly and indirectly occurs repeatedly (over twenty-times) throughout the document. For example “This lack of common approach results in considerable duplication of effort, inefficient service delivery and poor outcomes for clients...” (O.I.T., 2002:2). “It will enhance their level of efficiency and quality of service through the use of IT...” (2002:4). “It overcomes current inefficiencies across the Sector caused by duplicate initial assessments of clients and duplicated data entry. It eliminates the image and reality of inefficiencies and a lack of coordination...” (2002:7).

Repetition of the criticisms promotes other assumptions about the use of existing services and political and ideological positions reflecting the powerful intentions of the producers of the

document. Although contestable, the effect of the repetition within the texts undermines confidence in the existing practices without specifically naming the practices or their failings. In this way, the new capability of a different rationality ostensibly employing more sophisticated 'business' technologies and practices is made more attractive. In turn, the new capabilities developed through implementing electronic systems are said to benefit both the participating organisations and the government funding organisations. For the new systems, it is claimed, will provide protection for the community service organisations by improving their productivity resulting in the capacity for increased competitiveness and thus securing their longer-term survival.

### *Efficiency and effectiveness within the Interagency*

The claims of inefficiency made in the Government Department texts were largely rejected by the Interagency Coordinator who argued that this was an oversimplified representation and that much more complex social issues and practices, in fact, determined the effectiveness and efficiency associated with good professional practice. Texts developed by the Interagency demonstrate complex professional relationships, for example, between clients and workers. This complexity is illustrated as workers stressed that the needs of the client, rather than "what the referring agency thinks are the client needs" (Interview with staff dated 19/5/04), is at the heart of service provision. Thus workers spoke of requiring "a very accurate picture. ...That's often very different. If we get a whole list of things the referring agency wants us to assist the client with and the client doesn't want that, we won't do it" (Interview with staff dated 10/11/04).

The importance of participation and including the voice and perspective of the client in the referral process is thus highlighted. Participatory processes, however, often involve careful and time-consuming relationship building to ensure the best options of each young person are considered, discussed and chosen. For the Interagency staff the referral process involves much more than just reusing and transferring already abstracted information from service to service. To obtain a "very accurate picture" the process requires the engagement of clients in forms of open communication. Interagency workers emphasised respecting the agency and dignity of their clients in service delivery. Young people are offered choices so that they have the opportunity to voice their concerns and fully participate in processes that affect their futures. Interagency staff emphasised the complex nature of many of the personal issues the young people face relating to homelessness and that such issues are not just one dimensional and able to be quickly resolved through more effective electronic processing.



Another key feature of the development of the client-worker relationship, vital in Interagency referral processes, is that of trust between the staff and service users and the complexities associated with electronic communication of personal and sensitive information. Most workers and agencies say “they have to work very hard to get the client to trust them” (Staff Interview dated May 2004) for trust development in the context of youth homelessness is often related to broken trust within fragmented parental and familial relationships. A discussion between two case workers reveals some common difficulties associated with trust development for workers<sup>22</sup>. One worker ‘Peter’ makes a point of saying to his clients “The only know stuff I know about you is what you tell me”. He is concerned that the young people might say, “How did you know that? How much does this person know without meeting me?” This raised the issue of whether the referral should be sent ahead of the young person or if the young person should meet with an agency for an assessment prior to any information being sent. Another worker, Wayne recalled a lack of sensitivity in one case where “he “[government worker] sent out a referral to every agency in Sydney and ...suddenly every worker knew about this kid”. So for Peter some privacy and confidentiality is lost if referrals are made electronically but for Wayne some of the clients’ inhibition is lost.

The exchange between Peter and Wayne highlights the constraints placed upon workers, by their being privy to the sensitive disclosures of vulnerable clients. Respect of the confidentiality of such disclosures led to Peter’s way of working in which he prioritised such disclosures by clients themselves rather than second-hand information about clients transferred by agencies. For Peter the referral information always needed to be checked out by talking to the client. This way of working was perceived by Peter as respecting the client’s rights and choices, both of what was disclosed, and where and to whom, it was sent. In contrast, Wayne considered that if the referral was sent before the client presented for interview, the agency workers had background information which the client didn’t need to repeat.

An effective referral system enables these complex dimensions of client needs to be dealt with sensitively. In pursuing efficiency within the referral system, knowledge can be lost or replaced by more superficial information transfer. Peter gave the example of the importance of

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<sup>22</sup> In this specific discussion the workers are labelled with (new) names in an attempt to maintain the clarity of who said what during a particularly rich joint interview.

determining whether a particular aspect of client information is relevant and not to assume, that if a young person was sexually abused by her uncle that that information was necessarily pertinent and needed to be included in each referral: “the inclusion of such information could be seen as a betrayal by the young person. Every time the young person showed up somewhere they knew about this and, in many instances, it was none of their business as they were there to provide a different service...”. Peter thought that there needed to be some mechanism for the young person to in effect “press the button, to say, ‘yes, I’m right with this information’. Both agreed that,

...from the client’s perspective trust is paramount. It’s a measure of how well that young person is going to work with you... If you haven’t got their trust, which is the problem with the government system because it goes back on its word consistently... ‘Oh yes, if you do this, we’ll do this’ and the young person goes and does it and then they say, ‘Oh well that’s not what we meant.’ So the kid loses trust and the kid won’t listen to anyone from that Government Department. It’s just another bullshit story (Interview May, 2004).

In this exchange Peter’s identification with the young person and his commitment to the young person’s right to choice and respect for their agency, leads him to want to develop a trusting relationship. Trust also provides the commitment of the young person to the service interventions. Peter suggests that this way of working is crucial and is contrasted to the Government Department’s way of working which constantly makes and breaks agreements with clients and therefore reduces trust. Peter is concerned that this practice and the resulting loss of trust does not happen inadvertently by the employment of Referral.doc.

In contrast to the government system, the texts developed by the Interagency network emphasise the importance of establishing locally and historically-developed, values-driven, inter-organisation networks. Such networks are based upon relationships with other workers and underpin professional practices such as the referral processes. The social interaction undertaken, formally and informally, in networking opportunities between workers, provides occasion for workers to ‘check out’ the capability, approach, reliability, integrity and commitment of the other services and workers. Staff, both in meetings and in interviews, expressed concern that their clients would be referred only to services which were considered to be reliable and trustworthy. For example, another worker explained about her policy of being open and honest. “It’s massively important for the worker to keep their word...In relation to trust between agencies, trust sometimes develops between worker and worker and sometimes the workers would trust anyone within that agency” (Interview with worker, May 2004). They insisted that trust was only established with

other agencies through years working to develop open communication and relationships. Accordingly, staff strongly criticised instrumental referral processes where the actions of making referrals was controlled not by the best interests of the client but by bureaucratic or organisational expediency.

With electronic referrals, they would not all be treated the same... With meetings I have been to with [three different Government Departments], workers have said “yes, we lie to you and we withhold important information from you because you bastards won’t house the kids and we end up stuck with them.” So like they have actually made that admission that they are quite dishonest if not quite deceptive at times. So that a 15 year old with mild mental health issues coming from one service ...you would say, “we’ll consider that.” But the same referral coming from a different source, you’d have to say, “we are really going to have to watch this mental health thing. This could be major psychotic episode and that sort of thing.” So I’d say that the trust comes through the relationships and the history and the experience and that I’d think you would know that this is a [government agency referral] ...and they are just after a quick placement (Interview with Interagency Coordinator May 2004).

Client concerns and trust as well as worker expertise to deal with the issues and provide safe, participative interventions are thus foregrounded in the texts from the Interagency. The emphasis placed on IT and economic and bureaucratic efficiency by the Interagency is primarily as a means to the end of according greater priority to client work and service delivery within their social and community work.

Finally, the Interagency Coordinator suggests the importance of personal connections as essential for making trusting relationships between organisations that underpin the referral processes. The effective service network that exists between community service organisations is made through personal networking not the imposition of a tightly structured system. Attempts by Government Departments to impose tight systems are noted as being detrimental.

The majority of existing linkages between services, and the added efficiencies this creates, are made by personal connections. This seems particularly so in the aboriginal system. Central referral systems, such as the government community services Helpline and central Mental Health Team referral system, have been detrimental to these linkages and working partnerships being formed. I’m still thinking about how to overcome this (Interagency Coordinator Interview May 2004)

The Interagency Coordinator highlights that in general personal relationships are crucial to effective referral processes and goes on to suggest that this is particularly important in the area of aboriginal homelessness services where developing personal connections is paramount. He cites the negative impact of two other centrally operated referral systems established by Government Departments, suggesting that personally developed relationships were damaged by unresponsive, centrally-operated referral systems. The Coordinator emphasised that each of these systems were considered to be particularly unreliable. Notifications both to the Child Protection Helpline and the Mental Health referral system were notorious for their poor responses, resulting in a general lack of confidence in these systems both by service providers and service users.

### **5.3.3 Privileging of corporate practices and techniques**

The promises of increased efficiency and effectiveness within the government network documents are also linked to the production of other texts detailing terms, practices and techniques from within corporate practices such as accounting and economics. These texts have increasingly become part of the approach to governance operating within public and bureaucratic management and are being transferred into funding contracts which govern community service organisations (Clarke et al., 2000b; du Gay, 2000; Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). Use of technologies, such as methods of measuring outcomes, audits (Power, 1997), corporate notions of 'enterprise' and business are further evidence of the use of intertextuality (Fairclough, 2003).

The documents from the Government Department emphasise quantification of outcomes such as 'cost-per-case'. These texts construct service delivery quantitatively prioritising measures, specifying numbers of cases that staff should deal with on average over a given time period. These numbers are subsequently developed into benchmarks for the number of client outcomes. Outcomes are considered to be the number of abused children seen, the number of foster parents contacted, the number of children needing therapy, the average amount of time in initial assessments, and the amount of time spent supporting families or a child with a disability. In the proposed government system these outcomes would be assessed against a hypothetical target or 'benchmark'.

The quantitative outcomes of performance accountability are made very clear. However, the nature of the proposed quality improvements is less specific and remains unclear. Once quantitative targets or benchmarks are established then "similar quality and productivity improvement benefits are expected in NGOs leading to 0.5% higher level of client services being carried out per case worker pa (\$500,000 qualitative benefit per 2,000 case workers pa)" (O.I.T.,

2001:27). Quality and productivity measures, once established and costed, are thought to have the potential to be used as benchmarks and to be used as mechanisms for standardising procedures and potentially reducing costs. The details of these costings are based on generic processing, not individual services, and therefore do not take into account local and situated knowledge. However, the quantifications and costings are a central component of the Business Case document which provided the principal evidence and support for funding the proposal. The rationale is that if referrals can be made generically and quickly using an electronic system, then productivity and quality of services can be improved and costs reduced. What is missing are the details of the operationalising of the terms. What do the terms 'quality' and 'productivity' mean and why in such situations? If time spent with clients is reduced, how is trust to be developed? If young clients do not participate in discussions about their future, will decisions be made without their input and if so, will the young people enforce the right to choose alternative (perhaps more expensive or destructive) options?

Cost-benefit analysis is a commonly used technology to justify the viability and importance of projects. It forms a very significant section of the initial Business Case document which provided the principal claim for funding approval. The Project Benefits are listed and calculations made on the savings for each area. These areas include "professional networking, shared service directories, elimination of duplicated assessments, improved client outcomes, reduction in informal systems" (O.I.T., 2001:28). Costings for each are listed, for example "Based on discussions with a range of caseworkers it is estimated that the average time per initial assessment including data entry is 5 minutes" (O.I.T., 2001:28).

Further investigation of the complexities associated with the use of cost-benefit-analysis as a means of determining price for social services is beyond the scope of this research. What can be said is that the abstract examination of social spaces involving highly complex interactions and practices is clearly contentious and fraught with complications. For example, evidence is found in later texts which outline the complexities associated with making referrals. The translation to electronic processes is offered as a means of professionalising and streamlining the perceived inefficiencies of existing systems. Costing such processes in a quantified way is also contestable as social science debates measuring potential outcomes have repeatedly shown (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000).

The cost-benefit analysis, however, served the purpose of providing a rationale or grounds for the project's potential success and thus supported expectations of the high level readership by addressing areas of economy and election commitments. In another employment of

intertextuality (Fairclough, 2001), the cost-benefit analysis points not only to the process involving the promulgation and implementation of public policy but also to the discursive embedding of powerful political and bureaucratic agendas within non-government areas.

#### **5.3.4 Governmentality**

For the Government Department the area of contracted services funded very substantially was problematic. In order to address the problems associated with managing the enormous group of community service organisations several clear strategies are evident in the texts. They show the Department operating both through inducements for example, providing a free computer for all participating organisations.

Evidence within some Departmental texts points to the use of governmentality, for example, in redefining the meaning and use of the term 'professional'. The documents obtained from the Government Department show texts linking the term 'professionalism' with increasing the speed and efficiency of referral processing. The employment, within the Government Department's texts, of the term 'professional' is similar to the use of the term 'enterprise' (Rose, 1998). A governmental rationality concerned with the "conduct of conduct" (Burchell et al., 1991) links ideas such as the 'professional' as an 'entrepreneurial self' (Osborne and Gaebler 1992), subject to 'performance management and rewards' (Du Gay 2004), monitored by 'auditing' (Power, 1997). The self is the target and project of these monitoring activities and the subjectivity of the subject is disciplined according to this rationality, so that being professional is the same as constantly improving the efficiency and effectiveness of one's self (Doolin, 2002; Flynn, 2002; Rose, 2000). Furthermore, the collective result of such disciplining processes is as the Business Case states to "improve the image of business-like activities and image across the community service organisations" (O.I.T., 2001). This text suggests that the community service organisations were perceived as lacking professionalism and that the simple use of the technology provides an improvement in effectiveness. Moreover, it also suggests that the perception of the professionalism of the organisations would be improved if staff used IT to undertake their work.

Accordingly, knowledge of how services and their clients operate is used to shape the subjectivities of those involved. So specifying dimensions of client needs and the professional use of knowledge to deal with them enables client categories, and auditable systems of dealing with them, to be developed which simultaneously instrumentalise clients and increase staff control. Such processes may increase the docility of workers and clients through increasingly bureaucratic systems.



By developing one electronic system across all human services Government Departments and non-government community service organisations, differences are reduced and control increased. Thus texts from the government project suggest that practices within community service organisations must be refined to improve efficiency. Pursuit of greater uniformity and adoption of the standardised models is encouraged. “It overcomes current inefficiencies across the sector caused by duplicated data entry and reduces the time and effort needed by specialist staff to gather basic information” (O.I.T., 2002:10). The introduction of more controls would not, according to the developers, displace professional knowledge but may assist in streamlining “areas of duplication such as multiple case-visits. In turn staff will have more time to do other things...” (O.I.T., 2002:10). This claim is particularly contested by the Interagency Coordinator who argued that youth workers in many smaller services had very limited time to access the computer due to competing work demands. Any increases in efficiency would therefore be very limited in comparison to a government processor working at a desktop computer all day.

### **5.3.5 Client-focused discourse and resistances to managerialist discourse**

Resistance to the Government Information System by the Youth Interagency occurred on a number of fronts. First, a determination by the Interagency to include action research throughout the development process enabled a reflexive and recursive process rather than adopting the Departments recommended one-size-fits all model. Reflection by the Coordinator and myself with other team members facilitated careful examination of processes and issues that, due to time constraints, may have been overlooked without the involvement of a research process. The development of practice knowledge at this level of the project was crucial both to design the interagency referral form and to respond to the more prescriptive demands made in the government project.

Second, the nature of the Youth Interagency group, as a network relationship and system, supported resistance on the basis of ensuring that choices were made independently and with their collective client groups in mind. A sense of solidarity about their resistance supported their confident stance. Their holistic, situated and contextualised approach as practitioners was able to provide implicit critique through everyday decisions and actions taken in making referrals for clients to a wider variety of services and agencies.

## **5.4 Discursive shaping of organisational knowledge**

The questions raised earlier may now be more contextually and specifically addressed. Comparisons of the two sites and their IS development provide evidence that different discourses

are in operation and that they privilege different knowledge. What are the discursive issues impacting upon organisational knowledge within community service organisations when re-configuring social and electronic communication processes? How is knowledge identified within the two different sites, for what discursive purposes and with what effects upon organisational knowledge? What are the different approaches and types of organisational knowledge within the two discourses?

Knowledge use in the two referral development systems is reflected in contrasting approaches to production and transmission of texts. It is possible to represent these contrasts as a binary relationship as follows. In the managerialist discourse and electronic referral system, knowledge is largely abstracted through reductionist processes and generalisations. It employs the language of accounting, economics, public policy and neoliberal notions of competition. Texts show little capacity for local development and needs, due to the need for standardisation and uniformity. There is a reduced capacity for the development of trust, knowledge sharing, personal involvement/engagement with clients as an instrumental approach is adopted towards people generally.

In contrast, the Youth Interagency emphasises client-focused, local, situated practice knowledge. It has the capacity to encompass difference, situated needs and approaches. Knowledge draws strongly from social science perspectives of non-instrumental rationality (Habermas 1984). A values-driven rationality underpins decisions and actions. However, as the study has shown, if the values and practices are misunderstood then they may be regarded as inefficient or incoherent.

While texts lend themselves to a binarised interpretation between the two systems and the binary itself points to the existence of different and conflicting discourses, such binarisation is also problematic. Such a representation is too simplistic; the divide too tidy. A messier relationship exists involving difference, history, power, politics as well as powerful resistances within the two discourses. The relationship can be better represented by a more integrated analysis.

The knowledge sharing processes required to produce safe, effective outcomes for the Youth Interagency are demonstrably more complex than transferring information regarding a service or client. Complex practice and organisational knowledge is created and shared by the organisations within the Interagency network. This complexity posed serious problems for the developers of ReferralDoc. Close readings of the detailed documentation of subsequent development phases of The Government Information Systems project (Business Case, Scoping Study and Evaluations), as well as interview and meeting notes over two years, suggest that those developing ReferralDoc

increasingly learned about the complexities and variations within community service organisations.

Another dimension that was acknowledged later by the government system developers is that the large one-size-fits-all system is not useful for programs where high-need clients require high level personal contact with workers. This claim by the developers of Referraldoc is supported by the change in scope from a proposed state-wide rollout of the project to targeting specific service priorities in particular local regions, with only simpler referrals being made electronically.

The more a client is distressed and needs to talk through the emotional issues, the less relevant an electronic referral is going to be, at least that's what the workers are saying. Better for non time-critical, and that's probably bad news for you people [in youth homelessness] and the things that you're trying to do and bad news for us too...It will need to be a living, growing thing (GIS Senior Project Worker, June 2004).

The privileging of practice knowledge within the Youth Interagency involves individual staff members creatively and heuristically developing discrete distinctions and understandings of specific practices and services (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Staff eclectically and recursively draw upon "whatever it takes" to provide the service in ways that attempt not to compromise clients and their care. It comes as no surprise then that many representatives of community service organisations had major apprehensions concerning the 'rollout' of Referraldoc. Undoubtedly some of these apprehensions related to the limitations accompanying the big 'one-size-fits all' system. Systems of this type are by nature limited to the transfer of non-specific, abstract information. Yet such information, while important, does not form the basis of the acceptance or rejection of many referrals in the community service organisations studied. For this knowledge, (discussed earlier in Chapters 2 and 4) following Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001), involves another deeper level of human involvement and distinction-making (Taylor, 1985). Each specific organisation and its workers have developed context-related working knowledge which is drawn upon when making evaluations of worth.

The highlighted texts highlight a number of the nuanced meanings that accompany notions of knowledge in this context. Organisational knowledge and practice knowledge in the community service organisations studied were often tacit and therefore much more difficult to locate and talk about. For example, when a staff member was asked how a referral was previously undertaken, she forgot to mention the accompanying "chat over the phone" about the referral; perhaps she perceived it as routine, unimportant, or inconsequential. An omission such as this should not be

a surprise however, for research has shown clearly that much of the action undertaken in work practices is tacit and inseparable from the action itself (Cook and Brown, 1999; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas, 2003a; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Tacit knowledge in practices like this characterise many of the human and community services, as staff undertake community work in highly complex and intersecting social and electronic worlds. Workers recognise the need to augment electronic information exchange by verbally 'checking out' the social meanings accompanying the transaction.

This study clearly illustrates how decision making within many human services organisations can usefully be explored using Taylor's (1985) evaluations of worth. Decisions such as assessments for acceptance into accommodation programs are made on the basis of evaluations of worth. For example, an empty bed in an accommodation service does not necessarily mean that the next referral received will be accepted to fill that bed. For such a response would be made on the basis of a weak evaluation, made on the face of things and without considering possible alternatives. In contrast, a careful assessment including meeting service criteria and a background check along with assessments about the potential blend of and with, existing residents needs to be undertaken. If this process, or part of it, is to be made by electronic means and undertaken by others on behalf of the service, then trust in the referrals and embedded evaluations of worth need to be developed between workers and services. Within organisations trust in 'expert' knowledge (Giddens, 1991) is another complex area, though beyond the scope of this thesis. However, this study does underline the place and importance of trust in and by community workers as recognised professionals capable of using and sharing expert knowledge.

The multiplicity of meanings attached by workers to specific terms is an important consideration given the importance of making reliable evaluations of worth. For example, when a worker is informed that a particular person who is being referred has mild mental health issues, this can mean many things depending on the context, shared understandings and the trust between the workers and/or services. The interpretation made will shape the outcome of the referral request. In this way, participation in the Wittgensteinian "language game", or use of common discourse, shapes collective interpretations which, in turn, safeguards misinterpretations and leads to the development of inter-organisational knowledge. Collectivity of this sort is a historical process reliant upon careful reflective, recursive and trusting social interactions or heedful interrelating (Weick and Roberts, 1993).

As knowledge is constructed and shared, workers distinguish between "focal and subsidiary awareness" (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001) to ensure their attention is given to priority areas.

For example, practical work routines such as data entry and retrieval may be transferred tacitly into background or subsidiary awareness during the referral process. Focal attention is then placed upon carefully balancing the complexities of personal, professional, collective and organisational responsibility and care. In other words, the human services staff focus on the needs and priorities presented by the young person and their responses, by drawing on their professional and organisational knowledge. Co-construction of meanings occurs through participation with the young person (and possibly with other professionals) prior to any information transfer or exchange, so that the young person is more adequately represented as ontologically greater (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004) than the sum of the collected electronic data. Determinations are made in consultation with the young person as to what information is relevant to the request for a particular service. Not all of a client's often dramatic past needs to be dredged up every time a referral is made, yet sometimes this occurs when irrelevant information is transferred just because it is listed on a database (Poster, 1996). Additionally, care needs to be taken to ensure that the transfer of information between services does not reify the data by constructing a type of electronic pseudo-person.

Finally, when services are considering new forms of electronic communication for knowledge sharing and information exchange, careful consideration ought to be given to local and individual organisational knowledge of safety and care requirements. For example, in the current environment, organisations delivering services for homeless youth are constrained by strict legal and statutory concerns in relation to privacy, duty of care and confidentiality. The introduction of new electronic work processes ought to be carefully and thoughtfully planned and integrated in order to preserve organisational knowledge within these areas of accountability as well as in areas of service delivery.

This study further identifies the complexities associated with organisational knowledge and its creation and use within community service organisations and the discursive shaping processes that accompany the introduction of managerialist technologies. For complex knowledge creation and sharing practices such as these, are easily abbreviated, forgotten, hidden, obscured and lost in managerialist drives for greater efficiencies, or by the seduction of the speed and efficiency of new sophisticated electronic communication media. The principally technical orientation of Government Information Systems project was necessarily modified over time as its developers became more familiar with the individual services and their complex work. They came to understand to some extent, that the initial scope of Government Information Systems Project needed to be focused on specific, simpler services, in order to be effective. Thus their focus was



narrowed to less complex needs which regularly transferred high numbers of referrals. Simple requests for appointments with school counsellors, who were often absent from their desks and thus unable to make appointments directly, were more appropriate for Referraldoc. Rather than addressing the highly challenging complex knowledge sharing processes within many community service organisations, Government Information Systems Project sidestepped them. Interestingly at the time of submitting this thesis, the Referraldoc has not been fully implemented across community service organisations and Youth Interagency continued its resistance to the government project.

## **5.5 Implications and Summary**

The increased deployment of electronic media for the exchange of information within community service organisations requires awareness of situational and contextual complexities. Personal, social and community care and concern form part of a community service discourse with many heuristic applications of organisational knowledge. Moreover, as workers, organisations and communities operate in these complex social and discursive spaces, knowledge is inextricably linked with action. The following conclusions are therefore salient for community service organisations and their use of organisational knowledge in this intra-organisational networking context.

First, the Referraldoc project was challenged by the gap between abstract, generalised systems which require information processing and the locally situated complexities of providing human services to particular high-need clients. Such social and personal complexity, however, is shown to be the warp and woof of youth homelessness services. Second, the study demonstrates how information processing of a large, common electronically-based referral system needs to be supported by local, knowledge sharing networks of trusted relationships between client and worker, referring agencies and receiving agencies. Third, personal and organisational knowledge situated within a knowledge sharing culture, such as that developed across community service organisations, is readily overlooked or even represented as disorganised and unprofessional, since it does not fit with notions of bureaucratic efficiency. Thus, while there is clearly a contribution to be made from centralised electronic referral systems in terms of data entry efficiencies and anytime/anyplace transfer of information between organisations, there is a need to recognise not only its limitations but the ways in which other practices and knowledges are central to effective client service provision.



## CHAPTER 6 A STUDY OF CONTRADICTION IN ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN SERVICE DELIVERY

This chapter draws attention to changing organisational knowledge within community service organisations, as growing disciplinary pressure is exerted through managerialist discourse. Knowledges embedded within specific practices, language and structures of community service discourses are being constrained by the operation of power mechanisms. Earlier chapters discussed how community service discourse, formerly dominated by social science and client-focused perspectives on service delivery and community development, are increasingly being subjugated by economic, political and corporate knowledges and technologies employed within managerialist discourse. This chapter examines organisational knowledge and its changing operation and effects in the crucial area of service delivery. Discursive change in this area shapes organisational knowledge through managerialist decisions that directly impact upon the care and safety of very vulnerable children and young people. Clearly change in this area, at the level of language and practices, raises significant social and ethical issues for the broader Australian community: how will the State care for some of its most vulnerable members? Should financial considerations be pre-eminent in such cases? Who decides and why? What are the impacts of this decision-making process on families and communities and most importantly the children themselves?

This third study furthers the analysis undertaken in the two previous studies, by examining the operation of managerialist discourse and its effects on organisational knowledge in the service delivery context of one community service organisation. The setting is the highly sensitive social context of the care of homeless children, within a regional, specialist, youth services organisation regarded as being best-practice in the community service sector. The study focuses on the micro-level: a dispute over a specific case, which provides an example of the ways that managerialist discourse impacts upon service delivery to highly vulnerable clients. The tough managerialist approach adopted by the Government Department managers, points to additional coercive dimensions of the managerialist discourse, unexamined in earlier chapters.

The chapter shows how this complex service system draws upon various bodies of knowledge and rationalities, and in particular how the client-focused discourse, enmeshed in a web of power relations, is subjugated by managerialist discourse in the course of a disputed case. Employment of third-person action research encourages a reflexive response and helps staff to shape the developing dialogue of resistance within the community service organisation.

The study identifies and addresses the competing discourses operating during a complex case management issue and is organised in the following way. First, the site and focus of the study are introduced; a dispute about a particular case and program between a community service organisation and the managers of a government funding body. Second, the reflexive and emergent processes involved in the fieldwork and the methods used to collect data and text development are discussed. Third, critical discourse analysis again provides in-depth analysis of rich symptomatic texts. The discursive relationship of service purchaser and service provider, and its effects on organisational knowledge are foregrounded and examined.

## **6.1 Background of the study**

The study was undertaken emergently as opportunities opened contextually rather than through adherence to a designed plan, it is specifically related to the study described above in Chapter 5. Ongoing problems with the development and implementation of the project of the Government Information Systems referral process by the developers meant that its implementation within CYS and other Community service organisations was postponed. Moreover, after examining aspects of the Department Of Family Services referral process in the Care for Children Program at CYS, and consultation with community service colleagues within the organisation, it was decided that highlighting a particular case afforded a working illustration for an analysis of managerialist operations in one referral process at the micro-level of service delivery itself.

After a brief introduction to these specific children's services, each of the elements of the managerialist organising system are presented: first, the service provider second, the service purchaser and third, the purchased service.

### **6.1.1 Homeless children**

Care and protection of homeless children and young people involves various government and non-government organisations and is shaped by multiple, complex social and structural issues and causes at the societal level such as homelessness, domestic violence, poverty, unemployment (Parton, 1985; Parton, Thorpe and Wattam, 1997). The contributing social issues are contextually and discursively constructed often in a polarised manner. Accordingly, homelessness may be said to exist as a result of poverty and structural inequality or alternatively, as the result of laziness and 'dole bludging' (Scratton, 1997). These competing interpretations suggest diverse political and social purposes that, in turn, may be used to construct conflicting representations of homeless young people. For example, homeless young people are alternatively represented on the one hand as delinquent, anti-social and rebellious, to raise community contempt, or on the

other hand they can be represented as 'poor, children living on the streets' in an attempt to raise public sympathies (Scratton, 1997).

In the previous chapter, attention was focused upon organisations providing services for homeless youth. This chapter focuses on a similar program operating for younger children, which further intensifies the issues of care and protection. In this state, legal responsibility for the care of homeless children and young people is divested to the Department of Family Services. Mandated by child protection legislation, the Department draws upon various legal, social science, and more recently, corporate discourses. In this era of the post-welfare state (Jamrozic, 2001), the Department describes itself as a "service purchaser not a service provider" reflecting what was described in Chapter 5 as an 'enterprise discourse' (Doolin, 2002; du Gay, 2004). Consequently, the Department of Family Services now 'out-sources' service delivery to a range of government-funded community service organisations such as Central Youth Services (CYS) that are constituted as service providers delivering purchased services or programs.

### **6.1.2 A service provider: Central Youth Services**

Central Youth Services (CYS) is a community service organisation providing a comprehensive range of services for homeless youth, children and their families. The organisation is managed using a community board model that relies upon community members volunteering their services for board responsibilities; a management team is employed and supervises over forty paid staff and approximately twenty volunteers. The organisation is funded by multiple state and federal departments. The senior manager is regarded as a leading expert in the area of youth homelessness. Her knowledge of the area of youth homelessness and related issues, as well as her wide organisational knowledge are well recognised, having participated on a number of national youth homelessness bodies. The senior CYS Manager engaged the expertise of the Board who offered more general oversight of the organisation and who addressed the risks posed to the client, staff, managers and themselves. After many years of development, CYS has established a reputation as a provider of excellent youth and children's services and is generally regarded as a 'best practice' organisation in this field.

Despite being the site of multiple and competing social and political discourses, a client-focus discourse such as those described in earlier studies is evident from an examination of various organisational artefacts such as annual reports, policies and procedure manuals as well as organisational structures, processes and actions within CYS. The main aim of the organisation for example, is stated explicitly; "To provide support and assistance to young people who are

disadvantaged, homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, and their families...” (CYS Annual Report 2003–2004:2).

Further examination of CYS policy documents highlights “that the service be a therapeutic, nurturing environment” (CYS Annual Report 2003-2004:2). The organisation aims to operate using various participatory practices and processes: the rights of all young people are respected by the public display, dissemination and practice of the National Youth Coalition, Charter of Rights throughout the service; meetings are inclusive of young people including the annual general meeting; stringent, annual feedback mechanisms provide ‘a voice’ for young people on programs and staff performance (formal, internally developed feedback documents completed by the young people are sent to the funding bodies annually); use of simple language in communication – including liberal use of ‘clients vernacular’ by staff. Consequently, the organisation regards itself as being ‘client-focused’ in its practices and structures.

### **6.1.3 A service purchaser: Department of Family Services**

The Department of Family Services is a large and complex Government Department also influenced by multiple and complex social and political discourses. A scan of their website (at the time of undertaking the research) presents a picture of a huge Department operating in various areas such as foster care, child care services, child protection, disaster care and services for young people. It has ... “a total budget of \$852.7 million during 2003/04”. Increases to the budget mean that ... “an additional \$1.2 billion into the child protection system over the five financial years from 2003/04 to 2007/08” (Department of Family Services Website: visited 15/5/06).

The Department of Family Services website and other publications and documents also emphasised the centrality of working with the communities’ disadvantaged client groups.

We work to promote the safety and well-being of children and young people and to build stronger families and communities. In particular, we help those who are vulnerable and most in need. Department of Family Services helps children, young people and families across a continuum of care. Our core work focuses on child protection, starting with early intervention strategies (Website: visited 15/5/06).

The language employed by the Department indicates the presence of a client-focused discourse that is particularly evident in the website description of the State Care of Children Program,

Because the provision of out-of-home care is a shared responsibility between Department of Family Services and the non-government sector and because of the high and sometimes

urgent needs of clients, Department of Family Services requires funded services to be flexible, cooperative and appreciative of the primacy of client needs.... (Website: visited 15/5/06).

Finally, in the increasingly neoliberal, marketised approach to the management of public service, the funding relationship between Government Departments and State Treasury, relies upon stringent attainment of outcomes measured in extensive accountability documents. Treasury could be regarded in this model as the “funder” who engages the Department as “purchaser” to deliver specified program outcomes through a “service provider”.

#### **6.1.4 A purchased service: State Care of Children program**

One Department of Family Services program operating in the Department is the State Care of Children Program. The program aims to place homeless children and young people who have significant behavioural issues in safe supported accommodation. Department of Family Services funds it on a fee for service basis, by purchasing the services of providers such as CYS. Typically,

...the children may have a long history of abuse and damaged relationships and disrupted placements; they may require a structured behaviour management program or therapeutic/specialist input; they may require “high” intensity supervision and support or have serious difficulties in limiting/containing their behaviour...and have some or all of the following poor self-image; poor socialisation and peer relationships; educational difficulties; anti-social behaviours; suicidal tendencies; drug and alcohol issues; physically/sexually aggressive or violent behaviours (Service Specifications 2002:12).

Through the State Care of Children program, Department of Family Services purchases the service delivery component which includes residential accommodation supported by specialist youth workers; case management; personal development; assistance with special needs and basic living support. Placements are carefully negotiated by the Department and provider organisations using thorough referral assessment processes. If the young person needing assistance has no safe place of accommodation, or is at risk of harm at the time of referral, then the referral processes are frequently undertaken with a sense of urgency.

#### **6.1.5 Competing knowledges and rationalities**

The following critical incident narrative developed from documents and observations highlights a conflict over a problematic referral. The conflict related to a client-referral made by Department of Family Services to CYS for a State Care of Children Program. The CYS manager described the contentious referral assessment process in the following way:

Our assessment included consideration of her risk of suicide, depression, she hears voices, is exhibiting behaviour such as those seen in people with personality or conduct disorders, physical conditions such as jaw and other muscles locking/paralysis, her close proximity to other young vulnerable people which creates an unease and disruption in the service and to the peaceful and settled living arrangements of other clients, and she demands quite a lot of time with her behaviour. We assessed that as the hospital system thought she was at risk or other patients were at risk and she therefore needed to be "specialled" (twenty four hour staff supervision per client when awake and sleeping) that the same risks were present in our service and in some ways to a greater degree as there is less staff, only sleep-over staff available at night, less security, less assistance available. These risks included the safety of the client, the safety of the other clients the risk of sexual assault etc. (CYS Manager's notes dated 14/7/04).

After undergoing various psychological assessments, CYS considered the client to be an inappropriate referral for the State Care of Children Program due to the acute nature of a psychiatric condition, which had in the past, resulted in violence towards her family and carers. Other issues were also involved relating to the timing of the referral and acceptance to a more suitable treatment program.

The client was referred on a Friday afternoon and we asked for extra money in case we needed extra supports for this young girl, as she has been specialled (twenty four hour staff supervision per client when awake and sleeping) in the psych ward. We said because of her specialled status and our knowledge of her and given there was no case conference etc that we needed some extra backup in case we could not get Department of Family Services after hours or mental health supports over [the] long weekend. In the end we did not need extra support because senior workers came in and covered it and we managed and did not claim the money (CYS Manager's notes dated 14/7/04).

Despite the professional opinions and experience of staff and the risks associated with placing her at CYS, the management of Department of Family Services rejected an alternative, specialist mental health service placement, considering it too expensive and insisted rather that she be placed at CYS. Angry exchanges over the phone were reported. On the one hand the Department of Family Services Finance Manager accused CYS of over-charging for services, while the CYS manager insisted the inappropriateness of the placement at CYS and the need for specialist services.



### **6.1.6 A disputed referral**

A meeting subsequently convened to discuss the dispute, involved caseworkers, management and Board representatives from CYS, as well as the Regional Director of Department of Family Services and the Regional Manager of Finance. Direction for the meeting was powerfully established by significant comments from the Regional Director relating to the financial situation of the Department. Insisting that the Department as “the purchaser of services was reviewing its purchasing arrangements”, the Finance Manager positioned the Department by employing language from an enterprise discourse (Doolin, 2002). He went on to say that the Department “had a significant budget blow-out” and that the region “had a significant problem to address”. The Finance Manager had therefore been “brought off-line to be the manager of high cost kids”. This situation had been exacerbated by changes to the funding arrangement of Department of Family Services with State Treasury.

In this new costing approach, common in the private sector, young people in the intensive assistance program (such as in this case) would be categorised by Department of Family Services management by the cost in current dollar amounts paid-per-week for their care. According to the Regional Manager the new emphasis was “to provide better care more cheaply”. Details of how this might be achieved, however, were not presented or discussed. Notes taken at the meeting by CYS managers show that the Finance Manager surprised and offended CYS management by the use of such instrumental language to describe how there were so many children at this ‘cost or range’ and others in different cost ranges. Discussion ensued as to where and how the client’s needs might best be addressed; the significant risks for both CYS and Department of Family Services while the client was placed at CYS and how these might be minimised; the level of care provided by CYS and whether the organisation would continue to provide services. The meeting failed to reach a clear resolution and the young client remained at CYS for several more weeks during which time a careful exit strategy was developed enabling her to leave CYS to live in her own flat with intensive support from a specialist mental health service.

## **6.2 Emergent action research**

The research process involved in this particular site is again emergent and reflexive. In this site, the action research process including my involvement as an insider, enabled insight into the social spaces of the day-to-day service itself, for it is in these changing and contingent spaces that power relations emerge at the micro level. Action research at the first, second and third-person levels provided the opportunity to engage in and shape the developing process.

The research was informed at the levels of first, second and third-person action research developed by Reason and Torbert (2001). For example, the 'first person' dimension includes my reflections upon the research site as a suitable choice for the research. Then my actions and practices in the research process and further reflections and communication of the problems using the language and concepts from within theoretical literature. The reflexive process of planning, acting and reviewing again shaped the research processes and the methods employed. For instance discussions in Board meetings highlighted the issues that CYS faced at an organisational level including the risk to the organisation of a crisis arising from 'an episode' involving a high-needs client in a program which was not appropriate for the particular client.

In relation to the 'second person' of action research dimension (Reason and Torbert, 2001), I began working with those on the Board to resolve the issues and we shared ideas as to how the conflict might serve as a case example of managerialist discourse in this doctoral research project. In this way, the second person action research developed emergently as the research project and my interpretations of it assisted others to reflect upon the conflict and thus shaped our collective actions. Finally, the 'third-person' action research dimension provides an example of how a more authoritative application of managerialist discourse evident in this conflict is shaping both the organisation and its knowledge.

### **6.2.1 Data collection methods**

The data gathered for use as texts within the critical discourse analysis include records of discussions with board members; documents from the CYS manager; information from the organisations websites about organisational purposes, structures and programs. Finally, meeting notes and contractual documents that regulated the projects were collected.

Meetings were attended in which observations were made and notes recorded of the observations. As a former Board member, I was again positioned as an insider, I was thus able to draw upon earlier historical understanding of the processes in operation and thus construct a narrative interpretation of these events. As the research developed, a sense-making process (Weick, 1995) took place within the organisation and informed the later steps of the developing research and the research narrative. Inevitably, such processes have difficulties including the relationship between the researcher and the collection and use of data. The collective sense-making process (Weick, 1995), at the second person level of action research, developed through iterative conversations with Board and staff members, in which meeting notes were discussed, reflections and interpretation of the meeting made, and interpretations and ways forward shaped.

In later informal meetings after the initial formal meeting, CYS managers and Board delegates discussed these analyses and the implications for the service and the young people in the service. This participatory process followed a version of the action research cycle, 'plan, act/observe, reflect' by encouraging discussion and analysis of what had happened, and then interpreting and planning a way forward for the meeting and processes.

### **6.3 Critical Discourse Analysis**

Similar methods to those described in Chapters 3 and employed in Chapter 4 and 5 are again employed to critically examine texts. By using critical discourse analysis of rich symptomatic texts, the complex discursive relationship of 'service purchaser' and 'service provider', within the organisational management and practices is foregrounded. The discursive system is shown to draw upon various bodies of knowledge and rationalities. In particular, the analysis focuses on how the client-focused discourse, enmeshed in a web of power relations is subjugated by managerialist discourse in the course of the disputed case.

Again analysis of the texts is undertaken by highlighting a number of themes that were coded and analysed (see appendix pages 182-188). Selection and analysis of texts is undertaken using specific textual devices such as intertextuality, genre, foregrounding naturalised assumptions and choices of style (Fairclough, 2003). The discursive techniques employed both within written texts and social interactions and discursive ordering are problematised and the appropriations by managers shown to be shaping texts and their production and uses in the organisations. Thus unintended or forgotten discursive effects and consequences of managerialist actions on organisational knowledge are made visible in the context of service provision.

#### **6.3.1 Evidence and interpretation of managerialist discourse**

Four dimensions of managerialist discourse are evidently in operation at this site. Each of these dimensions is now discussed: corporate discourse, efficiency and effectiveness, evidence of bureaucratic control and organisational disciplining processes.

##### *Corporate discourse*

Analysis of texts shows that the contract document and funding agreement regulated the formal relationship between 'purchaser and provider'. However, of particular interest for this study is the application of interpretations applied by the Department in relation to the specific case. The contracts and funding agreements contained regulatory texts which were augmented and shaped by additional texts developed and introduced through correspondence and email by regional

management. While the earlier contract documents linked the provision of services by CYS to the regulations from the Child Protection Act and the Department's policies, later re-constructed texts such as emails and correspondence were based upon ongoing changes within the Department.

The regulatory application and operation of contract documents was thus augmented by newer contingencies brought to the attention of CYS by the Department managers during the meeting convened in an attempt to resolve the dispute. They stated that the Department made changes to their application of the costing structure based upon cuts to their funding by State Treasury, "Department currently reviewing its purchasing arrangements...Department currently has significant budget blowouts...(name of manager) is now manager of high-cost kids brought off line to deal with the situation...He is to look at intensive support dollars and the services purchased" (Correspondence, dated 21/6/04). This meant that the previously accepted practice of additional support being provided in the case of particularly difficult cases was now rejected. Furthermore, the classification of the client in this specific case, given by the new "manager of high cost kids", was lower than that provided by the CYS manager and the independent professionals called upon to provide assessment of the client. Although a very seasoned Department administrator and financial manager, the "manager of high cost kids" had no formal training in child protection and no case management experience or formal community work training.

In this site, the use of language and practices from corporate discourses such as accounting and economics is suggestive of a rationality of expedience. The Department of Family Services managers employ the language associated with enterprise discourse. Thus, the intertextual employment of terms such as "benchmark costing" and the "categorisation" of clients according to their cost and risk led to children being "priced" and categorised according to the costs associated with their care per week. The Finance Manager's redeployment as the manager of high-cost-kids specifically targeted cost reduction of these high needs children. The position taken by the Department managers commoditised clients and asserted the pre-eminence of managerialist rationality emphasising efficiency and maximising dollar-per-unit outputs. The employment of these texts as mechanisms to achieve managerialist ends point to the flexibility and power of the managerialist discourse. Texts are re-constructed and re-shaped 'on the run'. Intertextuality here involves the re-interpretation and re-incorporation of texts in other texts as in the case of the emails and correspondence and the re-interpretation of contracts and funding agreements.

Additionally, Department managers intertextually appropriated words familiar to a service delivery context but with changed meanings to suit their managerialist purposes. "...the provision of SCCP program is a shared responsibility...and because of the high and sometimes urgent needs of clients, the Department requires funded services to be flexible, cooperative and appreciative of client needs... (Meeting notes June 2004). The Manager of CYS is critical of what she sees as a lack of 'consultation', 'participation' and 'partnership' by the Department, all of which are enjoined within the Department's own funding contracts but re-interpreted to strategic managerialist ends.

Employment of corporate discourse is also accompanied by the direct actions and interventions of the senior managers of the Department within the referral and assessment processes. This unusual intervention by the Department forcefully reprioritised cost as the central component and rationality of the referral process.

The CYS manager regarded Departmental interventions at this level as both intrusive and offensive.

I am so annoyed at this. Given the sort of kids we take; the poor information that the Department provides at times; the delays that occur in case work decisions being made or carried through; the dangerous situations our staff face often with SCCP clients; the times when we have been flexible i.e. taken kids without case conferences, without the forms being completed; the extra hours staff work; the OHS issues (CYS manager's notes, dated 14/7/04).

Furthermore, she rejected Departmental claims that CYS had failed to comply with their requests that had resulted in the disciplinary warning from the Department. "The events surrounding the entry of (the client) into the intensive out-of-home-service auspiced by CYS, which I believe may raise some issues in the provision of services by [the organisation]" (Correspondence, dated 21/6/04). This section of the letter was interpreted, by the CYS Board and Senior Manager, as an accusation that CYS, as the service provider, was in breach of contract for requesting additional service costs to be paid and referring the client to another service.

Clearly managerialist change in this site was being driven by a more forceful approach taken by the managers themselves in order to cut costs. This forceful approach is supported through the employment of intertextuality as the managers developed new interpretations and regulations was grounded on the underlying legal structures within the contracts and funding arrangements. The result of this managerialist pursuit of control (particularly as it relates to cost) was productive

(counter-productive) of a reduction in important areas such as trust and goodwill between the purchaser and the provider of the services. For while CYS understood the need for change, the powerful approach to change of practices was taken without consultation with the service provider,

We understand their need for change particularly in regard to costs...changes have been fast and the environment difficult...We have tried to improve communication and wrote two letters clarifying and seeking information but got no response and earlier on requested meetings but these did not occur. Systems and arrangements that we have worked with have changed with no consultation and no time provided for us to adjust. Staff in the Department have changed and knowledge or understanding of the arrangements vary (Notes taken by CYS Manager dated 18/7/04).

The effects of these changes upon service delivery itself resulted in serious questions being raised by the service provider concerning the safety and treatment that the particular young person was able to receive in the placement. CYS management and staff suggest her placement there was inadequate as neither appropriate psychological care nor treatment could be provided. Moreover, the CYS itself was potentially jeopardised in the provision of its duty of care, thus increasing risk to each of their workers.

#### *Efficiency and effectiveness*

The managerialist rationality targetting increased efficiency and effectiveness is clearly prioritised in this site as emphasis is placed upon cost cutting. There remained, however, a continued expectation that such effectiveness and efficiency of client services would increase. While efficiency is important, the contractual process and agreements about cost-per-child were pre-eminent for the service purchaser. The rationality associated with efficiency and effectiveness, discussed in earlier chapters, is again evident and here relies more upon a contingent re-shaping and re-alignment of texts with managerialist rationality.

#### *Exercising bureaucratic control*

The Department was constrained by the reduction in Treasury funds and the need to manage projects in line with their budget commitments. Cost cutting became the over-riding and dominant rationality for the decisions being taken to reduce the levels of funding. "The Department years ago had a protected item like natural disasters etc. If the budget was exceeded due to unforeseen crisis such as a child needing extra support dollars due to behavioural issues, then it was available from Treasury..." (Meeting notes dated 14/7/04).



In a notable anomaly, the approach taken by the Department demanding price reductions and improved cost efficiencies, as service provider, was accompanied by their increase in direct intervention in the processes of service provision. This somewhat contradictory approach is further evidence of the new anomalous rationality employed by the Department managers to maintain control. If such a rationality is foreign to CYS, it is perhaps less foreign within the regime of a large Government Department where hierarchical and authoritative bureaucratic relationships are normalised. Arguably, the approach taken by the Department managers is to be expected in such a bureaucratic discourse where tight control of junior staff is expected. However, what is expected within this contractual relationship of purchaser and provider, between government and non-government organisations, is that the contracted organisation maintains its individual autonomy. For community service organisations such autonomy is highly prized and jealously guarded yet in this instance the Department challenges this autonomy.

In the current economic climate, decisions made in this way may not be regarded as uncommon as departments constantly review budgets and funding allocations. What is of interest are the discursive techniques evident in the texts and their production as the Department managers are contingently linking new texts presenting short-term decisions and connecting them to other texts containing implied longer-term strategies. For example,

...the provision of out of home care is a shared responsibility between the Department and the non-government sector and because of the high and sometimes urgent needs of the clients the Department requires funded services to be flexible, cooperative and appreciative of the primacy of client needs (letter dated 21/6/04).

Here in the letter written to rejecting requests to provide additional support, the Department manager employs the Departments' generic imperative to care for clients along with notions of joint responsibility for clients as a means of chiding the CYS management. The Department managers later admitted to the shortcomings of the Department in relation to case management support, saying that some "kids are going nowhere" (Correspondence, dated 21/6/04), as part of their longer-term commitment to improving service delivery. Ironically, using this evidence in their argument is counterproductive, as in this case, the result of the decision to enforce cost reduction translates to a reduction in service delivery and capacity. This "lashing together" of heterogenous texts as a means of managing the "conduct of conduct" is shown here to be an active and important component operating within managerialist discourse (Rose, 1999).

### *Organisational disciplining processes*

The power relations embedded in the naturalised use of language shows a strong disciplining process in operation. This disciplining is obvious and direct as the Department managers confront and challenge the CYS manager and staff in meetings and correspondence (see texts above). Here the managers redeploy the client-focused language of community service discourses in order to achieve their new managerialist ends. Despite other commitments to reduce services, if they are regarded as too costly by the Department, a “commitment to increase professional services to young people” is declared by the Department managers. They suggest that “greater expectations from the Department will be accompanied by greater support...the Department has issues with the behaviours of the specific children and will be seeking to draw upon expertise to support services with this information... (Meeting notes, dated 14/7/04)”. Such examples illustrate another means of intertextuality, this time, reversing the earlier processes by the intertextual employment of language from the client-focused discourse in the service of contrasting managerialist discourse.

The flexibility exercised by the Department demonstrates the operation of a contingent rationality, or regime of truth, in which short term budget needs are re-prioritised to safeguard their cost-cutting commitments to Treasury. This rationality is evident in the assertion made by the Department managers that “more support from the Department [in the future] will enable the clients to move on” (Meeting notes dated 14/7/04). The Department managers’ argument appears to be that as the Department is going to do better in the future, this case is to be handled as the Department suggests. Such confident assertions were received with suspicion by the CYC Board and Managers as other earlier assertions of improvements by Department did not eventuate.

As they challenged CYS to comply with their demands, the Department drew upon authority embedded in the purchaser/provider model that challenged the professionalism and organisational autonomy of CYS. An analysis of collected texts shows that the relationship had deteriorated. Formerly a more collaborative approach was evident when the Department had developed innovative funding arrangements with CYS to utilise the organisation’s facilities while allowing the organisation to maintain autonomy. In contrast organisational autonomy was now being threatened as the purchaser/provider model extended into areas challenging the autonomy and capacity of the community services organisation particularly in its principal objectives relating to service delivery. The Department not only wanted to purchase the service, it also wanted to

prescribe the operational details of the service. Organisational knowledge embedded in policies and practices of CYS were thereby contested by the Department.

### **6.3.2 Client-focused discourse**

There is strong evidence within CYS documents and practices of a dominant client-focused discourse, for example, the CYS Manager discussion in this case, focuses on stringent client assessment practices. These processes include obtaining assessment from other related professional services within related disciplines including psychiatric and general medical issues. This information is included with the client's input as well as reliance upon youth worker practice and organisational knowledge to develop and implement an appropriate case plan. Focus on the best interests and health needs of the client are the pre-eminent criteria for the effective placement of the client. The rights and choices of clients are integrated into case plans by informed participation. In this particular case for example, the client participated in the decision-making processes regarding her placement and care at several case conferences. When the necessary support was not forthcoming, the case became contentious. More generally, the organisational structures and processes discussed earlier present strong evidence of the client-focused discourse. Meticulous attention to client-feedback evaluations, case-conferences, induction programs, exit interviews and access to the senior manager all indicate client empowerment within the organisational processes.

### **6.3.3 Effects on organisational knowledge**

Changes to organisational knowledge relating to the complex case are substantial. New managerialist rationality rejects grounded and client-focused approaches to knowledge used in the assessments. Abstract knowledge is preferred in the new categories of "high cost kids" to determine interventions based on minimising costs and rejecting local knowledge. The professional knowledge of the CYS manager is rejected in favour of managerialist alternatives. Organisational knowledge of CYS routines, policies and practices for staff and client management is disrupted to align with the Department's cost management.

After extensive internal and external consultation to gather professional and practical knowledge regarding the best and most appropriate placement for the young person by CYS, recommendations made by CYS were subsequently rejected by the Department. The distinctions evident within the notes made by the senior manager of the organisation clearly indicate the requisite knowledge required to perform a competent assessment in this case. These distinctions were made on the basis of the extensive practice knowledge of the manager, existing

organisational knowledge and other highly experienced professionals such as the specialist youth mental health worker. The organisational knowledge was also linked to that of other professionals and included in the case plan and the assessment forms. New texts were thereby created by CYS that prioritised their professional and organisational knowledge of how best to deal with the case.

Not only did the assessment process rely upon the manager's knowledge of what were the important case issues, other areas of organisational knowledge were linked by the manager in her capability to translate this knowledge into language acceptable to the Department of Family Services managers (Yanow, 2004). This translation process required her to use a different language than that used to describe case management, including language relating to policy, understandings and interpretations of the contract and precedents and political positioning within the broader community service sector. The manager needed to carefully integrate knowledge of government discourses by intertextually incorporating this in her communication in order to argue using commensurate terms (MacIntyre, 1985).

Despite this knowledge and capacity to articulate an alternative argument to that put by the Department, the manager still described herself as "feeling bullied" and coerced by the Department managers. Use of institutional power, such as meeting attendance in suits (when others customarily dressed more casually), appeal to technical areas of the contract and bureaucratic authority structures were described "as being quite intimidating" to those within the informal community services culture maintained within CYS by the CYS manager and staff.

Organisational knowledge is evident in the distinctions made by the senior CYS manager and her staff that drew on the codified organisational policies, routines and practices. She was not the only person who knew what she knew. The development of policies, practices and routines embedded these understandings within the organisation and enabled generalisations to be made on the basis of these distinctions. Organisational knowledge was thus able to evolve contextually as the organisation incorporated knowledge reflexively. The dispute in this case was prompted by the disruption of standard routines and practices within CYS. The request for extra money required to fund additional support staff over the long weekend was rejected by the Department Managers, potentially leading to inadequate staffing levels necessary to operate standard safe practices and routines for the care of the client.

However, in this incident the organisation was constrained to change its practices in order to reprioritise managing costs. Client assessments were undertaken with management of costs in

mind for example. Local and historic knowledge about the assistance that the young client needed were rejected as being invalid in favour of the accounting knowledge of the Finance Manager. CYS management and Board knowledge of the organisation and its mission supported concerns about organisational capability and its suitability to work with this client group when inadequate resources for the programs offered increased risk to the organisation both of client critical incidents and of over-extension to support staff. The impact on management of the increased scrutiny and aggressive approach by the Departmental managers was a source of stress and frustration.

Organisational knowledge also enabled the staff to know their limitations. Staff were asked to work with the client without adequate training, back up or resources to assist them. In this case, staff were in an area of high physical risk of assault. Whilst the focal awareness (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001) of the manager was upon the client, staff and organisational risk, the managers' of the Department focus was upon the costs and then perhaps the care issues of the young person.

The CYS Manager, is in some sense, a "translator" (Yanow 2004) in that she is fluent in multiple organisational cultures and their languages. She is able to fluently employ the language of policy and management used within Department of Family Services, and at the same time, translate the distinctions and judgments made in workers' practice. The language of community services practice is thus translated for those within community services into the bureaucratic discourse.

The Department prioritised costs per category and the arbitrary application of this in the form of their contingent application of a tactical cost management strategy. On this basis, local practice knowledge of the needs of the client in the case-plan were rejected in favour of abstract knowledge of managing costs. Furthermore, CYS as the "provider" is constrained in the application of its successful approach to service delivery by the "purchasers" changing funding interpretations. Finally, the rejection of this practice knowledge by the Department was thought to result in the possibility of reduced and impaired service delivery, both in this case and others, subject to additional cost scrutiny.

#### **6.4 Implications and summary**

The Department's adoption of a purchaser/provider model linked to the increasingly direct control and intervention of community service organisations by senior Department managers had some very important implications. Areas such as client related issues of care and protection; practice issues for professionals, management and workers providing services in the area; civil

society issues regarding protection of the most vulnerable within our society; issues relating to enterprise service models relying on purchase and provider roles; political issues relating to financing the programs and managing the potential for public backlash/outrage if/when children die in care; issues of best practice models of care in this area.

The effects of this managerialist discourse are again shown to threaten participating organisations, their knowledge and clients, by colonising their client-focused discourse. In this study, CYS management and staff are placed under enormous pressure to increase their organisational risk by Departmental pressures to accept responsibility for young people requiring intensive levels of care. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, young homeless people are discursively re-categorized in order to save money. Thus they fail to receive what was, up until now, professionally (and ethically) regarded as appropriate help, for care is made subsidiary to a more expedient utilitarian end – cost management.

In summary, the study highlights the ways that powerful decisions made by Department of Family Services reshaped service delivery practices. First, how a client is constituted and at what level of need or dollar value, using which knowledges and rationalities – psychiatric and expert practitioner knowledge relating to a discourse of care and in contrast to managerialist knowledge in pursuit of financial efficiencies. Second, the identification of the problem itself, in this instance was contested and resisted. Third, what must be done at the case level? By whom? With what responsibilities? For although legally CYS “are partners with shared responsibility”, in practice the area is problematic as CYS demonstrably experienced the relationship as powerfully controlled by Department of Family Services and far from equal partners. Finally, the available subject positions for the children, workers and managers of CYS were prescribed but resisted. For the workers and the manager, the desired and dominant subjectivities involve technologies of the self, perceiving and disciplining the self to be a caring, effective, professional community worker. However, pressure from Department of Family Services for the CYS management to adopt a managerialist positioning raises significant dissonance both for the individuals and the organisation (Sykes and Treleaven, 2003).



# CHAPTER 7     MANAGERIALIST DISCOURSE ACROSS THE

## THREE STUDIES

The chapter presents a discussion of findings to the principal research question of the thesis research, how is organisational knowledge being shaped by managerialist discourse? The chapter is structured along the following lines. First, the reshaping of organisational knowledge in community service organisations is discussed, highlighting both practice knowledge and organisational knowledge embedded in routines and practices. Second, the effects and loss of community service organisational knowledge's are discussed. Third, the changing discursive order operating within community service organisations is discussed, specifically drawing attention to the expansion of managerialist discourse, its power relations and re-shaping of organisational knowledge. Alternative and contrasting client-focused discourses and their discursive operations, structures and practices are shown to be under threat resulting in changes to and losses of organisational knowledge and capability. Fourth, resistances and disruptive responses to managerialist discourse by staff and others resisting this discursive change are discussed. Critical and reflexive actions are shown to be one response capable of resisting the re-shaping of discourses producing and reproducing organisational knowledge.

### **7.1 Organisational knowledge in three community service organisations**

Organisational knowledge in community service organisations is constructed from several sources. First, the accumulated practice knowledge developed as workers undertook tasks associated with their roles and functions. Second, the store of organisation-wide generalisations was established in routines, policies and procedures. Third, primary organisational orientation provides parameters or rules for acceptance of what counts as knowledge. The primary organisational orientation, the *raison d'être* within community service, not-for-profit organisations is a commitment to human and community services. This commitment to working with disadvantaged people includes employing practices and language in ways that respect their agency and dignity. Such an orientation contrasts with other for-profit corporate organisations and this contrast is dealt with extensively in Section 2 of this Chapter when managerialist discourse is discussed in relation to community service organisation knowledge.

A major problem from the outset of the research process was how to identify clearly and talk meaningfully about complex organisational knowledge required to provide community services.

Typically, well-rehearsed, informed worker and organisational responses are required to deal with difficult social problems. Such responses are often tacit, overlapping and embedded in action.

One common, but problematic way of managing the hard-to-identify area of organisational knowledge, is to develop abstract categories and orders that enables classification to occur tightly and neatly (Alvesson, 2001; Blackler, 1995; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). In this approach, division of practices into their atomistic parts is made and each part coordinated resulting in greater understanding and control of the sum of the parts. In Chapter 5 this is shown to be an unsuccessful approach, as the developers of Referralsdoc in the Government Department attempted to establish neat and clean categories. However, these categories were rejected by community service organisation practitioners, for failing to accurately capture crucial distinctions required for effective referrals. For in the area of complex social and discursively developed knowledge, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.

Importantly, in discussing the findings of this research the same dangers exist. The research therefore does not attempt to develop sharp, tight categories, for knowledge in this area is inter-related and at times ambiguous (Alvesson, 2001). Attempts to tightly name and categorise tacit community service organisation knowledge encounter highly complex epistemological difficulties. These relate to the problem of ascribing language to the often simultaneous processes of action and knowing (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004). For these reasons, the research sought not to tightly classify the knowledge but to examine more closely the *workings* of this knowledge.

By examining the research question within three very different organisational sites, five important characteristics of knowledge at work in community service organisations are evident. First, community service organisations rely upon individual community service practice knowledge and skills often used heuristically to achieve organisational purpose – the provision of services. Second, knowledge in community service organisations is dispersed and distributed. Third, services to particular communities and groups require local and situated knowledge in complex social spaces. Fourth, evaluations of worth develop an important, and overlooked, ethical dimension to community service organisational knowledge. Fifth, loss and changes of organisation knowledge have significant impact.

### **7.1.1 Practice knowledge**

Individually developed practice knowledge includes personal knowledge and collectively developed and shared knowledge and is used extensively by staff in the organisations within the three studies. Practice knowledge is dynamic and includes what Bourdieu (1990) called “habitus”,

the making of distinctions within contexts based upon the inter-relationship of personally developed knowledge of how the world is, personal roles and values and individual sensemaking and organisational roles. Additionally, complex personal and practice knowledge is shaped into organisational knowledge, both by social interactions and training in the work context, as well as learning organisational routines (Tsoukas and Valdimirou, 2001) which operate tacitly and practically in organisational practices such as making and receiving referrals.

As staff became fluent in their knowledge use, worker efficacy and confidence increased, and they are also able to approach new and difficult situations with creative and innovative responses. Working in complex social spaces, at times necessitated creative responses, sometimes on the spot which may, for example in the context of aggressive or angry clients as in Chapter 6, be risky or dangerous. Such heuristic knowledge use is often overlooked but enables knowledge use by workers to be flexible and creative. Responses to service users or clients are made individually, based on applications of organisational policy and routines and careful assessments of client needs and available resources, not generically as in one size fits all approaches. Using knowledge heuristically allows the skilled worker to draw upon responses that may be kinaesthetic and creative, and as such, accord the client a dignity and respect that is lacking in more generic and bureaucratic responses (Yanow, 2004). While much has been made of the role of knowledge for developing innovation within for-profit corporations (Choo and Bontis, 2002; Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003; Nicolini et al., 2003), in this not-for-profit community services sector increasing reliance upon tight control mechanisms will arguably further restrict and limit innovation.

Organisations depend to a great extent upon the skill and expertise, or in other words, the practice knowledge (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004; Tsoukas and Valdimirou, 2001; Yanow, 2004) of their frontline workers, to engage with service users in highly complex social spaces. Individual practice knowledge is not detached and separate from organisational knowledge. Practice knowledge is augmented and directed by distributed organisational knowledge, through shared and collective generalisations encoded in policies, practices and routines across the organisation (Tsoukas, 1996; Tsoukas and Valdimirou, 2001).

The studies undertaken sought not only to analyse processes and practices to identify knowledge in the organisations but through encouraging discussion and reflection, also to enable workers to “command a clearer view of their skilled performances” (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulos, 2004). This was achieved by workers ‘re-mind[ing]’ themselves of how things were done, and bringing their tacit knowledge forward in their own thinking by encouraging them to articulate the

ineffable (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). For the 're-minding' process operates in and through social interaction forms such as conversations, dialogue, reflection and meetings and is linked to knowledge sharing.

Practice knowledge in community service organisations is thus particularly complex, difficult to talk about and categorise. Talking, reflecting upon and describing actions was difficult for many workers as their knowledge remained tacit, practical and largely unarticulated (Tsoukas, 2003a). As workers described practical and tacit action, focal awareness was necessarily transferred away from the action itself, which dynamically integrates physical, discursive, social and emotional responses, and attention was refocused on talking about the action (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Describing the action of making a referral requires a very different skill from performing the referral itself. Further, the capability to talk about the action was not considered a required part of the practitioner repertoire, unless the worker was called upon to train others to make referrals. Even then, the knowledge was learnt by watching and observing, embodied in actions, rather than acquired discursively.

Interestingly, crucial social components of knowledge, such as an informal networking discussion over coffee about a particular referral, were detached by those unfamiliar with practice knowledge, from more material areas of making the referral, such as completing forms. Although the distinction making process was shaped by these casual encounters in coffee or corridor conversations, their importance as knowledge work was often overlooked. Yet, as workers acted on data and information, they created knowledge by making distinctions at different levels based upon tacit and reflective questions. What do I need to know about this client if she is to move in to this accommodation program? What does she need to know given her present vulnerabilities and strengths? How will she fit in with other residents within the program, given their needs, strengths etc? What support mechanisms need to be established? Which authorities need to be notified, when, how and by whom? These considerations are reflexive and interrelated, often taking place tacitly, quickly and casually and remaining largely unarticulated. They are, however, crucial to the effective creation and use of knowledge in order to secure opportune and appropriate placements of clients.

### **7.1.2 Prioritising local and situated knowledge**

The size, scope and diversity of the organisations at the three sites are representative of some of the differences across the many thousands of community service organisations in the state. While problematic for government control, the large number of organisations and their diversity enable

specific services to develop close identification with the diverse cultures and communities within the state. Organisations possess their own shared language, practices and knowledge of how to work in these local and situated contexts.

In order to provide effective services in these local contexts, staff emphasised their need to be knowledgeable of the particular situations, communities and cultures where they work. Communities, or sub-cultures, occupy social spaces with very discreet social actions, practices and structures. Knowledge in these social spaces requires respect for clients and their culture, and may take time and patience to develop. Further, it may also require the knowledge, or what is sometimes called the 'practice wisdom', of how to gain the necessary trust and understanding required to engage with difficult-to-reach communities such as homeless youth. If services are to operate effectively to marginalised local communities, highly situated responses and interventions are required by organisations, to engage with their very specific needs and challenges.

This knowledge of context and practice is augmented by refined language use (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Not only are staff able to understand and appropriately use contextualised language and share meanings with their clients, but knowledge gained and skills developed also result in changed use of their professional language. For as the language capabilities of an individual worker, in a particular domain of action, become more refined, knowledge is developed through an increased capacity to articulate distinctions and make informed choices about possible actions (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001).

Youth workers in Chapter 5 for example, had clearly learnt the language of the youth sub-culture, sharing meanings and understandings of what it takes to survive in the complex social spaces of homelessness, involving "turf" issues, drug use, sexual relations etc. They developed knowledge and trust with the young people themselves, learning how to "translate meanings" (Yanow 2004) between the world on the streets – its language and meanings – and the institutional world within the organisation. Their knowledge was situated in the social context by learning to be attentive to the young people and to interact in the light of the highly complex "lived-experience and everyday knowledge" (Yanow 2004) of young people themselves. Moreover, the specific service interventions themselves were shaped by shared language and understandings with their young clients.

Situated knowledge is embedded in particular social encounters and practices with service users and their communities and is clearly distinguishable from abstract knowledge and information. Practice knowledge is "interactively derived knowledge", learned by staff through engaged actions



and experience, and is at odds with other “scientifically constructed knowledge” (Yanow 2004). Again as in Chapter 5, this is particularly salient where possessing abstracted information about a person or service in a referral form, albeit detailed and potentially relevant, is shown from be quite different to knowing that person or service.

At each of the sites examined, effective programs operated through knowledge that was developed with expert understanding of service delivery practices. Further, workers described the need for contextualised knowledge, in relation to time and space (Giddens 1984). Abstracted and generic knowledge made at a distance lacked what Yanow calls “mundane... but expert understanding of and practical reasoning about local conditions derived from lived experience” (Yanow, 2004:12).

This local and situated knowledge is difficult to transfer to new contexts and codify, for such processes necessarily lead to abstraction (Tsoukas, 1996; Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). In stark contrast to generalised and abstract managerialist knowledge (Townley 2002), this local knowledge “is seemingly not recognised beyond the boundaries of that community” (Yanow 2004:11). Within the ACCS study in Chapter 4, the local knowledge developed within the regional office was rejected for “it [was] not perceived as having any legitimacy in the broader organisation” (2004:11). Interestingly, as this research was undertaken in the various sites, attempts to document the knowledge development and sharing processes and to write academic papers discussing these processes, encountered the same difficulties with abstracting those concrete, local, specific practices and processes (Treleaven and Sykes, 2005, 2006b).

However, community service organisations, such as in the Youth Interagency network in Chapter 5 and CYS in Chapter 6, do develop generalised knowledge across the organisation. While situated practice knowledge becomes organisational through the reflexive development of shared language, meanings and understandings, it also entails a process of abstraction. For the development of generalisations (Tsoukas and Vladimiriou, 2001), or typifications (Berger and Luckmann, 1984), requires agreed-upon rules to guide practice: in situation x respond by doing y. This process of abstraction, while necessary to provide generalisations for organisational routines and practices, was shown to be problematic if not developed inclusively and participatively with workers, including where possible their language and distinctions made in often tacit, practical knowledge. Intentional or unintentional disregard for staff participation, evident in managerialist attitudes in each of the sites studied, is shown to impede the development of organisational knowledge by neglect of important local and situated practice knowledge.



### **7.1.3 Dispersed and distributed knowledge**

Within community service organisations, knowledge developed by individual workers or with work colleagues, or even by particular organisations, is dispersed and distributed across organisations both internally and externally. No one person can possess all the knowledge of an organisation (Tsoukas, 1996). Organisations address this situation in different ways: for ACCS in Chapter 4, their knowledge system had broken down, resulting in regional and local knowledge remaining hidden within sections of the organisation, while head office made global decisions based on a centralised or abstracted view of organisational knowledge. On the other hand, the Interagency network and CYS drew upon distributed knowledge to shape their decision-making processes by developing knowledge sharing practices. They broadened their individual and collective knowledge and strengthened their capability to provide services that were contextualised and relevant to local communities.

The community service domain has strong formal and informal networks that also enable knowledge sharing with other similar organisations. Managers and staff meet regularly, formally and informally, to discuss programs and issues. As many of the organisations provide similar services, or even the same program in different areas as in referrals, knowledge is again dispersed across organisations. Often clients are shared, going from service to service. Knowledge of working with these clients can also be shared, subject to stringent confidentiality and privacy requirements. A lack of competition and rivalry characterised the Interagency network, as they sought to share their knowledge across the network to facilitate improved services to their clients. Loss of this openness and knowledge sharing had negative results in organisations such as ACCS, where staff complained that competition and the pursuit of money had introduced protectionist approaches to their own knowledge and aggressive practices towards competition with other organisations.

### **7.1.4 Knowledge and values, evaluations of worth**

An important finding within this research is the extent to which the knowledge used in community service organisations prioritises client-oriented evaluations of worth. Of particular importance in the operation of organisational knowledge in the community service context, is workers making evaluations of worth (Taylor 1995). As discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, Taylor (1985) suggests that people have the capacity to make evaluations at different levels; first, in a weak sense concerned with evaluating outcomes, a capacity to make selections and choices and second, in a strong sense distinguishing the quality of motivation or evaluation of desires, making such a distinction with the aid of a sophisticated use of language. Distinctions made at this level

are related to human values and ethical distinctions that emphasise 'quality of life' as depth. Strong evaluations of worth therefore contrast with judgements made at face value.

It was shown in Chapter 5 that contrary to the face-value assessment made by an outsider, an empty bed in an accommodation service does not necessarily mean that the next referral will be accepted to fill that bed. For such a response would be made on the basis of a weak evaluation, on an instrumental basis. Community service workers in contrast, typically operate as in the CYS study in Chapter 6, where a strong evaluation of worth would involve careful assessment of service criteria, a background check, and consideration of how the referred person would blend with existing residents in the accommodation.

Within each of the sites studied, evaluations of worth were seen as integral to how community service organisations make decisions. These important distinctions were opposed in each site by others operating powerfully from an instrumental and utilitarian rationality. It was argued above that if information is to develop into knowledge, then the emphasis on the personal, social and values dimensions involved in areas such as the referral assessment need to be emphasised. Evaluations of worth provide an ethical, qualitative, value-based dimension to understandings of knowledge (Tsoukas and Vladimirou, 2001). Such evaluative knowledge was developed in the Aristotelian notion of 'phronesis' (MacIntyre, 1985). This type of knowledge gives greater priority to quality and ethical distinction-making and produce deep or strong evaluations of worth, rather than shallow, weak evaluations made principally on the basis of expediency, efficiency, utility, desire or whim. Effective knowledge use in a community service organisation is evident in the quality of its distinction-making which prioritises social justice values and the dignity of service users during their contact with the organisation.

In each of the three studies, evaluations of worth characterise the knowledge and its strongly ethical use within organisations. In Chapter 4, knowledge of how ACCS responded to the most disadvantaged within communities, drawing upon its Christian commitment to values, is paralleled with the concerns expressed by the community workers. In Chapter 5, inclusion of the evaluative and qualitative dimension of knowledge was not possible within the preset categories of ReferralDoc which relied instead upon simpler category matches. While in Chapter 6, the concerns of the CYS manager and her staff regarding the quality of care provided to the young client were contested by the Department managers, being weighed against their more instrumental budgetary concerns.

Strong evaluations of worth are being increasingly contested as managerialist values are accorded greater priority. Far from being value free and neutral as MacIntyre (1985) showed, management and managerialism are value-laden, prioritising expediency, utility and competition. ACCS, an historically conservative Christian organisation with a strong social justice mission, is implicitly turning away from strong evaluations of worth in its operational practice under the influence of new senior management. It is this incongruence between workers' and managers' own individual strong evaluations of worth ("a profound belief in what we did") and the organisation redefining its organisational purpose by re-prioritising weak evaluations (instrumental outcomes of financial viability) as pre-eminent, that is expressed so lucidly in interview narratives.

## **7.2 Impact of loss of organisational knowledge**

Reductions and loss of the quality of organisational knowledge within community service organisations may result in crucial changes to organisations and the services they deliver to communities. These include reduced provision of individualised and personal responses to service users; reduced provision of quality services requiring the use of highly developed practice knowledge; lack of understanding about what is actually done within the services that adds value or makes a difference; prioritising areas that allow for mass production or mass outcomes based on one-size-fits-all approaches; knowledge loss in translation processes, both external to the organisation with service users, communities, funders, as well as internal to the organisation, in uncoordinated practices.

The organisational knowledge required to achieve managerialist ends, as specified in organisational texts, is assumed to be explicit in the codified procedures to be uniformly applied. In contrast community services knowledge attends principally to community needs and is more reflexive, focused on identifying human and social needs, by supporting people, developing long/short term case-plans reflexively with those who have become clients. The studies in three sites show that this client service work draws on different knowledges, as community workers act in the context of specific and locally-situated knowledges.

Changes and losses to organisational knowledge occur in the domains of situated practice knowledges. These forms of organisational knowledge operate experientially, often tacitly, through personal relationships, social interactions and in action. The heuristic knowledge historically developed and shared by staff located within client-focused discourses were powerfully productive of organisational knowledge, based as on collective understandings and generalisations reflectively generated. Thus, widespread loss of organisational knowledge

occurred in terms of staff's ability to continue the social interaction processes of knowledge sharing, knowledge creation and reflection that comes about through well developed personal networks and collective engagements between people who share a vision and a set of enabling practices. As one interviewee noted, "It is more than just taking the body away, it's what's been gained and accumulated over the years, and the knowledge from personal experience and interaction that is so substantial in terms of making decisions for the services" (ACCS Interview 3:35). As a social process, knowledge sharing within and across organisational networks facilitates reflexive practice that, in turn, generates organisational knowledge and capability.

Of particular concern within the organisations studied were the changes of knowledge in translation processes undertaken by workers. Frequently, knowledge required translation into different, and at times incommensurable, contexts. Difficulties and misunderstandings, resulting from a lack of shared meanings, are characteristic of failure in the translation process. While workers demonstrated the development of kinaesthetic and aesthetic understandings when working with their clients, this was not the case in translating their understandings into bureaucratic discourse for the Government Department. For even though they developed a feel for a particular area and the phenomenon requiring explanation, they struggled to explain the phenomenon in ways that could be heard; their interpretations were often rejected on the basis of their incongruence with managerialist intentions.

Intuitive understandings and knowledge or knowing in action (Cook and Brown, 1999; Nicolini et al., 2003; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas, 2003a) are shown to be often overlooked or misunderstood by outsiders, but are part of the fluency or quality of expert practice beyond the sum of its parts (Tsoukas and Mylonopoulou: 2004). Tsoukas and Vladimirova's (2001) use of Polanyi's (1962) notion of "knowing through indwelling" describes the mastery and fluency within at least two languages required for good translation (Yanow, 2004). For example, the translation process operating fluently, as the CYS senior manager in Chapter 6 reflectively describes the assessment processes used within her organisation and translates this for the Department of Family Services managers, drawing upon Department of Family Services procedural knowledge and understandings of the contract to support her argument.

### **7.3 Managerialist discourse reshaping organisational knowledge**

Organisational knowledge in community service organisations is being reshaped by managerialist discourse in four ways: changing orders of discourse; the increasing dominance of a corporate

enterprise rationality and regime of truth; re-alignment of community service organisations with Government strategy; normalisation of managerialist discourse within society.

### **7.3.1 Changing orders of discourse**

The studies undertaken at the three sites demonstrate that discursive space, or what Fairclough (2001) calls the orders of discourse, are dynamic and evolving in the field of community services. Managerialist discourse, as identified in Chapters 4-6, is shown to be shifting and adaptive in the three contexts and settings, depending upon the strategies and power mechanisms of those producing and reproducing the discourses. For example, in Chapter 6 the Department of Family Services managers adapted their managerialist approach to suit the changed budgetary imperatives. The complex inter-relationship between organisational structures, agents and their strategies and social actions including text production, shape the following discussion of managerialist discourse and its reshaping of organisational knowledge.

Organisational knowledge is shown in each organisational site to be constrained by managerialist discourse. Language is used powerfully, drawing upon its ontological dimensions (Foucault, 1965, 1972) creating and recreating organisational reality and objects such as mechanisms, structures and changed or contested roles (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Categories and their corresponding subject positions are created and re-created by re-defining such things as what a 'case' (client) is, what 'case management' (service) is and what a 'case manager' (community service worker) is and who, in turn, is included or excluded within these categories and the rules that apply to them (Lakoff, 1987; Rose, 1998; Tsoukas, 1997; Tsoukas and Vladimirova, 2001). In so doing, the new discourse also prescribes the range of actions that staff are now expected to enact as a condition of their employment. Thus, it is when organisational knowledge is used, or in other words when action is taken, that power relations are identifiable in emergent and managed change processes.

Through the development of new carefully constructed texts, ACCS substantially incorporated managerialist discourse into its fabric through a strategic discursive shift operating within organisational change processes. New organisational structures, policies and routines were developed to support the embedding of the texts within ACCS organisational discourse. Such structures, policies and organisational practices supported organisational re-alignment, with the large government bureaucracies and moved the organisations emphasis from client-first to corporate managerialism. This realignment developed strategically as ACCS senior management courted large, profitable contracts with powerful government departments, driven by neoliberal policies. For the corporatist enterprise discourse has thrived in the neoliberal political



environment employed in the service of conservative political agendas. As Government control of organisations increases, both through powerful contracts and neoliberal mechanisms relating to social interactions, the dangers of Orwellian types of social engineering and control are high. Staff lamented their inability to halt the changing focus of the organisation and the resulting loss of organisational knowledge. For practitioners, this changing focus translated into radically changing knowledge use. Understandings of what constituted a client and who the organisation served were contested and re-defined. The diverse and dynamic expressions of the discursive relations and the different forms of managerialist discourse operating within each organisational setting point to the opportunistic and exploitative capabilities of managerialist discourse.

Organisational knowledge changed in ACCS as management strategically, and perhaps cynically, employed the language of the displaced client-focus discourse in their marketing strategies, website and other publications in order to generate income from donors. Client-focus was no longer the central, albeit tacit, and embedded value which shaped personal and practical knowledge. Now new more contingent values prioritising budgets and managing risk motivated and constrained actions and knowledge use. Deep evaluations of worth linked to the instrumental employment of such language were increasingly threatened as new staff with administrative and processing skills replaced other experienced staff, with their embedded evaluations of worth and embodied practical, personal knowledge.

Not only are discourses dynamic and evolving but their production necessitates the inclusion of a variety of texts from within specific but changing contexts. Together with the involvement of different agents for manifold political and strategic purposes, text production and reproduction enables seemingly diverse and incongruent positions to be connected. For example, in Chapter 5 the intertextual lashing together (Rose, 1999) of texts from the client-first discourse with language from IT and IS technologies, Government policy commitments, and strategies for control of community service organisations. Managerialist discourse thereby enlarges its control and power within community service organisations and can be seen as colonising.

Organisational knowledge is thus constrained to be generic and transportable, to enable a one-size-fits-all approach driven by the financial imperative of cost reduction and in managerialist terms, *doing more with less*. In Chapter 5, the Referraldoc project clearly highlights the intention within that discourse to simplify complex knowledge sharing practices in order to reduce costs. These intentions are shown to be mis-informed as the government department was forced to admit in later planning and scoping iterations. The ways in which situated and local knowledge



are rejected in the quest for standardisation and uniformity is perhaps most clearly evident in the establishment of electronic categories.

As a large national community service organisation ACCS, in Chapter 4 stands in stark contrast to some of the small agencies comprised of only one or two staff, such as the membership of the Interagency network in Chapter 5. Yet the managerialist and client-focused discourses shaping of organisational knowledge and practices within the organisations, although constructed and operating in different ways, are to some extent quite similar. For it is clear that managerialist discourse was able to include and incorporate diverse texts from different contexts to suit differing strategic purposes. Such adaptability is evident in texts collected throughout the studies showing the strategic inclusion of broad political agendas, policy and accountability requirements for organisations, day-to-day correspondences, and emails and other social interactions, all shaping the generation and production of new and emergent texts.

### **7.3.2 New corporate/enterprise rationalities and regimes of truth**

As well as changes to organisational knowledge arising from changing discursive spaces or orders, organisational knowledge is also shaped by the introduction of a different rationality (Toulmin, 2001; Townley, 2002a, 2002b) or regime of truth (Rose, 1999) that significantly affects knowledge within community service organisations. An abstract language is used to articulate knowledge extracted from its context and generalised ahistorically across time and space. This epistemological shift involves the ascendancy of a strongly Cartesian rationality associated with modernity. Townley (2002a) deconstructs this rationality suggesting that it operates by using the components of “rationality, causality, agency, certainty and sovereign power” (Townley, 2002a:557). These powerful mechanisms operate through modernist meta-narratives to legitimate notions of the decentred subject, positivist scientism and economic expediency. Such knowledge is the common currency of managerialist discourse. Uniformity and control exerted through ‘scientific’ notions of measurement and causality easily reduce complexity. This rationality is evident in documents collected for the study in Chapter 5. In these documents, government election commitments to tighten control and expenditure by community service organisations were included in the preamble of the documents (O.I.T., 2002). Accordingly, the Government Information System aimed to develop one link in this area by providing an electronic means of accountability.

In earlier times, dominant representations of community work evident in community services organisational artefacts and technologies, pointed towards a strong social science-driven regime

of what counts for truth. However, the authoritative deployment of legal and neoliberal regimes of truth embedded in managerialist texts is contesting this social space. Such approaches have been shown to employ knowledges incongruent with strong evaluations of worth and tacit and heuristic knowledge use associated with good practice in human services organisations (Sykes and Treleaven, 2005a; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005).

A new regime of truth asserts the common sense rationality and acquiescence with management techniques and practices in order to achieve corporate success. This rationality is evident in each of the sites studied: first, in Chapter 4 in the corporate marketing rhetoric of texts developed by ACCS senior management; second, in Chapter 5, the confident, ill-informed assertions within the cost-benefit analysis of massive cost reductions if the new GIS referral system was adopted; and third, in Chapter 6, the cost per unit approach to “managing” highly disadvantaged children by the Department. Current organisational knowledge in community service organisations is, in this way, profoundly challenged by such instrumentalist and strategic rationality embedded within managerialist discourse.

Similarly, the managerialist regime of truth, determined what counts for knowledge, and the conditions of its production or as Rose asserts “...ways of speaking truth, persons authorized to speak truths, ways of enacting truths and the costs of so doing” (Rose 1999:19). The political dimension of knowledge and its production is highlighted and shown to be ‘rational’, only in the sense of aligning with a particular, historically developed purpose. In Chapter 6, the CYS manager pointed to the professional knowledge of psychologists and mental health professionals as well as her own expertise as the manager of the service and her personal knowledge of the young client. However, such knowledge or evidence was rejected in favour of other knowledge emanating from another very different regime of truth, the need of the Department to cut costs due to their significant budget challenges. This ‘truth’ gained power as it was linked to other contractual obligations and the intentions of the regional Department of Family Services managers.

Further, within Chapter 4, the newly dominant corporate managerialist discourse established a different regime of truth which quickly became normative within ACCS. Not only the loss of organisational knowledge required to know what to do spontaneously in order to relate to the complex issues of their clients but also to a loss of contextualised understanding of what is happening at the coal-face. Replacing skilled welfare practitioner knowledge and practices is an array of centrally-controlled procedures overseen by administratively-trained processing staff in central office who are directed from the top.

Finally, the introduction of “entrepreneurial governance and the idea that ‘enterprise form’ can be introduced successfully to all forms of conduct” (du Gay, 2000:64) is clearly considered within the study of ACCS in Chapter 4 and Department of Family Services itself in Chapter 5. The promotion and adoption of such neoliberal approaches are thought to provide ready solutions to many of the vexed problems associated with what are perceived as the escalating costs of service provision within community service organisations (Clarke, Gewirtz and McLaughlin, 2000a; du Gay, 2000).

### **7.3.3 Alignment with government strategies**

Organisational knowledge within the community service organisations studied is being very significantly shaped by the contemporary neoliberal policy regime, productive of corporate managerialist discourses (du Gay, 2004; Keevers et al., 2006; Townley, 2002a). These discourses operate as powerful organising forces producing new discursive practices that are highly contested in the three organisational studies. In each of the sites the studies show that, while the community service worker’s primary focus was upon the client’s needs, newer management imperatives for accountability and contracted outcomes were legitimated by close links with Government. The mutually constructive relationship between discourse and power was especially clear as client needs, which formerly received greatest priority were now given a different more contingent status in new organisational routines and culture.

Government strategy implementing neoliberal policies together with enterprise discourse created conflict with the formerly dominant client-focused discourse. For many years community work principles of care, and practice embedded in a societal level (Hardy and Phillips, 1998) welfare discourse (Jamrozic, 2001), shaped the dominant community services discourse and the attendant organisational knowledge. Now however, managerialist discourse, strategically deployed through the use of contracts and strategic decision-making, is shown to be powerfully re-shaping services through changing their practices and organisational knowledge.

The three diverse settings within organisations investigated in this research provide illustrative examples of the various technologies that are being used by government to discipline and control the conduct of conduct within the sector. Mechanisms such as restructures and the development of new IS systems were used to secure ‘buy in’ of proposed ‘better’ systems that appeared to resolve long-standing organisational or social issues. In short, additional technologies such as contracts, information systems and cost-benefit analyses were employed within managerialist

discourse to discipline the organisations into compliance with their corporate and neoliberal strategies.

The Government Department in Chapter 5 attempted to use the IS/IT system as a control mechanism to make smaller organisations more efficient and accountable. Inducements such as giving the organisations a personal computer and 'linking them' to new sophisticated government developed IS and IT systems courted 'buy in' to a project considered irrelevant by some community organisations. Links to long-term government strategies to introduce tighter electronic funding and reporting accountabilities were evident within texts examined. These strategies first necessitated the use of the information system itself and were predicated on the category changes to 'client' and 'referral'. These categories were constructed and reconstructed in order for the e-system to work and enabled the community service worker to move from their existing methods to new ones required by the developers of the software. Again, such requirements for uniformity of categories within the information system and questions as to what should be included powerfully disallowed the use and preservation of important local and situated knowledge.

Different disciplining mechanisms were stridently employed by the Department of Family Services managers in Chapter 6. First, the funding contract was used politically to ensure compliance and adherence to particular, although contested, interpretations of the contract. Second, the pricing system was used by the Department, as the purchaser of services, to classify children according to the costs to the Department associated with their care etc. Third, new texts were developed in correspondence such as email, letters and phone calls that challenged and controlled CYS capabilities as a service provider and its compliance with the contract.

Yet such disciplining processes within community service workers are not straightforward. The Government Department also employed governmentality through discreet managerialist disciplining processes reliant upon technologies of the self (Rose, 1998). Subject positions adopted by community service managers were consistent with a social welfare discourse within human services. However, flexible interpretations of the contractual documents provided Department of Family Services were the basis for a different disciplining process of CYS managers. It is arguable that in framing their communication with CYS, the client-focused discourse was deployed by Department of Family Services as a means of disciplining CYS, through governmental strategies, to fulfill its contractual and managerialist intents.

Organisational knowledge was reshaped as these disciplining mechanisms redefined what counted as knowledge, by contesting situated, personal, professional and practical knowledge relating to the case, in favour of detached abstract classification process based on generic categories. As the client was categorised according to a particular level, costs for her care were then fixed and the level of intervention by the service provider set. Although workers remonstrated with the Department about the inadequacies of this treatment and the risks posed to staff and other clients, the contextualised professional knowledge of what constituted appropriate intervention was rejected by the Department repeatedly.

#### **7.3.4 Normalisation within contemporary society**

Finally, organisational knowledge within community service organisations is reshaped as the increasing acceptance and integration of managerialist language within society generally provides a context for the inevitability, common sense and rationality of the application of managerialist discourse to community service organisations. A number of phenomena thus contribute to a growing tacit acceptance of managerialist discourse within society. These include the growing spread of the language of marketing and management, the Macdonaldisation of society (Parker, 2003), the decay of public language (Watson, 2003) as well as the use of interdiscursivity and intertextuality as means for the colonisation of management to expand to areas hitherto alien to its spread (Parker, 2003).

Acceptance of managerialist discourse in society generally, both through the blurring of corporate and personal boundaries and through the increasing employment of management terms in public language (Watson, 2003), is in turn productive of normalisation and acceptance of managerialist discourse by community service organisations. Arguably, societal and community services discourses are mutually constituted as the discourse is shaped and re-shaped, in and by society; it is translated and reflexively incorporated, and thus also becomes accepted within community service organisations. So workers faced with increasing levels of bureaucratic accountability and control, through the intertextual development of accounting and economic language, are assured by management that 'contemporary business requirements' and 'increased professionalisation of services' require such accountabilities. Organisational knowledge, prioritising the language and practices of community and client-focused approaches, is replaced by other more economically-oriented, utilitarian and managerialist language.

## 7.4 Action, resistance and agency

Managerialist discourses cannot be considered as complete and deterministic operating through structural domination of agency (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). Such a view, often attributed to Foucault, is not consistent with the findings of this research. Within each of the organisational sites studied, managerialist discourse is shown to be dominant particularly within ACCS, while other discourses such as the client-first discourse, resisted and contested its dominance. This contestation was shown to be much more successful within the Interagency in Chapter 5 where the dispersed nature of the Interagency and Government intervention failed to entrench managerialist discourse within the Interagency referral form.

The intentionality of agents and their purposes is not ruled out in what might be regarded as overly deterministic Foucauldian interpretations. For following Giddens (1984), and more recently Fairclough (2005), the analysis shows how structure and agency interact reflexively and in mutual relationship or co-constitution. For example in Chapter 5, the decisions made by the Interagency network to develop their own referral form necessitated decisions and actions by network members which, in turn, reflexively shaped and reaffirmed the structures of the Interagency. Also in Chapter 4, simplistic cause and effect interpretations were rejected in favour of more complex interpretations. In ACCS, the unintended effects of organisational knowledge loss during the restructure went unrecognised by senior management but were identified, ultimately to no avail, by regional management. It follows from the incompleteness and partial scope of discourse and in particular managerialist discourse, that spaces do exist within which to resist and contest dominant discourses (Hardy and Phillips, 2004). Knowledge development in alternative texts has the potential for incorporation within the discourse, offering possibilities for alternative discourses.

Chapter 5 showed how the actions of the staff were powerful in resisting the dominance of managerialist discourse as the Interagency withdrew involvement from Referral.doc. Alternative views were developed and texts such as correspondence, plans, policies and procedures were developed which strengthened their resistance and maintained the dominance of client-focus in this practice. Resistance was more possible because the local Interagency was coordinated by the network itself and was not directly funded through the powerful contractual mechanisms. The Interagency recognised the power of the new electronic referral system to change organisational knowledge. Meanwhile, in contrast, Chapter 6 demonstrated how contestation and resistance also occurred even when government control was greater. In this case, the constraints imposed



by the funding body, strategically employing contractual and financial imperatives, were challenged by the powerful actions of the CYS management and staff.

Opportunities do therefore exist to contest and influence discourse. The findings developed through the employment of critical discourse analysis suggest that discourses are not immutable. As Hardy and Phillips (2004) state, discourses are always incomplete and “never completely cohesive”, they are partial and not “devoid of internal tensions”, they are contested and resisted to some degree (2004:304). In each of the studies, community services staff contested conflicting and incomplete managerialist discourse to unsettle, resist and interrogate the dominance of the managerialist discourse by developing new and alternative perspectives. To effect resistance and create change, texts were required to be carefully developed to reflect an alternative organisational knowledge and way of acting that incorporated complex personal, practical, situated knowledges and deep evaluations of worth. Moreover, text development had to take into consideration the key areas identified by Hardy and Phillips (2004) for acceptance into discourse. These key areas included ensuring compatibility in the area of genre and that appropriate textual devices and styles are employed, appropriate distance and positioning from the texts is used, and in particular that the careful use of intertextuality and interdiscursivity provide links and congruence with existing texts accepted within the discourse (Hardy and Phillips, 2004:308-309).

## **7.5 Summary and implications**

This research therefore goes beyond observation, description and analysis by informing action itself. Using action research at three levels together with critical discourse analysis, the research critically incorporates observations and reflections and, in turn, shapes and encourages new actions. Employing critical discourse analysis the research has shown that “...actors [are] always involved in multiple discourses [and that]...the tensions between these discourses produce a space in which the agent can play one discourse off against the other” (Hardy and Phillips, 2004:304). In this way, the research shows that those involved with community service “can influence discourse by using texts as weapons which are compatible with their interests” (2004:306).

## **CHAPTER 8 EFFICIENT MANAGEMENT/WASTED KNOWLEDGE?**

This doctoral study draws attention to the growing influence of managerialist discourse in community service organisations which is evident, not only in changing language but also, in the re-shaping of organisational knowledge and practices. Emphasising the importance of local and situated knowledge, and the powerful and productive capabilities of discourse, the study makes clear the pitfalls associated with the abstraction and generalisation of knowledge across contexts (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Reason and Bradbury, 2001). It is with these constraints about the problems associated with generalising in mind, that this chapter presents the conclusions of the thesis. The chapter first presents the findings of the study and their implications, second, the specific contribution of the study to ongoing research, and third, suggested areas for further research.

### **8.1 Reduced quality of service through reshaped organisational knowledge**

In summary, the findings of the research demonstrate that community service organisations rely upon organisational knowledge for the provision of client services. Such organisational knowledge is cumulatively generated through the application of locally developed practice knowledge to achieve specific client-focused outcomes. Of particular importance is the often-overlooked ethical dimension to community service organisational knowledge embedded in evaluations of worth. Changes to the use and application of organisational knowledge in community service organisations therefore, have significant impact on the quality of services to particular communities and groups that require local and situated knowledge in complex social spaces.

The continued expansion of managerialist discourse employing heterogeneous, flexible and corporate-enterprise regimes of truth, aligned with politically-motivated government strategies are shaping and reshaping community services organisational knowledge. By implementing governmental disciplining processes linked to alternative organisational structures and practices, governments are exerting more extensive forms of control and power within community service organisations. Although partial and incomplete (Hardy and Phillips, 2004), managerialist discourse in community service organisations is bound together, in a mutually constituting relationship, with more generalised societal incorporation of managerialist discourse.

In the light of these findings further implications may be drawn. First, a changing discursive order is occurring within the community service sector. Fuelled by governments' quest for cost reductions and greater control of community service organisations, managerialist discourse is increasingly being naturalised. As the language and practices associated with the managerialist discourse become embedded in community service organisations, new practices and knowledge may be privileged and included, or, alternatively marginalised and excluded. Concurrently "...some texts and some claims to knowledge are deemed legitimate, right, proper and are allowed incorporation; others are deemed illegitimate, improper, wrong – or even bad and mad – and are excluded" (Westwood and Clegg, 2003:1). In this way, managerialist discourse is reshaping the operations of many community service organisations by redefining both what is possible and what is accepted.

This research study draws attention to mechanisms and technologies redefining such inclusion and exclusion within community service organisations. In particular, the capability of community service organisations to work effectively at the local community level are shown to be increasingly under threat as governments impose measures to increase control and cost efficiencies within the sector through a range of discursive mechanisms designed to standardise and generalise operations. Accordingly, the research highlights how community service organisations are learning to prioritise ways of identifying their often tacit, practice knowledge. The organisations studied in Chapters 4 and 5 had identified and prioritised the organisational knowledge necessary for good professional practice and so were not swayed by pressure to conform to alternative managerialist, generic practices and policies.

Second, the research study shows the particular incommensurability of managerialist discourse with community services orientations. Such a discursive incompatibility has important implications for community service organisations with a primary commitment to working with the needs and interests of their clients. Their organisational focus and ways of working are distinguishable from other, more corporate organisations by their prioritising of community orientation and emphasis on strongly values-oriented organisational knowledge. In contrast, expanding managerialist discourse brings embedded within it, more abstract language and reductionist processes supported by instrumental use of knowledge and an ethics of expedience and utility. In this view, what constitutes good practice may be determined more by compliance with bureaucratic process than by effective service delivery to disadvantaged communities. Such re-prioritisation of people and their needs to a more contingent status is inconsistent with the purposes of the community service organisations themselves but is in accord with broader social

agendas currently being implemented in other human services contexts such as health (Doolin, 2002; Iedema et al., 2003), and education (Davies and Bansel, 2005; Davies et al., 2006). The findings of this thesis contest such re-prioritisation demonstrating that organisational knowledge, regarded by practitioners as effective and proven in situated practice contexts, is overlooked within managerialist discourse and is therefore wasted.

Considerable government pressure for compliance with their managerialist agenda was placed upon community service organisations. ACCS for example was transformed in a relatively short time through the re-orientation of organisational priorities and practices. However, organisational realignment with government priorities, through the adoption of managerialist mechanisms, increasingly disenfranchised other stakeholders including longstanding and committed staff members, other community service organisations and community members. The research shows the existence of strong connections in the relationship between changing routines, practices and structures of organising, such as in the restructure of ACCS, and the potential to reshape or lose valuable organisational knowledge (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002; Treleaven and Sykes, 2005).

Third, the research underlines how claims embedded within managerialist discourse to deliver promised improvements remain contestable. Claims that managerialist changes to practice would increase efficiency and effectiveness within organisations and result in improved community outcomes were shown to ignore organisational knowledge, indeed to waste organisational knowledge without realising the promised increases to efficiency. New regimes of truth, and their accompanying disciplinary processes, were demonstrably shown to be questionable and based on erroneous assumptions about what was meant by 'effective' and 'professional' service delivery. The intertextual employment of the language and practices of more corporate business-oriented disciplines within managerialist discourse are not axiomatically equated with service improvements.

Fourth, the research findings demonstrate that resistances to managerialist discourse, although difficult, are possible. As careful consideration was given to the imperatives for compliance with government agendas, creative strategies were developed to counter the powerful operations of managerialist discourse. As Hardy and Phillips (2004) suggest, all discourse is partial and incomplete. Developing language by creating alternative texts, to articulate tacit practice knowledge, and employing carefully developed rationalities, supported by relevant evidence are ways to disrupt and managerialist truth regimes and deflect governmental disciplining processes employed by neoliberal government. In this way, community service organisations may be able

to continue to maintain and develop established practices and routines, thereby, retaining organisational knowledge for client and community focused service delivery.

## **8.2 The contribution of the thesis**

The thesis makes both a disciplinary contribution to organisational studies of managerialism and organisational knowledge as well as a practical contribution to community services organisations themselves.

### **8.2.1 Theoretical disciplinary contribution**

The principal disciplinary contributions of the thesis are made in the areas of community service organisations, organisational studies of knowledge and discourse, and third-person action research. In the area of community service organisations, the research identifies the relationship between managerialist discourse and changing organisational knowledge in community service organisations. Broadly, the studies underline the importance of community service organisations understanding their organisational knowledge and more clearly identifying its characteristics. Thus the study provides community services organisations with another means of analysis that has gained broad acceptance in other, more mainstream, studies of organisation. Careful attention to knowledge, its creation, sharing and uses are regarded as crucial within many sectors of the business and corporate world (Bell, 1999; Drucker, 1993; Tsoukas, 2005). The community service sector, however, has yet to fully take up and prioritise knowledge in the same way. This thesis has shown that valuing complex practice knowledge, embedded within organisations and recognised as organisational knowledge, is crucial for the community service sector itself and the delivery of effective services.

Accordingly, building on earlier research work, this study reaffirms that managerialism is still highly problematic in the community service sector. The action research demonstrates one way of resisting managerialist discourse within the community service sector. Governments are shown to be powerfully shaping and re-shaping highly valued and longstanding ways of doing and talking about things by naturalising managerialist language and practices within the community service sector. As organisations within the community service sector come under increasing pressure to conform to managerialist expectations, the value of organisational knowledge is often overlooked. Whether through re-structuring, improving IT/IS networking or responding to the constantly changing service system, organisations are constrained by managerialist imperatives. In this research, the community service organisations differing in size, scope and structure, had all developed specific, contextualised routines, practices and ways of

talking about how they do things. The research has highlighted that the organisations themselves, and their particular community orientation, are embedded in this collective organisational knowledge. If such knowledge is wasted then proposed increases to efficiency and effectiveness are unlikely to be achieved without significant reductions to service capability.

A second disciplinary contribution is made in the area of organisational studies. Having taken up the call by Tsoukas and Vladimirou (2001) for greater theorisation in the area of knowledge and its uses in organisations, the study provides further evidence that understanding the operations of knowledge is crucial for effective organising. Earlier studies, such as those in the work of Tsoukas (2005) and discussed in detail in Chapter 2, have provided excellent tools for analysis of knowledge and organisational knowledge. This thesis adds to a body of work focusing on the relationship between power, knowledge and language in organisations that engage in complex social interactions. Despite claims made by some managers and bureaucrats in the field, that changing language is ‘neither here nor there’, the findings of this thesis contest this view, showing the powerful capabilities of discourse to redefine objects and subjects (Foucault, 1972) and in this case community service organisations. Institutional and societal level discourses, or what Fairclough called capital ‘d’ Discourses (Fairclough, 2003), such as neoliberalism and globalisation, are changing language and its uses in societies generally. In turn, these discursive changes are powerfully reshaping organisational discourses and thus organisational knowledge.

A third contribution made by this study draws attention to the ethical, qualitative dimension of community service organisational knowledge that defines and characterises the organisations and their community-oriented operations. Embedded in organisational routines and practices, and in workers’ tacit practice knowledge, such organisational knowledge is discrete and situated, and in this community service context, oriented by strong evaluations of worth (Feldman, 2000; Orlikowski, 2002; Tsoukas, 2005; Yanow, 2004). The study demonstrates how strong evaluations of worth are made by the organisations at both the individual worker level and at the organisational level, aiming to privilege the quality of service provision. In particular this meant prioritising the unique situated needs of individual service users while enabling them to maintain their dignity and participatory involvement. Changes to this qualitative organisational knowledge are importantly shown to not only change practices and capability but also the primary orientation and motivation of these organisations. The thesis shows that the unintended waste of such organisational knowledge occurs as managerialist discourse expands its disciplinary influence within the community service sector.



The study shows how strategically employed governmentality results in the re-identification of both community service organisations and individuals in shapes and identities more amenable to bureaucracy or post-bureaucratic forms of government (Iedema, 2003). The governmental uses of language within organisations are shown to reshape subjectivities and identifications of individuals and collectives (Fairclough, 2003; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Rose, 1998). Changing discourses within the community service sector redraws the territory (Rose, 1999) of power relations within the organisations.

Fourth, the thesis makes a contribution to research methodology through its third-person action research (Reason and Torbert, 2001; Torbert, 2001). It provides an alternative and participative approach to conducting research congruently with local community groups. Such participation ensures that local knowledge is not only heard and identified but that it is taken up, both in theorising and in the reflexive development of the research itself. Additionally, “the place of the self” (Harris, 2001) in the research is repositioned through reflexive research practices, integrated in conversation, theory and, most importantly, action. The measure of the success of the research may well be whether it ‘rings true’ or has catalytic validity (Lather, 1991) within the broader community audience, particularly, if the research, or subsequent developments, are taken up in further praxis (Greenwood and Levin, 1998; Lather, 1991; Reason and Bradbury, 2001).

### **8.2.2 A practical contribution to community service organisations**

The research undertaken at the three sites contributes to both identifying and disrupting the operations of complex power relations in managerialist discourse that are reshaping organisational knowledge in community service organisations. Thus the research makes a contribution to what was described in the Introduction to this thesis as a ‘longstanding and vexed problem’ about managerialism. Furthermore, a more specific and practical contribution was made to the community service organisations themselves by working participatively in practical areas such as those described in Chapters 5 and 6. The reflexive action research project supported participants in their development of alternative responses and actions. A knowledge contribution of the research in these chapters is therefore embedded within the actions taken by the two organisations, both in their resistance to managerialist discourse and clearer identification, valuing and retention of practice and organisational knowledge.

This doctoral study and its contribution is not an isolated and discrete undertaking but is related and reflexively integrated with other ongoing projects. Indeed, the development of several related research projects, involving partnerships between universities and regional peak

community service organisations<sup>23</sup>, is continuing. The first such project, *Tacit, practical and visible: A methodology for bringing out the local knowledge of community service organisations*<sup>24</sup> developed a knowledge tool for use by local community service organisations. It provided much of the groundwork for a second, later, and much larger, three-year partnership project funded by the Australian Research Council and titled *Maximising the contribution of NGOs in a new planning framework for community service provision*.<sup>25</sup> This project aims to identify and maximise the contribution of local community service organisation knowledge in government planning processes affecting service system development and funding.<sup>26</sup>

Finally, the research also has implications for practice and policy within the Community services sector. For example, managers both within the community services organisations themselves and in government funding bodies need to be aware of the relationship between the loss of organisational knowledge and organisational capability. Should expanding managerialist discourse continue, some organisational knowledge may be entirely lost to the sector resulting in diminished services to the community. Policies need to be informed by a particular sensitivity to situated knowledge and not default to generic one-size-fits-all approaches without room for informed local variation. Consultation between the managers of government and non-government organisations is required if the community sector is to thrive.

Similarly, the implications of the study for practitioners include a recognition that community services organisational knowledge is bound up with a situated, reflexive understanding of practice. Knowledge sharing, reflective practice and developing evaluations of worth within complex services are crucial. The employment of managerialist discourse shows no signs of waning and effective practice will operate within this context.

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<sup>23</sup> Peak community service organisations may be local, regional or national and represent disparate and heterogeneous groups of organisations in various capacities including lobbying, training, professional support, networking and advocacy.

<sup>24</sup> Two publications were written arising out of this research project (Treleaven and Sykes, 2006a, 2006b).

<sup>25</sup> The research project is supported and funded by The Australian Research Council (ARC), the University of Sydney and the University of Western Sydney with Illawarra Forum Inc. as Industry Partner, through an Industry Linkage Grant- KLP 0562569.

<sup>26</sup> A refereed paper presented at the *Governments and Communities in Partnership Conference*, Centre for Public Policy, The University of Melbourne. 25-27 September, 2006 (Keevers et al., 2006).

### 8.3 Areas for future work

The research opens up a range of questions for further research. Some of this work is now being addressed in the partnership projects outlined. These questions include: How can knowledge in community service organisations be better identified and utilised? How do community service organisations share knowledge? What are the types of tacit knowledge that are employed by workers in community service organisations? How can this tacit knowledge be talked about and made visible?

A number of other important areas remain to be examined. What will be lost if the managerialist pursuit of efficiency and effectiveness leads to significant reductions in the number of service providers? Will a smaller number of large organisations such as ACCS incorporate the local knowledge necessary for effective service delivery? At what point does the drive for efficiency turn back upon itself and create inefficiency? What does it mean for the sector, and service users in particular, if community service organisations become more instrumentally oriented, adopting weaker evaluations of worth? To what extent are these changes adversely affecting the services provided (and received) by clients of community service organisations? What other forms of resistance within alternative more client-oriented discourses are available?

It remains to be seen whether, and when, these questions will be adequately addressed. However, this thesis points toward the need for a substantial revaluing of community service organisational knowledge across the sector. The importance of an independent and autonomous community sector capable of providing highly effective services tailored to the needs of individual communities needs to be kept in the foreground. Organisational knowledge wasted by privileging notions of economy, standardisation and control generally associated with managerialism is reshaping many important community service practices. Failure to prevent these losses of organisational knowledge may mean that the community service sector becomes unrecognisable from corporate and bureaucratic forms of organisation.

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## APPENDIX 1 DATA SOURCES AND ANALYSIS

SITE 1 ACCS CHAPTER 4		
Organisation	Data Type	How Recorded
ACCS	Interview 1 ACCS Manager 1	Taped and transcribed
ACCS	Interview 2 ACCS Manager 2	Taped and transcribed
ACCS	Interview 3 ACCS Manager 3	Taped and transcribed
ACCS	Interview 4 ACCS Manager 4	Taped and transcribed
ACCS	Document 1 ACCS Annual Report 1995	Sections copied
ACCS	Document 2 ACCS Annual Report 1996	Sections copied
ACCS	Document 3 ACCS Annual Report 2005	Sections copied
ACCS	Document 4 ACCS Website	Sections copied
ACCS	Document 5 Chambers book (2000)	Sections copied
ACCS	Document 6 McClure Report (2000)	Sections copied

SITE 1 ACCS DATA ANALYSIS	
Coding themes used in discourse analysis	Reasons chosen
Changing community services practices	To identify how knowledge and its use was changing within ACCS
Intertextual use of managerial language	To identify managerialist language
Use of neoliberal language	To identify how neoliberal language was being used by ACCS
Client focus	To identify client focus and what was meant by this emphasis

<b>SITE 1 ACCS DATA ANALYSIS</b>	
Changing emphasis of process and outcomes	To examine how processes in ACCS were changing and in what areas
Knowledge use	To examine how knowledge was being used within ACCS
Knowledge loss	To examine how knowledge was being lost within ACCS
Changing organisational values	To examine how values were changing within ACCS
Changing communities of practice	To examine what communities of practice were in operation within ACCS

<b>SITE 2 YOUTH INTERAGENCY CHAPTER 5</b>		
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Data Type</b>	<b>How Recorded</b>
Youth Interagency	Interview 1 Interagency coordinator	Taped and transcribed
	Interview 2 Youthworker 1	Taped and transcribed
	Interview 3 Youthworker 2	Taped and transcribed
Family Support Service	Interview 4 Family support worker 1	Taped and transcribed
	Interview 5 Family support worker 2	Taped and transcribed
	Interview 6 Family support worker 3	Taped and transcribed
Youth Interagency	Meeting 1 with Interagency coordinator (2/9/02)	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 2 notes with Interagency coordinator (3/9/02)	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 3 notes with Interagency coordinator 16/10/02	Handwritten notes

**SITE 2 YOUTH INTERAGENCY CHAPTER 5**

	Meeting 4 notes with Interagency coordinator 13/11/02	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 5 notes with Interagency coordinator 29/11/02	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 6 notes with Interagency coordinator 12/12/02	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 7 notes with Interagency coordinator	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 8 notes with Interagency coordinator 23/2/03	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 9 notes with Interagency coordinator 5/4/03	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 10 notes with Interagency coordinator 9/5/03	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 11 notes with Interagency coordinator 21/8/03	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 10 notes with Interagency coordinator 18/9/03	Handwritten notes
	Document 1 Interagency coordinator's work outline	Sections copied
	Document 2 Email 1 (Feb 02)	Sections copied
	Document 3 Email 2 (Feb 02)	Sections copied
	Document 4 Email 3 (April 02)	Sections copied
	Document 5 Email 4 (May 02)	Sections copied

SITE 2 YOUTH INTERAGENCY CHAPTER 5		
	Document 6 Email 5 (Oct 02)	Sections copied
	Document 7 Email 6 (Feb 03)	Sections copied
	Document 8 Email 5 (Aug 03)	Sections copied
	Document 9 Email 6 (Sept 03)	Sections copied
	Document 10 Email 7 (Oct 03)	Sections copied
	Document 11 Email 8 (Oct 03)	Sections copied
	Document 12 Email 9 (Oct 03)	Sections copied
	Document 13 field notes of meeting	Handwritten notes
	Document 14 "Dream list"	Sections copied
GIS	Document 1 Business Case	Sections copied
	Document 2 Scoping Study	Sections copied
	Document 3 E-Bulletins	Sections copied
	Meeting Notes (23/2/03)	Taped and transcribed

SITE 2 DATA ANALYSIS	
Coding themes used in discourse analysis	Reasons chosen
Practice knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Knowledge sharing	Identification of types and working of

	organisational knowledge
Situated knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Information sharing	Contrast between knowledge and information sharing
Organisational knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Tacit knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Managerialist language	Identification of managerialist discourse
Governmentality	Identification of power operations
Organisational background	Developing context

<b>SITE 3 CYS CHAPTER 6</b>		
<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Data Type</b>	<b>How Recorded</b>
CYS	Meeting 1 7/7/06	Handwritten notes
	Meeting 2 14/7/06	Handwritten notes
	Document 1 Letter dated 21/6/04	Sections copied
	Document 2 CYS Annual Report 2002	Sections copied
	Document 3 CYS Annual Report 2003	Sections copied
	Document 4 CYS Annual Report 2004	Sections copied
	Document 5 CYS Annual Report 2005	Sections copied
	Document 6 Email dated 21/6/04	Sections copied
	Service agreement	Sections copied



DFS	Document 1 DFS Service agreement	Sections copied
	Meeting 7/7/06	Handwritten notes

<b>SITE 3 DATA ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>Coding themes used in discourse analysis</b>	<b>Reasons chosen</b>
Practice knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Knowledge sharing	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Situated knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Information sharing	Contrast between knowledge and information sharing
Organisational knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Tacit knowledge	Identification of types and working of organisational knowledge
Managerialist language	Identification of managerialist discourse
Governmentality	Identification of power operations
Organisational background	Developing context

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