

**AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF CROSS-NATIONAL  
MANAGERIAL WORK**

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## **ABSTRACT:**

### **AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE NATURE OF CROSS-NATIONAL MANAGERIAL WORK:**

This thesis documents a research project into the nature of cross-national managerial work, the work of managers operating abroad in multinational business organisations. The study focuses upon the impact of national cultural differences upon such work, and seeks to explain how cultural differences can lead to the development of costly and destructive problems, involving conflict, mistrust or resistance to parent company directives. The research breaks new ground in the study of cross-national managerial work by examining what has largely been overlooked to date, namely the experience of working in cross-national organisational settings. The study establishes the practical importance of this aspect of cross-national managerial work, by showing how the experience of working with cultural differences plays a constitutive role in the development of organisational problems. In discussing what has been overlooked to date, this thesis identifies an important area for future research, and suggests different ways in which this can be explored. It is intended that this thesis will contribute to knowledge about the nature of cross-national managerial work, such that national cultural differences may be better, more knowledgeably managed.

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## CHAPTER ONE:

### INTRODUCTION:

#### SECTION ONE: THE SCOPE AND THEMES OF THE RESEARCH

##### *Introduction:*

This thesis discusses the nature of cross-national managerial work, the work of managers operating abroad. It is written primarily to contribute to the debate about the pervasive and costly impact of national cultural differences on managerial effectiveness in other countries. Certainly, in the debate to date there has been an awareness of the impact of such differences. For instance Mendenhall et. al (1987), note that 20-50% of those assigned to overseas posts fail, and have to return home prematurely. In this thesis, I contribute to the debate by attempting to explain this appalling record.

Of course, the managers themselves have needed no convincing of the impact of the cultural factor in their working lives. Indeed, throughout the research I heard countless versions of the same story:

a competent manager takes up a post abroad and fails dismally; a second manager is appointed to pick up the pieces, and leaves within four months; payment negotiations with a Chinese organisation limp on interminably, with several changes in personnel; a French manager takes up a challenging appointment in London, and returns with a loathing for the English.

Such stories are variations on a theme: differences between national cultures pose special problems for managers at all levels. These problems can be extremely costly in terms of lost contracts, late goods, personnel turnover, time and morale. There is, therefore, a practical imperative for senior managers to understand why things go wrong when their managers work in other countries. There is a need to understand, such that national cultural differences can be dealt with in ways that are effective.

This thesis, then, is written to contribute to existing knowledge about the nature of cross-national managerial work, such that national cultural differences can be better, more knowledgeably managed.



### *The nature of cross-national managerial work:*

In this thesis, I concentrate upon the nature of cross-national managerial work as it is understood and done in everyday organisational settings. This is not, of course, to claim that to do so reveals the essential nature of such work. It does not. Indeed, one of the lessons of management studies to date has been that different approaches result in different characterisations of the nature of managerial work (see Reed, 1989). For instance, from a neo-Marxist point of view, the nature of managerial work could be defined in terms of class structure (Eldridge et al. 1991, pp. 44-78, Dahrendorf, 1959). From a functionalist point of view, the nature of such work could be defined in terms of socio-technical systems (Reed, 1989, p. 14, Emery, 1959). Such is the interrelationship between theory, methodology and findings. The characterised nature of cross-national managerial work, then, depends upon the theories and methodological approaches favoured by the researcher. Indeed, to claim that cross-national managerial work has a nature independent of the theories, and methodological approaches favoured by the researcher is itself to define such work in terms of certain beliefs about the social world.

This then is but one way of looking at cross-national managerial work. It is a way of looking, however, that does have advantages over other approaches. Firstly, it redresses an imbalance within the sociology of management to date, which has tended to overlook managerial work activities; and, secondly, because the focus is upon managerial action, this approach reveals aspects of managing abroad that may be of use to managers, company strategists and management trainers.

Of course, the study of the impact of cultural differences on cross-national managerial work, raises analytical questions that are broader in scope than those of how managers understand and do their work in everyday organisational settings. There is, for instance, the question of how cultural problems happen when managers of different nationalities work together in the same organisation. In this thesis, then, I begin by investigating how managers understand and do their work, but I do move on to explore how cultural differences can lead to destructive and costly cultural problems.

In order to contribute to knowledge about the nature of cross-national managerial work such that national cultural differences can be better, more knowledgeably managed, I thus discuss three interrelated issues:

1) How managers work in cross-national organisational settings:

What do managers do when they work in cross-national settings? In addressing this question I discuss some of the work I observed and recorded in the London subsidiary of a multinational electronics company. In doing so I describe what the managers did. For instance, I discuss: how they asked questions; how they put pressure on colleagues; how they used meetings to secure responsibilities; how they elicited information from others; and how they deliberated over dates, names, and time-scales. Such are some of the things that the managers did in cross-national settings.

By paying close attention to such activities, I aim to rectify an imbalance in our knowledge about cross-national managerial work. To date, research into cross-national management has tended to treat managerial work activities as uninteresting in and of themselves. This is to be regretted, for there is much to learn about managerial work by paying close attention to how it is understood and done. Certainly, it paves the way to a more sophisticated, more sensitive understanding of this kind of work, and it may enable us better to assess established theories about cross-national managerial work.

From the analysis of how managers understand and do their work in cross-national organisational settings, I move on to address the place of national cultural differences in the working lives of such managers:

2) How managers treat cultural differences as they work:

Over recent years there has been an increase in the literature into so-called cross-cultural management (see Bartlett and Ghoshal, 1989). This literature, however, has tended to overlook the question of how managers from different countries understand, and act upon, national cultural differences as they work<sup>1</sup>. I attempt to redress this imbalance by exploring how cultural differences are encountered and dealt with in cross-national situations.

From observing managers at work in cross-national situations, I noticed that the definition of the situation in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation furnished a sense of propriety, a sense of priorities - of what was and was not relevant or important<sup>2</sup>.

Examining what managers did when they worked, then, I found that their activities had little to do with national cultural differences, and a great deal to do with the ongoing work of the organisation. Cultural differences were publicly overlooked, or treated as being unimportant, as the managers got on with what was important. This is not to say, of course, that cultural differences were not noticed, or that they did not have an influence upon the way the work was done. Indeed, the managers I observed did seem to act differently when working with foreigners. However, picking words carefully, or requesting clarification were done as part of the work.

Where then do cultural differences have their impact? Talking to the managers, I discovered something that has been overlooked to date - that managers notice and understand features of managerial work settings other than the immediate practical concerns of working. In particular, cultural differences - although they are treated as being unimportant - are noticed and understood, and they can come to colour the experience of working<sup>3</sup>.

As I go on to discuss, the experience of working with national cultural differences can influence how managers act, both within, and beyond, cross-national settings. An appreciation of this is crucial if we are to understand the impact of national cultural differences on managing abroad.

Existing work on cross-cultural managerial work (eg. Evans, Doz and Laurent, 1989) has tended to overlook how national cultural differences are understood and acted upon in everyday organisational settings. In doing so, such work has overlooked the constitutive role of understanding and experience in the development of what managers call cultural problems. In addressing the question of the understanding and experience of cultural differences in managerial work, I aim to contribute to our knowledge about the way cultural differences can lead to difficult and costly cultural problems in the operations of multinational organisations.

### 3) How cultural problems happen:

Although cultural differences are treated as being unimportant, they often make work with foreigners more difficult, frustrating and irritating than work among compatriots. However, in order to get on with the business of the day managers put up with such difficulties as part of their work.

How then do cultural differences lead to cultural problems - the type the managers talk about? The kind that are so costly in terms of time, money and morale?

The answer to this lies in the wider social dynamics of working in an organisation. The difficulties, frustrations and irritations of working with cultural differences appear to have an impact beyond the immediate cross-national setting:

Firstly, in a subtle way but pervasive way, the managers I observed preferred to socialise and work with compatriots: it was simply less difficult, less tedious, and less hassle than dealing with managers from other countries. It was easier to strike up a rapport with a fellow compatriot than with a foreigner. In a subtle way, then, managers preferred to deal with compatriots.

Secondly, managers' preference to deal with compatriots had significant constitutive implications for the ongoing work of the organisation, encouraging developments and settings that could be characterised as cultural problems. During the research, I noticed that in order to do managerial work, such things as networks, trust and information were very important. The subtle tendency for compatriots to deal with one another, rather than with other national groups, had an impact upon each of these factors, thereby encouraging mistrust, lack of communication, and conflict.

Thirdly, managers' subtle preference to deal with compatriots encouraged greater rapport, trust and dealings within their own national group. This further encouraged managers to deal with compatriots, rather than members of other national groups.

Fourthly, within informal compatriot settings, the managers were at liberty to talk about their experience of working with the foreigners - of their strange ways of doing things, of their unreliability, their inscrutability. The social construction of the status of other national groups thus took place beyond those encounters where cultural differences were noticed, and within compatriot settings where such differences were discussed<sup>4</sup>.

Developments and settings which could be defined as cultural problems resulted from the way managers understood and acted upon national cultural differences in the ongoing work of the organisation: the way managers understood and experienced cultural differences in their work; the way in which they subtly preferred to deal with compatriots; and the way others' national status was defined within compatriot settings. Of course, the development of cultural problems is more complicated than this, and this complexity will be dealt with as the main body of this thesis. What is clear, however, is that cultural problems are the product of managers, understanding, experiencing and acting upon national cultural differences in the ongoing work of the organisation. As such it makes good sense to examine just how these things are done.

I discuss such things in order to contribute to our understanding of how cultural differences lead to destructive and costly cultural problems. To date, work on cultural problems within cross-national managerial work has overlooked how managers understand, and act upon cultural differences, and thereby how such problems develop. Cultural problems do not result directly from national cultural differences, but result from action in terms of such differences. Through examining such action, I aim to describe how cultural problems develop, in a way that will be of use to management trainers, policy makers and, of course, cross-national managers themselves.

## SECTION TWO: THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *The reflexive nature of the research:*

Such an exposition is intended to lay out the area covered by the work of this thesis. I have characterised the research in order to inform the reader. In this section I do so again, but in a way that examines the reflexive nature of investigating and documenting social activities:

The requirement to establish the validity of claims and findings underpins much methodological discourse within social research<sup>5</sup>. Indeed, it is to sociology's credit, and integrity as a discipline, that it constantly seeks to ascertain the nature of analytical validity. Such concerns, furnished by the sheer complexity of the social world, often mean that sociological theses seem arcane, and more concerned with complex methodological issues than with what is being studied. This is understandable, considering the practical concerns of establishing validity in the face of complexity.

Throughout my own work I have taken seriously the notion that research is itself a form of social activity. The research activities in this case involved examining how managers did their work, how they understood and dealt with cultural differences, and how cultural problems developed.

What epistemological status do I ascribe to my analyses? Such a question requires a discussion about the reflexive nature of my research activities, analyses and characterisations:

Much of the work in this thesis is ethnomethodological, in that it takes seriously the question of how managerial activities are done, or (to use the ethnomethodological term) accomplished. As Garfinkel (1967, vii) put it:

Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e. 'accountable', as organisations of commonplace everyday activities. The reflexivity of that phenomenon is a singular feature of practical actions, of practical circumstances, of common sense knowledge of social structures, and of practical sociological reasoning. By permitting us to locate and examine their occurrence, the reflexivity of that phenomenon establishes their study.

Much early ethnomethodological work (McHugh et al., 1974, for example) was the result of this agenda outlined by Garfinkel. Such work treated any activity, including that of social analysis, as being done in terms of a particular definition of the situation (in its broadest sense). The radical nature of this agenda lay in its claim that there was no time out from this reflexivity. As Pollner points out, the recent assimilation of ethnomethodology into the sociological corpus has been achieved by playing down the radical notion of reflexivity, which constituted one of the defining concerns of the ethnomethodological initiative in the 1960s. He reminds us, (Pollner, 1991, p. 372),

that there are two related but distinct understandings of reflexivity in early ethnomethodology. Endogenous reflexivity refers to how what members do in, to, and about social reality constitutes social reality. Thus, language and action are not merely responses to an a priori reality but contribute to its constitution. Similarly, members' 'knowledge' or descriptions of the setting 'turns back' - a root meaning of reflexivity - into the setting as a constituent feature of its organisation. Referential reflexivity conceives of all analysis - ethnomethodology included - as a constitutive process. Not only are members deemed to be involved in endogenous constitution of accountable settings, but so are analysts. Thus ethnomethodology is referentially reflexive to the extent it appreciates its own analyses as constitutive and endogenous accomplishments. Referentially reflexive appreciation of constitution is radicalized when the appreciator is included within the scope of reflexivity, i.e. when the formulation of reflexivity - as well as any other feature of analysis - is appreciated as an ongoing achievement.

Pollner's work draws our attention to the everyday glosses that we use in order to describe social reality. There is no time out from the reflexive nature of social analysis, from the research activities to the writing of the research report. As Pollner (1991, p.372 ) observes:

Concern with both endogenous and radical reflexivity permeates early ethnomethodology. Garfinkel (1967) emphasises that analysis of any sort - any effort to make the world 'seeable sayable' - is an ongoing accomplishment.

'Every form of inquiry relies upon taken for granted assumptions, knowledge and practices through which its 'intelligibility', 'rationality' or 'accountability' is constructed. No inquiries can be excluded no matter where or when they occur, no matter how vast or trivial

their scope, organisation, cost, duration, consequences, whatever their successes, whatever their repute, their practitioners, their claims, their philosophies or philosophers. Procedures and results of water witching, divination, mathematics, sociology - whether done by lay persons or professionals - are addressed according to the policy that every feature of sense, of fact, of method, for every particular case of inquiry without exception, is the managed accomplishment of organised settings of practical actions, and that particular determinations in members' practices of consistency, planfulness, relevance, or reproducibility of their practices and results - from witchcraft to topology - are acquired and assured only through particular, located organisations of artful practices.' (Garfinkel, 1967, p.32).

In its everyday sense the research project was emergent. Notions built upon notions, social networks developed and collapsed. Research competences developed without which features of managerial settings would have passed unnoticed, without which arguments could not have been developed, without which questions would not have arisen:

To characterise the research project in terms of a conceptual and networking logic such as development or emergence is useful for the purposes of writing a thesis. To do so, however, does reconstitute the meaningful reality of the particular research settings, i.e. it glosses the settings within which the research activities were done (and therefore wherein the research is deemed to have developed or emerged). One need only examine some of the conversations I had with the managers (see Chapter 5) to appreciate that in characterising my work activities, I engage in descriptive work which - to a greater or lesser extent - reconstitutes the meaningful order of the particular activities themselves.

Such research activities, then, are emergent in terms of retrospective characterisation. They are emergent in the sense that they have a residue within the thesis findings. Of course, an appreciation that this is so does not undermine such characterisations. All everyday or sociological descriptions gloss the settings they describe, whether this be through notions of class, anomie, emergence, development, or understanding. Describing is done in terms of the practical concerns of doing what is being done, whether this be telling a joke, or writing the introduction to a thesis. All descriptive actions then are indexical, in the sense they are done and understood in terms of a particular definition of the situation.



Much of Garfinkel's early work exposed the futility of trying to stamp out the indexical properties of such activities. Any description, this included, must gloss, select and characterise in terms of the particular practical concerns of describing. Glossing then does not undermine, but enables humorous, judicial, sociological and ethnomethodological description. An appreciation of this, then, should lead us not into analytical despair, but should guide us towards a methodological catholicism. It is useful to approach descriptions as done in this way, for it enables us to deal with them with conceptual propriety.

There is a sense then in which the reflexive nature of action, rather than pulling the carpet from under the feet of any description, rather props up and enables description, whether it be for sociological, ethnomethodological or humorous practical purposes.

An appreciation of the indexical and reflexive properties of describing encourages a conceptual clarity in our understanding of characterisations of social reality. Certainly, it sensitises us to the particular practical concerns of doing particular descriptions. For instance, to complain that a sociology of managerial work does not attend to the practices of doing such work is not to pull the carpet from under its feet; it is to address issues that may not be practical concerns within such research.

An appreciation of the indexical and reflexive properties of describing and characterising need not lead us into an analytical abyss. It is not iconoclastic. It is not nihilistic. All activities have such properties. We are all in the same boat as it were. No activity - including the more self-consciously reflexive forms of ethnomethodological description - is more worthy in this respect. That is not of course to say that one can not have preferences. However, critiques of one practice employing the practical concerns of another can become as inappropriate as criticising a comedian for ignoring class structure.

An awareness of the reflexive nature of descriptive practice enables us to proceed in a way that is knowledgeable. Such an awareness enables us to skip from one level of analysis to another in a way that does not result in a conceptual muddle. The knowledge that we are switching from one practice to another enables us to discern between the practical concerns of doing one

activity (such as describing managerial work) from the practical concerns of doing another (such as describing the reflexive properties of describing).

Furthermore, an appreciation of these points does not mean that one constantly has to attend to the nature of one's descriptive and analytical practices; rather, it furnishes the knowledge that one's descriptive and analytical practices are bound up with the particular practical concerns of what one is doing. As I have stressed, this knowledge is descriptively and analytically useful. One is thereby able to attend to one's descriptions and analyses as modes of descriptions and analyses. The realisation that this is so should encourage an analytical modesty.

It is in this spirit that I characterise my research activities. In this thesis I endeavour to describe how I found out what I did through talking to managers, observing their work, discussing issues with colleagues, reading, and thinking things over. I agree with Silverman (1970) that this is best done through writing an intellectual biography, in that the focus remains throughout upon the writer's interaction with those people, ideas and events through which the research was done. I thus offer this document of the years I spent investigating the nature of cross-national managerial work.

*The concept of understanding:*

In approaching the question of how managers understand cross-national work settings, I developed an interest in the nature of understanding. Through an ongoing interest in ordinary language philosophy, in particular the later work of Wittgenstein<sup>6</sup>, I came to view understanding not as a psychological event, nor as mystical, unfathomable experience, but in the practical sense of being able to proceed in a way that is socially competent. What impressed me about the work of Wittgenstein was his ability to demystify what until then had been dealt with in terms of private mental experience. Take for instance his discussion of private experiences of colour or pain (Wittgenstein, 1968). Wittgenstein's great leap forward was to point out that if such things were talked about in the same way, then they were treated as being the same for all practical purposes (see Wittgenstein, 1968, p. 31-32). Wittgenstein thus brought the understanding of understanding out from the private, the mystical, the inscrutable and into the public domain of social interaction.

This was not of course to deny that people did have private experiences: it meant, however, that such experiences could be talked about, relied upon and understood in everyday social settings. Wittgenstein's work thus placed the notion of understanding firmly within the domain of social practice.

As Malcolm observes, talking about understanding as something internal, something that happens in the brain, is a bad habit that has accompanied much of what passes as analysis of mind (Malcolm, 1989, p. 187):

Philosophers have got into the bad habit of referring to the instantiations of all psychological concepts as 'mental states'. Thus, thoughts, sensations, emotions, beliefs, intentions - even physical pains - are called 'mental states'. Our actual use of the expression 'mental state' is much narrower than that. A prolonged depression is called a mental state; but certainly not the pain of a twisted ankle; or the thought that it will probably rain this afternoon; or the intention to order seats for the opera.

Following this argument, the notion that understanding is something that goes on in the brain, is but another example of this malaise or confusion. Certainly, in this sense, Identity theories, that mental states are but neurophysical activities of the brain, mystify understanding by overlooking its social interactive nature<sup>7</sup>. Understanding, according to Wittgenstein, should be attended to in terms of its place in everyday human affairs. As Malcolm, (1989, p. 188) quotes:

When we do philosophy we are like savages, primitive people, who hear the expressions of civilised men, misinterpret them, and then draw the queerest conclusions from their interpretations (PI 194)

Guided by Wittgenstein's work, I began to tackle the issue of how a manager understands his work as he works<sup>8</sup>. Both Wittgenstein and the ethnomethodologists (and hybrids such as Coulter) approached the notion of understanding in terms of social practice. The ethnomethodological corpus in particular pointed the way to an examination of understanding within social settings. One of the guiding principles of such investigations was the notion that people understand social settings and the activities therein for all practical purposes. The ethnomethodological understanding of understanding, then, tended to be bound to the practical concerns of

doing whatever activity was being studied. In subscribing to the social interactive nature of understanding, ethnomethodological analysis focused upon the nature of understanding in particular social settings. As Coulter states (1979. p. 39):

The criteria for understanding, for having understood, cannot be private, inner mental or experiential states or processes, but must be scenic; if theorists try to contemplate the 'meaning' or fix a 'referent' for the word 'understanding' out of contexts instead of trying to examine it, along with other participles, as a tool or signalling device in avowals and ascriptions in common-sense discourse, they will tend to conjure up quite inappropriate and metaphysical positions about it; it will appear esoteric if disengaged from its conventional tolerances for use in public communication.

*In the world of civilised men:*

Schutz's related ideas of the natural attitude, and the reciprocity of perspectives, made lasting contributions to the analysis of understanding in everyday life (see Schutz, 1967). In the natural attitude actors assume that the world is how it appears to be: the understanding of what one sees or what one hears, then, are only attended to in settings of perceived ambiguity (or in a willful suspension of the natural attitude, as in some sociological and philosophical writings). Within the natural attitude one's own understanding of social settings is not a concern, and it is not consciously orientated to except in times of ambiguity or suspension of the natural attitude. Likewise, following Schutz's reciprocity of perspectives thesis, others' understandings of those same settings and of one's own actions are not perceived to be problematic (although, of course, others' understanding can furnish the practical concerns of activities such as teaching, misleading or managing). As Schutz and Luckmann (1973, p. 3-4) point out:

The sciences that would interpret and explain human action and thought must begin with a description of the foundational structures of what is prescientific, the reality which seems self-evident to men remaining within the natural attitude. This reality is the everyday life world. It is the province of reality in which man can engage himself and which he can change while he operates in it by means of his animate organism. At the same time, the objectivities and events which are already found in this realm (including the acts and results of actions of other men) limit his free possibilities of action. They place him up against obstacles that can be surmounted, as well as barriers that are insurmountable. Furthermore, only within this

realm can one be understood by his fellow-men, and only in it can he work together with them. Only in the world of everyday life can a common, communicative surrounding world be constituted. The world of everyday life is consequently man's fundamental and paramount reality. By the everyday life-world is to be understood that province of reality which the wide-awake and normal adult simply takes for granted in the attitude of common sense. By this taken-for-grantedness, we designate everything which we experience as unquestionable; every state of affairs is for us unproblematic until further notice. The circumstance that what has up until now been taken for granted can be brought into question, is a point with which, of course, we still have to deal.

Garfinkel's (1967) demonstrations were designed to put a spanner in the workings of the natural attitude and the reciprocity of perspectives in order to examine the nature of what was assumed, what was left implicit. Doing so, Garfinkel found that unconventional activities in certain settings were understood in terms of the conventions, or rules, or norms that prevailed within those settings, even when they constituted a departure from the conventional definition of the setting. Unconventional activities such as taking the king in chess, for instance, were understood in terms of breaking the rules, or as a symptom of ignorance about the rules of the game. We can appreciate then that misunderstandings or redefinitions of social settings become salient features of those settings for the very reasons that they are accountably misunderstandings, or redefinitions. Understanding is a social practice. Should one fail to understand with propriety, then one's actions become salient and are understood in a way that keeps the notion of the reciprocity of perspectives intact.

Common sense knowledge - the ability to understand in a particular way - is relied upon in social interactions. The ability competently to understand, and act within a setting in terms of such knowledge is simply taken for granted except at times when conceptual lacunae become a salient feature of the setting, or when the natural attitude is suspended, or used (as in lying, or telling a joke). As Coulter (1979, pp. 21-22) explained:

The aspects of what can be called 'common sense' which interest the ethnomethodologist are those which enable anyone possessing it to perform their ordinary activities in ways that are recognizably appropriate, rational, intelligible, proper, correct or reasonable for all practical purposes. Members possessing common-sense knowledge possess the means whereby they can behave in orderly ways; since a part of that 'knowledge' is non-propositional and

unformulated for them, we can speak of it as 'practical knowledge' - expressible in terms such as 'knowing how to . . .' in contrast to 'knowing that . . .' Ethnomethodologists studying the reasoned structures of ordinary activities seek to reveal, or explicate, in propositional form, much of the presupposed or tacit reasoning informing their orderly production. Thus, common-sense amounts to a set of culturally-furnished abilities. Such abilities constitute the doing of any mundane activity, such as transmitting information in various contexts, recommending something to someone, persuading someone about something, enumerating, grading, complaining, insulting, warning, apologising, thanking, promising, ascribing statuses and countless other practical actions. To say of someone that he is able to do such things means that he knows how to do them, and this practical knowledge forms the central core of what is here being described as 'common sense knowledge of social structures'.

Knowing then is also a social activity. One may think that one knows something, and later find out that the knowledge was wrong. In an analogous way, one may be convinced that one has made an original contribution to knowledge only to find that what one knew to be new, and knew to be true was neither new, nor true. Knowledge then is on a par with rules and norms (as explored by Garfinkel) in the sense that it may be relied upon, discussed, socially sustained, or changed. Rules, norms, and knowledge, therefore, are not determinative of behaviour in any causal way, but are relied upon, invoked and used in everyday social settings. In this thesis, then, I treat rules, knowledge, knowing and understanding in terms of their place in human affairs. Whereas rules, norms and understanding have historically been treated as as a hidden hand acting upon (or within) individuals, I treat them in terms of their place in social interaction.

Dealing with rules, knowledge and understanding in this way enables us to approach the reality of the social world as people understand it. People are not blind to rules, but can attend to them, discuss them, break them, or reassert them. People are able to consider their understanding, assess the nature of it, and compare it with others'. (Even children are able to discuss the quality of their understanding). People can, as it were, take one step back from the rules, norms, knowledge, and understandings that have historically been characterised in terms of internalisation, constraint and determination of behaviour. It is thus ingenuous to talk either in terms of an internalisation of norms, or in terms of collective programming of mind.

*The primacy of meaningful action:*

Ethnomethodological studies treat understanding in terms of its place in social interaction. In dealing with what is accountable, this approach deals with what is understood for all practical purposes. The strength of this approach, and part of the reason it has not disappeared into the history of sociology, is that it examines everyday social activities in the same terms as they are understood by those doing them. Good ethnomethodological description documents what people understand and act upon in particular social settings.

The implicit ethnomethodological maxim to treat manifest action as accountable action is theoretically sound, and analytically useful. This characterisation of action (and it is a characterisation) encourages a rigour in ethnomethodological studies, in the sense that descriptive practice is grounded in people's understandings of the practical concerns of acting within particular settings.

Ethnomethodological studies to date, however, have tended to overlook those aspects of human experience that are not accountably understood and acted upon in terms of the social setting. Within the ethnomethodological corpus, this focus upon the accountable, the public, has meant that the unaccountable tends either to be left out of the analysis altogether, or treated only in terms of the meaningful activities within the setting: understanding is generally dealt with wholly in terms of the practical concerns of acting within particular social settings.

There are drawbacks to this:

1) In treating understanding wholly in terms of the practical concerns of acting within a particular setting, such an approach portrays the person as being wholly engaged within it. This is misleading. We are all able to smile while feeling angry, or to think of home while getting on with the business of the day. Ethnomethodology to date has overlooked the experience of acting.

2) In overlooking the unsaid experiences and feelings that inform and influence how a person acts within a social setting, this approach runs the

risk of ignoring an important constitutive element of social settings. As people, we can all appreciate that what we do is coloured by feelings, understandings and experiences. We may have to hide our boredom, suppress our frustration, bite our tongues. Feelings like these constitute the experience of work, and have an unsaid, unaccountable but undeniably important influence on the way managerial work is done.

It may be said here that consciousness, experience and emotions are psychological or even physiological phenomena, that are beyond the brief of sociology. Coulter counters this view by bringing Wittgenstein's ideas to bear upon those most physiological of mental states, emotions (1979, p 138):

People normally have to deal with more complex emotions than fear, elation and other forms of affect which do not require any linguistic capacity on the part of those who manifest them: human emotions include a large range whose objects are 'abstract'. Characteristically, even those emotions warrantably ascribable to non-linguistic creatures are tied, in their human displays, to conceptually-constituted abstract phenomena, although humans can react with fear or elation directly in a way that is unmediated by linguistic constitution. Those emotions constituted by the orientation of the person to a conception of an event or situation can be transformed by alterations in the conception of the event or situation. Thus Henslin has illustrated some of the ways in which the emotions of guilt, reconstituted by four different orientations to the suicide of a relative or a close friend can be 'naturalised' by adopting changed conceptions of the suicided person, the nature of the suicide itself, and/or the factors thought to 'explain' the suicide. Henslin's is one of the only genuinely sociological approaches to the study of affect and its transformation available in the human sciences, and is itself admittedly a first approximation. We are becoming more prepared to investigate affect independent of psychobiological speculations, but its social construction and organisation remains largely unanalyzed.

Coulter, thus, examines such phenomena as affect, fear and frustration, and, through attention to their conceptual status in everyday life, places them within the social world of human affairs.

Once we define such conditions or states as social, is it right that we should treat them as having no place in our analyses of social activities? Like it or not, we not only live in a world of practical activities such as securing responsibilities, satisficing, and making decisions. We live in a world of experience, amusement, motives, and desire. Such things are no different to



external states in the sense that they enable us to understand the world and ourselves in such terms.

If we look at cross-national managerial work in terms of doing the work, we can see - as the managers do - that experience is not some private residue of the work, but is constitutive of it in the sense that it influences how they go about doing it. In setting up meetings, deciding whether to phone somebody up or to send a memorandum instead; in deciding whether to sit next to somebody in the canteen; in talking about colleagues; in making decisions about placements and promotion; in deciding whether to give somebody a ten minute or a twenty minute slot; in deciding whether to keep a meeting short; in forming teams and alliances; in doing all of these things, managers' experience of work plays an important part in how they do it (or whether they do it at all). Managers' experience of their work, then, should be treated with care, but not ignored, for it is constitutive of such work in the sense that it influences how (or whether) they go about doing it.

Examining manifest action in a way that treats everything within the organisational setting as accountable in terms of that setting, carries with it advantages and disadvantages. One disadvantage is that we run the risk of dehumanising the setting. Those doing the work tend to be defined in terms of the setting, and thus emerge as faceless residues of the action. People are not faceless residues. People do things. People do things in all sorts of different ways, depending upon the practical concerns of doing what they are doing, but also upon their frustrations, their feelings, and their experiences. An appreciation of managers' experience of their work can thus be seen as a corrective for the ethnomethodologist, whose indifference to the unsaid (to date) means that he may say nothing about the frustration, the boredom, and the uncertainty which constitute managers' experience of their work, and influence how they go about doing it.

### *Conclusion:*

I will end this chapter by restating two of the ideas that have guided me throughout my research. Firstly, people do things in terms of their understanding of particular social settings. Following on from this, if we wish to understand what people do in such settings, it makes sense to consider how they understand what they are doing, for it is in these terms

that they act. These ideas, of course, are not new. They have had a long, turbulent history from Weber's work on understanding (Weber, 1949), through to contemporary debates within ethnomethodology (see Sharrock and Button, 1991, 170-171).

Such ideas hold significant implications for the study of such activities as cross-national managerial work:

If we are concerned to understand such activities, it makes good sense to examine them in the same terms as the managers themselves do, for it is in such terms that the managers work. In order to do this one has to spend a good deal of time among working managers. There are no short cuts in learning how to understand such work. The process is long, drawn out and frustrating. Such fieldwork, however, is well worth doing, for in acculturating into the world of work as it is understood, and done, by the managers, we learn things about their work that tend to be overlooked or ignored by other modes of enquiry.

Take, for instance, the impact of cultural differences within multinational organisations. As is well known, managers who work abroad have to work in the face of cultural differences, and this has costly implications for the running of multinational businesses (see Mendenhall et. al., 1987). In investigating this phenomenon, social research to date has tended to apply theories of culture to the study of culture. A cultural template is held up against the social reality of multinational organisations, revealing culture in one its many guises. Such an approach is defensible, however it may not reflect cultural difference as it is understood and acted upon in the managers' everyday work. If we wish to understand how cultural differences cause managers problems in their work it thus makes sense - at least for the purposes of beginning an enquiry - to put aside our cultural templates and examine how managers understand cultural differences as they work, for it is in such terms that they experience and act upon such differences.

How then do we approach managers' understanding of cultural differences in their work? As the fieldwork progressed, an interest in this question lead me to observe that there is more to understanding in social settings than understanding in terms of the practical concerns of acting. To date,

ethnomethodologists have dealt with understanding in terms of the practical purposes of acting within particular social settings. In so doing, they have tended to portray people's consciousness wholly in terms of what is done within such settings, and have thus left the experiential aspect of working unaddressed. In everyday life, things like feelings, emotions and experiences are discussed and understood in a way that cause no conceptual panic or soul-searching. Ethnomethodologists to date, however, have tended not to use such concepts in their analyses of action. In certain cases, it is true, emotions have been explored in terms of their constitution in terms of particular settings, but, to date, they have not been used to explore action within social settings<sup>9</sup>.

Such things as feelings and experiences are not private mental events. Nor are they mystical entities whose nature precludes description. (Wittgenstein, 1968). Accepting this enables us to examine cross-national managerial work in a way that reflects more closely how those doing the work understand it. Managers' understanding of their work is not restricted to the practicalities of getting things done. They also understand work settings in terms of their feelings, and their experience of the work. Such experiences can have a great deal to do with how they go about managing. If we are to understand the impact of cultural differences in cross-national managerial work, such features of the social world as feelings and experience should have a place in our descriptive repertoire, for, as I shall discuss, managers' experience of cultural differences in their work has a great deal to do with how they go about working, both within and beyond cross-national settings.

## NOTES:

1. As I shall discuss further in Chapter 3, there has recently been some work on cross-national managerial action, (see Yamada, 1989, 1990 for instance). Such work, however, has been carried out using a conversation analytic (C.A.) approach that has concentrated more on turn distribution and pauses than on the nature of the work as it understood by those doing it.
2. For an incisive discussion of this aspect of managerial action, see Whitley (1989).
3. This distinction between said action and unstated experience is not just an analytical characterisation, but was used and discussed by the managers themselves.
4. What I mean by the social construction of other national groups, is best clarified with a quote from Best (1989, p. vii-xiii):

From . . . a strict constructionist perspective, the sociologist does not compete with members as an arbiter of true and accurate knowledge. Instead, the theoretical task is to study how members define, judge, and press claims; how they publicise their concerns, redefine the issues in question in the face of political obstacles, indifference, or opposition; how they enter into alliances with other claims-makers; and the myriad other activities that constitute subject matter for the study of social problems.

5. In sociological texts, the concept of validity is often used interchangeably within other concepts such as relevance and truth. As such, the notion of validity often differs markedly from the notion as it is used to characterise philosophical arguments. For an incisive and entertaining discussion of validity in philosophical arguments, see Flew (1975). As Flew states (p. 9):

The first thing to get straight about thinking is the difference between questions about validity and questions about truth. But in getting this straight we shall find that we are also sorting out every other really fundamental notion. For the indispensable notions are all connected. We cannot fully master any one without getting the same grasp upon the lot. Once the essential preparation is complete, we may proceed to the main business of the book. That business is to consider examples of thinking, usually of bad thinking, in order to learn how to do the job better. Here and now we have first to clean and tidy the tools.

The reason to begin precisely where we are beginning is that thinking about thinking is concerned, at least in the first instance, with the validity or invalidity of arguments, rather than the truth or falsity of propositions. What is true or false, is propositions. What is valid, or invalid, is arguments. These notions, and these distinctions, are absolutely basic. To say that an argument is true is as uncomprehending, or as inept, as to say that someone played scrum half in a soccer match or scored a lot of tries at cricket.

Accepting Flew's characterisation of validity, Hammersley's discussion of validity in ethnographic research seems to suffer from the confusions that Flew attempted to sort out. As Hammersley states (1992, p. 69):

In conceptualising validity, I adopt a position of what might be called subtle (as opposed to naive) realism . . . I use 'validity' as a synonym for what seems to have become a taboo word for many social scientists: 'truth'. An account is valid or true if it represent accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain or theorise. Assumed here, then, is a correspondence theory of truth, but the correspondence involves selective representations rather than reproduction of reality. Furthermore, I recognise that we can never know with certainty whether (or the extent to which) an account is true; for the obvious reason that we have no independent, immediate and utterly reliable access to reality. Given that this is the situation, we must judge the validity of claims on the basis of the adequacy of the evidence offered in support of them.

Certainly, then, there appears to be a stark gulf between philosophical and sociological notions of validity. This need not worry us, in that the practical concerns of doing philosophy, and the practical concerns of doing ethnography differ markedly. For instance, philosophers are concerned with Formal Validity, which characterises the status or justification of inference from premises and conclusions alone. Such preoccupations do not concern the ethnographer, who is in the business of exploring and documenting the meaningful social world of particular groups or collectivities of people. Hammersley's discussion of validity may seem sloppy by the standards of philosophical analysis, but the ethnographer is not accountable to these standards, for his inference is not from premises and conclusions. Rather, the ethnographer is accountable to the standards, values, norms and activities of the social group he is exploring. Of course, those within such groups may not possess knowledge of the place of their activities within wider social dynamics and wider social structures, because they may not

need to know about such things in their everyday affairs. The ethnographer then, may document the wider socioeconomic context within which a group operates in order to explain certain social activities and social institutions. However, good ethnography must start with an exploration of the way those in the group understand what they are doing.

When used in discussing ethnographic work, the notion of validity thus differs markedly from the concept of validity as it is used in analytical philosophy. It is broader in scope, and can (in some cases) overlap in applicability with other concepts such as truth and propriety. The reason for this rests on the interrelationship in ethnography between theoretical preconceptions, methodology and findings. Assessment of the truth of claims documented in ethnographic work, involves more than an examination of the logical developments from premises to conclusions; it involves wider questions concerning the epistemological status of theory, methodology and findings, as well as how well the research was done under certain circumstances, how reliable the researcher's interpretations of events were in the working up of the research findings, and how sensible it was to pursue certain issues rather than others. In assessing the activity of ethnographic research, then, we do need some concept that we can use to assess the epistemological worth of this interrelationship between research activities and research findings. The concept of truth may be useful in assessing research findings, but the truthfulness of otherwise of such findings rest upon the success, propriety and validity of the methods and activities through which they were worked up.

6. I refer mainly to Wittgenstein, 1967, 1968 and 1974.

7. For a useful discussion of Identity Theory, see Moya, 1990, p. 74-75.

8. Throughout this thesis I use the subjective pronoun 'he', the objective pronoun 'him' and the genitive determiner 'his' regardless of gender. I do this purely for stylistic reasons, and for the reader's sake: the constant use of s/he, he/ she, and him/her in a text as long as this is both tiresome and ugly. Furthermore, I have decided not to employ the popular alternative strategy of using only plural pronouns and genitive determiners, as this hinders the effective characterisation of individual cases. I hope my decision to write in this way causes no offence. Indeed, for aesthetic reasons I would

be pleased to see onus on using he/she, his/her disappear altogether. Writers should be free to use whichever pronouns they choose, whether these be masculine or feminine.

9. Much of the best sociological work on the nature of emotions and experience has been approached from a social constructionist perspective. See, in particular, Kippax and al. (1988), Shotter (1984) and Averill (1980). In characterising emotions in terms of their constituted place within everyday social settings, however, they tend to portray emotions as social residues. They thus overlook how such emotions and experiences can influence how people go about acting within (and thus constituting) such settings.

## CHAPTER TWO:

### THE DEBATE ABOUT CULTURE:

#### *Introduction:*

For obvious reasons, the study of cross-national managerial work invites an investigation into the nature of national cultural difference; the reasons being, of course, that cross-national managers frequently run into difficult and costly cultural problems. Both in the literature and among managers, cross-national managerial work is deemed to be more difficult than working among compatriots, because it involves dealing with national cultural differences (see Joynt and Warner, 1985). It is this cross-cultural aspect of cross-national managerial work that I explore in the bulk of the thesis.

One of the more difficult and troublesome issues I encountered in my investigations was the question of the nature of culture. Indeed, the debate about the nature of culture constitutes a lively field in itself. Reading through the literature, it becomes apparent that culture can be characterised in terms of different theoretical perspectives, and that there is no shortage of perspectives from which one can characterise culture, whether Marxian, positivistic, functionalist, ethnomethodological or post-modernist (see Linstead and Grafton-Small, 1992). In this chapter I give a brief overview of the relevant areas of this field, and show how certain writers have taken us to a point whence we can depart from the cut and thrust of conjectural debate about the nature of culture, and pursue the study of national cultural difference in terms of managing in a foreign country.

#### *The importance of Hofstede's research:*

The notion that the research was to be about cross-cultural managerial work developed at an early stage in the research project. I thus set about reading through the existing literature in those fields related to the impact of cultural difference within multinational organisations. As I worked my way through countless articles and books, I was soon impressed by the enormous impact Hofstede's work (1980) had made on research into comparative and multinational management:



As is often cited, Hofstede analysed the questionnaire responses of 72,215 I.B.M. employees from 40 countries (Hofstede, 1980, p.411). In the questionnaires he asked employees about their work, their organisation, and their relationships with superiors and subordinates. The contributions to knowledge within the book came in the form of statistical analyses of these questionnaire responses. Pulling together certain key questions, Hofstede constructed four dimensions of culture: power distance; individualism; masculinity and uncertainty avoidance. Analyses of the responses to these questionnaires suggested that there were varying cultural profiles between national collectivities along these four dimensions. For instance, consider the following figures (Hofstede, 1980, p. 315):

	U.K.	France	F.D.R.
Power Distance	35	68	35
Uncertainty Avoidance	35	86	65
Individualism	89	71	67
Masculinity	66	43	66

My studies of Hofstede's work, and of the work of other cultural empiricists such as Laurent (1983), Ronen (1986) and Gudykunst (1987), were carried out during a time in which I became interested in the potential of an ethnomethodological approach to the analysis of cultural differences in human affairs. As I read through the ethnomethodological corpus (especially, Cicourel, 1964), Hofstede's empirical techniques, and the assumptions upon which they were based became as interesting as his findings.

I soon became uneasy about the uncritical acceptance of Hofstede's findings in further studies of national cultural difference (see in particular, Ronen, 1986). This unease grew as I examined how Hofstede had implemented his techniques, and worked up his research findings:

Guided by my ethnomethodological concerns, I came to view Hofstede's national cultural profiles as complex accomplishments, worked up through such activities as, formulating the questions, defining the dimensions of culture, and bringing a particular model of culture to bear upon the generation and analysis of questionnaire data.

As I examined how the national cultural profiles had been worked up, I became convinced that Hofstede's techniques were largely inappropriate to the study of culture. Certainly, I discovered serious theoretical inconsistencies within his approach. Moreover (and more importantly), through the analysis of Hofstede's approach, I came to realise that a positivistic approach to the analysis of culture runs into serious problems at the level of data collection<sup>1</sup>.

In the next section, then, I discuss what I learnt about the analysis of culture through paying close attention to Hofstede's techniques.

*The problem with cultural empiricism:*

The propriety (or otherwise) of a particular analysis of culture depends upon what one understands about the nature of culture. Hofstede leaves us in no doubt about what he understands about the nature of culture. His definition is as follows (Hofstede, 1991, p. 5):

It is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category from another.

Hofstede defines culture in terms of an objectivist theoretical standpoint (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979, pp. 160-164). Certainly, the programming analogy implies a hard form of determinism. As such, his conception of mind and culture ensures - prima facie - a coherence and integrity to his work. Culture is a collective programming of the mind. There are thus collective patches of minds that have been collectively programmed. If this is so then what better way to look at culture than through positivistic questionnaire techniques?

Initially, Hofstede's work looked unassailable from within his objectivist paradigm. However, as I read through the ethnomethodological corpus, the internal inconsistencies within Hofstede's work became obvious:

For each country in the I.B.M. survey, Hofstede assigned scores to the four dimensions of culture on the strength of replies written down to certain key

questions. Take Power Distance as an example. Hofstede (1980, p. 99) defines Power Distance in the following way:

The power distance between a boss B and a subordinate S in a hierarchy is the difference between the extent to which B can determine the behaviour of S and the extent to which S can determine the behavior of B.

Hofstede then is in the business of determining the relationship between boss and subordinate in particular national cultures. In particular he is endeavouring to ascertain differences between the boss's ability to determine the behaviour of a subordinate, and the subordinate's ability to determine the behaviour of his boss.

Having worked in organisations, and researched into managerial work I have often been struck by the complexity of such social arrangements as the boss-subordinate relationship. For instance, the social interaction between boss and subordinate involves such practices as informing, checking, concealing information, making a good impression, delegating, phoning, promising, acting as boss, acting as subordinate, voicing one's opinion and, above all, getting on with the job at hand. Such are some of the practices that constitute and sustain the relationship between boss and subordinate<sup>2</sup>. Were I then to come to what I would consider an adequate or rigorous analysis - or characterisation - of the boss-subordinate relationship, I should hope to do field work, interviews, in-depth questionnaires, perhaps. Such is the nature of good social research.

If we return to Hofstede's work on Power Distance, we find that his formulation of the Power Distance Index relies upon answers given by individual employees within I.B.M. to three 'related' questions (Hofstede, 1980, p. 92):

It can be expressed in a Power Distance Index (PDI) which is derived from country mean scores on three questions in the . . . survey. These questions deal with perceptions of the superior's style of decision making and of colleagues' fear to disagree with superiors, and with the type of decision-making which subordinates prefer in their boss.

Likewise, in his formulation of the other three dimensions of culture, Hofstede relies upon a handful of questions. My objection to his thesis is not

that the power distance index of a country is set loose into a plethora of statistical manipulations when it is based upon three questions, though that might worry me. My objection is that Hofstede's objectivist coherence breaks down at the questionnaire paper, and it is the questionnaire paper that generates every one of the figures that is bandied around in his book.

The power relationship between boss and subordinate is carried out in a way that is orderly, complex, and knowledgeable. The relationship is social and interactive, and as such I suggest that it should be assessed in a way that takes stock of the social, interactive nature of the the relationship. An assessment of power in such a relationship, for instance, would look at the nature of power within such a relationship. From my own experience of managerial work I know that to do this is no easy task: the endeavour could (and should) become bogged down with analytical and methodological issues. For example, What do we mean by power in a boss-subordinate relationship? Do we use power in a way that is understood by the boss and subordinate(s)? What constitute manifestations of power? And so on . . .

Such questions are important. I am sure that Hofstede would agree that any researcher worth his salt would do well to tackle these questions, which indeed ramify into a plethora of further philosophical and methodological issues. Such is the lot of the social researcher. Whether three questions in and of themselves do justice even to a simplistic transcendent model of power within the boss-subordinate relationship will not be pursued here. I will, however, pursue the notion that Hofstede's objectivist research relies entirely upon disparate common-sense notions at the point of generation of data. The question I wish to raise then is one of theoretical coherence.

Each one of the respondents answered the following three questions, the mean score of which then went on to constitute a country's Power Distance Index:

As Hofstede himself states (Hofstede, 1980, p. 102-103):

A Power Distance Index for each of the 40 countries has now been computed on the basis of the country mean scores for three questions:

(a) Nonmanagerial employees' perception that employees are afraid to disagree with

their managers (B46).

- (b) Subordinates' perception that their boss tends to take decisions in an autocratic (1) or persuasive/ paternalistic (2) way (A55)
- (c) Subordinates' preference for anything but a consultative (3) style of decision-making in their boss: that is, for an autocratic (1) a persuasive/ paternalistic (2) or a democratic (4) style (A54)

Specifically, the questions each respondent answers are the following:

Question B46 (Hofstede, 1980, p 408):

B. 46 How frequently, in your experience, do the following problems occur?

	V. Freq.	Freq.	Sometimes	Seldom	V.Seldom
B.46. Employees being afraid to express disagreement with their managers?	1	2	3	4	5

Questions A55/55 (Hofstede, 1980, p. 406):

The descriptions below apply to four different types of managers. First, please read through these descriptions:

Manager 1 Usually makes his/ her decisions promptly and communicates them to his her subordinates clearly and firmly. Expects them to carry out the decisions loyally and without raising difficulties.

Manager 2. Usually makes his/ her decision promptly, but before going ahead, tries to explain them fully to his her subordinates. Gives them reasons for the decisions and answers whatever questions they may have.

Manager 3 Usually consults with his/ her subordinates before he/ she reaches his/ her decision. He/ she then expects all to work loyally to implement it whether or not it is in accordance with the advice they gave.

Manager 4 Usually calls a meeting of his/ her subordinates when there is an important decision to be made. Puts the problem before the group and invites discussion. Accepts the minority viewpoint as the decision.

Usually calls a meeting of his/ her subordinates when there is an important decision so to be made. Puts the problem before the group and tries to obtain consensus. If he/ she obtains consensus, he/ she accepts this as the decision. If consensus is impossible, he/she usually makes the decision his/ herself.

A54 Now for the above type of manager, please mark the one which you would prefer to work under.

1. Manager 1
2. Manager 2.
3. Manager 3.
4. Manager 4.

A55 And to which one of the above four managers would you say your own manager most closely corresponds?

1. Manager 1
2. Manager 2
3. Manager 3
4. Manager 4
5. He does not correspond closely to any of them.

Individual respondents answer each of the three questions, producing as data three numbers for statistical analysis. This accomplished, the numbers are for all practical purposes treated as objective entities for statistical manipulation. As I understand it, such numbers are treated as having a relationship of sorts with a programming of mind which - as we have seen - is shared in common, thus defining, and being defined by the respective national collectivity in the form of national culture. There is then an implicit objectivism that permeates not only the statistical cross-tabulations, the definition of the research, and the definition of mind and culture; but also an objectivism that treats as unproblematic the notion that an individual's contingent, practical response on a piece of paper is somehow

related to his national culture, the collective programming of mind which guides his hand.

The activity of ringing a number is analytically interesting. Each individual respondent works within his part of the organisation. Each has a boss of sorts. Some may have the same boss, but will have different working relationships with him. Each comes to the questionnaire with different experiences (of sorts), backgrounds (of sorts), bosses (of sorts), relationships with their bosses, preferences, plans and so on. Each acts and works within a particular work environment. As I have mentioned, such work is complex, and requires careful and rigorous analysis. To treat employees' responses as having an unproblematic relationship with a collective programming of mind is one thing: to base one's objectivist statistical manipulations upon the contingent social practice of individual respondents is another.

Hofstede's work is based upon the social practices of drawing correspondences and airing opinions and preferences. Although each set of three numbers that go to make up a country's Power Distance Index are the result of contingent, local, distinct social practices, they are treated as incontinent, unseparate, undistinct. Each response is given equal weight.

For expository purposes, the practice of answering the questions can be characterised in the following way:

- 1) interpreting the question;
- 2) interpreting one's organisation.
- 3) writing the response.

In Hofstede's work, an implicit link is made between one's collective programming of mind (the national culture) and one's questionnaire practice. If the link is uncertain, then the descriptive worth of numbers generated through questionnaire responses must be put in doubt. One's collective programming of mind (one's culture) then determines,

- 1) how one interprets the question;
- 2) how one's organisation 'is';
- 3) how one interprets one's organisation; and,
- 4) how one answers the questionnaire.

A very strong form of determinism is needed to sustain theoretical and descriptive coherence here. If the collective programming of mind determines how one interprets the question, how one interprets one's organisation and how one fills in the questionnaire, then how do we account for different answers (from 1 to 5)? The determinist response must be that this is so because they are each interpreting different organisations, and different boss-subordinate relationships. If this is so then what epistemological status do we assign the mean of such individual scores? Even within the objectivist paradigm such research practices becomes problematic: if we are dealing with individual employees, each interpreting different boss-subordinate relationships, what epistemological gain is there in aggregating all these different interpretive practices even if these practices are somehow determined by the collective programming of mind? To take Hofstede's objectivism to the point of theoretical and analytical coherence is to apply it at the level of data generation. When we apply it here, the determinism retreats to the notion that people in different work situations interpret these situations differently, but in a way that has some link with the collective programming of mind. The collective programming of mind then takes on the role of making people do different things in different situations. That this is so begs the question, if the collective programming of mind is indexically determinative, what gain is there in aggregating?

I have discussed Hofstede's work in order to examine the internal inconsistencies within a positivistic approach to national culture and cultural differences within multinational organisations. Hofstede's work (including his subsequent work), has invariably been grand in design, meticulous in its attention to detail and, within the bounds of empirical social scientific research, rigorous in the execution of its objectives. If we look at established knowledge as a social process, we can appreciate Hofstede's enormous contribution to the debate about comparative and multinational management. It is on the shoulders of the great and good that lesser mortals are able to proceed. Without Hofstede's work, my research would have taken a different turn, if it had been pursued at all.



*Moving on from cultural empiricism:*

Much of the literature about the impact of culture within international organisations, and international management, attempts quantitatively to characterise various national cultures. As I have stressed, Hofstede's work has been enormously influential in the field of international management, and his dimensions of culture are frequently cited in the literature to characterise specific national cultures.

If one wishes to explore the field further, Ronen's (1986) book is a comprehensive and useful catalogue of this kind of empirical research into national cultures and national cultural differences. In this work Ronen claims that the use of national units is logical and methodologically sound, because national boundaries delineate the legal, political and social environments within which organisations and workers function. From this premise (and it is a bold one) he approaches national cultural difference in a similar way to Hofstede. Dimensions of culture are measured through questionnaire techniques and the figures generated are put through a series of statistical manipulations resulting in clusters of national cultural similarity and difference.

Hofstede and Ronen are among the most influential writers to use large scale questionnaire-driven, statistical approaches in the study of national cultural differences. From such evidence as this (within the terms of this kind of research), there do appear to be significant differences in national work cultures, even within the same multinational organisations (Hofstede, 1991, Laurent, 1986, p. 95).

As I have pointed out, there are problems with this approach to the study of culture. Nevertheless, even the most sceptical observer of managerial work in different countries would be hard-pressed to deny that there are variations, indeed differences, in the way managers understand and do their work in different countries. Such research findings, then, do seem to reflect the experience of managers who work in cross-national situations, in as far as managers certainly encounter, and have to deal with, national cultural differences.

I suggest, however, that we should now move on from such empirical studies, to examine how cultural differences are encountered, understood and dealt with by working managers. Certainly, such an approach has the potential to be more useful to managers and management trainers than the measurement of static dimensions of culture, for it enables us to explore how cultural problems develop in multinational companies.

*Culture as the context for communication:*

Moving on from the work of the cultural empiricists, I encountered a plethora of different approaches to culture and cultural differences. Hall (1974), for instance, proposed a more dynamic approach to culture, by viewing it in terms of the context for communication. According to Hall, sociocultural systems vary in the importance they place upon context in communication. He thus distinguished between high context, and low context, communication (Hall 1974, p, 79):

A high-context (HC) communication or message is one in which most of the information is either in the physical context or internalised in the person, while very little is in the coded, explicit transmitted part of the message. A low context (LC) message is just the opposite, i.e. the mass of the message is vested in the explicit code.

According to Hall (op. cit),

high context communication is a long-lived cohesive force that is slow to change and, therefore, unifies the sociocultural system; low context communication however does not unify the sociocultural system. Both low and high context messages are used in every sociocultural system, but in each system one tends to predominate.

Such claims, if borne out, have obvious implications for the doing of cross-national managerial work. Managerial work is an interactive practice which relies a great deal on what is taken for granted. Should such context be treated differently by managers of different cultures, then cross-national managerial work will involve more difficulties and frustrations than managerial work among compatriots.

The characterisation of culture as the context for communication certainly makes sense theoretically. However, this kind of work does overlook the

practice of communicating as it is done in real life situations: the interdependence between culture and 'communication' is thus asserted without addressing the practice of communicating. Culture, then, is characterised as a kind of template against which 'communication' casts its meaning in relief. Certainly, such a characterisation is more sophisticated than that of culture as a thing to be measured, however to assert that culture furnishes the meaning of communication, without going on to investigate what communicating involves as a practice means that the relationship between culture and such practices is left uncertain. Culture may well have a great deal to do with the way communicative practice is understood and done. We would do well to move on from theorising about this relationship, to investigating it.

*Culture and cognition: social psychological approaches:*

Cross-national managerial work involves work interaction between people of different nationalities. How people of another nationality are perceived, and how this perception influences the tendency for groups to form along national lines has obvious implications for the doing, and studying, of such work. There has been a good deal of social psychological work done which characterises culture in terms of cognitive structures. According to writers such as Triandis (1964) the common possession of social categories enables people to communicate effectively with each other. As Oddou and Mendenhall (1984, p. 78) state:

Part of the perceptual process is concerned with the cognitive 'perspective' of an individual. How an individual categorizes perceptual information and what one's categories are certainly influences one's perceptions. Perceptual categorization is perhaps one of the most fruitful components of understanding cognitive similarity between cultures and relating it to cultural attribution and adjustment.

The role of social categories in intercultural social dynamics is of obvious interest to the study of cross-cultural interaction. If, and how, social categorisation gets bound up with the ascription of different cultural characteristics to different nationalities is certainly an important question in the study of cross-cultural managerial interaction. Tajfel is one of the more influential writers to have addressed the question of the role of social

categorisation in group formation and intergroup definition. Social categorisation is defined by Tajfel (1978, p. 61) in terms of:

the ordering of the social environment in terms of groupings in a manner which makes sense to the individual

As Tajfel (1982, p. 239) states:

Social categorisation cannot be considered as a 'static' variable which somehow leads people to behave in a constant and uniform manner to those who are classified as 'outsiders'. The conditions of interaction between groups, and the relevance of a group membership to an individual vary from situation to situation, from one period of time to another, and from one outgroup to another. The individual and social significance of the membership of a group (and, consequently, the importance of the presence of other groups) vary continuously. Therefore, an individual's affiliation with a group and the functional relevance of social comparisons with other groups, or even with the same group from one situation to another, enter into a continuously changing dynamic relationship.

It is noted by Tajfel, that once categories are formed, people have a tendency to exaggerate differences on critical dimensions between categories (ie. social group memberships) and minimise these differences within categories when category membership is salient. Tajfel (1982, p 240), then, discusses,

the effects of group categorizations superimposed on individual characteristics in situations which involve some kind of conflict or competition. These effects seem to consist of a bias against the 'other' which is stronger in the case of intergroup than inter-individual relations. But situations of explicit conflict or competition are . . . not the only necessary condition for showing the powerful effects of categorizing people into groups. It is apparently sufficient simply to make people more aware of the presence or potential presence of another group to elicit in-group bias.

Social categorisation, then, can be seen as a feature of social interaction which can initiate, and maintain the cross-cultural interface (see Brown, 1983). Brewer and Campbell's (1976) work on in-group and out-group social dynamics lends support to this theory. This tendency, if it does indeed occur, has obvious implications for the doing of cross-national managerial work. If social categorisation does lead to group polarisation along national lines, then the social dynamics of working with managers from other national

cultures may indeed be different from work in a compatriot organisation. Cross-national managerial work involves communication, networking, teamwork and trust. If national status encourages the formation of in-groups and out-groups along national-cultural lines, then this may lead to difficulties within the doing of such work, through encouraging conflict and lack of communication between the groups.

Related to this work on social categorisation, the notion of stereotype has had a good deal of currency in the corpus of social psychological work on intergroup social dynamics. According to Hewstone and Giles (1986), stereotyping is the result of cognitive biases stemming from perceived correlations between group membership and psychological attributes. Stereotyping influences the way information is processed in several ways: more favourable information is remembered about the ingroup while more unfavourable information is remembered about outgroups; stereotyping thus creates expectancies about others which tend to be confirmed in interaction; and stereotyping tends to constrain others' patterns of communication, thus encouraging stereotype-confirming behaviour. From a social psychological perspective, the implications of stereotyping for the maintenance of in-group and out-group boundaries are obvious.

Certainly this kind of social psychological work has a great deal of explanatory potential. The work to date on stereotyping, however, has tended to portray people in a way that underplays their ability to assess their understanding of other groups. As I shall go on to discuss, the managers I spoke to were conscious of the way they made sense of their colleagues, and were knowledgeable about the way national categories, even stereotypes, could come to colour their perceptions of other national groups.

Another feature of this kind of social psychological research is that it has tended to theorise about such social categories as stereotypes while ignoring cross-cultural relations in everyday life. By paying close attention to how managers understand, and act upon, cultural difference in everyday organisational settings, claims about the role of social categorisation in group formation can be assessed.

### *Culture and managing:*

It is now widely accepted that management is not a culture-independent universal practice (Joynt and Warner, 1985, Evans, Doz and Laurent, 1989). Indeed, as Hofstede himself states (1983, p. 88):

Both management practitioners and management theorists over the past 80 years have been blind to the extent to which activities like 'management; and 'organizing' are culturally dependant. They are culturally dependant because managing and organizing do not consist of making or moving tangible objects, but of manipulating symbols which have meaning to the people who are managed and organized. Because the meaning which we associate with symbols is heavily affected by what we have learned in our family, in our school, in our work environment, and in our society, management and organization are penetrated with culture from the beginning to end.

Over the past decade we have witnessed the rise of burgeoning field within management studies which has examined the national cultural roots of management (see Ouchi, 1981, Barsoux and Lawrence, 1990). Some of these writers have investigated how workers' conceptions about management and organisation are nationally culturally determined. The work of Laurent (1983) and Inzerelli and Laurent (1983) into national cultural differences are good examples of such research:

Laurent (1983) explored how nationally-held belief systems affect managers' views about the nature of organisation, and therefore their action within organisations. He therefore characterised the process of managing as,

. . an implementation process by which managers translate into behaviour some of their basic, implicit beliefs about effective action in organisations. (Laurent, 1983, p. 75).

Moreover, he claimed that,

. . the national origin of European managers significantly affects their views of what proper management should be. (Laurent, 1983, p. 75).

In order to investigate the national cultural roots of managerial conceptions about the nature of organisations Laurent issued a 56 item questionnaire with a 5 point agree-disagree scale to managers in 10 different countries,

eventually getting 817 respondents. The data collection strategy was designed to randomise, as much as possible, all variables except nationality. Laurent analysed the responses using four dimensions<sup>3</sup>:

Firstly, he investigated organisations as political systems. In order to explore this aspect of managers' understanding of organisations he clustered three items dealing with: the political role played by managers in society; their perception of power motivation within the organisation; and, an assessment of the degree to which organizational structures were clearly defined in the minds of the individuals questioned. He found that in those countries where managers reported a strong perception of their political role in society, they also emphasised the importance of power motivation within the organisation and reported a hazy notion of organisational structure. He noted, for instance, that British and Danish managers expressed a significantly lower political orientation than French and Italian managers, but a clearer notion of organisational structure.

Secondly, he investigated organisations as authority systems. In order to explore this aspect of managers' understanding, he investigated three questions dealing with: the conception of hierarchical structure; the perception of authority crisis in organisations; and the image of the manager as a negotiator. French, Italian and Belgian managers reported a personal and social concept of authority that regulated relationships among individuals in organisations, whereas U.S., Swiss and German managers reported a more rational and instrumental view of authority that regulated interaction among tasks and functions.

Thirdly, he investigated organisations as role-formalisation systems. In order to do this, he explored questions focused upon the relative importance of defining and specifying the functions and roles of organizational members. These questions stressed the values of clarity and efficiency, values that encouraged the implementation of such things as detailed job descriptions, well-defined functions, and precisely defined roles. Laurent discovered lower insistence on the need for role formalisation in Sweden, the U.S. and the Netherlands than in the remaining countries.

Fourthly, he investigated organisations as hierarchical relationship systems. His investigations suggested sharp differences in attitudes towards

organisational relationships as one moved from Northern Europe and the United States, on the lower end of the scale, to the Latin countries of Europe on the higher end. He discovered that a desire to eliminate conflict from organisations was associated with the belief that a manager should know more than his subordinates, and that organisations should not be upset by such practices as bypassing or having to report to two bosses. From Laurent's research, matrix type organisational arrangements were culturally more appropriate in Sweden than in Italy.

Laurent was keen to discover whether cultural differences in conceptions about the nature of management and organisations would persist within the potentially homogenising corporate culture of a single multinational company. In order to do this he analysed similarly-produced data from one U.S. multinational company with subsidiaries in France, Germany, and the U.K. The results clearly indicated the consistent and pervasive effects of national cultures in the the three countries involved. Laurent (1986, p. 95) observed:

The overall research findings led to the conclusion that deep seated managerial assumptions are strongly shaped by national cultures and appear quite insensitive to the more transient culture of organisations.

Laurent went on to investigate what he saw as a fundamental concern for international management: the conceptions managers held about what a manager was. Below (Laurent, 1986, p. 94) are the percentages of those managers polled who agreed with the question,

It is important for a manager to have at hand precise answers to most of the questions that his subordinates may raise at work

	% Agree.	No. of respondents:
Japan	77	55
U.K.	30	349
W. Germany	40	161
France	59	382
U.S.A	13	138



In this way, Laurent demonstrated not only that management knowledge and practice were nationally determined, but that fundamental conceptions about the very nature of managerial work were culturally determined along national lines. Laurent concluded (1986, p. 97):

Comparative research shows that managers from different national cultures hold different assumptions as to the nature of management and organization. These different sets of assumptions shape different value systems and get translated into different management and organisational practices which in turn reinforce the original assumptions.

Such findings, if borne out, have serious implications both for the doing of cross-national managerial work, and for the study of it. If managers from different countries not only manage differently, but hold different preconceptions about the nature of organisations and of managerial work itself, then there may be significant potential for misunderstanding, conflict and difficulties. Rather than conjecture about the nature of these difficulties however, it makes good sense to investigate how managers from different national cultures actually work together. Only by doing this can we explore how such cultural differences make an impact within their work.

Much of the work that has investigated the national cultural roots of management, has overlooked how managerial work is actually done in different national cultures. There is thus a need for further research into the nature of managerial work in particular countries (see Barsoux and Lawrence, 1990, for instance). Likewise, in the study of cross-national managerial work, there is a pressing need for research that explores managerial work with people from other national cultures. It makes sense, then, to move on from establishing differences in the national cultural roots of management, to explore how managers from differing national cultures actually work together.

#### *Cross-cultural managerial encounters:*

Recently there has been a good deal of work done on cross-cultural managerial work that deals with the difficulties of effecting organisational change, and on managing cultural differences within multinational organisations (Joynt and Warner, 1985, Evans et al. 1989). Some of this work has addressed the problems associated with cross-cultural business

interaction, but has done so in a way that overlooks how cultural differences are perceived and dealt with as part of managers' everyday work. That work that has attended to the issue of cross-cultural managerial practice has tended either to be anecdotal, or general in scope, highlighting such things as business protocol, face-saving and the misunderstandings that can arise in in cross-cultural business encounters. Among the few pieces of research that have investigated cross-national managerial activities, the most notable is the work of Yamada (1989, 1990), who examined in fine detail cross-cultural managerial meetings between Japanese and U.S. managers:

The focus of Yamada's research was on culturally determined differences in topic management and turn distribution between American managers and Japanese managers. In order to assess the nature of the practices in inter-cultural settings, she first set about examining intracultural managerial practice among American managers, and among Japanese managers. Yamada explained the different ways of doing things in terms of their wider socio-cultural context (1990, p. 281):

There are two important ethnographic differences between the American and Japanese business meetings which give each of the meetings a different tone. First, there is a qualitative difference in tone between the two intra-cultural conversations: the American conversation has a more formal, business-like tone, but the Japanese conversation has a more casual, personal tone. The qualitative difference is partially explainable through findings revealed in comparative studies of American versus Japanese decision-making (for example Ouchi, 1981) which report that a great majority of Japanese decision-making occurs 'behind-the-scenes', using the ringi system of approval. The ringi system is a uniquely Japanese process of unanimous decision-making, where decision approval is made collectively by affixing one's seal to a widely circulated document. Thus, unlike the American decision making process which uses the meeting setting as the actual ground for the fielding of ideas and subsequent decision-making, the meeting setting in Japanese business meetings is only used to stage the formality of meeting occurrence, since participants at that point are already aware of the outcome of the decision-making processes.

Yamada thus established a link between what is done in business settings such as meetings, and the wider national business culture. She then proceeded to analyse certain interactive features of intra-cultural managerial practice, in particular the turn-taking practices of Japanese and American managers. As Yamada (1990, p.283) states:

The analysis points to two significant strategic differences in the way American and Japanese participants distribute their turns. First, Japanese participants distribute their turns more evenly in topics than Americans. Second, American participants take a greater proportion of turns in the topics they initiate, but Japanese participants do not necessarily take a greater proportion of turns in the topics they initiate.

Through counting the number of turns managers used as they worked through certain key topics, Yamada thus established differences between Japanese and American managerial action in these terms. Having done this, she turned to the analysis of cross-cultural meetings between Japanese and American managers. Again, through counting the number of turns used in the proceedings, Yamada observed that participants typically used their native turn-distribution strategies in conversational topics (1990, p. 290):

In the cross-cultural meeting conducted in English, both the American and Japanese participants use their respective turn-distribution strategies. That is, the American participant . . . typically uses intracultural American turn-distribution patterns, while the Japanese participant . . . uses Japanese turn distribution strategies.

As I have mentioned, Yamada worked up these conclusions by counting the proportional distribution of turns and topic initiators in the cross-cultural meeting. What we see in Yamada's work, then, are two practices that Hofstede himself indulged in, in working up his research findings:

- 1) generating a dimension of culture and cultural difference; and,
- 2) measuring national culture in terms of it.

In Yamada's case the dimension of culture was 'turn taking', and Japanese and American cultures were measured in terms of it through counting the number of turns participants employed in discussing a topic. As in Hofstede's work, then, Yamada's research established cultural differences between national collective groups along predefined lines.

Yamada thus established that there were differences between American and Japanese managers in terms of turn-taking practice, and that these difference did not disappear in cross-cultural managerial work settings. Of course, an analysis of turn taking distribution is only one possible way of characterising

cultural difference between national cultural collectivities. For instance, one could do a similar type of analysis of cross-national managerial work, measuring instead the number of words managers use per turn, or, indeed, measuring the average decibel count among the different nationalities. What would go unaddressed in such studies - and what is overlooked in Yamada's work - is the question of what the cultural differences mean to the managers as they work.

Instead of characterising and recharacterising national cultural differences in terms of different preconceived research dimensions, it makes sense - at least as a corrective - to examine what such national cultural differences mean in the cross-national work setting. The focus, then, should switch from formulating new improved criteria along which to measure cultural difference, to examining how national cultural differences are understood and acted upon in cross-national managerial settings.

*Culture as action in terms of conventional meanings:*

I turn now to that work on the nature of culture, which views culture not as a determinative entity, nor as a psychological predisposition, nor indeed as something to be measured, but as a characterisation of conventional action within everyday social situations. The main proponent of this approach was Geertz, whose work on culture has influenced generations of ethnographers since the 1960s. Though concerned with culture's constitutive place in people's understanding and experience of the human world, Geertz stands in opposition to psychologistic approaches to culture. By viewing culture as the understood social context by which action is interpreted in everyday social settings, he lays open the route for its investigation, or, rather, its interpretation. The prescribed approach is to study action and institutions in terms of their meaningful place within particular collectivities (Geertz, 1973, p. 408):

The analysis of culture comes down . . . not to an heroic 'holistic' assault upon 'the basic configurations of the culture', and overarching 'order of orders' from which more limited configurations can be seen as mere deductions, but to a searching out of significant symbols . . . and the statement of the underlying regularities of human experience in their formation.

Geertz thus treats culture not a thing in itself, but as a property of action within everyday social settings: appropriate action is done in terms of culturally sustained meanings; and appropriate understanding, and action sustains and reaffirms such conventional aspects of local culture. Geertz's work then is significant in that it breaks away from psychologistic and deterministic approaches to the analysis of culture, and treats it as inseparable from action and understanding in everyday situations. For the ethnographer to be said to understand action, then, he must interpret it as it is understood within particular social settings in appropriate cultural terms.

Such an interpretive ethnographic approach is necessary if one is to do good ethnomethodological analysis. Among those ethnomethodological writings that explore the nature of culture, Sharrock's (1974) paper, has been particularly influential. In this he shows how membership of a community is inextricably linked with the competent display of the corpus of knowledge that is 'owned' by the community<sup>4</sup>. Sharrock's methodological prescription for the analysis of culture is thus,

. . . that of interpreting the relationship between a collectivity's corpus of knowledge and the activities of its members. (Sharrock, 1974, p.5)

According to Sharrock, then, there is a relationship between culture and competent action within a collectivity, but this relationship is not causal, deterministic or psychological. Members of a collectivity are conscious of the cultural norms, conventions and institutions that have a constitutive place within that collectivity. Through acting in terms of such norms, conventions and institutions, a collectivity's culture is thus sustained and affirmed during the everyday activities that go to make up the ongoing life of the collectivity.

Such work has implications for the doing, and the study, of cross-national managerial work. Firstly, it seems that although a manager may be a competent member of an organisation within his own national collectivity - i.e., he has a thorough, workable knowledge of appropriate action and understanding in everyday social settings within organisations in his home country - the manager may find that he is less than competent in another collectivity. The nature of his understanding and action within particular organisational settings, then, may not be of an order that enables him to

manage in a way that is effective. In order to manage, one requires a workable knowledge of one's organisation and one's colleagues. Much that is obvious and taken for granted among compatriots may not be obvious or taken for granted in the cross-national situation.

Of course, ethnographers are (and should be) much more concerned with investigating cultures, rather than discussing the nature of culture. Occasionally, however, they do enter the debate about the nature of culture, though they do tend to do so in terms of how to go about investigating it (see Hammersley, 1992). One notable contribution to the debate has come from Lee (1991), who criticises the tendency within social studies for discussion about culture rather than interpretation of cultures. In particular, he attacks the attempts to establish a link between culture and language, and argues that we must take seriously the ethnomethodological respecification of the foundations of sociological reasoning. This involves a departure from the theoretical debate about the link between culture and language. Lee thus recommends (Lee, 1991, pp. 224-225):

1) Suspending general questions, such as the question of the relationship between 'culture' and 'language' until these have been described with respect to the question of how they translate into the witnessable understandings and activities of social interactants.

2) Treating social activities such as talk, strictly in terms of the production of witnessable events, rather than as a product of adopting the philosophical and conceptual assumptions involved in treating language as cognitively generated.

3) Dissolving the conceptually un-analysed notion of 'language' and language form into the question of how social actors co-ordinate their activities in and through talk, seeking to locate structures by which they do so without preconceived notions of what these structures look like.

4) Taking it that the ways persons co-ordinate their talk/ activities in fine detail necessarily reveal how co-conversationalists ongoingly achieve order in their collective behaviour. Thus the drive to solve sociology's problem of order is relocated in terms of the ways in which culture is furnished and produced.

5) Neither treating culture as 'external' to, and constraining upon, language, nor treating language as 'external' to, or constraining upon, culture. But treating culture as an embedded

phenomenon in language-in-use, on the grounds that culture is encountered that way by society's members.

6) This involves that total rejection of the traditional view of culture as an abstract, transcendental object or system to be related, in favour of treating its organisation as a recoverable, reproducible stock of knowledge and skills available in daily, routine, mundane ways of talking and acting.

Lee thus places the onus firmly upon investigating real-life incidences of meaningful action. The ethnomethodological corpus thus holds many lessons for the researcher who would approach the role of national cultural difference in cross-national managerial work. The approach advocated by Lee involves investigating social activities in terms of their public, accountable meaning, i.e., as they are understood by those who act within such settings. If we wish to investigate cross-national managerial activities, such an approach is certainly useful: to keep one's analyses in line with the accountable meaning an organisational setting holds as it is understood and acted upon by those who do the work within it, both contributes to our understanding of such work, in the sense that research to date has tended to overlook real-life examples of cross-national managerial work; and it enables us to assess the worth of wider theorising about the role of cultural difference in cross-national managerial work.

### *Conclusion:*

In this chapter I have given a brief overview of that part of the debate about culture that is relevant to the study of the impact of cultural differences in the doing of cross-national managerial work. By way of conclusion, I will turn to two questions that have underpinned much of the debate, i.e., 1) what is culture? and, 2) what constitutes cultural difference?

Both of these questions seek to ascertain a transcendent essence or definition of culture, or of cultural difference. The competent membership of collectivities involves the ability to understand and act in conventional ways in everyday social settings. Such collectivities can range from departments within companies, to nation states. Culture, as a concept, is used by ordinary people and by sociologists to characterise conventional aspects of action and understanding that are sustained among collectivities.

When people speak of cultural differences, they are speaking of different ways of understanding and acting that are socially sustained as part and parcel of membership of different collectivities.

The questionnaire generated differences propounded by Hofstede, Laurent and Ronen may indeed reflect different ways of understanding and doing things within organisations in different nation states. The problem with their kind of research, however, is that they measure differences along preordained dimensions, using predetermined categories, in a way that overlooks the ways people understand and do things in their everyday working lives. The relationship between the measurements, and what we call the culture of the collectivity is therefore left uncertain.

Rather than attempt, a priori, to ascertain what culture is, one would learn more that is useful by investigating how people within certain collectivities understand and do things as competent members of that collectivity. Following Geertz, and the ethnomethodologists, rather than speculate about the nature of a certain aspect of social life, we are well advised to investigate it. Questions about the nature of culture and cultural difference are easily raised, and form the basis of numerous articles and books (Hall, 1974, Archer, 1988 etc.). In such discourses, the glossed notions of culture, and cultural difference, seem to take on a life of their own: they are ascribed characteristics; they are explored in relation to action and understanding; and they are given definitions that lend them transcendent, incontinent qualities. More often than not, these activities are done without discussing in any detail how people understand and do things as competent members of particular collectivities.

In order to put this type of conjectural practice in perspective, it is useful to ask more specific questions. For instance: What is the culture of the software engineering department in Lombarge Technologies? What constitute cultural differences between the software engineering and the marketing departments in this particular company? It makes sense to ask questions about how people understand and act within such social settings. It does not make sense to attempt to answer such questions without going in to investigate.



The preoccupation among academics with trying to ascertain the nature of culture shows no sign of dying out. (The paucity of this approach to culture can clearly be seen if one tries, through conjecture, to ascertain the nature of some other everyday category.) There is no transcendent culture which has transcendent properties that can be characterised through conjecture, but there are cultures, which we can investigate. There is no transcendent cultural difference, with universal transcendent properties, but there are cultural differences that can be noticed, acted upon, ignored, discussed, bemoaned and investigated.

If we wish to investigate the impact of cultural differences in cross-national managerial work, then we would do well to leave the conjectural debate about the nature of culture behind us, and proceed to investigate how managers understand and do such work. Rather than deciding, a priori, that cross-national managerial interaction is somehow cross-cultural, a better approach would be to enter the world of the managers, and investigate just how cultural differences are understood and acted upon as part of their everyday, ongoing work in their organisations. It is time to move on from conjecture. It is time to investigate.

## NOTES:

1. Broadly speaking I subscribe to Burrell and Morgan's characterisation of sociological positivism (1979, p.7):

In essence this reflects the attempt to apply models and methods derived from the natural sciences to the study of human affairs. It treats the social world as if it were the natural world, adopting a 'realist' approach to ontology. This is backed up by a 'positivistic' epistemology, relatively 'deterministic' views of human nature and the use of 'nomothetic' methodologies.

2. Such characterisations as mine are of course just that. Later on in the thesis, I examine some examples of boss-subordinate relationships in action.

3. The methodology Laurent employed was similar in kind to that used by Hofstede (1980). My criticisms of Hofstede's approach to the study of national culture thus apply to Laurent's work. I have dealt with Laurent in this section in order to cover coherently that work that has attempted to establish national cultural differences in conceptions about management.

4. 'Ownership' was a useful and pertinent way of putting it, as members of the studied community did indeed claim to own certain aspects of their social life. When it was pointed out that other communities displayed similar cultural traits, they explained this in terms of the knowledge having been 'stolen' from them.

## CHAPTER THREE:

### METHODOLOGIES:

#### *Introduction:*

In this chapter I review the methods I used to investigate the cross-cultural nature of cross-national managerial work. As I discussed in the last chapter, in the doing of this research I saw it fit to depart from the common practice of using the questionnaire as a tool for investigating national cultural differences, and instead attempted to approach cultural differences as they were encountered, understood and dealt with by managers as part of their work. There were many reasons for choosing to do this, perhaps the main one being that although there had been some work done on the broad effects, and organisational dynamics of cultural difference in cross-national managerial work (see Joynt and Warner, 1989), the research to date had tended to overlook managers' work activities in everyday organisational situations. Meanwhile, that work that had investigated such activities (see Yamada, 1990) had tended to use analytical techniques that overlooked the meanings such situations held for the managers involved. My aim, then, was to explore how managers encountered, understood and dealt with cultural differences as they worked in everyday organisational situations. It was intended that in doing so, I would go some way to rectifying such oversights in our present knowledge about cross-national managerial work. In this chapter I review the ways I went about doing this.

#### *Getting to talk to the managers:*

In order to interview cross-national managers about their work, I needed to track down relevant personnel. I thus set about securing interviews with overseas managers who were working in this country for a significant period of time. Tracking down such managers was a tedious activity that involved several stages:

Firstly, I went through the Times Top 1000 and listed over 150 indigenous and foreign-owned multinational companies, on the assumption that the operations of such companies would be likely to involve the international interflow of management personnel.

Having secured the addresses of likely multinational organisations, the next step involved identifying people within these companies who met two criteria: firstly, that they were likely to know of any overseas managers they had working there; and, secondly, that they were likely to wield enough influence to get me into the company to meet them. I decided that senior personnel managers met both of these criteria. The nature of their work meant that they were likely to know of any overseas managers they had working for them, and their senior positions were likely carry a considerable amount of influence among their colleagues.

The next step involved phoning up each company on an individual basis, and asking for the name of their most senior personnel manager. From experience, I gauged that managers would be more likely to reply to a letter that addressed them by name, rather than role. I am sure that this simple step was important in enabling me to get into these companies.

In the letters, I outlined my research aims and requested the opportunity to discuss my research with them (with a view to securing interviews with those foreign managers they had working in the company). I received a good response, and went on to discuss my research with 54 senior personnel managers.

It is worth noting here that the nature of the research was instrumental in the success of the project. From my point of view, the personnel managers were the gate keepers of the the company. Getting them interested in the project then, was a crucial step in the research process:

Talking to the personnel managers I learnt that it had been the cross-cultural aspect of the project that had caught their eye. It was this that had got them interested enough to invite me to the company to discuss the research. As it turned out, there was a practical reason for their interest: the personnel managers themselves encountered cultural difficulties in many aspects of their work, from doing business on the phone with overseas colleagues, to formulating personnel strategy. My research, then, was perceived to be relevant and interesting by the gate-keepers of the company, and this certainly helped in securing introductions to the overseas managers. There is, then, a lesson here for further research:

In order to gain access to companies, it makes sense to couch one's research in such a way that appears directly relevant to the gate-keepers of the organisations.

Because the gatekeepers of the 54 companies I visited perceived my research to be interesting, relevant and useful, I was able to secure meetings with many overseas managers. In total, over the period from February 1989 to April 1992, I interviewed 174 overseas managers whose work involved working on a regular basis with people of other nationalities. Most of these were French or German personnel who were working in multinational subsidiaries in the United Kingdom for periods of time ranging from three months to three years. Most of the managers were in technical managerial roles, though some were general managers, and two were working in the personnel function<sup>1</sup>.

#### *Talking to the managers:*

In the first few weeks, I was somewhat uncomfortable in my dealings with the managers. Certainly, I had had dealings with business people before, however, I found the role of social researcher a difficult one to manage:

Within such encounters, there was what could be regarded as a difference in discretionary power between the managers and myself. I was allowed into such encounters through their good will, and they were under no obligation to help or to inform me. Striking up a rapport within the first few minutes of each interview then was crucial, and played a big part in determining the success of each conversation in terms of what they told me, how honest they were, and how much they were willing to help me. A good deal of my efforts in dealing with such managers were thus directed towards presenting myself as business-like, and well-informed, while establishing common ground and common interests in a relaxed and personable way.

I had to learn how to do this. The first batch of interviews then were as useful in terms of learning how to talk to managers, as they were in terms of learning about their work. As with many learning processes, the first stages were troublesome. Sometimes the interviews did not work at all. Indeed, my very first conversation with an overseas director left me highly

disillusioned, and rather irritated at his condescending manner. As the interviews proceeded however, I gradually learnt how to conduct myself. I learnt to gauge what constituted a relevant question. I began to understand what constituted an appropriate observation, and I increasingly used the sort of language and banter that helped in establishing the rapport needed to do the research.

Of course, acting in a personable business-like way did not in itself ensure managers' cooperation. I was, after all, there for a reason, the reason being to investigate the nature of cross-national managerial work:

My knowledge about cross-national managerial work was another crucial factor in my relationship with the managers. At the beginning of the research, what I knew about the nature of cross-national managerial work, and the impact of cultural difference in the doing of such work was limited to the books and articles I had read. I thus approached the interviews knowing a good deal about what I had read, but little about what cross-national managers did in their everyday working lives. In a sense, then, the early stages of the research were a process of disguising my ignorance about the particulars of such work, while keeping them talking. There was an element of bluff about the proceedings. I did a lot of nodding and agreeing in an effort to disguise my lack of knowledge. As I nodded and agreed, however, I learnt a lot, very quickly. I began to recognise acronyms, and understand organisational roles, sentiments, managerial difficulties and the impact of cultural problems in their work.

The early stages of the research thus involved two related processes:

- 1) learning how to deal with the managers; and.
- 2) learning about their work and the place of cultural difference within it.

In a sense, then, the early stages of the research were period of acculturation into the world of cross-national managerial work. It involved making mistakes, and it certainly involved a great deal of frustration, stress, confusion and disillusionment. In retrospect, however, it is apparent that this period of acculturation was a crucial step in the doing of the research.

In going through this difficult period, I also learnt an important lesson about the doing of social research. In order to enter into, and understand, particular social groups, one has to go through a period of personal development.

*Learning from the managers:*

As I have discussed, I began the project with the idea that the research was to be an investigation into the impact of cultural differences in cross-national managerial work. My readings in ethnomethodology had sensitised me to the constitutive place of social theory in the formulation of research methodology, and of the constitutive place of research methodologies in the working up of research findings (Sharrock and Anderson, 1986, pp. 13-23). Consequently, I was conscious that social research could not ascertain, in any direct, absolute way, the social reality of cross-national managerial work (see Sharrock and Button, 1991, pp. 137-175). I was, then, in the business of working up a version, a theory-driven, methodology-constituted characterisation of the cross-cultural nature of cross-national managerial work. Two issues that I had to tackle, then, concerned what form the approach should take, and in what ways this approach was appropriate.

Certainly, ethnomethodological research influenced the way I approached cross-national managerial work. With its focus upon accountable action, the corpus of ethnomethodological research encouraged an analytical interest in the understood nature of cross-national managerial work as it was done in everyday organisational settings (and this led me to observe and record such work). The question of how I was to gain an understanding of such work activities as they were understood and done by the managers, however, went largely unaddressed in the literature. I thus had to work up a way of approaching managerial work in cross-national situations in the same terms as those who did it.

The way I went about doing this was, broadly speaking, to get to know as much as I could about cross-national managerial work. Of course, strictly speaking, knowledge about work is of a different conceptual order to knowing how to do such work. However, these orders of knowledge are interrelated in terms of everyday practice, and the analytical distinction should not be overstressed<sup>2</sup>. As Coulter (1979, pp. 21-22) explained:

The aspects of what can be called 'commonsense' which interest the ethnomethodologist are those which enable anyone possessing it to perform their ordinary activities in ways that are recognizably appropriate, rational, intelligible, proper, correct or reasonable for all practical purposes. Members possessing common-sense knowledge possess the means whereby they can behave in orderly ways; since a part of that 'knowledge' is non-propositional and unformulated for them, we can speak of it as 'practical knowledge' - expressible in terms such as 'knowing how to . . .' in contrast to 'knowing that . . .' Ethnomethodologists studying the reasoned structures of ordinary activities seek to reveal, or explicate, in propositional form, much of the presupposed or tacit reasoning informing their orderly production. Thus, common-sense amounts to a set of culturally-furnished abilities. Such abilities constitute the doing of any mundane activity, such as transmitting information in various contexts, recommending something to someone, persuading someone about something, enumerating, grading, complaining, insulting, warning, apologising, thanking, promising, ascribing statuses and countless other practical actions. To say of someone that he is able to do such things means that he knows how to do them, and this practical knowledge forms the central core of what is here being described as 'commonsense knowledge of social structures'.

The ability to understand, and act within, a work setting in a way that is competent (for all practical purposes), thus requires a workable knowledge about the social world one is operating in - knowledge about colleagues, knowledge about the ongoing work of the organisation, knowledge about what is, and what is not, done in one's work organisation.

Through the process of trying to work up a method of approaching the accountable nature of managerial work, then, I learnt that in order to do good ethnomethodological work one has to do a good deal of broad in-depth ethnographic work (see Hammersley, 1992). I had seen enough managerial work done in my own organisation to appreciate that managing is done in terms of things and concerns that may not even be mentioned within particular situations. In order to come to a workable understanding of what was plain and clear to the managers as they worked, then, I needed to gain a working knowledge about the terms in which such work was done - the people, the work done by different departments, the rules, regulations and protocol observed by competent members of the organisations. It made sense, as a first step, then, to learn all I could about the work of the managers from the managers themselves. In order to approach the doing of cross-national managerial work, I firstly needed to learn about it.



The way I did this was to talk to the managers about their work. Of course, as Sharrock and Button (1991) point out, there are important issues concerning the conceptual status of what people say about what they do. For instance, what managers say about their work may be partial, biased, and limited in perspective (in the sense that they may not need to ponder, or deliberate about aspects of their work broader than the practical concerns of doing their work). However, managers do know enough about their organisation and their work for them, with varying degrees of success, to do managerial work in their everyday working lives. If one is concerned with investigating the nature of cross-national managerial work as it is understood and done by working managers, then this order of background knowledge is certainly useful in that it can be used to understand managerial action within cross-national organisational settings.

Another important issue concerning the conceptual status of what managers say about their work involves the possibility that managers may not always tell the truth (in terms of how they perceive it). They may portray their work in glamorous or gloomy terms. They may give a biased version of their work. They may try to portray the company in a positive light, and talk only of successful ventures and smooth-running departments.

How is the social researcher to deal with this? As I emerged from the tumultuous early stages of the research process, I found that I was better able to strike up a rapport with the managers, and better able to understand what they were getting at when they talked about things ranging from implementing new management systems, to the problems they associated with cultural differences. This increased knowledge about managerial work, together with improved interviewing skills meant that as time went on I developed a critical faculty, whereby I was able to assess the worth and validity of what the managers said. I reached a point whereby I could spot good points, platitudes, ill-considered nonsense and sincere, incisive observations. Over a period of two years, then, I moved on from the naive acceptance of what managers told me, to the critical assessment of the worth of their observations.

The nature of this ability is difficult to characterise. Certainly the ability to assess the worth of managers' contributions was grounded in an increased knowledge about managerial work. For instance, I began to mistrust those managers who characterised their work in simple terms. I had heard and seen enough managerial work to convince me that the doing of such work was on the whole not simple, straightforward or smooth-running. The better interviews tended to be with those managers who addressed this complexity.

Such managers seemed to appreciate the opportunity to discuss their work, and to try to make sense of their role, their activities and their organisation. These interviews seemed to constitute time out from the hurly-burly of organisational life, enabling them to consider what they had not had time to consider because of work and family commitments. Moreover, once I had secured a decent rapport, and given my assurance of confidentiality, the interviews also seemed to constitute time-out from the moral and political constraints of the organisation: within the bounds of the interview setting they could criticise colleagues; they could give their opinions on the organisation; they could tell 'the truth' about 'working in a place like this'. Such interviews as these cropped up more and more as my ability to strike up a rapport with the managers developed. In turn, my ability to discuss managerial questions in a way that was pertinent, relevant and incisive increased. There was a sense then in which the research began slowly, and uneasily, but gained momentum as I learned more about their work. Learning more enabled me to learn faster.

These conversations were invaluablely informative, and they certainly helped me to appreciate the difficulties associated with doing managerial work in cross-national situations. As I shall discuss in the next section, however, in order to approach an understanding of particular cross-national work settings, such general knowledge about the nature of managerial work, though essential, needed to be supplemented by that particular knowledge that was assumed, invoked and used as the managers got on with the tasks at hand in particular organisational settings.

*Making sense of what was done:*

Conversations with cross-national managers about their work proceeded throughout most of the research project. This was not so much a stage of the research then, as an ongoing process of learning and development.

As I have discussed, my ethnomethodological interests guided the doing of my research such that, from an early stage, it was my intention to explore the doing of such work in everyday organisational settings. Interviews alone, though they provided me with useful and relevant knowledge about cross-national managerial work, were not on their own adequate for the purposes of investigating how managers worked in cross-national situations. By about January 1990, then, I had reached a stage in my research, and in my personal development, whereby I was ready to turn from what managers said about their work, to what managers did when they managed.

In order to do this, I went back to one of the companies that had been particularly helpful, Lombarge Technologies. There I visited Doerman, a Dutch marketing manager whom I had met on previous visits. With him I discussed the place I had reached in my investigations, and talked about the direction I now wished to take the research. Doerman had already shown a great deal of interest in my research to date, and he kindly agreed to let me observe and record his work<sup>3</sup>.

Over the next three weeks I spent my time within Lombarge Technologies talking to managers and observing their work. The time spent among the managers was again a learning process. The order of this learning, however, was slightly different to the order of learning I had undergone through interviewing previous managers about their work. In talking to managers at Lombarge about their work, and in observing their work activities, I was interested in learning about the organisational specifics of doing managerial work in this particular organisation, rather than learning about trans-organisational generalities about cross-national managerial work:

In order to understand what the managers were up to, I had to secure a workable background knowledge of the organisation. This background knowledge entailed knowing about specific products, the importance attached to particular projects by different departments, the organisational

profiles of individual personnel, and the everyday working life of the organisation.

Reaching a state of competence whereby I could understand what the managers were up to, what they were referring to, and the implications of certain initiatives and decisions for the ongoing work of the organisation, was another confusing and frustrating process. Although I was now able to present a credible business image, and I was able to ask sensible and pertinent questions about managerial work, the first few conversations with the managers at Lombarge were dogged by my ignorance of the organisational particulars. I had, then, to begin again, as it were, and undergo yet another period of acculturation.

After a period of time spent observing, and talking to the managers however, I began to find my feet. I got to know about the work done within the company: the projects, the timescales, and the work done in the different departments. With the help and guidance of the managers, I reached a stage whereby I was able to understand what was going on at meetings: to gauge the implications of certain developments for particular departments, to see what certain managers were trying to do, and to understand why individual managers were fudging, or pushing for a particular agreement.

Before one can understand what is going on in an organisation in a way that approaches how people working within the organisation understand their work, then, one needs to learn a good deal about that organisation. Take for instance, this snippet of dialogue between some managers<sup>4</sup>:

D: So: (0.5) w-what is still going on as far as Capital is concerned in engineering then?

G: Capita:l?

D: Yeh. Sorry Micro AMS.

G: Micro AMS? (0.5) Umm:: we've (0.2) got (0.2) a (0.5) bug for Sarsons that we have to fix in the next two weeks the M.B.D.C. scheme problem which is Nigel Ringers's next job and when he's done that he is then starting on the autoranging work (1.0) which we're currently intending to deliver at the end of July

In order to understand what is being discussed here, one requires a workable knowledge, for instance, about the place of Micro AMS in the ongoing work of the organisation. In order to proceed with an ethnomethodological analysis that investigates what is going on in organisational settings such as this, one requires a workable background knowledge of the organisation: getting to the point where one is able to understand such work involves doing one's ethnographic homework.

Of course, I was a social researcher, and not a full-time manager, and I was therefore limited to the time the managers could spare me. Certainly, then, by the standards of the managers, I attained only a limited knowledge of the work of the organisation. This amount of knowledge however was workable, in the sense that it took me to a level of competence whereby I could ask relevant, well-informed questions about what I did not know or understand.

My studies in ethnomethodology had convinced me of the worth of investigating particular organisational settings in terms of how they were understood and dealt with by the managers. In order to do this I required a good deal of knowledge about the organisation, its products and its personnel. I did not, however, need to know everything about the company.

In the end I tape recorded two meetings in their entirety, lasting about 90 minutes each. My conversations with the managers about their work, and the place of certain projects in the ongoing working life of the organisation, helped me to understand what was going on as the managers discussed, negotiated and fought their corners. Although my understanding of such activities was not perfect (in that it perfectly matched their own), I did understand enough of what was going on to clear up certain points with them after the meetings. In subsequent discussions with the managers involved I was pleased to see that my observations of their work broadly matched their own, and that my comments upon the activities were perceived to be sensible and, broadly speaking, correct.

I later transcribed the recordings of the meetings, and set about producing an interpretation of what was understood, and done by the managers. Although, broadly speaking I understood what the meetings were about, and what the managers were doing, documenting what I understood proved

to be a very difficult process. There has been little written on how to go about doing ethnomethodological research, and, alas, even less on how to go about documenting what one has discovered. I thus not only had to develop a way of approaching the materials analytically, but I also had to construe a way to document what I had learnt about cross-national managerial work. Some ethnomethodological works were more helpful than others in suggesting ways in which I could do this. One of the more constructive, and straightforward research agendas was set out by Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock (1987, pp. 144-145):

The data which we will be examining is taken from a transcript of a negotiation . . . Experience has shown that this transcript is particularly dense and difficult to follow because much of the action it displays is embedded in sets of shared knowledge and understandings to which the participants alluded. Without some information concerning the place of the meeting in the overall structure of the negotiation, the steps in the negotiation can be extremely difficult to keep track of. For this reason, we will give a generalized gloss of what we think is happening at various points in the transcript, and some background detail which will, we hope, enable others to find their way through it. Such detail is not necessary for the analysis we offer, but it will help bridge the gap between the global features of the meeting and the detail with which we will primarily be occupied.

Such a characterisation is useful, but it does underplay the epistemological difficulties involved in the interpretation and documentation of activities in managerial meetings. My readings in ethnomethodology had convinced me that the analysis of real-life examples of cross-national managerial activities was useful and interesting. My readings and my ethnographic research had thus taken me to the point whence I could analyse such activities. How I was to proceed when confronted with the transcripts was, however, another matter.

I tried to analyse the activities in the meetings in terms of the way they were understood and done. As Anderson et al. point out (op. cit.) the terms in which managers understand and act within particular settings are often implicit, and require the analyst, and the reader, to be knowledgeable of the wider organisational context. I therefore set about interpreting what the managers were doing, or attempting to do, in terms of what I had learnt about cross-national managerial work, and what I had learnt about the work of this organisation in particular. The attempt to do this was successful in

that I could indeed understand the managerial activities as they were done and understood by the managers involved. Documenting what I understood, however, raised important epistemological questions that just would not go away. One of the more difficult questions I encountered as I attempted to analyse the meetings, concerned the notion of accountable action. As Garfinkel (1967, vii) put it:

Ethnomethodological studies analyze everyday activities as members' methods for making those same activities visibly-rational-and-reportable-for-all-practical-purposes, i.e. 'accountable', as organisations of commonplace everyday activities. The reflexivity of that phenomenon is a singular feature of practical actions, of practical circumstances, of common sense knowledge of social structures, and of practical sociological reasoning. By permitting us to locate and examine their occurrence the reflexivity of that phenomenon establishes their study.

One of the difficulties I ran into in the analysis of the transcript was an appreciation that certain activities were differentially accountable to those doing the work. In other words, the same activities did not hold the same meaning to all of the managers involved. For instance, some managers would try to mislead other managers (in a subtle and unremarkable way) through encouraging an understanding of what they said, that they did not themselves subscribe to.

The way I tackled this was to deal with such different understandings of the same activities head on. I therefore analysed and documented the understood nature of the work activities in terms of common definitions of the situation when they were common, but also in terms of different definitions of the same situation when they were held differently by those doing the work. As I go on to discuss in the next chapter, in these particular meetings, different understandings of the same issues, the same questions and the same activities were predominantly rooted in the ongoing practical concerns of working in different departments.

An appreciation that organisational situations and activities did not necessarily hold the same meaning for different managers, enabled me to approach the data in a way that documented the meaning of the work activities as they were understood, and done by the managers. This involved documenting what what was accountable to all doing the work,

but it also involved documenting manoeuvres and practices that were done in terms of differences in meaning. My understanding of accountable action then fell into line with what I observed, and what I learnt from the managers. The reason I had found the analysis and documentation of such work difficult was not because of any flaw in my understanding of what I had observed, but because of my preconceptions about the nature of accountable action.

*Approaching the experience of cultural differences:*

From reading articles and books about cross-cultural interaction (Kim, 1988, Brown, 1983) I was predisposed to view the work of managers from different countries as cross-cultural interaction. I thus approached the observation of managers at work in cross-national settings convinced that cultural differences would constitute an important, salient feature of their work.

As I have discussed, the focus of my observations and analyses lay upon the accountable nature of managerial work activities in cross-national organisational situations. When I came to observe, and analyse, how such action was done, however, I was struck by the apparent absence of activities orientated to the cross-cultural nature of the interaction. Against my expectations, cultural differences were publicly (or accountably) overlooked as the managers got on with the particular tasks at hand, whether this be haggling over a timescale, or discussing a new appointment. When working with other nationals, it seemed, managers publicly overlooked cultural differences, and got on with the work at hand.

When I spoke to such managers about their work in cross-national situations, however, they stressed the significant impact national cultural differences made in their work. On the whole they found working with other nationals more frustrating, and more difficult, than working with compatriots. Such frustrations, such difficulties, however, did not seem to manifest themselves in the working activities of the managers.

I reflected upon these findings for some time. The apparent disjuncture between what managers said about their work, and what I discovered to be the case in everyday cross-national situations caused me to take stock of the methodologies I had worked up so far. No matter how much I fine-tuned



my ethnomethodological approach to accountable action in cross-national managerial settings, the difficulties and frustrations managers associated with national cultural difference were missed, invisible:

While managers of different nationalities worked together, they got on with the job, and dealt with the tasks at hand while treating cultural differences as unimportant. It seemed, however, that although they treated cultural differences in this way, such differences did make their work more difficult, more frustrating and more taxing than work among compatriots. This experiential aspect of their work was being missed in the analysis.

The issue of how to deal with this aspect of cross-national managerial work came to dominate the study. One cannot 'listen in' to what managers think and feel as they work. It is difficult to gauge their feelings if such feelings are kept silent as they talk and get on with the work at hand. At times, this question of the unsaid understanding and experience of managerial work raised such intimidating philosophical and methodological spectres that I tried to find ways of sidestepping the issue altogether. Time and time again, however, the managers reasserted the importance of this aspect of their work.

I did find some consolation in the fact that I had at least made something of a step in identifying the importance of this aspect of managerial work in cross-national situations. I was, however, determined that having identified an important area for future research, I would at least attempt to work up a way of investigating the experiential impact of national cultural differences in the doing of managerial work.

Of course, because I could not listen in on what managers were actually thinking as they worked, whatever method I used would have to involve a conceptual jump of sorts from what I did have access to, to what I did not have access to. To a certain extent, then, any initiative was always going to run the risk of being cast as conjecture or ungrounded theorising. I was, however, faced with a choice, either to step into the field, or to stop short, and merely identify that there was a field here to be explored.

I looked around at what I had already learnt. I had learnt that there were difficulties and frustrations associated with doing managerial work with

other nationals. I had also learnt that these difficulties and experiences were quieted, suppressed, unsaid as the managers got on with the tasks at hand. I appreciated, then, that an analysis of what was public or accountable in such work settings was not the best way to investigate the experiential nature of working<sup>5</sup>. I thus turned to the what managers said about their work:

In order to take a step of sorts into the field of how managers understood and experienced national cultural differences as they worked, then, it seemed sensible to explore the terms in which the managers understood and experienced their work and their colleagues.

In working up a way to go about this, I was influenced by Coulter's (1979, 1983) incisive work on the role of social categories in the constitution of everyday understanding of the social world (see also Jayyusi, 1984, 1991, pp. 227-251). Both Coulter and Jayyusi discuss how activities within everyday social settings are understood, and done in terms of certain social categories. The ability to understand certain social settings in a way that one can proceed requires a workable everyday common-sense knowledge of social affairs, structures and procedures. As Coulter (1979, pp. 21-22) explains, such a knowledge is constituted through one's ability to use a natural language:

The tie between . . . knowledge and mastery of natural language becomes clear when it is recognised that an overwhelming number of our ordinary, everyday activities are performed through speaking, and most of the rest presuppose linguistic abilities. To have grasped a natural language is to have grasped practical knowledge of more than vocabulary and word order constraints; it is to have mastered a range of socially-required skills along with a great deal of propositional knowledge as well. The common-sense competence in which the ethnomethodologist has an interest then, is in a large measure coextensive with natural language competence; the one varies with the other insofar as they are mutually constitutive. We learn a language and a common culture together and pari passu, and we discover, through speaking to others, where, and to what extent, that common culture of a natural language fragments and where it is sustained between us.

He continues (op. cit):

There is, then, a kind of solidarity built into the orderly functioning of talk which goes beyond a basic commonality of syntax and vocabulary sufficient for minimal comprehension: there is a solidarity in the organisation of speaking, in the monitoring of presupposition, in

the inference-tickets I write with my words, wherever and whenever mutually intelligible and orderly communication is taking place.

My approach to managers' understanding and experience of cultural differences in cross-national situations was thus guided by a simple, uncontentious principle:

The ability to use social categories competently in everyday social affairs enables people to make sense of social situations in terms of these categories<sup>6</sup>:

The managers I spoke to often characterised their work in terms of national cultural categories. Certainly, then, they were able to understand their work in terms of such categories for the purposes of telling me about it. If they were able to make sense of their work (in interviews) in terms of such categories, then it was reasonable to suppose that they would be able to make sense of everyday work settings in these terms. Furthermore, because they talked about national cultural differences in their work so much (and with so much conviction), it seemed very likely that they often did understand and experience their work in such terms.

In order to understand the terms in which the managers understood and experienced their work, I investigated how national cultural categories were used to make sense of, and describe, their work. In order to do this, I transcribed several interviews, and set about exploring how the managers used such categories in explaining their work. In such a way I tried to explore the conventional properties of the categories in terms of which they seemed to make sense of cross-national work settings.

The following snippet, from a conversation I had with a German manager, is fairly typical of the materials I used:

P: Even than French (.) err (.) let's say in Germany you've got a meeting (.) you know exactly what you are going to talk about (.) you start immediately (.) and you have to finish in so and so many time to have (.) decided something

M: Right

P: In France (.) for the same purpose (.) you have to reconsider the whole

history of why you are going want to change something (.) why you want to (.) so it's certainly

M: What's the difference there (.) can you see any?

P: The German I would say have a goal

M: Yeh

P: The French have the same goal but have to reconsider . .

Managers then were able to order, and make sense of their work in terms of national cultural categories, at least for the purposes of telling me about it. As one can see from this snippet, they were able to link national categories with different forms of activities, different institutions and different working practices. Their possession of such social categories, then, enabled them to make sense of different forms of social life in these terms. Different ways of doing things were understandable in terms of national categories.

In approaching these national categories, I set about documenting the conventional relationships that pertained between them, and also attempted to show how certain ways of doing things, certain social institutions and certain ways of understanding and acting within cross-national settings were conventionally linked, or 'bound' to the categories (Sacks, 1979). Through doing so, I aimed to understand better how the managers understood and experienced their work in cross-national managerial situations.

Of course, I realised that an analysis of the way managers used national cultural categories to account for different work practices in their working lives, did not reflect their unsaid experiences and understandings of managing in any direct, incontinent way. I was conscious of the conceptual leap I had to make from what I could see and hear, to what I could not. I realised, however, that if I were to tackle this aspect of managerial work, this conceptual leap from the seen to the unseen would have to be made whatever method I chose. One cannot reflect the essence of experience and unsaid understandings in any direct way, and even if one could, the shift from individuals' experience, to the experience of managers in general would entail a theoretical shift away from this essence. My approach then was aimed at achieving a rough characterisation of the terms in which managers often experienced their work in cross-national work situations.

I thus used Coulter's writings to work up a way of approaching the unsaid understanding and experience of working with other nationals. The method I developed (outlined in detail in Chapter Five) was an attempt to investigate the terms in which the managers understood and experienced cultural differences in their work. As such it was a theorised approach, but at least such theory was grounded in what managers said about cultural differences, and my assertions about the use of national cultural categories could at least be assessed by referring to the materials I used.

Furthermore, my analyses of the way managers used national cultural categories to talk about their work, were not done in a conceptual void. They were part of the research, done in terms of what I had learnt through the research thus far. My conviction that managers understood and experienced work with other managers in terms of national cultural knowledge thus itself guided, and was informed by the ongoing research process. As the research proceeded, and I talked to more managers, and observed more of their work, I discovered that managers' definition of colleagues, and colleagues' activities and work practices in national cultural terms did indeed play a constitutive role in the life of the organisation, and in particular, in the development of what managers called 'cultural problems'. As the research progressed through interviews and observations, the role of such social categories in the working lives of the managers became increasingly apparent. To explain how this became apparent, I need to discuss in detail what I discovered as the research and the research methods developed. I deal with these details in the following chapters.

### *Conclusion:*

As can be seen, in approaching the cross-cultural nature of cross-national managerial work, I did not employ a methodology as such. Indeed, one of the things I learnt through doing the research was that epistemological issues soon come to snap at the feet of inflexible methodological templates in the study of social activities.

In writing about the research methods, I have attempted to portray the ongoing, reflexive nature of my research endeavours. The doing of the research required different approaches at different times, different ways of understanding at different stages in the research project:

Throughout the research process, I had to work up ways of approaching the nature of cross-national managerial work. What I learnt about the nature of such work through these methods furnished further things to be investigated. As often as not, there were no established research methodologies that I could use to approach these further issues, and so I had to work up ways of doing so. The research, then, involved a process of trying to make sense of cross-national managerial work through working up approaches that were appropriate in terms of what I had learnt about the work thus far. What I thence learnt about cross-national managerial work altered my approach to research methods, and what I learnt thereby about research methods altered my approach to the work. This thesis is a document of what I learnt in the process.

## NOTES:

1. The reason for the high incidence of business systems and technical managerial roles among overseas manager is interesting in itself. As I go on to discuss in Chapter 4, this seems to reflect a differential in international transfer-ability between technical skills and the more people-orientated managerial skills. Among the managers, technical skills were perceived to be largely culture-independent, whereas managerial competence was perceived to require a considerable amount of national cultural and linguistic competence. The transfer of personnel to the more people-orientated roles was thus perceived to involve a higher risk of cultural problems.

2. For a useful and authoritative discussion about the nature of knowledge, knowing and everyday social practice see Patterson (1987, pp. 167-185).

3. It is as well to note here just how important the interview process was in getting me to a stage whereby I could strike up sufficient rapport and trust with a busy senior manager, for him to allow me to intrude upon his work like this. Throughout the research I had been acutely conscious of the need to gain entry into a company such that I could not only record and observe managers at work in cross-national settings, but such that I could learn enough about the workings of the company to enable me to interpret what I saw and recorded. For ethnomethodological work to be successful, access to social activities is vital, but equally important is the process of learning how to interpret what one sees. In order to learn enough about the workings of an organisation to interpret what one has recorded, one must spend a good deal of time in the organisation, watching, talking, asking questions and generally making a nuisance of oneself. Gaining sufficient access to a company for analytical purposes, thus means securing a good deal of tolerance, trust and good-will. What I had learnt through talking to managers in different companies got me to the stage where I was able to do this.

4. I use the transcript notation outlined in Appendix Two.

5. One could do good ethnomethodological analyses of other forms of work, such as playing professional football, bricklaying or prostitution. Through such an approach, one could learn a great deal about the procedural

techniques used to accomplish such activities. If one restricts one's analyses to what is public, accountable and done however, one could overlook thoroughly important aspects of the work, that influence how the work is done (and whether the work is done at all).

6. Such a claim is not new. Indeed, the role of social categories in human understanding has constituted a lively field in itself. Several writers to date have addressed the question of the role of categories in the constitution of understanding. Perhaps the most significant of these have been the psycholinguist Sapir, the philosopher Wittgenstein, and the ethnomethodologist Sacks:

Sapir proposed the influential Sapir-Worff hypothesis (see Sapir, 1949), that a natural language is an epistemological system that furnishes a world of things, people and groups. In identifying a relationship between language and understanding, this appeared to be a step forward from the behaviourism that dominated psychological thinking at the time (see Skinner, 1976). However, Sapir's work was not so much a departure from the deterministic characterisation of people, but a development of it. In overlooking the indexical and reflexive properties of language use in everyday social affairs, Sapir produced a characterisation of natural language that resembled an epistemological template, against which the world showed up its culturally-determined nature in relief. In this sense, Sapir's thesis resembled that of Hofstede's collective programming of mind thesis (Hofstede, 1980). The mind, and thereby, the person, was predisposed (or programmed) to see and understand certain things in certain ways. The programme was language.

Wittgenstein observed that understanding was done in terms of certain social categories, but that these social categories had no incontinent link or relationship with other categories or language structures. In his investigations into the notion of the meaning of social categories (Wittgenstein, 1968) he pointed out the absurdity of ascribing incontinent mental properties to words. Meaning was a characterisation of the use of social categories in social affairs. Sapir's mental template - language - was thus deemed neither to be mental, nor to be an epistemological template.



Sacks (1979, 1972) went on to observe the role of social categories in everyday human affairs. One of Sacks more influential contributions came in his analysis of a line of a story told by a three year old child:

The baby cried, The Mommy picked it up.

In analysing this story he developed the notions of 'category devices', and 'category bound activities', showing how such a line makes sense to the listener (or reader) in terms of the his possession of such social categories, common-sense knowledge about the relationship that pertains between them, and an appreciation of what people tend to do qua these category roles.

According to Sacks, then, the understanding of everyday social settings in a way that is competent (and thereby competent action) is done in terms of certain social categories, the relationship between them (in everyday affairs), and the activities that are conventionally bound to these categories in everyday social affairs.

Sacks, however, departed radically from the characterisation of language as an epistemological template. He was conscious of the reflexive and indexical properties of action in everyday human affairs, and explored the way people's understandings of certain social settings in terms of particular social categories could be orientated to, and tackled in terms of other social categories. For an incisive investigation of the attempted definition and redefinition of a particular social setting in terms of different social categories, see Sacks (1972).

Coulter's work builds on and contributes to the work done by Wittgenstein and Sacks. In discussing the foundations of psychological approaches to understanding, he (re)asserts (1979, p. 127):

Mental predicates, in all their variety, belong firmly within the social matrix of concepts formation and usage.

Moving on from such work, I suggest that there is potential for tackling managers' experience and understanding of working in the face of cultural difference, through investigating the terms in which they act.

## CHAPTER FOUR:

### MANAGING WITH FOREIGNERS:

#### SECTION ONE: GETTING ON WITH THE JOB

##### *Introduction:*

In this chapter I discuss how managers understand and act within everyday cross-national business settings. I do so for two reasons: firstly, to rectify an imbalance in research to date, that has treated everyday managerial activities as uninteresting; and, secondly, to explore the nature and status of cultural differences in cross-national managerial work.

Reading through Reed's (1989) comprehensive overview of management theory, we can see that much sociological work into management has been achieved through defining the nature of managerial work in terms of explicit or implicit theoretical assumptions about contingency, conflict, systems or roles (see, Reed, pp 1-19). There is, of course, nothing wrong with this (see Chapter One). However the dominant theoretical standpoints to date have ensured that the most widespread and influential publications in the field of management have tended to treat managerial activities as being analytically uninteresting.

In recent years however, a small number of significant texts have been published, which have gone some way to redress this imbalance. The focus of these texts lies upon managerial practice (see Reed, 1989, 20-25). Writers such as Hosking (1988), Hales (1986), and Whitley (1989), for instance, have stressed the need to understand managerial work in terms the constitutive relationship between managerial activities and the nature of organisations. As Reed (1989, p. 21) explains:

management is treated as a process or activity aimed at the continual recoupling or smoothing over of diverse and complex practices always prone to disengagement and fragmentation. It is based on the, usually contested, capacity to control the institutional mechanisms through which some degree of overall co-ordination and integration can be secured. This implies a rather different view of work organisations to that conveyed in the more orthodox approaches . . .

He continues (op cit):

Within the practice perspective, work organisations are seen as points of intersection for a wide range of social practices that are subjected to various strategies of institutional combination and recombination. This offers a more realistic and flexible conception than that which treats organisations as rigidly structured social units subordinated to the performance of an essential function within the economic, technical, administrative or political imperatives imposed by a particular socio-economic sector or system.

Much of this discussion of managerial practice has been of a theoretical nature, however there is an emerging corpus of studies that does investigate managerial practice in action. Cuff and Sharrock (1985), and Anderson, Hughes and Sharrock (1987, 1989), for instance, investigate such activities as satisficing, negotiating and assessing figures, in terms of how they are understood and done in everyday organisational settings. This corpus of work thus deals with what has been overlooked, or treated as uninteresting, to date. In doing so, it has uncovered important aspects of managerial work that have not previously been addressed.

Taking my lead from such studies, it seemed sensible, and analytically interesting, to identify practices and activities that were conventionally defined as managerial work, and to investigate how they were understood and done in cross-national organisational situations:

A commonly cited institutional setting for the doing of managerial work is that of the meeting (see Cuff and Sharrock, op. cit.). If one wishes to observe activities and practices that are conventionally defined as managerial work, then, a meeting is a good place to start. In this section I discuss the practical concerns of doing some of the work I observed and recorded in a cross-national managerial meeting.

The reader may well ask here, Of what use is the analysis of one isolated example of managerial work? The variety of tasks and concerns that can be defined as managerial work are innumerable. An examination of one particular site of managerial work will produce knowledge only of this particular situation. What possible contribution to knowledge can be gained by an analysis that is so small in scope?

These reservations about the scope of such an analysis miss the point. If we are to pursue an investigation into the nature of cross-national managerial work, we would do well to identify what practices and activities are conventionally defined as managerial work, and proceed to investigate them as practices, i.e. in terms of how they are understood and done. An analysis such as this documents the practical concerns of doing cross-national managerial work in a particular organisational setting. Any analysis that is broader in scope, any attempt to generalise, shifts away from the particular practical concerns of doing the work.

The tag, managerial work, can be applied to many different activities and settings. Activities that can be defined as managerial work often differ markedly from each other. It is because of this very variety, then, that any attempt to generalise about the activities that are conventionally defined as managerial work, shifts the focus away from the practical concerns of doing such work in particular settings. This is not, of course, to say that knowledge about managerial work is invalid, or a mischaracterisation. I am merely making the point that if we wish to explore the local setting-bound practical concerns of doing cross-national managerial work, then we would do well - at least initially - to restrict our analysis to particular episodes of such work.

Nor is this to say that things may not be learnt from attention to the practical concerns of doing such work, that may not support or constitute a more general understanding of cross-national managerial work. Certainly, things may be learnt about the practical concerns of doing such work that have a significant contribution to make to our sociological understanding of the nature of cross-national managerial work. Indeed, as I go on to discuss, my analysis of how cultural differences lead to cultural problems is grounded in an appreciation of the practical concerns of doing such work.

This particular example of cross-national managerial work is just one of the many I observed. As I learned more about the practical concerns of working in this particular organisation, I gained a greater capacity to interpret such settings as the managers did. I began as a relative neophyte, unable to understand why managers said and did certain things in certain ways in particular situations, but as I learnt more I learnt how to understand what was going on in meetings, telephone calls, and conversations in corridors.

Through observing and talking to the managers, I found that my understanding of events, people and the practical concerns of working in particular settings more closely matched their own.

In this section then I offer an interpretation of cross-national managerial work as it is done in a particular organisational setting. There is of course the question of whether it is the right interpretation. The only way one has of ensuring that it is the right interpretation is through learning how to understand the setting as the managers do. This learning process is long and hard. It can be done through becoming a manager in the company, in which case one has to understand such situations for the practical purposes of doing one's job. Thankfully, for the researcher, it can also be done through the long process of talking to managers about their work, observing their work activities, spending time by the coffee machine, and through doing some managerial work oneself. This is the stuff of good qualitative research, and there are no short cuts in developing the ability to understand managerial work in the same ways as the managers.

In this particular case I spent time talking to the managers involved in the meeting about the meeting, about who said what to whom, and why certain things were said in certain ways. I was pleased to discover that my interpretation of events broadly matched their own. I thus offer this interpretation of some cross-national managerial work, as one that broadly matches that of the working managers.

#### *Getting to know Lombarge Technologies:*

As was generally the case with the companies I visited, I made initial contact with Lombarge Technologies via the personnel manager, sending a letter outlining my interest in cross-national managerial work, asking if I could come to see him and discuss my research, with a view to meeting any overseas managers they had working in the company. I soon got a letter of invitation to come up to the company.

The following week, I met the director of personnel, who seemed very interested in the project, particularly in its potential to provide practical solutions to the cultural problems being encountered by the managers they had working there. In the meeting he gave me the names of twelve overseas

managers within the company, all of whom knew of my research, as he had passed on photocopies of my letter to them. That day, he spent much of the afternoon showing me around the company and introducing me to managers and technical personnel. Two managers in particular, Doerman and de Larquier, seemed very interested in my work, and so we set up meetings for the following week.

In these meetings I struck up a good relationship with the managers. This rapport enabled me to return to the company some weeks later, and secure their further help with my research. In the end, I spent a good deal of time with Doerman, de Larquier and their colleagues, learning about the work of the company generally, and about the managerial work they did as part of their everyday working lives<sup>1</sup>.

Through talking to these managers and observing their work, I found that in order to understand those activities and practices that they characterised as managerial work, I had to learn about the organisation as a whole, for the managerial work within managerial settings, such as meetings, was done in terms of the wider organisation. This observation was supported at the theoretical level by McHugh (1968) who explained that in order to be said to understand action within a particular setting (managerial or otherwise) one has to understand the actors' definitions of the situation, for action within a particular setting is done in terms of particular definitions of the setting.

One of the more important things I learnt about managerial work during my fieldwork was that such work is done in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. In order to understand a particular episode of managerial work as the managers did, then, I had to understand it in terms of the appropriate organisational context.

In order for the reader to understand what is going on in a particular meeting in Lombarge, therefore, it is necessary to learn something of the organisation, structure and products of Lombarge Technologies, for the meeting activities were understood and done in terms of the wider, ongoing work of the organisation. In this section, then, I provide information about the wider organisation that will enable the reader to understand the work being done in a particular meeting between three marketing managers and three software engineers in Lombarge Technologies.

### *About Lombarge Technologies:*

Lombarge emerged in the 1950s as the world's largest oil field service company, evaluating and monitoring the technical operation of oil wells with electrical measurement systems. As a group it grew to employ more than 50,000 people in over 100 countries. In the early 1980s the parent company set up Lombarge Technologies, a new international business group targeted at customers in the design and manufacturing industries.

Lombarge Technologies was split into two main divisions, one producing Automated Test Equipment (ATE) and the other specialising in Computer Aided Manufacturing equipment (CAM). The ATE Division targeted the computer, semiconductor and telephone industries, supplying products designed for the testing of printed circuit boards and large scale integrated circuits. These products included powerful ATE systems which enabled integrated circuit manufacturers to reduce the percentage of defective chips as well as accelerating prototype development. Lombarge ATE had product development operations in France and England. In England, the ATE division had its engineering laboratories and its manufacturing unit at the same base in Middlesex. It was here that I met Doerman and his colleagues.

### *The products of the company:*

Broadly speaking, the products of Lombarge ATE were in the area of ATE. ATE products were used by client companies to test circuitry and hardware for a variety of prospective products and capital projects. Lombarge's products were used for testing for circuitry faults, and identifying faulty components, such as dud resistors or capacitors (a tedious and time-consuming task without such technology). The products were also used to test for faults and malfunctions in microchip boards, and were able to identify the faulty chip, thus saving the client company both time and the need to dispose of the boards. Automatic testing equipment was in the form of hardware and software, and was itself tested using the ATE products of the company. Broadly speaking, then, the work of the company consisted of developing, manufacturing and marketing ATE products for manufacturing and design companies around the world.

The work of the engineering department thus lay in three main areas:

- 1) the development of new products
- 2) the enhancement of existing products, and,
- 3) the maintenance of installed products (fixing bugs, etc.)

*Annual Release and Beta Released Products:*

Much of the work of the Marketing and Engineering departments was orientated to what was called the Annual Release of their products to a wide portfolio of customers. The Annual Release included all the new, existing and enhanced ATE equipment that was, from that date, available to customers. The rationale behind releasing all of the products at once like this lay in the need to ensure that all of the products were tested to the same quality, and were thus safe for release (in terms of reliability).

Much of the work of the company was orientated to the Annual Release of the company's products. In addition to this however, the company dealt with corporate customers who had particular needs in terms of testing requirements or urgent needs for particular pieces of testing equipment. Such customers, called Beta released customers (to distinguish them from Annual Release customers), received specialised products or enhancements, other than, or before, those in the Annual release. In addition to these there were what were commonly called Interim releases, that were generally in the form of fixing bugs that were discovered by corporate clients after the Annual release. Such work was done for individual Beta-released customers.

Much of the work of the company, then, was involved with producing ATE products for Annual release, whilst doing more ad hoc work for the Beta released customers. The products that concern us in the meeting between software engineering managers and marketing managers are as follows:

Series 500. The hardware for an important, well established ATE range of testers for chip boards and circuitry, sold in the form of an integrated package of hardware and software.



Series 590. The new improved hardware for the ATE range of testers for chip boards and circuitry, sold in the form of an integrated package of hardware and software. This was an update of the Series 500, and was both faster and more sophisticated than its predecessor.

Micro A.M.S. This was a subsection of the larger Analogue Measurement System (A.M.S.), which was used to measure the values of resistors, capacitors and other features of the clients' circuitry. The A.M.S. (therefore the 'Micro' A.M.S.) was a feature of both the 500 and 590 Series.

Autoranging System. The Micro A.M.S. had a special Autoranging capacity in the form of an intelligent software system which enabled it to anticipate the order of resistance of a resistor.

Algard was a particular piece of work that was being developed for a Beta released customer, Lorne. It was an intelligent software tool that was able to nullify the effects of other features of the circuitry in calculating component measurements. It was able to freeze out the rest of the circuit as it measured each subsection of the circuit.

## The Meeting between the marketing managers and the software engineers:

### *The view from the Marketing Managers:*

Doerman, a Dutchman, was the ATE products marketing manager in the Middlesex subsidiary of Lombarge Technologies and had been working in this capacity for three years. In order to record managerial work activities, I asked him if I could tape record some of his managerial work. He kindly assented, and suggested that I record one or two of his meetings. That Doerman should spontaneously suggest meetings as an obvious institutional setting for recording managerial work activities, made practical sense for sure. (During my observations, I noticed that a lot of managerial work was done on the hoof, and was difficult to catch on tape without disturbing the activities themselves). His suggestion that I should record meetings, however, also made conceptual sense, confirming the conventional notion that the work activities within meetings constituted managerial work.

Eventually, we fixed a date for the recording. Doerman explained the forthcoming meeting to me. He was calling a meeting with the software engineering department in order to discuss the issue of timescales for the Annual Release. Among its other products, the company designed hardware and software products for the testing of productive and development circuit boards. Such products were released at once to all their customers in the Annual Release. As the manager explained, the rationale behind releasing all the products at once, annually, was that it ensured that all the new products, and existing product enhancements were thoroughly tested to the same standard. Furthermore, from a marketing point of view, it also helped with the marketing of the products, as information about new products and enhancements could be made available to customers in one comprehensive package.

Much of the work done in the marketing department was concerned with liaising with actual and potential customers about the Annual Release, or specific interim release projects. According to Doerman, the date of the Annual Release was of great practical importance to client companies in deciding whether to purchase Lombarge's ATE products, and in planning for payment, and installation. The timing of the Annual Release was therefore

of the utmost practical importance to the marketing department, who had to negotiate with such companies and answer their enquiries. Similarly, the timing of the more ad hoc projects was of great practical importance to the marketing managers. The timescales for interim releases were an immediate practical concern in negotiating with corporate clients. Corporate customers needed to know when new equipment, or the work on existing equipment, would be ready.

As a marketing manager, Doerman found himself at what he called the interface between the organisation and the customer. Much of the marketing department's work consisted of securing and maintaining relations with corporate customers, whilst negotiating prices, timescales and deadlines. The products themselves of course were designed, enhanced and fixed by the software engineering department. Recently, relations with the engineers had become strained, as several interim release deadlines had not been met. Doerman was worried that the knock-on effect of missed deadlines could put the date of the Annual Release back further than he and his customers had expected. The situation had been tolerable in the past, though it had always been a source of friction. Recently however, the catalogue of mishaps and delays in the software engineering department had ensured that even the more conservative timescales tendered by the marketing department were perceived to be unreliable: the supply of timescales, particularly that of the Annual Release, as part of the dealings with corporate customers, had been fraught with potentially costly difficulties.

According to Doerman this situation needed to be sorted out. He had recently found himself in some embarrassing situations, having to fudge timescales in negotiations with customers. Some of their more important customers would be less than happy about the extension of delivery deadlines, and he needed information - accurate information - that would enable him to deal with his customers, anticipate future difficulties, and, indeed, to manage the operations within his own department. This particular meeting, then, was called by Doerman to discuss the situation in software engineering, with reference to some important customer commitments, in particular the Annual Release.

### *The View from Software Engineering:*

That of course was the marketing managers' side. The broader practical concerns of the software engineers were different. In talking to the software engineers, I discovered that there was a prevailing sense of irritation in their department. According to the engineers, some of the deadlines had been set by Doerman and his colleagues with only the most cursory consultation with them, and their inability to meet these expected time limits was not due to any incompetence or slackness on their part, but due to lack of resources, particularly trained personnel. Recently, this situation had been aggravated by a key engineering manager (Doug Barton) leaving his job for a higher paid post elsewhere, and by their inability to replace him (due to the strong demand for skilled software engineers, and the high cost of living in the London area). The software engineers were working as efficiently as they could.

Within the software engineering department, timescales had always been formulated in terms of rough estimates. Speaking to the engineers it seems that the reason for this was that work in such a department tended to be unpredictable: the length of time it took to fix a bug, or develop a new system varied considerably from project to project. Software engineering was generally prone to what they called 'technical hitches' - unpredictable, uncontrollable developments within the prescribed work that could take anything from five minutes to a month to sort out. Software development was not like manufacturing, they said. It was more intuitive, more erratic, and more dependant upon the engineers' expertise, experience and good fortune. Any attempt to formulate rigid timescales was doomed to fail, and indeed was antiproductive, for it did not take into account the interflow of information and personnel from project to project in the everyday working life of the department. The effective management of the department required a flexible approach to individuals and to timescales.

I found that quite often the software engineers simply did not know how long certain products would take to complete. They could assess how long individual projects would take in a roundabout way; however, when they had seven or eight major projects on the go, the cumulative room for error became such that effectively - they admitted - they were guessing. The dates that they could supply to the marketers were difficult enough to assess in

terms of technical concerns. When, however, technical concerns were complicated by the practical concerns of doing and prioritising several projects at once, the supply of accurate dates became very difficult indeed. Considering the staffing difficulties they were having, things were being done as efficiently as they could be done.

*The different practical concerns in the meeting:*

What we see here then are departmental differences in the practical concerns of formulating and supplying timescales. The practical concerns of dealing with customers meant that the marketing managers needed to secure timescales that were accurate for the practical purposes of doing their job. In the formulation of timescales, however, they relied heavily upon the information given them by the software engineers, the experts, who could best judge just how long a technical task would take.

The practical concerns of working in the marketing department were thus of a different order to those of working in the software engineering department. Likewise the relative importance of the accuracy of timescales were of different orders. In an effort to maintain good relations with corporate customers, the marketers were in the business of presenting the company as efficient, reliable and good value for money. In order to do this the marketing managers needed to come up with more precise timescales than the software engineering department. As part of negotiations with corporate customers, they could - and often were - asked to come up with timescales for the supply of their products, or product enhancements. Time scales could be fudged to a degree, but in order to keep good working relationships with corporate customers they needed to supply more accurate figures than the engineers were willing to give them.

We can see then that the practical concerns of managing in this particular meeting were informed by the wider departmental practical concerns of working in the company (as outlined); to put it another way, the wider departmental practical concerns of working in the company furnished an understanding of the practical concerns of this particular meeting. Broadly speaking, the reason Doerman called the meeting in the first place was that he and his colleagues in marketing needed software engineering to come forward with no-nonsense timescales that they could rely upon, and act

upon in their dealings with their customers, and in their marketing work generally.

What we see here then is that the practical concerns of the ongoing work of the managers furnish the practical concerns of the meeting. Managers' understandings of what is going on in the meeting are informed by their wider knowledge of how things are in the organisation. In order to understand a meeting such as this, in order to understand why and how managers act in this particular way, one must be conscious of the wider ongoing organisational context that informs the managerial work within the setting. Through attending to the wider ongoing organisational context of the meeting, one can begin to understand the meeting as it is understood by the managers involved.

*Beginning the meeting:*

On the day of the meeting, I put on my suit and travelled to the company. At the appointed time I entered the meeting room, and sat at the end of the table. The people involved knew who I was, so they thought nothing of my presence. As I waited for the meeting to begin, I listened attentively to the usual informal chat that precedes a meeting, while the assembled waited for the others to arrive. As I listened to the informal chat, I lifted my tape recorder out from my brief case, and placed it unobtrusively upon the table, along with a couple of books. I put the recorder on standby and waited for the proceedings to begin. Soon everybody had sat down at the table, and the meeting was opened by Doerman. I released the standby switch:

## THE MEETING AT LOMBARGE TECHNOLOGIES:

- D: Right we'll get right down to the software issues (0.4) and what they mean to the series 500 (0.4) and what they mean (1.0) therefore also to the 590 (0.2)
- A: Okay
- D: Brendan (0.5)
- A: Uh::m (0.5) Well the two main software issues are Capital
- D: Uhuh
- A: =Since Lorne (0.5)
- D: Uhuh
- A: A:::nd (0.2) u:::h (0.4) the changes to the Micro A.M.S =
- D: =Do we have a description of the changes to the Micro A.M.S err Graham? (1.0)
- G: Yes it's in the package that's going out to them this afternoon (2.0)
- D: What they really mean
- G: I've given a copy to Neil and Mike (2.0) of what the changes=it's about a five page document that just summarises what the changes are and the parameters they need to use
- D: Right (0.4)
- D: So: (0.5) w-what is still going on as far as Capital is concerned in engineering then?
- G: Capita::l?
- D: Yeh. Sorry Micro AMS.
- G: Micro AMS? (0.5) Umm:: we've (0.2) got (0.2) a (0.5) bug for Sarsens that we have to fix in the next two weeks the M.B.D.C. scheme problem which is Nigel Brewer's next job and when he's done that he is then starting on the autoranging work (1.0) which we're currently intending to deliver at the end of July
- D: That's final that we That's is final that we've got a clear commitment on the table there? (0.2)
- G: Yeh (0.2) Yeh and it's his top priority (1.0)
- D: Okay. There is no chance anyone will take it off to to t-do the job for something else.
- G: That is correct (2.0) According to Jeff Hatton's rules it's a customer (0.5) commitment with a (0.2) with a targ- with a fixed date and therefore it's his top priority (0.5) it takes priority over 590 kate (1.0) uhh model library::

Such activities as these can only be understood adequately in terms of the broader organisational context within which the meeting is taking place. Here we see Doerman (D) securing information from the software engineers about how a key project is being dealt with in the software engineering department. He is attempting to establish information, information for the practical purposes both of managing within the setting, and for the practical purposes of managing in his ongoing role as a marketing manager. He needs information, and commitments, for the practical purposes of working in his everyday role as a marketing manager:

The practical concerns of Doerman's everyday departmental work means that he must be able to provide information to customers and colleagues. In turn, his customers and colleagues rely upon such information for the practical purposes of doing their work, and their planning. In order to deal with customers effectively, Doerman must be able to come up with prices, names, assessments, and timescales that can be relied upon by his customers and colleagues. Fudging and procrastinating will be noticed and may jeopardise the company's relationship with corporate clients. Doerman's work within the company, then, ensures that he has an interest in acquiring relevant information about timescales, costs and product developments that he can use, rely upon and present to his customers as reliable and true for all practical purposes. His everyday work within the company also ensures that he has an interest in ensuring (as best he can) that those deadlines, costs, and assessments are met for the practical purposes of his work. Should we ask, then, Why does Doerman act in the way that he does?, we can only answer in terms of the practical concerns that he himself is orienting to. The practical concerns of acting here and now in this particular managerial setting can only be understood in terms of the understood wider ongoing organisational context, part of which involves the practical concerns of the everyday work activities in his department.

Consider what Doerman does in this particular passage:

D: So: (0.5) w-what is still going on as far as Capital is concerned in engineering then?

G: Capita::l?

D: Yeh. Sorry micro AMS.

G: Micro MS? (0.5) Umm :: we've (0.2) got (0.2) a (0.5) bug for Sarsens that



we have to fix in the next two weeks the M.B.D.C. scheme problem (0.5) which is Nigel Brewer's next job (0.4) and when he's done that he is then starting on the autoranging work (1.0) which we're currently intending to deliver at the end of July

D: That's final that we that's is final that we've got a clear commitment on the table there?

G: Yeh (0.2) Yeh and it's his top priority (1.0)

D: Okay (0.2) There is no chance anyone will take it off to to t-do the job for something else.

G: That is correct (2.0) According to Jeff Hatton's rules it's a customer (0.5) commitment with a (0.2) with a targ- with a fixed date and therefore it's his top priority (0.5) it takes priority over 590 kate (1.0) uhh model library::

The date of the Annual Release is of the utmost practical importance to Doerman for the purposes of dealing with customers and managing his own department. The completion of the Micro A.M.S is an important practical concern for Doerman, as it constitutes the final stage, barring testing, after which the Series 500 can be released to corporate customers as part of the company's Annual Release. The departmental concerns about the Annual Release can thus be seen to furnish practical concerns within the particular setting. The date of the Annual Release that Doerman has been hoping for, and using in his work, was around July, and he is under considerable pressure, from customers and from colleagues, to realise this date.

We can see therefore that Doerman asks about the crucial Micro A.M.S. work in order to ascertain how this particular product is proceeding, and to keep tabs on the timing of the Annual Release products. Doerman then is asking for an up-date on the Micro A.M.S. project in order to gain information required for the practical purposes of managing in this setting, but also to gain the information required for the practical purposes of doing his everyday marketing work, such as planning and dealing with customer queries. The practical concerns of his everyday marketing work then furnish the practical concerns of acting within the meeting.

Graham answers Doerman's request in the knowledge that the marketing managers are decidedly nervous about the time of the Annual Release.

Believing that the work is being done as quickly as possible, he characterises the Micro A.M.S work in terms of the ongoing concerns of his department. He provides a breakdown of the work to be done. Firstly an emergency has to be sorted out, i.e a bug that has been discovered by Sarsens, which has to be fixed over the next two weeks. After this, work can start in earnest on the crucial Micro A.M.S. autoranging work. This Micro A.M.S work would be expected to be done within two and a half months, i.e. by the end of July.

G: Micro MS? (0.5) Umm :: we've (0.2) got (0.2) a (0.5) bug for Sarsens that we have to fix in the next two weeks the M.B.D.C. scheme problem (0.5) which is Nigel Brewer's next job (0.4) and when he's done that he is then starting on the autoranging work (1.0) which we're currently intending to deliver at the end of July

D: That's final that we That's is final that we've got a clear commitment on the table there?

G: Yeh (0.2) Yeh and it's his top priority (1.0)

D: Okay (0.2) There is no chance anyone will take it off to to t-do the job for something else.

G: That is correct (2.0) According to Jeff Hatton's rules it's a customer (0.5) commitment with a (0.2) with a targ- with a fixed date and therefore it's his top priority (0.5) it takes priority over 590 kate (1.0) uhh model library

The practical concerns of working in the marketing department mean that Doerman requires knowledge about the progress of certain key projects. As we have seen, as the situation stands, Micro A.M.S is planned to be part of the Annual Release, and so the date of the Annual release depends to a large extent upon the date of completion of this particular project. Here we see Doerman (Lines 6-7 underlined) attempting to secure a commitment that the Micro A.M.S. autoranging work will be done, as there have been doubts about this, thus endangering the date of the completion of the Micro A.M.S., thereby pushing back the date of the Annual Release. Doerman knows full well that in the past certain projects in software engineering have been delayed because engineers have been switched from project to project, as different technical needs have arisen, and he addresses this as part of his managerial work (Lines 10-11 underlined), thus eliciting a reassurance, a

commitment that it will not happen in this case. Doerman therefore goes some way to ensuring that this will not happen.

Graham again replies, giving a characterisation of the situation in software engineering. He reassures Doerman that the job will be done to time, backing this up by pointing to its customer commitment status. This project has to be done to a fixed date for a Beta released customer before Annual Release. Graham thus paints a picture of the software engineering department working normally, abiding by the rules, prioritising projects in a way that is appropriate.

As the meeting proceeds, we see Doerman and his colleagues trying to establish the Annual Release date. Of course, from the perspective of the software engineers, the timing of Annual Release is very uncertain, both for technical and organisational reasons. Technical hitches may have a knock on effect, thus muddying any accurate forecasting of the date. Doerman and his colleagues however, attempt to elicit certainty, public commitment to a specific date, for the practical purposes of doing their work:

- G: That's for the completion of 500 chain but it won't necessarily mean 590 from that day (1.5) It can presumably go in the following release (0.2) for 590 (0.4) It won't (0.3) that's the Beta release it won't be fully released on 500 until the Summer (0.4) full (0.2) full release (0.3) in the full release
- D: >When does that mean () in July is it?<
- G: It's being planned for two months after micro M.S. and Algard (1.0)
- E: Which is what?
- F: In September
- G: Well if (0.4) if (0.3) if Algard (0.5) would (0.3) well if end
- D: Bloody Hell
- G: of September if whatever Algard work (0.2) Lorne want is done by the end of July (1.0)
- D: >I thought we were going to have em released by (0.3) by err June now<
- G: Well you can't (0.5) if you want Micro M.S. autoranging in that release we cannot release it before we've done the mi(hu)cr(hu)o M.S work

In this case, Doerman attempts to elicit the date of the Annual Release from Graham (Line 6 underlined). Once again, Graham responds in terms of departmental commitments, and is vague about the date. Doerman's colleague then points to Graham's junior and asks him for the date (Line 9 underlined). The junior gives a date, September, which gives away the timescale that the engineering department has been operating on. Graham then steps in to reaffirm the status of the project in terms of other departmental commitments. Doerman swears, disgruntled with the timescale being talked about and claims that he was expecting a date more in line with June. Graham points out the departmental practical concerns of getting this job done: it simply has to wait until Micro A.M.S. and Algard are done. Doerman reiterates the point, that the marketing department was working upon the assumption that June was to be the time for the Annual Release:

- D: >I thought we were going to have em released by (0.3) by err June now<  
G: Well you can't (0.5) if you want Micro M.S. autoranging in that release we cannot release it before we've done the mi(hu)cr(hu)o M.S work

Once again Graham answers in terms of the practical concerns of working in the software engineering department. And so it continues. We can see in this meeting how wider departmental practical concerns inform how the managers act within the meeting setting. The marketers broad concerns to get the products delivered as quickly as possible, and to maintain healthy customer relations, enable us to understand why they attempt to get the engineers to provide dates, information and commitments in a way that provides certainty for the practical purposes of doing their job. The software engineers' broad departmental concerns to get projects completed in the face of uncertainty, enable us to understand why they fudge, parry and point to the organisational imperatives of their work in order to offset this unwelcome pressure.

- D: >So< (0.4) why don't we stop that release and err::: and order that that (0.4) that that particular feature in that err will each um and still release err (0.3) in June July time  
G: Because I was told that the (0.3) that the big things we were doing all had to be in that Summer release  
D: >I apologise yes that that's right< (0.3) >yes<

Throughout the meeting Graham characterises his department as working in a way that is orderly, legitimate and as efficient as it can be, considering. The marketing managers' preference for an earlier release date is repeatedly characterised as unattainable, not because of any laxity or inefficiency in the engineering department, but because of the practical concerns of doing the work. As in this case, Doerman repeatedly tries to find ways around the practical problems outlined by Graham, such that the Annual Release can proceed. Here Doerman suggests that they release without the Micro A.M.S. enhancement, implying that the need to get the products out to customers overrides the need to include the Micro A.M.S. enhancement. Graham however points to the decision made by Jeff Hatton that all the major enhancements were to be in the Annual release, legitimising the work being done in the software engineering department in terms of the powers that be. Doerman recognises the immutability of this high-level decision, and backs off, until . . .

D: Okay so is there anything else that is in that stuff that could be released in the Summer? I mean is there. I . . . This is a question. Are you hanging everything out 'till September for a release that could be available in the Summer?

G: Well it depends what the Lorne Algard work turns out to be. If they want what we thought they wanted then we're four months away from that  
(1.0)

D: (Whistles)  
(1.0)

G: So. If, if it's it a four months Lorne job, then that doesn't finish till the end of August, which would put full year release out to the end of October=

E: =But last time I spoke to Michael Harner about Algard

G: If you want the Algard

E: = He said if Capital is (0.2) isn't better sufficiently (0.5) then he's (0.5) they won't (0.2) they're not going to launch the err::=

G: =Well fine (0.5) All I'm saying is (0.4) If you want a particular enhancement in the full year release (0.2) then the full year release will be two months after that (0.5) cos when we (0.2) when we give (0.2) Germany the Beta release at the enhancement (0.3) then we freeze all

the software (0.2) two months later the full release pops out the end (0.3) assuming (0.5) of course (0.2) that we've got a replacement for Doug Barton (3.0)

D: That seems err a little bit of a weak err thing to say assuming=

G: Well. You can either decide that you want these things in the full release in which case the full release has got to wait for them (0.3) or decide that you don't want them in the full release and we can start the full release process as soon as we've got some resource

Doerman again attempts to find a way around the late Annual Release date, effectively asking Graham if there is anything that can be done to get the release done in the Summer. Once again, however, Graham explains the practical concerns of the work in software engineering, pointing out difficulties that they have to face as part of the work of producing the product enhancements. He explains and defends the priorities assigned to each of the tasks, and identifies the reasons for the 'unacceptable' date for Annual Release. Firstly, there is the practical need to do the Algard work for Lorne. Secondly, there is the length of the actual testing process itself, which can take anything up to two months after the products are 'frozen', i.e. after work on the products ceases. Thirdly, and compounding this unavoidable practical concern is the fact that their main tester, Doug Barton, left in February, meaning that a new engineer had to be found, appointed and trained up. As the meeting proceeds, Doug Barton's resignation is discussed in terms of its practical implications for the timing of the Annual Release.

What we find in this particular episode of managerial work is that the date of the Annual Release has continually been defined by Graham in terms of the practical concerns of working in the engineering department. He is telling the marketing managers how it is. The marketing managers thus find themselves unable to speed up the process. The productive process is out of their hands, so to speak, and they are wholly reliant on the engineers, not only for the production of the products, but for the assessment of timescales. From the marketing point of view, everything Graham says makes good practical sense, but, for the practical purposes of doing their work in the marketing department, they would still prefer more accurate dates, and a July date for the Annual release. This explains the rather lame, and impotent contributions by the marketing managers, who can only

express uninformed preferences about the timing of what is done in software engineering. Throughout the meeting Graham has been able to counter pressure from Doerman through pointing out the practical concerns of producing the goods. Doerman has been unable to counter these assertions of how things are, and the prioritising that has been done, because he is ignorant of the practical concerns of doing such engineering work. Any preferences he has expressed have been met by an explanation of the practical concerns of doing the engineering work. He thus reaches an impasse, unable to insist upon a July Annual Release:

- D: So (0.3) we're looking for somebody who has a (0.2) has the experience of all our systems is that what you're saying?
- G: Mm:: (0.4) You don't need a great deal of experience (0.2) en-enough to know what you're doing (0.8) yeh (0.5) yeh
- E: You'll want a software guy as well then eh
- G: Oh yes I mean as he goes through he'll find problems (0.2) and then the people responsible for those areas of the code will have to (0.3) get in there and fix them
- E: Yeh
- G: Now that process is (0.2) two and a half man months' of work
- E: Shit
- G: It's - it would be optimistic to suppose from when we've reached the software then - that the release would be much earlier than two months after the freeze (0.6) if we've got
- D: >O.K.<
- G: someone full time and someone part time (1.0)
- D: So were gonna find out what we::: err what (0.2) what we will err can add and release in the Summer time right?
- G: Yeh
- D: Depending upon the outcome of the Algard =
- G: =That's right
- D: Okay
- G: Yeh
- D: This is only two points right?
- F: That's only one so far
- G: Hahahah

Here we see Graham again explaining the practical concerns of getting to Annual Release in terms of the work done in the engineering department. This time however, Doerman interrupts him with a sharp 'O.K.' He then proposes a decision, that they should go away and find out what they can have released in the Summer. In this way he ends this particular discussion on the timing of the Annual Release, with a decision of sorts that keeps open the option of a Summer Annual Release, puts the onus upon the engineers to go away and come up with ideas about what products could be released as Annual release, and also gives himself time to approach various other people within the company in order to see what can be done about it. The issue then is still open to further action, even though this particular discussion has ended.

*Managing in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation:*

Taking this meeting as an example, we see that the practical concerns of doing managerial work within this particular organisational setting are understood in terms of the ongoing practical concerns of working beyond the setting. The date of Annual Release is discussed in terms of the date's implications, viz., wider organisational, especially departmental, work concerns. From observing such work, I have noticed that everything from the transfer of information, through to the initiation of structural change is done through social interaction, the practical concerns of which are understood and acted upon in terms of the wider ongoing organisational context. The understood ongoing organisational context thus informs and orders the managerial work activities in particular organisational settings.

As we have seen, the Annual Release date has practical implications both within and beyond the organisational setting. We (along with the managers) can appreciate that once the date of the Annual Release has been set, then it will furnish practical concerns within the ongoing work of the departments involved: for the marketers, the date can be used for the practical purposes of dealing with their customers; for the engineers, the achievement of this date may have to be secured through taking so-and-so off this project, or through requesting extra resources. Managerial work meetings such as this then are about organisational concerns, done through an understanding of those concerns, and, to a greater or lesser degree, constitute the organisational context for the ongoing work beyond the meeting: things are



decided, thus establishing certain courses for further activity within the organisation; things are agreed upon, thus establishing certainty for the practical purposes of working; figures are presented, thus providing resources that can be used, referred to, and acted upon in the ongoing work of the organisation; new organisational structures may be agreed, thus sanctioning further activities within the organisation (thus enacting these new structures).

If we wish to investigate the nature of managerial work activity, it makes sense to explore how managers understand the practical concerns of their work, for they act in these terms. Managerial activities are concerned with organising in the knowledge that the work done, here and now, will furnish practical concerns within the ongoing work of the organisation. As we have seen, the deliberations over whether the Annual Release date is June or September were done in terms of the practical concerns of working within the organisation, in the knowledge that any decision would be acted upon in and as the further work of the organisation. The interactive activities and practices that are characterised as managerial work, are thus concerned with organising in terms of the ongoing organisational context, and themselves constitute the organisational context that furnishes the practical concerns of the ongoing work of the organisation.

#### *Lessons for management studies:*

In this section I have attempted to approach managerial work in a way that documents managers' own understanding of the practical concerns of working in a particular organisational setting. In keeping my analyses as close as possible to the managers' own, I have identified several issues that have implications for further research into the nature of managerial work:

The present is understood in terms of the ongoing. The managerial situation is understood, assessed and acted upon in terms of its constitutive place in the ongoing work of the organisation. This ongoing organisational context may be understood in different ways by different managers. As we have seen, managers sometimes understand, assess and treat the same situation in different or conflicting ways. In the meeting, for instance, the managers understood and acted upon the present in terms of the work's implications for their respective departments.

These observations consolidate and refine Whitley's (1989) incisive work, in which he identified five features of managerial tasks, which differentiate them from other sorts of work (1989, p. 222):

Firstly, that they are highly independent, contextual and systematic;

Secondly, that they are relatively unstandardised;

Thirdly, that they are changeable and developing;

Fourthly, that they combine both the maintenance of administrative structures and their change; and,

Fifthly, that they rarely generate visible and separate outputs which can be directly connected to individual inputs.

The particular, contextual nature of managerial tasks lead Whitley to point to the local propriety of managerial skills (1989, p. 214):

. . . managerial skills differ considerably from other sorts of expertise in their limited standardisation across industries, their susceptibility to change, their specificity to situations rather than problems and their diffuse, varied knowledge base.

His appreciation of particular tasks in particular settings, and thus of the propriety of certain skills at certain times, informed his characterisation of managerial work as being embedded within the ongoing work of the organisation (1989, p. 217):

Managers have to implement solutions and, collectively, deal with their consequences in ways that personal services do not. This means that managerial skills are not so much focused on 'solving' discrete, well bounded individual problems, as on dealing with a continuous series of internally related and fluid tasks in particular circumstances.

Whitley's discussion about the nature of managerial work is significant in that it identifies the importance of the ongoing organisational context in furnishing a variety of tasks to be done.

In broad terms, Whitley is right to talk in terms of the constitutive relationship between the ongoing work of the organisation and the nature of managerial work. Managerial work, however, is not done in broad terms. From the meeting, we can see that by glossing over the interactive practices of doing what he calls managerial work, Whitley simplifies the practical concerns of managing. He overlooks how the definition of the particular in terms of the wider, ongoing organisation informs how managers go about their work. For instance, from close attention to the work done at a meeting, we have seen that managers may define the same setting in ways that differ in terms of what is important and what needs to be done. By paying close attention to managerial practice, we saw that managers' assessment of what was important, and their understanding of what was to be done, differed in terms of the ongoing practical concerns of working in their respective departments. Such differing practical concerns underpinned, and ordered, the negotiating, the questioning, the explaining, the managerial work.

If we are to talk about the relationship between the organisational context and the here and now in a way that reflects the way things are done within managerial settings, we would be well advised to examine the practical concerns of doing such work in managers' terms. This involves treating the organisation, not as some kind of entity that impinges upon the present, but in terms of how it is understood by the managers as they work. As we have seen, what is important, what things are to be done, may be understood in very different ways. Different managers may have different priorities, understood in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. Whitley was able to produce a characterisation of managerial tasks that overlooked this constitutive feature of managerial work through glossing over his own definitional activities (particularly with respect to the notion of 'managerial tasks'); and through glossing over the activities the managers engage in when they do what he terms 'managerial work'.

We can thus appreciate the pitfalls of glossing the practices of both describing and doing managerial work. The sociology of managerial work to date has largely been done through producing characterisations that gloss over both practices. I have written this section to rectify this imbalance by bringing to light some of the practical concerns of doing managerial work, and some of the practical concerns of describing it.

The variety of practices that can conventionally be described as managerial work is enormous, and I have set out an interpretation of just one example of such work. If the ethnographic research has been done properly however, much can be learnt from the particular. The scope for further research is enormous, both in terms of the various practices that can be explored, and in terms of the amount that can be learnt from them. It is my hope that qualitative research into the practical concerns of managing will continue to develop as a field in its own right, constituting a corpus of research that does justice to the enormous variety of managerial practices, and enables us to assess the conventional wisdoms about managerial work.

## SECTION TWO: THE EXPERIENCE OF MANAGING ABROAD

### *Introduction:*

In the last section I documented the practical concerns of managing in a cross-national situation, a meeting. I discussed how the work was done in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation, and I explained how the meeting was understood and acted upon in terms of its implications for the ongoing work of the different departments.

I stress these points in order to introduce a further point, that the national cultural difference between Doerman and his colleagues was treated as being unimportant, as the managers got on with what was important. The work was done in terms of the ongoing organisational context. The practical concerns of doing such work thus had little to do with nationality or culture, but a great deal to do with the ongoing work of the organisation.

As we have seen, the practical concerns of working were understood in terms of the implications of certain release dates for the ongoing work of different departments. As such the practical concerns of managing were no different in kind or scope from the practical concerns of working among compatriots. That is not to say that different nationals were not present at the meeting table; nor is it to say that there were not certain subtle differences in the way things were done. It is merely to point out that any differences in nationality and culture took a back seat, as it were, in order to get the work done. The need to get certain organisational issues sorted out, shaped a sense in which national cultural difference was accountably peripheral. The work was done in spite of national cultural difference.

In this section, I move on from an examination of the practical concerns of managing in a cross-national situation, to address the question of how cultural differences make an impact on managerial work abroad. As I shall go on to discuss, although national cultural differences do tend to be overlooked as the managers get on with their work, they can, and do have a significant impact at the level of experience.

### *The ordering properties of work:*

How are we to explain the celebrated difficulties associated with national cultural differences? Talking to the managers, I found that they often stressed the impact of cultural difference within their work. It seemed that they were bogged down with cultural problems that furnished all sorts of practical concerns, making their job more difficult, more complicated and more frustrating than work among compatriots. Cultural differences seemed to play a big part in cross-national managerial work.

As I observed the managers at work, however, I noticed that although there were cultural and linguistic differences between those doing the work, such differences were treated as being unimportant. What was important was important in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. Managers' activities, then, were more concerned with organisational concerns such as securing dates or coming to decisions, than with any cultural difficulties or linguistic misunderstandings, which were dealt with as part of the work.

We, along with the managers, can thus appreciate the ordering properties of work in an organisation. As I continue to stress, managers act in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation, in the sense that an understanding of the operations of the wider organisation furnishes local imperatives - things that have to be done here and now. Work in an organisation thus has organising properties that order the importance and propriety of certain practices in particular settings. The managers doing the work may not particularly want to spend hours deliberating over a date or a decision, but in organisational terms they may simply have to do so.

Managerial work, then, is done in terms of organisational concerns such as getting the work done to time, or to quality specifications. Such prevailing, but locally invoked imperatives furnish an accountable sense that getting the job done to time, or to quality specifications, are what is important. In organisational terms, cultural differences are simply not that important, and are tolerated, or muddled through, in order to get the work done. Approaching managerial activities as organisational work thus enables us to understand why dates are dealt with as an issue, and cultural difficulties are not. This is not to say that cultural and linguistic differences are not noticed. It is to point out that they are noticed and dealt with as part of the work.

### *The experience of working:*

In trying to understand the impact of cultural differences on cross-national managerial work, I noticed that the managers often explained the impact of cultural differences in terms of the experience of working with other nationals. In other words, much of the difficulty associated with cultural difference seemed to be understood in terms of its impact at the level of experience. There appeared, then, to be more to cross-national managerial work than organising in terms of the organisation.

Managers' understanding of their work, then, is not limited to the accountable practical concerns of getting the work done. Certainly, managerial activities are accountably work activities, and are understood in these terms. Other features of their work, however, are also important to them. For instance, concerns that a colleague has an overbearing manner, that he talks loudly, that he is untidy, that he swears, that one just does not get on with him, or that he is culturally different can furnish personal concerns of the first order, but these take a back seat within the work setting. The power of work, then, can be seen in its power to organise, to produce an accountable setting wherein work is done, but wherein experiential concerns may have to be suppressed or quieted. The power of work is such that such defining human emotions as anxiety, mistrust, liking, frustration, suspicion, anger, pleasure and irritation may have to be suppressed - for they simply have no accountable place in the doing of managerial work.

I acknowledge the worth of analyses that examine the accountable practical concerns of naturally occurring work activities. There is, however, scope for further understanding (as the managers themselves understand further) through tackling the experience of being a manager in a foreign country. As the managers tell us, work is not only done, but is experienced.

As I continue to stress, a work setting is accomplished in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. From the managers' point of view, however, it may be an emotional setting, a setting of suppression, a setting perhaps wherein nobody wants to be there. The work however simply has to be done. Along with the managers we can appreciate the powerful organising properties of managerial work in a business organisation.

A manager's understanding, then, is not restricted to the accountable concerns of the work setting. The manager is able also to attend to a way of talking, an aggressive manner, a look in another's eyes, a shadow of anxiety passing across another's face. He is able to laugh at a quip while fuming inside, to get the job done while feeling overwhelmed by irritation; to talk about rules and colleagues while crossing his legs in frustration. There is no time out within a managerial work setting: irritation, anxiety, hope, or despair may constitute the experience of the manager while he acts with managerial propriety.

How can we deal with this aspect of managerial work? Well, for a start we can humanise our picture of the manager. We can go further than the managerial practice we witness, and endow those doing the work with an awareness that is more than a social residue, and more than that of an engaged member acting within an organisational setting. The manager is able to attend to himself, not just in terms of the work, but is able to feel worried, tired, bored, frustrated, excited, or anxious. The sweaty palms, the headache, the longing to be elsewhere, however, may have to be suppressed, hidden, put away until after the meeting or phonecall.

Generally speaking, managerial work settings are understood and acted upon in ways that are competent for all practical purposes. Humanising our picture of the manager enables us to appreciate that such settings are understood and acted upon, in other, unsaid ways. Work and colleagues are understood in ways that are not accountably required, relied upon, oriented to, or invoked within a particular work setting. Sense is made of a setting in ways that may be peripheral, unrelated to the immediate task at hand. Managers are people, and people are able to do so:

A manager's mistrust of a colleague, whether constituted through previous experience, or through noticing a sudden flush or glazed expression, may underpin his activities, but may not become manifest, public, an accountable feature of the setting. Likewise, a manager's incompatibility with a colleague may be considered, regretted or viewed with anxiety, without it becoming a noticeable feature of their work together. Accountable sense is made of the setting in terms of the practical purposes of getting the work done.



There is much to gain in considering the hidden effort, the hidden frustration, the hidden emotions, the hidden understandings that shape the experience of managerial work, that furnish a sense of what the work 'is'. In humanising the manager, in appreciating the ability to attend to, and understand peripheral features of the work setting, we can appreciate that the manager is able, as it were, to transcend the activities within a particular setting, and to consider a strange way of talking, to think of other things, to notice the grey in a colleague's hair, to notice cultural difference. The manager has feelings. He is able to make sense of his feelings, to consider the reason for these feelings, and to consider the implications of revealing them. He is thus able to suppress, to manage, to get on with the job:

B: Yes, I was absolutely furious. I mean, it wasn't my fault that the room hadn't been booked. But what could I do? Cause a scene? Blow my top? That's the last thing you should do. If you lose your rag in this organisation, then you've blown it. They've won.

The definition and constitution of the setting in terms of the ongoing furnishes the practical concerns of acting or not acting: an understanding of the wider ongoing organisational context furnishes practical imperatives within the particular setting. This onus on getting the business done, on organising in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation, can thus be seen to organise selves (see Mangham, 1978). The manager, in order to work within a particular setting, must put aside likes, dislikes, anxieties, frustrations and irritation. He may have a toothache, a headache, a pain in his chest, but may not have the opportunity to couch his lack of concentration, his unconvincing smile in these terms.

The setting then shapes how one publicly feels. The manager may find the work at hand dull, boring, frustrating, or confusing. However the situation may determine that a yawn be stifled, a doodle be hidden, a glance at the time be done with attention to the gaze of his colleagues. The manager may find a colleague to be stubborn, unreasonable, uneducated or culturally different. The onus on getting the work done, however, requires that he gets on with the work at hand; the onus on getting the work done does not require that he becomes overly preoccupied with the cultural difference of his colleagues, though this may be attended to and dealt with as he gets on with the work.

*Managers are human too:*

The experience of managing has been sorely neglected both by the use of blunt instruments in sociology, and by the apotheosis of the transcript in ethnomethodology. The thoroughly human manager is able to attend to a good deal more than practical concerns as he gets on with his work.

Certainly, the fact that action is social, is public, allows us into managerial settings as far as our organisational knowledge stretches. The social, accountable, public nature of managerial work means that a researcher can learn to recognise the practical concerns that constitute particular work settings, to understand managerial work for all practical purposes, the practical purposes being those of doing the work.

This much we know. However, we also know that the onus on formulating the work, on getting the work done, is not without experiential implications for the managers who act within and constitute the setting. In humanising the manager, in attending to his consciousness, his emotional character, his experience of working, I have done nothing to weaken an analysis of how he works in everyday organisational settings. We do not have to bracket the unsaid, non-constitutive aspects of managerial work. Indeed, as I shall discuss, there is much to gain in dispensing with the brackets altogether, for the experience of working is of great practical importance in the ongoing work of business organisations.

*The experience of working:*

In this discussion I have laid great emphasis on two points: firstly, that the definition of managerial settings in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation orders those settings in terms of what is, and what is not important; and, secondly, that along with other features of these work settings, cultural and linguistic differences are accountably overlooked, and are dealt with only as part and parcel of getting on with the work at hand.

Talking to the managers, however, we find that cultural and linguistic differences constitute concerns of the first order: cultural problems furnish all sorts of difficulties in their work.

In order to appreciate why this is so, we must address the issue of managers' experience of their work. Managers are managers, and as such they understand work settings in terms of the practical concerns of working. Managers however are also people; as such, they are able to consider, understand and experience their work in terms other than the practical concerns of working. Managers get bored, irritated, envious, and hurt within work settings without such experiences entering into the public domain. Such experiences, however, are thoroughly important to them, and can come to shape their understanding of the nature of their work. If we wish to investigate the nature of so-called cross-national managerial work in a way that remains true to managers' understanding of their work, then it makes sense to investigate the experience of working with other nationals. Indeed, in doing so I discovered that the experience of working is interesting for good, practical reasons:

- 1) It influences how managers act within cross-national settings,
- 2) It influences how managers act beyond cross-national settings, and,
- 3) It can lead to the development of destructive cultural problems.

The practical implications of experience in business organisations must be understood in terms of the ongoing temporal nature of the organisation:

The understood organisational nature of work furnishes an onus on formulating the work, on getting it done. This the manager does. At the end of a meeting, for instance, the business will have been completed, the job done, and decisions made or postponed. Situations or issues will have been clarified, commitments made, duties assigned.

Such is the practical nature of the work. The experience of the manager in getting all this done, however, may have been one of frustration, tedium, or boredom. The work of getting the business done may have been bogged down with such activities as:

choosing one's words carefully so as to be understood; ignoring mistakes, or snubs; being civil, even friendly, to an infuriating colleague; overcoming a

colleague's reticence; coaxing out the truth; concealing frustration or impatience; coming across as enthusiastic; overcoming embarrassment on making a gaffe; overcoming anxiety; working with embarrassment; working with anxiety; working with mistrust; working with uncertainty; or working with an unformulated gist.

Humanising the manager enables us not only (to continue) to explore the practical concerns of doing managerial work in everyday organisational settings, but it also enables us to attend to the experience of managing. To do so is important, for the experience of managing is not incidental to managerial activity within an organisation. It is something foundational. Private experiences of humiliation, frustration, irritation, anger, anxiety, and uncertainty are thoroughly important to the manager for they can colour his work activities, and influence how exactly he gets things done, both within and beyond the particular work setting.

Irritation within a work setting may be set aside, suppressed, in order to get on with the job (indeed, in certain circumstances a display of irritation may be unthinkable). However, the experience of the setting for the manager may be not so much one of eliciting responses, securing commitments, or characterising the situation in his department - though that is what he accountably does. The experience of the setting may be one of utter tedium, of unmotivated colleagues who stall at every possible occasion, or of national cultural differences. According to the managers, it is this experience of the setting (bluntly characterised) that they carry away with them.

Herein lies the practical importance of experience in the ongoing work of the organisation. A manager not only leaves the setting with a handful of commitments, of figures, of new responsibilities, of relevant information. He may leave the setting with impressions, feelings, hopes, grudges, disappointments, suspicions, uncertainties, and frustrations:

A manager's experience within particular settings is not epiphenomenal to his ongoing work in the organisation, but is attended to, understood, and acted upon by the manager who may thence prefer to conduct business through memorandum, letter or fax; who may thence prefer not to attend a particular meeting; who may go on to talk of Stein as pompous, or dismiss Andre as a sloppy worker; who may decide to promote Smith rather than

Wang because he is so much easier to work with; who may decide to leave the company for a less stressful job; who may tell his spouse that he has had an awful day; who may feel like leaving the table; who may be insulted; who may insult; who may snub; who may neglect to invite Sanchez to the meeting; who may never want to have a meeting like that again. Managers' experience of their work transcends the exigencies of working in a particular setting: it is what managers take away with them in the form of admiration, grudges, frustrations, enthusiasm and bitterness.

A manager's experience of working colours or influences how he acts in the ongoing work of the organisation. The importance of experience can be appreciated by considering how the manager goes about tackling the practical concerns of working in a particular setting - enthusiastically, reluctantly, cursorily - and how he acts beyond the setting in the ongoing work of the organisation.

*The ongoing role of experience:*

Examining the practical concerns of managing in an organisation, we have seen how discrete (completed) managerial settings may be used, invoked, and acted upon in the ongoing work of the organisation. Within such settings, decisions are made, characterisations of the organisation put forward and endorsed, options outlined, responsibilities assigned, and information disseminated in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. We have seen how what has been said and done in the past is used in the present. Indeed, the past provides context for the present, and the present is understood to provide context for the future. It is important to realise then (as do the managers) that the work done in the here and now can be discussed, invoked, relied upon, changed, concealed, or revoked in the ongoing work of the organisation (in further organisational settings). An understanding of the future furnishes practical concerns in the present.

How then do managers act upon the done, the completed? A manager's residual understanding of a particular setting may be vague, impressionistic, inaccurate, emotional. He may be able to recall that these decisions were taken (sort of), that these people were present (and maybe so and so). The interactional exigencies of the meeting, however, may be forgotten. What was said exactly may be lost.

The manager thus leaves a particular setting with impressions of what went on. In his further work activities, he is able to gloss what was said. The practical concerns of working in further organisational settings furnish an importance, a relevance, to certain of the decisions that were taken, certain of the responsibilities that were assigned, and certain of the options that were discussed. Such features of the setting are remembered for all practical purposes (at least until they matter no more).

Impressions of (done) work settings are not, of course, restricted to an understanding of the practical concerns of working therein. The manager may walk away with grudges, disappointments, suspicions, uncertainties, despair, frustrations (and impressions thereof). As we have seen, such experiences are not epiphenomenal to the setting as understood by the manager, wherein the onus on getting the business done prevails. Furthermore, it is important to realise (as do the managers) that such experiences are in no way epiphenomenal to how the manager acts upon the completed managerial work setting: indeed, the experiences of the manager may have a great deal to do with how he acts within, and beyond, organisational settings in the ongoing working life of the organisation.

*Public action and private experience:*

To say that managers often hide their true feelings to get the business at hand done should no longer set us spinning into a spiral of semantics, of justifications, of philosophising (see Chapter One). Managers are able to do this. They do have feelings, and can name them, talk about them, suppress them, show them. They are able to have opinions that do not make it into the public arena of the work setting. They can talk about them afterwards in other settings, with other colleagues. They can also lie about them, hint at them, threaten with them, or change them. There is, then, in managerial work an element of uncertainty, of inscrutability, of unpredictability, of the unknown. Certainly, the onus on formulating the work, on getting the business of the day done provides for an accountable organisation of work activities which may be done in a professional, upbeat way. However, as the managers tell us, there is also the unknown: what the manager really thinks; what he really made of the meeting; what he is thinking of; how he is really feeling; whether he knows he is making a bad impression; how

Weise's arguments are being perceived; whether he really believes what is being said; whether he really does trust him; whether when he says he will, he means it.

Even the most competent, the most experienced of managers experiences uncertainty; that uncertainty incarnate in the form of the other, that permeates one's understanding of another's understanding, and defines one's understanding of another's experience.

There is then an accomplished opacity between the doing of managerial work and the experience of the managers working: between public activity, and private experience. This accomplished opacity can be attended to and exploited, as in the case of lies, acting ignorant when knowledgeable, knowledgeable when ignorant, or acting as an ally while plotting against a colleague. The managerial work setting can be attended to, understood and acted upon, both within the setting, and later on, in ways that have little to do with the work activities themselves. There is thus a disjuncture between one's private experience and understanding, and one's public, accountable action, that is managed and monitored as one gets on with the task at hand. An appreciation of this disjuncture, this accomplished opacity, is necessary if we are to understand the nature of cross-national managerial work in the same way that the managers themselves do. In the next chapter I will examine how cross-national managers experience their work, and how such experience can lead to the development of destructive cultural problems.

### *Conclusion:*

Through close attention to the practical concerns of doing managerial work I have explored the definition of the particular in terms of the ongoing. Through close attention to managerial practice I have approached structure, conflict and organisation as they are understood and acted upon by those who produce such phenomena. There is much to be learnt from the analysis of managerial practice, and there is great scope for further research in this field. However, we must be aware that restricting our attentions to the accountable practical concerns of managing runs the risk of portraying the manager wholly in these terms. The picture of the manager that results may thus be one of an instrumental actor, wholly engaged within the setting.

That managers act in such a way is true in the sense that they do organise in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. There is, however, more to managers' understanding of their work, and more to how they go about tackling the practical concerns of managing. There is much to gain, in terms of analysis, in terms of use, in terms of recognisability, and in term of dissemination, by tackling the experience of managing. To reinstate the experience of the manager does not detract from an analysis of the practices of managing. The picture of the manager becomes more complex, certainly, but people are complex things.

As I have discussed, work settings are organised in such a way that emotions may have to be suppressed, feelings about someone may have to be hidden, opinions may have to be lied about, secrets may have to be kept. This distinction between managers' activities within a setting and their experience of the setting is crucial to an understanding of national cultural difference in managerial work.

Consider Doerman's work. An examination of the transcript - the public work activities - reveals few cross-national, or cross-cultural concerns: few instances wherein the managers accountably attend to, understand or act within the setting in terms of it being cross-national, or cross cultural. The notion that working managers are from different countries, or are culturally different does not accountably belong within the public work of the setting.

It is important therefore to reflect upon the fact that my conversations with Doerman were dominated by his talk about the impact of cultural differences upon his effectiveness as a manager. Along with scores of other overseas managers he considered managerial work in the United Kingdom to be difficult, problematic, frustrating, annoying, slow. In our conversations he became animated as he characterised the English and compared them to the Dutch. The English were like this; the Dutch were like that. Along with scores of other managers he told me what his work was really like. Along with other managers he talked about his work in terms of national cultural categories, of them and us, of national attributes. Like others he characterised his work in terms of difficulties, problems: cultural difficulties, cultural problems.



Here we can appreciate the accomplished, managed relationship between public work activities and private experience, private understanding. Here we can appreciate the power of the work setting over the manager. In the meeting we see Doerman getting on with the job, dealing with the business at hand. Conversing with Doerman, however, we are able to appreciate Doerman's understanding, the experience of his work. His characterisation of his work in terms of cultural difference, confirms the importance of cultural difference within his work, the bearing his foreign status has for him, his work, his understanding of his work, his understanding of himself, and his experience of his work.

This accomplished relationship between work and experience of work lies at the heart of managerial work between managers of different gender, different educational backgrounds, different interactive styles, with different ways of doing things. This accomplished distinction between work activities and private understanding of the work setting lies at the heart of managerial work between managers of different religions, of different linguistic abilities, of different countries, of different cultures. This accomplished relationship between public managerial work activities and private experiences lies at the heart of managing in the face of difference.

So what of national cultural differences? Are such differences no more important to the manager than gender differences, accent, or overbearing mannerisms? All of these may be noticed and acted upon within the work activities. What is so special about national cultural differences?

In order to answer this, it is important to discover just what cultural differences are, i.e. how they are noticed and understood by the managers themselves. I have at my fingertips many academic theories of culture and cultural difference, and I could go on to discuss these. However I consider that if we are concerned to explore the place of national cultural difference in managerial work, we should look at how managers understand cultural difference within everyday organisational settings, for it is in these terms that managers attend to, understand and act upon such difference as they get on with their work. This is the work of the next chapter.

## NOTES:

1. See Chapter Three for a discussion about the nature of interviewing, and striking up a workable rapport with the managers.

## CHAPTER FIVE:

### MANAGERIAL WORK AND NATIONALITY:

#### *Introduction:*

In the last chapter I stressed the need to investigate the experience of working with cultural differences in cross-national managerial settings. Certainly, there is great potential for further research in this field, and such studies could be very useful in the formulation of recruitment policy, the identification of training needs, and the development of training methods for cross-national managers. Before one can go on to produce useful knowledge about the experience of managing in everyday cross-national settings, however, one has to work up a way of approaching this aspect of cross-national managerial work. As I have discussed, it is difficult enough to document what is said in cross-national managerial settings. Trying to document what is left unsaid, is more difficult still. There are significant philosophical and methodological problems in the characterisation of tacit understanding and experience. However, because of the obvious importance of this aspect of cross-national managerial work, and because of the potential practical gains that may result from its investigation, we would do well to make a start.

#### SECTION ONE: MAKING SENSE OF DIFFERENCE:

##### *Introduction:*

The managers I spoke to stressed the importance, the significance, and the potential danger of national cultural differences in their work. Time and time again they complained of cultural differences, and cultural problems. National cultural differences thus kept cropping up in many guises, but mainly as the cause of organisational strife and failure. Such differences came at once to represent the cause, and the explanation, for many of the ills and disputes within their organisations. In describing their work, certain attributes, actions and institutions were commonly brought to bear upon groups of people defined in terms of their national cultural status. In this section, I investigate this practice, and thereby explore the terms in which managers appear to understand their work in cross-national settings.

### *Cultural difference and management:*

A great deal of the research process was taken up with interviewing managers about their work. The 174 overseas managers I interviewed were predominantly in technical managerial roles, such as project management or business systems management, rather than in more general managerial roles such as the personnel function (though I did meet such managers). The reasons for this were generally explained in terms of the 'transferability' of technical staff. It was deemed to be easier for technical staff to work effectively in other countries. A high degree of technical competence was understood to facilitate effective transfer from one country to another.

Many of the managers I spoke to were involved in such things as implementing new technology, managing engineering projects, managing the implementation of business systems, and managing the synchronisation of accounting systems. However, the technical aspects of their work were not generally defined as problematic. Indeed, they were usually deemed to be the most straightforward part of their work:

Generally speaking, the practical concerns of designing pricing software, new plant, technical systems, or new products were perceived to be pan-cultural. Technical languages, the language of engineering, the language of computing, and the language of circuitry were commonly characterised as transcendent and universal. As one manager in the London subsidiary of a French multinational organisation told me:

H: You see, to a certain degree they do have a common language. If you're flown in to fix some bug or other, then all you require is to be shown the terminal, and off you go. If however you're brought in to settle a dispute, or to implement some organisational directive and see it through then that's a different question.

M: In what way would you say it was different?

H: There are more factors involved. You're dealing with greater amounts of uncertainty. You see they know their own organisation better than any outsider. So when a manager is brought in, as happened in international sales last year, then they're seen to be insensitive. They're rather like bulls in a china shop.

Technical competence was commonly perceived to transcend language and culture through providing an alternative medium for the achievement of their work. The manager continued:

H: The language of technology, of maths, of figures . . . of I.T. is a language in the true sense of the word. It allows people to communicate, to get things done.

M: And what about culture? Cultural differences that sort of thing?

H: Well, it sort of leaves that behind, doesn't it? It sort of transcends the differences. In a way the technological medium provides a culture that's all its own. There's a culture of technology if you like, and people can operate in it.

This view of technology as being culture-free on one hand, and of furnishing a culture all its own on the other was supported by the views of many of the managers. Consider the words of one of them:

M: This was after grande ecole?

P: That's right, when I was twenty four I went to work in Stuttgart.

M: In a technical role?

P: Technical yes, with minor administrative duties . . . but it was mainly in the area of development.

M: New product development?

P: No, not really. More internal systems for the err robots I suppose.

M: And how did you find it over there . . . any problems?

P: No, not really problems. Technical problems yes. That was my job of course, err fixing, repairing, improving, and so on.

M: Was language a problem?

P: Language, no not really. I'd already spent some time over there anyway . . . and anyway talking to the system was more important than talking to err colleagues. Back then. Now of course, language is my job. If you were to ask me what problems I have now . . .

M: Yes.

P: I would say people problems. Motivating. Resolving disputes, err securing trust. Getting the various projects done, on time.

M: So the problems change with the job then.

P: Yes, of course. When you start off . . . if you are an engineer like me,

then problems are engineering . .

M: Technical . .

P: Technical, yes. But as you take on more and more administration, then you leave those sort of problems to your err subordinates and get on with the administrative tasks.

M: Would you say that such administrative problems are more complex than the problems you had when you were younger?

P: Of course, they are problems with people, with trust, with feedback . . . cultural problems.

Many of the managers I spoke to then were in partly technical, partly managerial roles. Invariably, however, it was the managerial role that was deemed to be problematic. What then is it about the nature of managerial work that encourages cultural problems to happen? As I shall discuss, the answer to this lies in the experience of working with cultural difference.

*Managing in terms of national cultural status:*

I encountered real difficulties in trying to work up an approach to managers' experience of cultural differences in cross-national settings. As I have discussed, work within cross-national settings is accountably concerned with the tasks at hand rather than with any cultural differences that may exist between the managers. As one observes managers at work, then, one cannot 'listen in' to what they are thinking and feeling. In order to explore managers' tacit understandings of cultural differences, then, one has to make do with what managers say about their experience of working.

A major part of the research was taken up with interviewing managers. As I grappled with the issue of how to analyse and document their experience of working, I became interested in the potential use of talk about work:

As I talked to the managers I learnt about the frustrations and difficulties associated with working with national cultural differences. Such work was certainly more difficult and frustrating than work among compatriots. When it came to documenting what I had discovered, however, I found that the characterisation of experience was very difficult. This difficulty was compounded by the fact that very little published research had attempted to do this. I thus had to work up a method of analysis and documentation.

My approach was guided by an ongoing interest in the nature of understanding. This seemed appropriate, considering it was the nature of managers' tacit understanding that I was seeking to characterise. Broadly speaking, the approach was guided by a simple principle that runs through the work of Wittgenstein (1968), Sacks (1979), Jayyusi (1984) and Coulter (1979). The principle is that the ability competently to use categories in everyday life, enables one to understand everyday social settings in terms of such categories.

As I have discussed, the managers I talked to stressed the importance of national cultural differences in their work. In doing so they used national cultural categories. It seemed likely, then that they were able to understand everyday organisational situations in terms of such categories. Furthermore, because they talked about cultural differences in cross-national settings so much, and with so much conviction, it seemed very likely that they often did understand such settings in terms of national cultural categories.

Influenced by the work the above writers, I thus set out to analyse the terms in which managers appeared to understand cross-national settings. I did this through transcribing several of my conversations with the managers, and documenting the conventional properties of the national cultural categories they used, such as: how (and whether) they were conventionally linked; how certain attributes were invoked with the use of certain categories; and how such categories were used to discern between different types of social practice, and social institutions. The results of this analysis are discussed in the next section.

#### *Choosing this interview:*

In order to document what I discovered, I have transcribed part of an interview with a manager, and set out my analyses for the reader. The criteria I used for choosing this particular interview are rooted in what I learnt over the research period as whole:

As I have discussed, the contributions of my early interviews were not so much in terms of their analytical worth, but in terms my acculturation into the world of managerial work:

When I started out, I was in no real position to agree, to disagree, to suspect, or to assess, in a way that was competent. My tactics were to pass as a serious, interested, researcher. Interactively, this meant asking questions in a way that could be defined as pertinent and informed. As I have discussed, operating as a neophyte in a business culture can be an uncomfortable experience. This very discomfort, however, means that one learns and acculturates quickly. One has to. Before too long, however, one finds that one has learned the ropes, and developed to the point where one is no longer nervous, or out of one's depth. One sets to the task at hand, which is getting to know more and more about cross-national managerial work. In concert with such personal development, one reaches a state of competence where one can discern between good and mediocre material, between oracles, reporters and bullshitters. One reaches the stage where one listens to a manager and thinks,

I've heard all this before, or

Sounds wonderful, or

Now that's new, I've not thought of that before.

One thereby reaches the stage where one can assess the analytical worth of the interviews: The manager is not infallible, nor is the researcher, but one can for all practical purposes say that this is a better description of the reality of the situation than that.

Of course, it was not only through experience of conducting interviews that I developed an ability to assess the worth of what managers said. My work within my own organisation, and my experience of organisations generally, enabled me to conduct the interviews with increasing competence and confidence. That is not to say that my learning experience outside the interview setting was any greater than it was therein. One informed the other. What I learned in interviews, I took out with me; what I learned in my own work, and in other organisations, guided my dealings with the managers. This personal development not only enabled me to interview better, but it also enabled me to assess the managers I was talking to, and assess the worth of what they were saying.



As I learned more, I began to understand how cultural differences caused the managers difficulties and problems in their work: I began to appreciate the practical problems of being perceived to be foreign; I began to appreciate the difficulties posed by cultural differences in not being able to take things for granted. Learning about such aspects of cross-national managerial work enabled me further to understand what managers were talking about, and to assess the worth of their contributions.

It is through such conceptual development that I feel that I am now able to pick this particular interview for analytical purposes. When I interviewed Pascal, I believed him. He came across as sincere, business-like, concerned about his work, and aware of the impact cultural differences were having in his everyday work. He made sense. As such, in my opinion, Pascal's talk provides us with a useful characterisation of the nature of cross-national managerial work, as understood by one particular manager<sup>1</sup>:

*Talking to Pascal about his work:*

- M: Could you talk about the err (.) managerial aspect to your role?
- P: It's quite it's quite difficult because err (0.7) you you need (0.4) milk you want milk?
- M: err:: that'll do actually like that
- P: no?
- M: th-that's fine  
(Puts down milk jug)
- P: err
- M: thanks very much
- P: that's where you've got a cultural problem I would say (0.5) especially from (.) for somebody coming from Germany (1.0) because it's:: very different (0.5) err the German OK (.) are much more complicated in the term of err (0.6) they need precise things (.) they need precise answers (.) they are (0.7) quite (0.6) err concerned with err:: their job actually and so on (.) but more in terms of they didn't want to become (.) err robots and so on
- M: Yeh=
- P: =Y'know (1.0) so (.) it's difficult to even to do that sort of job in Germany (0.4) but (0.8) as soon as you::ve sold some ideas and so on (.) that's then accepted  
(0.4)
- M: R::ight
- P: Then everybody (.) works in this (0.8) sense (.) in this purpose (0.5) in England (.) err::: you you have to talk hours
- M: Yeh  
(0.5)
- M: R::ight
- P: And that's (.) not DP no (.) we are supposed to be precise
- M: It's vaguer (.) Right
- P: We start from there (.) so many day to for instance to achieve that (.) So there's no thousand ways to go from there (.) to there

## *Understanding national cultural differences.*

In this section I discuss the use of national cultural categories in everyday social situations such as research interviews. As I have mentioned, this analysis is guided by the simple principle that the ability to use categories in everyday social settings, enables people to understand social situations in terms of such categories (Coulter, op. cit.). It follows then that the ability to use national cultural categories enables managers to understand, and act, in terms of these categories, both within and beyond cross-national settings. Indeed, as I have discussed, it seems very likely that they do.

This interview was one of many settings wherein I learned about national culture differences within multinational organisations. One of the things I noticed throughout the ongoing interview process was that there was a conventional way of talking about cultural differences in terms of national cultural categories. For instance, the managers I talked to used the notion of cultural difference in a way that linked it to nationality. This, of course, is unremarkable, but it becomes very interesting when we ask two questions:

- 1) What is the nature of this link?
- 2) What are the implications of such a link for their work?

Consider Pascal's talk:

P: that's where you've got a cultural problem I would say (.) especially somebody coming from Germany because it's very different (.) err the German OK are much more complicated in terms of their (.) they need precise things

I would bring the reader's attention to the linking of a cultural problem with nationality. Indeed, through using the word 'especially', Pascal not only establishes a link between a cultural problem and nationality, but also, a link between the degree of cultural problem and the particular nationality: the conjunction is used to indicate a high degree of problem for somebody coming from Germany. Pascal makes sense of organisational cultural problems in terms of national status. He continues:

P: err the German OK are much more complicated in terms of their (.) they need precise things

The category, German, is linked to other categories such as French, and English in the sense that they are all national categories. As Sacks (1979) observed, the use, and the understanding, of categories rests upon an ability to link categories to other categories, invoked, and defined, in terms of a particular conventional criterion. In this case, then, the use, and the understanding of the category, the German, rests upon the ability to link this category to other categories, such as French, English etc., invoked and defined by the particular conventional criterion, nationality. A national category is understood in terms of national categories. To appreciate the pervasive nature of this in everyday life, consider this unremarkable statement about Germans:

B: Germans are the most rational people

This superlative ascription of rationality to the Germans is not done in terms of categories like 'Essex men', 'young people' or 'medics', but is done to ascribe supreme status in terms of other national categories such as the French, the English and the like. The conventions informing the use of such categories in everyday life ensure that many replies to this assertion would be absurd:

B: Germans are the most rational people

M: Ah hang on - but what about scientists?

Joining Pascal again:

P: err the German OK are much more complicated in terms of their

The invoked criterion is nationality. Here then, the German is used, and understood, as a member of an invoked category group that includes 'the French' and 'the English'. The line as used is comparative. The comparison is a comparison between the German and the English - and not, for instance, between the German and the software engineers.

It is important to realise that although categories may be conventionally linked in terms of invoked criteria such as nationality, they do remain distinct, and distinguishable even in the case of commonalities being assigned. Consider, for example:

F: personnel and marketing both involve managing . .

These categories are linked in terms of the criterion of organisational role, however, they remain distinct and distinguishable in terms of innumerable other criteria. Likewise, national categories may be linked through the criterion, nationality, but they are distinct, and distinguishable in terms of innumerable other criteria.

*Characterising the distinction:*

Returning to Pascal:

P: The German OK are much more complicated in terms of their (.)

This attribution establishes the nature of the distinction between the categories. There is no absolute, incontinent link between nationality and complication, just as there is no incontinent link between nationality and good humour or innumerable other criteria. Yet Pascal uses this attribute to elaborate the distinction - the difference - between the national categories:

P: the German OK are much more complicated in terms of their (.) they need precise things (.) they need precise answers

A further attribution is used to elaborate the meaning of the distinction established by the use of the national category. Such distinctions make sense in terms of certain attributions that are commonly linked with 'Germans'. For instance, consider the following:

the German are rational

the German are mechanistic in their approach

the German dislike sloppy work

These are statements about the German, but they are also comparative, in the sense that they pitch the Germans' rationality, their mechanistic approach and their dislike for sloppy work in the context of other nationalities. The number of nationalities in question is a practical concern for the parties to the particular interaction. It may be indeterminate and vague, or it may be just two, as is the case in hand. Pascal is using his words to be understandable as meaning: the Germans need precise things more than the English; they need precise answers more than the English.

Pascal continues his listing of German characteristics in the following way:

P: (.) they are (0.7) quite (0.6) err concerned with err:: their job actually and so on (.) but more in terms of they didn't want to become (.) err robots and so on

M: Yeh=

P: =Y'know (1.0) so (.) it's difficult to even to do that sort of job in Germany (0.4) but (0.8) as soon as you::ve sold some ideas and so on (.) that's then accepted

The considered way in which Pascal constructs his talk to be understood by me can clearly be seen in an abandonment of one way of telling. His words are hearable as orienting both to his previous characterisations of the German, and to my understanding of what he is saying. Pascal thus elaborates the theme still further by elaborating the meaning of his previous utterances; but the methods he uses to do so are different to those he used immediately before. Indeed, Pascal is addressing the risk that I may be thinking, Oh dear, the same old national stereotypes: Germans are rational, precise, task oriented . .

By acting in this way, Pascal combats the rational-mechanistic-precise stereotype of Germans - a possible understanding of his talk. He attends to my understanding of what he has said of the German. His previous characterisations of the German are isomorphic with other stereotypical attributes, and invoke such other characterisations as rational, mechanistic, logical, unemotional etc. To invoke disjunctive attributes requires more work. This is what Pascal does. The practical concerns of doing so are different. For instance, Pascal could have continued like this:

P: they need precise things (.) they need precise answers (.) they are a rational people (.) they like things to be clear cut.

The attributions are isomorphic (in these particular circumstances). The characterisations are conventionally linked. The considered nature of Pascal's practice becomes apparent when he uses a different characterisation to describe the German, one that limits this nexus of linked attributes. He thus demonstrates a reflective orientation to the conventional clustering of attributes with the ones that he has already used, as they are perceived and understood by the listener. He demonstrates a sensitivity to what I understand, and works to counter the conceptual clustering that informs my understanding of his words. His words have accountably invoked a stereotypical cluster of attributes. Pascal deals with this possible stereotyping:

P: they are quite concerned with their job actively and so on but more in terms of they didn't want to become robots and so on . .

Concern with their job is not hearable as one of the practical, precise, rational, logical cluster of attributes. It is disjunctive, and is thus hearable as countering or checking the stereotype. It provides a reconstitution of the distinction already made. It is used, and understood, as a departure from the everyday stereotypical cluster of attributes:

P: more in terms of they didn't want to become robots and so on

Here Pascal attends to everyday stereotypical knowledge. He departs from the stereotypical cluster of attributes by employing a powerful overarching category which acts economically to subsume most of the clustered attributes: precise, rational, logical, mechanistic . . . In so doing Pascal clears the way to his description of the German. He puts aside the corpus of everyday knowledge that he himself first invoked<sup>2</sup>.

P: actually and so on (.) but more in terms of they didn't want to become (.) err robots and so on

M: Yeh=

P: =Y'know (1.0) so (.) it's difficult to even to do that sort of job in Germany (0.4) but (0.8) as soon as you::ve sold some ideas and so on (.) that's then accepted

Having dealt with the corpus of stereotypical knowledge, Pascal proceeds by elaborating the theme: he talks about the managerial aspect to his role: the difficulty in doing 'that sort of job' lies, for the practical purposes at hand, in the German needing precise things, needing precise answers, just that . . . for the time being at least.

*What such an analysis tells us:*

In this section I have attempted to explore the use, and understanding of national cultural categories in an everyday social situation. As I have attempted to show, there is a conventional logical grammar (see Coulter, 1983) that is sustained, used and orientated to in the use, and understanding of national categories. Categories, linked or grouped through the criterion nationality, are used to make sense of differences in the way that people do things. Ways of acting, ways of doing things, predispositions, and attitudes can all be attributed to particular national categories. Differences in ways of doing things, differences in predispositions, and differences in attitudes can thus be attributed to, and thereby elaborate, the distinction between categories of people, linked or grouped through the criterion, nationality.

In this section I have shown how certain attributes, and certain ways of doing things can be attributed to national categories. The logical grammar of national category use and understanding enables this. That national categories of people are distinct in certain ways is thus taken for granted. One can always find some institutional, dispositional, attitudinal or behavioural criterion through which national categories differ. Talking about the relationship between different national categories of people then often does take the form of characterising this difference. National category use, and understanding, then, tends to be comparative, and tends to sustain, or establish difference between one category in the national category group and another, in collective, homogenous terms.

The fact that we can talk seriously about differences in national terms, disregarding the plethora of institutional, attitudinal and behavioural differences within national collectives, is often overlooked in sociological work. The reason we can do this, is because we have a vocabulary of the names of nation states. The logical grammar of national category use means



that attributes and certain ways of doing things can be linked with these names, without any conceptual soul-searching, or panic about the validity of such linkages and attributions. National categories, then, are very powerful and influential devices, which, through the everyday conventions of their use, enable differences to be ascribed along national lines.

The categories exist, and as long as they do exist they will have a part in the conceptual make-up of mankind. The fact they do exist means that we can make sense of the world in such terms, from sociopolitical movements, to the movements of a colleague at a meeting. Certain activities and predispositions can be ascribed to particular categories.

Managers are able to make sense of the world in terms of national categories. The managers I spoke to stressed the importance, and impact of national cultural differences in their work. It thus seems that they (to some extent at least) make sense of the activities, attitudes and predispositions of their colleagues in such terms. Certainly, Pascal notices differences in the way his colleagues do things. He is able to make sense of such differences by understanding practices, attitudes and colleagues in terms of their national status. That is how they do things in England. Difference is noticed, understood, and acted upon in terms of national cultural categories.

*The practical concerns of cultural difference:*

Perceived differences in the way colleagues do things - and this includes expecting, needing, not doing etc. - furnish complex practical concerns that must be dealt with as part of a manager's work. For instance, according to several German managers, national cultural differences in the status of directives encourage complex practical concerns that can come to hinder effective managerial work. In Germany, they say, directives are issued upon the assumption that they will be implemented without further ado: once directives have been issued, they are as good as done. The status of directives is different in England. Consider a German engineering manager:

M: You must always check up on people here . . . it's ridiculous. I'll phone someone and say have you done this yet or that yet and they'll say . . . almost, almost . . . it'll be done . . . but not today . . . tomorrow. It makes my job more difficult you see . . . it's simply a waste of time.

Pascal himself finds that national cultural differences in the status of directives furnish complex practical concerns within his work. He makes sense of such perceived differences as any of us would. People in this country do things differently. Understanding such differences, then, is not the problem. Dealing with them is.

Certainly, national cultural differences furnish practical concerns that would not arise among compatriots. What would be left implicit in Germany, may have to be made explicit in England, which means that Pascal's colleagues may come to define him as fussy, autocratic, a worrier. National cultural differences, then, can give rise to complex practical concerns in cross-national managerial work.

How then do managers deal with cultural differences? As I have discussed, in cross-national settings, cultural differences are treated as being peripheral or unimportant as managers get on with the work at hand. As I talked to the managers, and observed their work, however, I noticed that the definition of settings in national cultural terms encourages what I call accommodation. In a subtle way, managers act differently with foreigners than they do among compatriots:

they let opaque talk pass;  
they speak more slowly and with simpler vocabulary;  
they explain in greater detail than they would among compatriots;  
they let gaffes pass; and,  
they act in a way that is civil, courteous, and unflappable.

Through the definition of cross-national settings in cross-cultural terms, differences in behaviour, assumptions and vocabulary are tolerated, or accommodated, as the managers get on with the tasks at hand. That is not, of course, to minimise the difficulties and problems encountered in many cross-national situations. However, through the definition of the situation in national cultural terms, such difficulties are not so much conceptual problems, nor indeed are they perceived to be the fault of individuals, but they are understood and acted upon as practical problems associated with differences in the way things are done within the respective collectivities. Such difficulties are understandable.

We can appreciate then, how Pascal is able to understand, and deal with national cultural difference in his work. The categories that Pascal possesses enable him to understand, and act upon differences and procedural anomalies for all practical purposes.

As we have seen, cross-national managerial work is done in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. However, the way the way the work is understood, and done is often informed by the definition of particular situations in national cultural terms. Such a definition of the situation enables the managers to proceed, and get on with the tasks at hand:

Consider Pascal at work: such categories as German and English are not manifest in his work activities. However, without a competence in the use of such categories, his work could be replete with conceptual as well as practical concerns. There is no doubt that practical problems do abound: how to work with a limited vocabulary; what to make of a slang word; what reaction to display when a decision has not been implemented. However, such practical problems are understandable. He does not question his conceptual competence. He does the best he can, considering. He does not question his linguistic competence when he does not understand a slang word - he may request clarification, or let it pass depending upon the circumstances. He does not fly off the handle when a directive is not implemented - he will understand this in terms of national cultural difference, and act accordingly.

Pascal may have problems in his managerial work, more so than a manager working within his own collectivity, but Pascal is no incompetent. His recognition of national cultural differences - his competence in category use and misuse - enable him to proceed, without working in an organisation of conceptual problems. If misunderstanding occurs in his work, he knows very well why - his interpretation of that at least is up to the job. Misunderstanding is no mystery to Pascal; it is a practical problem to be resolved: requests for clarification, elaborations etc. may be employed. Pascal may have complex, irresolvable problems (as seems to be the case): his conceptual competence enables him to recognise what these problems are and why he has them. They enable him to tell me about them, and allow me to analyse just how he understands his managerial work.

### *Difference and the presentation of self:*

Pascal's ability to tell me about his work through the competent use of national cultural categories, suggests that he is capable of awareness in these terms. In coming to a meeting, for instance, Pascal is seemingly able to view his colleagues and their activities in such terms, and thereby to act in these terms. Furthermore, Pascal's competence in the use of national cultural categories means that he is able to attend to himself in these terms. The ability to identify cultural differences in the way that he does, enables him to position himself in his English colleagues' conceptions of him:

His competence in national cultural categorisation enables Pascal to view himself as a foreigner trying to change things in a foreign country. The bitterness, frustration, self-doubt, and constraints of operating in another culture, then, are clearly understandable: not only does Pascal have to deal with the everyday practical difficulties posed by cultural differences, but he must manage his public self which may be perceived in terms of his national cultural status. He is conscious that his cultural difference may be attended to and understood by his colleagues. He is aware that he is accountable on their terms. Mastery of national cultural categorisation, thus at once endows him with a conceptual clarity for the practical purposes of working with others, but it also enables him to attend to himself in national cultural terms. His work activities are accountable on their terms, i.e. in their terms. The complexity of the practical concerns of doing cross-national managerial work at once becomes apparent.

### *Conclusion:*

In this section I have attempted to characterise the tacit understands of managers as they work in cross-national situations. As I have mentioned, this is a difficult area to explore, and I did not embark upon the study of this aspect of managerial work lightly. Time and time again, however, the managers I spoke to stressed the importance of such understanding and experience, as they worked in, and beyond, cross-national settings. In writing this thesis then, I could either ignore this aspect, or attempt to address it.

The principle that the ability to use categories in everyday settings enables us to understand social situations in terms of such categories, is a strong one. Talking to the managers, I found that they did, indeed, appear to understand cross-national settings in terms of cultural difference along national lines. Of course, the degree to which managers define a situation in terms of national cultural categories will vary, from a first encounter with Japanese businessmen (for instance), to dealings with the colleagues one sees every day. Because of the stress managers laid upon this aspect of their work, however, it does seem very likely that they often do define, and understand cross-national settings in terms of national cultural categories, and that, in certain cases, a preoccupation with this aspect of the work can come to dominate their experience of particular work settings, and influence how they act beyond them.

In exploring the conventional properties of national category use, I have attempted to characterise the terms in which managers can come to understand, and experience particular organisational settings. Moreover, as I have discussed, it seems likely that the ability to use national cultural categories enables managers not only to define, understand and deal with their colleagues in such terms, but also enables them to define, and understand themselves in such terms. The managers were acutely conscious, for instance, that they too could be defined in such terms by their colleagues. As I shall go on to discuss, the awareness that this is so can shape further practical concerns as managers work with their foreign colleagues. In the next section, then, I will move on from an analysis of the understanding of work in terms of national cultural categories, to explore how categorisation in these terms can lead to the development of major cultural problems.

## SECTION TWO:

### HOW CULTURAL PROBLEMS HAPPEN:

#### *Introduction:*

In this section, I use what I have discussed so far to examine how situations that can be defined as cultural problems develop in multinational business organisations. In order to do this, I document the development of such a situation in the London subsidiary of Averill, a multinational chemical company. As I shall discuss, exploring national cultural categorisation in the ongoing work of a multinational organisation can reveal a great deal about how foreign management initiatives can result in full-blown crises.

#### *The crisis at Averill:*

I have chosen the situation at Averill because it provides a good example of a costly and destructive cultural problem (the kind that is of most interest to industry). I learnt about the nature of this particular problem through talking to the managers about their work in general, and through discussing the role of national cultural differences in particular. Of course, my ability to understand the situation in this particular company rested upon what I had learned throughout the research project as a whole:

One of the more significant aspects of my development as a researcher was my increased capacity to understand what managers were on about when they talked about the impact of national cultural differences. When a manager described a cultural problem, for instance, I was increasingly able to appreciate what the problem was, how it worked, and how it affected his work in the company. I was able to see the practical implications of such a problem, to see how nationality itself could lead to innumerable complications, misunderstanding and mistrust. The research thus endowed me with an appreciation of the status and dynamics of cultural differences within multinational organisations, such that by the time I reached Averill, I could see that I was perceived to know what they were talking about, and to know what I was talking about. I could see their problem.

Through talking to the managers and observing their work, I thus developed the ability to understand cultural differences as the managers understood and dealt with them, both within and beyond cross-national settings. Moreover, as the research progressed further, I developed the capacity to spot and consider wider organisational contexts than the managers themselves had previously thought of. Managers are managers, and in their everyday working lives that may not need to consider the wider social dynamics of their organisation. The managers certainly had a sophisticated working knowledge of the nature of cultural differences in their work, but it was restricted. Through talking to scores of managers, and through observing their work, I began to understand how cultural differences could lead to the development of destructive cultural problems.

In this section, then I move on from how managers understand and do their work, to explore the development of cultural problems. In order to do this, I discuss in detail one particular cultural problem, the problem at Averill:

I investigated this particular situation through talking to several British and overseas managers within the company. Among these managers, Pascal was at once the most involved, and the most helpful. He was deeply concerned about the impact of cultural differences in his work, and tried as best he could to explain the nature of the problem to me. As I have mentioned, through doing social research one does develop an ability to assess managers, and ascertain the analytical worth of what they say. Pascal was helpful, truthful and incisive in his observations. In my conversations with him, I learnt a lot. What he said about the cultural problems at Averill enabled me to refine what I already understood about the development of cultural problems within multinational organisations.

I learnt a great deal about the development of cultural problems through talking to managers about their work. Managers are managers, however, and because they often do not have to consider the wider social dynamics of their organisation, they may be unable to explain the development of certain organisational situations. The onus rests upon the researcher to consider what he has heard and observed, and attempt to explain it. This may involve placing cultural differences in organisational and conceptual contexts that may be wider in scope than those orientated to by the managers in their everyday work, or indeed in their accounts of their work.

In this section I document what I learnt about the development of the cultural problem at Averill. Because Pascal was in the front line as it were, and experienced the cultural problems first hand, it makes sense, at least initially, to explore the situation from his point of view. I will begin then, by exploring how Pascal encountered, and understood the cultural problem at Averill. I will then move on to explain how such a situation developed.

*What a cultural problem means to a manager:*

In order to understand Pascal's predicament, one needs to possess a certain amount of knowledge about the historical and organisational context. I will begin then with some general information about Pascal's role in the London subsidiary of Averill:

When the London subsidiary of the company was set up in 1977, the national market in their line of chemical products was relatively unsaturated. Sales growth at the beginning was therefore good, averaging out at just over 10% per year. At the time, both in Paris and in London, this seemed to be a very satisfactory state of affairs. However this performance did hold the seeds of unseen future problems for the parent company:

While growth was of this order, the parent company largely ignored the managerial and administrative systems within the subsidiary. The UK branch thus developed independently of the parent company in terms of organisational structure, administrative procedures and managerial systems. These national organisational differences eventually became an issue, however, when, after 10 years' operation, the sales curve hit a plateau. To combat the slip in performance, the parent company moved to improve efficiency. In the drive for greater efficiency it was decided to shake up the existing management systems. Pascal was brought in as part of this shake up.

In 1987, Pascal was appointed to the London subsidiary of Averill in the role of business systems manager. Pascal's job brief was to manage the implementation of a new DP (Data Processing) system. The implementation of computer systems is a long and complicated job, which requires not only technical expertise, but the ability to manage the social arrangements around the technology. Pascal's job involved changing the way people worked,



training them to use the system, developing new organisational structures, dealing with colleagues' investment in the status quo and managing cultural difference.

An important part of the administrative work done in the company had to do with liaising with suppliers. When a corporate customer placed an order, the subsidiary was required to buy the necessary raw materials from supplier companies in France. Sale and purchase were thus connected at the level of organisation. In the search for increased productivity, this routine link between the lodging of an order and the ordering of raw materials was an obvious area for computerisation. Pascal's job, then, was to administer and tailor the implementation of a computer system to do this job, such that when a sales order was lodged, the system responded with a purchase order. One of the major problems for Pascal was that over the years, the purchase administrators had developed different procedural methods for dealing with each of the 40 supplier companies. Trying to iron out such differences, and set up a harmonised system thus involved radically changing the way the administrators were used to working.

The breadth of the gulf between the company as a whole and the subsidiary becomes apparent when one considers that before Pascal was posted to the UK, the London subsidiary was the only company in the group without a sales-purchase computer system. Indeed, two managers before Pascal (both German) had attempted to implement such systems, but had failed dismally because of (what people I spoke to referred to as) the cultural factor. These failed attempts were however before sales hit the plateau, so they did not carry the full weight of the parent company behind them. When the plateau was reached, however, the decision was taken to rationalise work methods and the implementation of the computer system was given top priority. Since that day Pascal and his colleagues had endured endless difficulties, problems, cultural problems. There is much to gain by looking at how this beleaguered manager encountered such problems in his work.

*Pascal's cultural problems:*

Pascal's job involved managing organisational change. Indeed, as I shall go on to discuss it also involved managing cultural change. Many of the more profound, more stubborn, more complex practical concerns within his work were furnished by the wider culture of the organisation. As he says:

P: My very first priority was to instil say or to to to install the company thinking and so on to receive the tool (.) which I think was the failure of my two predecessors (.) they put tools in this company and the company wasn't ready for that

He goes on:

P: Well I said that the company has been created 12 years ago and everybody created his own work methods and so on (.) without really (.) err (.) without logic or you know it was more ad hoc again (.) so I had two problems (.) first of all they were not ready (.) that's what I'm trying to explain by company thinking (.) they were not ready to use a computer which is something logical uh

M: Yeh (.) was this technical know how or cultural know how?

P: When you've got people let's say free to do what they want for 10 years (.) a computer means standardisation (.) logical processing and so on (.) and something a narrow way to do things or a precise way (.) you cannot play very widely with a computer (.) it tells you what she needs for information and full stop so (.) that's what they call err flexibility (.) but a computer is not flexible in that sense.

M: That's very interesting

P: So that's what I'm trying to explain by company thinking to change it all (.) all these sort of mentality (.) they were at the step where OK we want a computer (.) because they do want one but they are not ready to make any concessions (.) the computer is supposed then to cover everything they are doing today (.) manually or (.) and that as I said maybe 10 different ways in this company (.) to put a sample (.) to put a quote (.) you know so that goes against the definition of a computer (.) a computer is there to work by big volumes (.) easy tasks and repetitive tasks (.) so they are (.) they want a computer (.) to treat the big volumes because we've got ten times bits and pieces (.) repetitive not really (.)

because they are doing a thousand thing (.) they want the computer to do a thousand things and err (.) easy not because they developed very complicated ways of doing things (.) and that's why as I told you at the beginning (.) this this connection to the suppliers so you have an impact there too

Pascal's work thus involves implementing new computer-friendly working methods into the subsidiary, thereby enabling the implementation of the required computer technology. Such a task however, is fraught with difficulties. The established ways of doing things in the organisation, that have developed over the years, impinge upon such practice. Workers' ways of doing things within the organisation provide a conceptual and practical context, in terms of which which new methods of working are understood, dealt with (and maybe resisted). Pascal accounts for the failure of his two predecessors in these terms - they failed because they failed to perceive, or deal with, or manage the way things were already done in the organisation:

P: So my very first priority was to instil say or to to install (.) the company thinking and so on to receive the tool (.) which I think was the:: failure of my two predecessors (.) they put tools in this company and the company wasn't ready for that . .

What constitutes an organisation's readiness to use a new computer system? There is a disjunction being alluded to here: a disjunction between:

- 1) The established ways of doing things, interacting, working and defining action, personnel, and work methods within the organisation; and,
- 2) The interactive requirements of the technology: the ways of doing things, interacting, working and defining action, personnel, and work methods needed for the computer system to operate successfully.

Pascal cites the installation of company thinking as the first priority, the first practical concern, the first step in managing the implementation of the system. He puts the fate of his two predecessors down to a failure to deal with the wider organisational implications of changing the way people work. Company thinking is a useful overarching characterisation of those activities and competences.

There is much to learn from the competent manager who has thought long and hard about his work. His use of the concept, company thinking, suggests that he appreciates full well the definitional power of the workers, the fact that conventional definitions of their work and their organisation are the real practical concern for the manager who would shake things up around here. He knows full well that the conventional definitions of their work, their roles, and their organisation, underpin conventional work practices within the organisation. Such established conventional practices frustrate his effective work as a manager.

His use of the metaphor, tool, is worthy of consideration. A tool is something that is used. For a tool to be used, one has to know how to use it. There is a link being made here between the different orders of knowledge and competence that have to be attended to in the management of the scheme: firstly, the company thinking, the common-sense knowledge of the organisation, the ability to act with organisational propriety; and, secondly, the methods of working in situ, how to use the tool, the new interactive methods required by the technology. The new work activities are accountable in terms of the prevailing culture of the organisation. Managing change in working methods, then, is a complex operation which must take into account the prevailing organisational culture. Indeed the wider culture of the organisation is what must be dealt with first. It takes first priority.

Pascal continues:

P: Well I said that the company has been created 12 years ago and everybody created his own work methods and so on (.) without really (.) err (.) without logic or you know it was more ad hoc again (.) so I had two problems (.) first of all they were not ready (.) that's what I'm trying to explain by company thinking (.) they were not ready to use a computer which is something logical

Readiness, or the ability to use the computer system, depends upon the possession of the appropriate thinking, the appropriate work methods. Such new methods are accountable in terms of the culture of the organisation.

Here then is one facet of Pascal's cultural problem. The technology requires work methods that are consistent and precise. The job for Pascal is to implement the appropriate work methods into the subsidiary, i.e., to instil the appropriate thinking into the workers. A practical concern for Pascal, then, is the disjunction between the methods required by the computer, and the work methods displayed by his colleagues. His primary task - without which the implementation of the computer system is doomed - is to change the latter to meet the needs of the former. The job is *prima facie* just that, for the purposes of getting the system up and running. However there is also the question of how his colleagues attend to, understand, and act upon these new work methods. It seems then that Pascal's job is *secunda facie* more complex. The practical concerns of his work deepen and multiply:

P: They were not ready to use a computer which is something logical

M: Yeh (.) was this technical know how or cultural know how?

P: When you've got people say free to do what they want for ten years (.) a computer means standardisation (.) logical processing and so on (.) and something a narrow way to do things or precise way (.) you cannot play widely with a computer (.) it tells you what she needs for information and full stop so (.) that's what they call err flexibility (.) but a computer is not flexible in that sense

Pascal has to change the way his colleagues work, to suit the technology. For instance, his colleagues must adopt different procedural methods required to interact at the computer interface, and must work differently away from the interface in order to produce computer-congruent information. The knock-on effects of the initiative are obvious.

Because of the profound impact of the computer system on the work done in the organisation, the management of the scheme is fraught with problems. As Pascal has discovered, such problems are compounded by his national cultural status.

### *Managing as a foreigner:*

As McHugh (1968) points out, there is a mutually elaborative relationship between the understanding of action, and what one understands of the actor: action may be understood in terms of one's definition of the actor; how one defines the actor may be informed by how one understands what he does. Through the research process I came to appreciate the practical importance of this relationship in cross-national managerial work.

Consider Pascal's predicament. Pascal's job is to implement a new business system into the London subsidiary of the Averill group. Such a task requires the implementation of new, different, computer-congruent work methods. At certain times and in certain situations, the definition of the manager and the understanding of his work are mutually constitutive. Pascal's colleagues may thus attend to, understand, and act upon these new, different work methods in terms of their definition of Pascal.

The installation of the computer system is his project. At certain times, and in certain situations, the project may be defined in terms of him, and he may be understood in terms of the project. This constitutive relationship between Pascal and his activities thus raises important practical concerns in his work. Indeed, the success or failure of his mission depends upon the nature of this relationship: his colleagues' understanding of the initiatives, determines, to a large extent, whether the changes are accepted, or resisted.

It would be difficult to deny that there is a constitutive relationship between actor and act, between a manager and his work. One shapes the meaning of the other. In appreciating this crucial point we have come a long way from the notion that the manager manipulates his work environment to achieve certain tasks: the work environment is made up of, and constituted by, people who define, assess, and work with (or against) the manager in terms of his work practices, in terms of his identity, and in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. The practical concerns of managing change can thus be very complicated. In cross-national managerial work this complexity is compounded by the the manager's national cultural status. His nationality must also be managed.

As I have discussed, Pascal is aware that he may be defined in terms of his national cultural status. The ability to make sense of his work in terms of national categories, endows him with an awareness that others are able to do so in their work. The ability to define people and situations in national cultural terms furnishes the practical concern that he may himself be defined in such ways. We can see then how national cultural categories can come to underpin the meaning of cross-national managerial work in multinational companies, and thus lead to what may be characterised as cultural problems. Consider the following:

P: You know (.) in the last three years (.) I have heard (.) I heard (.) a hundred times (.) you are not here in Germany

M: And this is said to you by your English colleagues is it?

P: Yeh

M: Oh:

P: You are not in Germany (.) here you can do it this way (.) here you can do it this way  
(1.0)

M: It's uhh (.) it's quite umm (.) it's quite nice to hear that what (.) that what I've been reading does actually happen in real life (.) it seems it seems to me to be quite true=

P: How many (.) how many times I heard (0.8) uhh (0.8) it's a different culture (.) you are not in Germany

In the above snippet Pascal displays an awareness that his work activities are understood in terms of his national cultural status:

P: You are not in Germany (.) here you can do it this way

Pascal's characterisation of what his colleagues say to him, about him, and about his work reveals the multifaceted, multidefinitional nature of cross-national managerial work. The conceptual relationship between themselves and their work is something that cross-national managers have to attend to and deal with every day. Cross-national managerial work is thus made that much more complicated (and more prone to failure) by the categorisation of the manager and his work in national cultural terms. This is something that Pascal knows. He is well aware of the complex practical concerns that being somebody from Germany incurs.

Pascal's job is to implement new, different working methods, methods that are computer congruent. He knows full well that such an initiative may be perceived and understood in terms of his identity. He is aware that the difference he initiates, and implements may be understood and acted upon in terms of his national cultural status. Pascal knows that he is accountably somebody from Germany, or foreign, or not one of us. He is aware that his initiatives may be perceived in such terms.

This relationship between national cultural status and managerial action can constitute an important element in the conceptual order of cross-national settings and situations. Being able to reflect upon the understanding of others, the manager is aware of the implications of his national cultural status as he goes about his doing his work. Being foreign is not something that can easily be put aside. It must be managed. National cultural categories, then, not only enable the manager to make sense of his work; they can also furnish complicated practical concerns as he works.

*The conceptual roots of a cultural problem:*

Pascal was appointed to implement a new business system into the London subsidiary of the Averill group. As we have seen, the implementation of such a system can have significant knock-on effects - from the need to train people to use the system, to the organisation of data production such that it is usable by the computer, to a standardisation of working methods such that data input is consistent over time and office boundaries. It is a complicated task, with unpredictable organisational results.

One interacts with a computer. For successful interaction to proceed, methods of interacting with it, ways of understanding it, must be learned. Precision, consistency, (computer) logic, (computer) rationality are the usual requirements for successful interaction. Managing the implementation of an important computer system thus involves the initiation of a form of cultural change: from instilling a sense of precision, consistency, (computer) logic and (computer) rationality into those who would use it, to rationalising the wider data-generating tasks, like dealing with invoices and sales figures.



We can thus appreciate the profound cultural implications of the implementation of the computer system in Averill. We can appreciate how Pascal's cultural difference can encourage stubborn and infuriating cultural problems. The mutually constitutive relationship between manager and managerial work, can be seen to be at the root of such problems. His job involves changing how people do things within the subsidiary. Such activities are understood and acted upon by his colleagues. Pascal's foreign status colours how his colleagues understand what he is up to. The definition of Pascal in national cultural terms, then, has a constitutive place in the ongoing work of the organisation.

*Working in spite of cultural differences:*

As the research proceeded, I discovered that the definition of overseas and indigenous managers in national cultural terms played a constitutive role in the ongoing work of the organisation, encouraging settings and situations that could be defined as cultural problems. In scores of organisations, I found that the difficulties, frustrations and mistrust experienced when managing in cross-national settings were understood in cross-national terms, and that this, in a subtle but pervasive way, influenced the way they worked beyond those settings in the the ongoing work of the organisation.

Although there may be cultural differences within cross-national managerial settings, they are largely ignored, or overlooked, as the managers get on with the work at hand. Cultural differences are treated as being unimportant in the face of what is, accountably, important. The work, then, tends to be done (with varying degrees of success). In the process, however, difficulties, frustrations and mistrust are noticed, and experienced. The experience of such work, understood in national cultural terms, plays an important constitutive role in the ongoing work of the organisation:

managers may prefer to work with compatriots because it's so much easier; they may prefer to eat with compatriots because they can relax with them more easily; they may prefer to send a memorandum instead of telephoning because it's simply less hassle; they may prefer not to joke with the foreign manager because he probably would not get the allusion anyway; they may prefer not to tell the foreign manager too much, as it is widely known that he is in cahoots with his compatriots.

Within multinational organisations, then, there is a subtle, but pervasive, tendency for groups and networks to develop along national cultural lines. We can now appreciate how cultural differences, publicly overlooked, but privately endured, can develop into cultural problems in the ongoing work of the organisation. We can thus begin to understand Mendenhall's (1987) dismal statistic (that up to 50% of managers posted abroad fail):

Managerial work relies a great deal upon trust, networks and effective communication with other members of staff. In a subtle, but pervasive way, then, the preference to deal with compatriots damages trust, networks and effective and honest communication between members of different national groups. Managerial work is thus more difficult with foreigners: there is more uncertainty, more scope for conflict, more potential for costly misjudgement.

Through the field work I noticed that the tendency for groups and networks to develop along national lines sustained a further feature of organisational life that itself contributed to the worsening of relationships between different national cultural groups. I found that within these (resultant) compatriot groups and networks, managers often discussed, bemoaned and joked about the difficulties experienced with other national groups. The experience of working in cross-national work settings thus tended to be aired beyond those work settings in the ongoing work of the organisation. The definition of certain features of the organisation in term of national cultural status was thus sustained and elaborated within compatriot settings. In turn, such definitions seemed to influence how the managers dealt with the foreigners in the ongoing work of the organisation.

How successful one is in one's managerial role is dependent (to a degree) upon how one is perceived. How one is perceived or defined by a colleague, or by a group within an organisation, has practical implications for getting one's work done. In multinational organisations managers are often defined in terms of their national cultural status. The definition of themselves and their work in national cultural terms holds practical implications for getting things done, for securing cooperation, for pushing a proposal through, for getting promoted, or for getting one's way at a meeting. National cultural status thus furnishes practical concerns in many different settings and situations in the ongoing work of the organisation.

We can see then how the experience of cultural difference plays an important constitutive role in the ongoing work of multinational business organisations. Of course, on the whole, the work in cross-national settings gets done in spite of such differences, but cultural differences are noticed and experienced. As we have seen, the understanding of such differences and difficulties in terms of national cultural status may take on an organising role at the level of working preferences. Managers may prefer to work with compatriots. They may prefer to avoid collaborating with foreign colleagues. They may prefer to sit with compatriots in the canteen. They may prefer not to divulge too much to the foreigners. We can see then how working in spite of national cultural differences takes on an ordering role in the ongoing work of the organisation.

*The constitutive place of experience:*

Throughout this thesis, I have taken pains to stress the temporal nature of organisational life, the ongoing work of the organisation. Certainly, cross-national settings are constitutive of the ongoing work of the organisation. Furthermore, however, managers' experiences within such settings are also constitutive of the ongoing work of the organisation in that they may come to influence how they act both within and beyond such settings:

For instance, consider managers as they work through their working day. Manager's may experience difficulties, frustration, and irritation within cross-national settings. As they continue to work within the organisation, the way they work both within and beyond such settings may be coloured by the experience of cultural differences within such settings:

M: So how do you deal with this? You keep your real feelings to yourself, and then what do you do?

L: Ha. There is often a big difference between what I do, and what I would like to do.

M: Uh huh

L: I mean, sometimes, you know, I would like to scream. Things get done so slowly. It can make you mad.

The experience of certain settings can inform how the manager acts within further organisational settings. The experience of a meeting, or of a colleague may colour how the manager talks about the meeting or colleague in further settings in the ongoing work of the organisation. It may influence how he works in future settings. It may colour his preferences throughout his working day. We can thus see how the experience of cultural difference can lead to the development of cultural problems.

People talk. People talk about organisational things. Managers do not just talk in terms of the practical concerns of doing their work (though this may be the case in some settings). Managers often talk about other managers. The difficulties experienced within cross-national settings may inform such talk. The competent manager knows this, and this knowledge furnishes further practical concerns within cross-national settings. One has to be careful.

Difficult meetings are talked about as difficult meetings. Such meetings are discussed in terms of why they were difficult. If such difficulties are understood in terms of national cultural differences, then it is not surprising that they are talked about in such ways in the ongoing work of the organisation. Conversations among compatriots, then, are often invested with the frustration and tedium experienced in cross-national settings:

K: Oh, dealing with the Japs can be infuriating. They talk amongst themselves in Japanese for a start. And they play all these face games like making you talk first. It can be bloody annoying.

Such sentiments aired within an organisation can become self-verifying, self-sustaining, and can lead to groups forming along national cultural lines.

Cultural problems are situations that can be defined as such. The development of such situations involves the tendency to make sense of perceived differences in terms of national cultural categories. There will always be different ways of doing things within different collectivities, and for historical reasons certain ways of doing things will be associated with nation states for the foreseeable future. In this sense, national cultural categorisation seems to have a lot of mileage in it yet. Such constitutive features of organisational life will thus continue to provide the potential for cultural problems within multinational organisations.

Endeavours to minimise the potential for costly cultural problems must be informed by an understanding of the social dynamics of the development of such situations. Cultural problems cost multinational companies a great deal of money. Now that this research has been done, the way is clear for further research to consolidate these findings, and to investigate how the development of cultural problems can be managed.

### *Conclusion:*

In this chapter I have attempted to address two interrelated issues:

how managers understand and experience cultural differences in cross-national managerial settings; and,

how situations that can be characterised as cultural problems develop in multinational organisations.

Exploring what remains unsaid in cross-national managerial settings is a difficult thing to do. After long deliberations, and the odd attempt to sidestep the issue altogether, I turned to what managers said about their work. The analysis of what managers said was informed by a guiding principle that has resonated through the publications of several writers since the groundbreaking work of Wittgenstein (1968). This principle is that the ability competently to use categories in everyday life, enables one to understand everyday social settings in terms of such categories.

Using this simple, powerful and (in the end) wholly sensible principle, I examined the way managers used national cultural categories to describe their work. By paying close attention to the use of such categories, I noticed how national categories were often used to account for differences in behaviour. Certain ways of doing things, certain attitudes, could be linked to a vast number of people en masse without any concern or panic about the validity of such practice. Indeed, as we witnessed, Pascal, who was very careful about how he described certain national groups, was simply more sophisticated than many about attributing certain characteristics to people en masse in terms of their national status.

National categories exist. Because they do, and because they are conventionally used in everyday social settings, they enable people to make sense of social situations in terms of such categories. Managers possess such categories, and they thus appear to possess the ability to understand everyday work situations in such terms. Furthermore, because managers talk about national cultural differences in their work so often, and with so much conviction, it seems very likely indeed that they often do understand everyday settings in these terms.

As I have discussed, cross-national managers often understand and experience their work in national cultural terms. Through my broader ethnographic work, I was able to see how the experience of working with foreigners played an important constitutive role in the ongoing work of multinational organisations. The frustrations, irritation, and difficulties experienced in cross-national settings - and understood in national cultural terms - influenced the way the managers worked, both within and beyond such settings. For instance, in a subtle but pervasive way, managers preferred to work with compatriots. It was a lot less hassle.

In many of the organisations I visited, I witnessed this subtle but pervasive tendency for members of national groups to deal with compatriots. In some cases this tendency resulted in situations of conflict and mistrust. Certainly the experience of cultural difference in cross-national managerial settings influenced action beyond those settings. Furthermore, in compatriot settings, the frustrations, irritation and difficulties experienced through working with the foreigners, were often discussed, thus reinforcing the association of national status with certain attributes and ways of doing things. We can appreciate then how the understanding of cultural difference in national cultural terms tends to bring about a worsening of relationships between groups defined in national cultural terms.

In order to understand how cultural problems develop in multinational companies, one must approach organisational activities in terms of their constitutive place in the ongoing work of the organisation. Cultural problems do not result in any simple, straightforward way from cultural differences. We are all different from one another in certain ways. Within a national collectivity there are enormous differences in accent, vocabulary and ways of doing things that may cause all sort of difficulties, frustrations

and irritation. Within multinational companies, however, there is a tendency to understand, and talk about differences in terms of national cultural categories. As we have seen, the understanding of colleagues and their activities in these terms, can influence action both within and beyond cross-national settings in such a way that suspicion, mistrust and conflict develop between groups along national cultural lines. Suspicion, mistrust and conflict along national lines are all classic features of situations that are commonly defined as cultural problems.

## NOTES:

1. It must be stressed here that this thesis does not rest upon the analysis of one interview. This thesis rests upon 174 interviews, and a good deal of broader ethnographic research. I have decided to use this one of the 174 for expository purposes. The analysis of this particular interview was part of the research process as a whole. Had I not interviewed scores of managers before Pascal, I would not have been able to strike up a workable rapport with him, and I would have been unable to assess the worth of what he said. Furthermore, without the experience of talking to managers, observing their work, and reading through the literature I would have been unable to have spotted the importance of national cultural categorisation in the doing of cross-national managerial work. This analysis, then, is but one limited part of the greater whole of the research process. The thesis rests not upon this one interview, but upon the research process as a whole.

2. The way in which managers talked about national collective attributes, and ways of doing things both supports and undermines the notion of stereotyping as it is used in social psychological literature (see Hewstone and Giles, 1986, for instance). Certainly managers use national categories to characterise colleagues and their activities. Certain ways of doing things are deemed to be typically English, or typically French, for instance, and differences in ways things are done are often explained in terms of national categories. As we can see in Pascal's characterisation of the German, however, the characteristics that managers ascribe to various national groups often stretch the term 'stereotype'. Certainly they do link certain attributes and ways of doing things to national status (thereby overlooking the enormous differences in attributes and ways of doing things that may prevail within a national collectivity). However, they do seem to be conscious that their assertions about national cultural characteristics may differ from those stereotypes held about nationalities among other groups. As such they are conscious of what they know, and of what they think. Certainly, they are not constrained by stereotypes, in the sense that their actions are somehow determined by them. Rather, they are conscious about the contingent nature of their knowledge about national cultural characteristics, in the sense that it may differ markedly both from that held by other groups and individuals, and in the sense that their knowledge about national cultural groups may change over time. Certainly, then there is a great deal of scope for further



research into stereotyping. Simplified, and often misguided information about groups (whether along national lines or not) does exist, and does have an influence upon intergroup social dynamics. However, as I hope to have shown, a stereotype does not constitute a hidden hand that guides action in terms of other groups. Further research into this field should take into account people's knowledge about the nature and status of their knowledge about other groups.

## CHAPTER SIX:

### CONCLUSION:

### LEARNING FROM THE RESEARCH:

#### *Introduction:*

This final chapter is a discussion of what I learnt about sociological research through doing it. In order to investigate the impact of national cultural differences in the doing of cross-national managerial work, I developed different approaches as I switched from one aspect of the work to another. In this chapter, I assess the value and usefulness of the approaches I used in my investigations, and point to possible directions in which these approaches could be developed further.

In the writing of this thesis, I have endeavoured not to separate methodology and findings, as though they were two discrete entities (the methodology as a template, and the findings as what is revealed, as it were). Instead, I have tried to convey how my engagement with managers, ideas and difficulties had constitutive implications for the way I approached cross-national managerial work, and what I discovered in the process.

Qualitative research of this variety is rarely easy or straightforward. Because it departs from the 'rules' of natural scientific methodology, it is often difficult to come up with firmly established criteria by which to assess the worth of what one has done. Because the rules of the game are rarely agreed upon within the academic community, there is thus an onus upon explaining and defending the approach one uses every step of the way. There are difficulties then, not only in doing this kind of research, but in documenting it. In addressing this problem, Silverman (1970) advised the researcher to write in the style of an intellectual biography, always keeping oneself in the picture such that the rationales, criteria and practical concerns of one's activities be kept clearly in view. In this chapter, I assess this intellectual journey in terms of the relationship between the development of my approaches, the research findings and my own development as a researcher and a person.

*The reflexive nature of the research:*

Throughout the writing of this thesis I have been conscious of the sceptical reader who at each and every turn could ask, How do you know this is true? This question is profoundly important, and has guided my writing throughout. There is certainly a danger in documenting qualitative social research that such work can be dismissed as *The World According To The Researcher*, and I have commonly heard those of a more positivistic persuasion charge qualitative sociological work with everything from being unscientific, to charlatanism.

Such charges are easy to make, certainly, but they should not be ignored: indeed, throughout the research process, I found the possibility of such charges useful in the sense that they encouraged me to consider the status and scope of my interpretations and claims. The question, How do you know this is true?, requires evidence of grounding, in the sense that any assertion requires grounds for its assessment.

Much has been made of the reflexive nature of social research activities. My research was guided by the principle that all action is reflexive in that it is done in terms of a particular understanding of a social setting or situation (McHugh, 1968). As has been well documented, the implications for social research, are, of course, that social research 'topics' are formulated in terms of certain practical concerns, and furthermore that the research into the characterised topic is itself done in terms of particular practical concerns and theoretical assumptions throughout the research process as whole. Burrell and Morgan (1979), did a good job in popularising the notion that the social reality of organisations can be approached in many different ways, resulting in different characterisations of organisational reality. Their discussion of the constitutive relationship between theory, methodology and findings explained how Marxists discover conflict, functionalists discover social systems, and ethnomethodologists discover accountable action in a variety of guises and settings. All action is reflexive, and this includes social research, at every twist and turn of the research process. This does not undermine research of any variety (in the same way that it does not undermine action of any variety), but it does alert us to the researcher's role in constituting the research findings.

Sharrock and Button (1991, p. 144) discuss the role of theorising in social research, and point to the notion that the investigation of 'objective social reality' is itself a theory-constituted process:

'Social reality', we are told is identified through the procedures and investigations of theoretical activity, but this means that social reality is the *end product* of our studies. 'Social reality' will, on these terms be specified as the outcome of a *successful* programme of sociological work, so there is more than a hint of paradox about any suggestion that the understanding of social action begins by viewing it relative to objective social reality. On the very terms which constitute the notion of 'objective social reality' such a conception can become available to us only at a date in the sociological enterprise, when the discipline has prospered in ways which it certainly does not yet do. If one accepts the objectivist viewpoint, then we are up against this disconcerting fact: that the social actor may not know what the objective reality of his/ her social existence is, but *no more does the sociological theorist*.

From an early stage, the research was into the place of cultural differences in cross-national managerial work. A dissatisfaction with questionnaire-driven statistical work into the nature of national cultural differences, certainly convinced me of how I did not wish to approach the study, but I had no such conviction about which alternative methodologies I was to use.

After a while however, I began to work up an approach. Through an interest in ethnomethodological studies, which stressed the analytical primacy of accountable action, I came to approach cross-national managerial work as it was understood and done in everyday organisational settings. Certainly, such an approach was itself not value-free or pre-theoretical, but it did encourage an awareness of its own reflexive properties.

The study of accountable cross-national managerial action involved a good deal of time talking to managers, observing how they worked, and learning how they understood what they were doing. At first, this process was difficult, frustrating and confusing. However, after a time, I found that I could understand what they were doing in a way that was workable. The results of this endeavour are discussed in Chapter Four, where I interpret an episode of cross-national managerial work in terms of how it was understood by those doing it.

One of the advantages of doing research of this kind is that throughout the research one keeps in constant engagement with those one is studying. One's theorising is thus kept in check as it were by the managers. If one is interested in the meaning certain settings hold for managers, then this engagement is crucial. To the question of the truth of my claims about cross-national managerial action, I can only say that, broadly speaking, they are true in terms of those who do the work.

As to claims that social research such as this is unscientific, I would reply, on what grounds? If what is meant by science is the production and improvement of characterisations that reflect reality, I would reply that my interpretation of cross-national managerial action reflects the social reality of the work fairly well. Social reality is a meaningful state of affairs. If we are to produce characterisations of the social reality of managerial work, then the question for the scientist is how best we do this. Interpreting the understanding of the activities we are studying, is thoroughly scientific if science is the documentation of meaningful reality.

Action and understanding are linked in the sense that action is done in terms of an understanding or definition of the particular setting or situation (McHugh, 1968). To claim otherwise would either be to talk nonsense, or to talk of things other than action and understanding, such as reflex arcs. In order to understand cross-national managerial work therefore, we would do well to approach such work in the same terms as the managers, for they act in these particular terms. In other words, we must be able to make sense of the work at the level of meaning that is understood and acted upon by the working managers. Much of the research process was bound up in reaching this ability. Through my time among the managers, I gradually learnt how to interpret what they did in a way that broadly matched their own.

Throughout this thesis I have stressed the notion that managers understand and act within particular cross-national managerial settings in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation. What is important, what has to be done here and now is understood in terms of ongoing organisational concerns.

I have stressed this aspect of managerial action because it holds significant implications for contemporary management theory. By treating everyday managerial activities as uninteresting, by passing over the exigencies of

working in an effort to produce elegant models of work, writers to date have produced theories of cross-national management that have glossed over the understood social reality of doing it. The exploration of particular episodes of cross-national managerial work, enables us critically to assess such static and simplistic models.

The sceptic here may object, Does this mean that we are restricted to the analysis of particular episodes of managerial work? What about such things as restructuring and organisational change?

To say that attention to the detail of particular incidences of managerial work is small in scope and generalisability, is to say that the work itself is small in scope and generalisability. As we have seen, in the deliberations over the Annual Release date at Lombarge Technologies, significant and far-reaching decisions were taken at the local, interactive level. If we wish to understand the social dynamics of production release, restructuring and organisational change, then, it makes sense - at least initially - to pay close attention to how such things are done. As we discovered, such structuring and profit-influencing developments as product releases are decided upon and sanctioned at the level of managerial interaction, and such work is understood and done in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation.

Again the sceptic may interject. Such microsociological analyses may well be defensible and produce limited contributions to knowledge about doing cross-national managerial work; however, they do not address the more macrosociological concerns of structure and environment.

Such concerns reify the organisation. An appreciation that the particular is defined and acted upon in terms of the ongoing, enables us to transcend the micro-macro debate. Focusing the analysis at the level of doing cross-national managerial work, renders concerns that the study of such work as it is done will somehow miss out wider organisational concerns absurd. If macro-organisational concerns have a place in managerial work they will be there, and will be understood to be there. Indeed, as we have seen, such concerns as production timing, the company's relationship with its customers and the cost of living in the South of England, were all dealt with as part of the work of the managers.

An appreciation that managers deal with the particular in terms of the ongoing, sets an agenda for further research into managerial work in terms of the practical concerns of doing the work: it opens up the pursuit of studies into budgeting, restructuring, opening subsidiaries, deliberating about new products and deciding upon redundancies, that pays close attention to the constitutive relationship between managerial action and the ongoing work of the organisation, as it is understood by those who do the work.

In this thesis, I have attempted to further our knowledge about cross-national managerial work by paying close attention to how such work is done; in so doing I hope to have worked up an approach that has practical implications both for organisational theory, and for the the assessment and prosecution of further research into cross-national managerial work. Both organisational theorists, and management researchers would do well to address the understanding of those who produce the organisation they are studying. To do so would inform and refine such concepts as organisational structure, production process and customer relations, by shifting the focus to how such things are dealt with, talked about, maintained and changed at the level of everyday work.

*Investigating cross-national managerial work:*

One of the more important findings of my research was that managing in cross-national settings is done in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation; it is not done in terms of national cultural difference, in the sense that cultural differences furnish the business of the day. Of course, within multinational companies, international and cross-national concerns such as dealing with the parent company, or setting up a new subsidiary may come to dominate the proceedings. Such work, however, is done in spite of any national cultural differences between those doing the work. What is important is understood to be important in terms of the ongoing work of the organisation, whether this work be at the departmental or the international level. Managers' perceptions of the ongoing work of the organisation furnish priorities, things to be done, things to be raised, things to be sorted out. The definition of the situation in such terms organises the propriety of action within the setting. National cultural status takes a back seat, as it were, as the business of the day is done.

Talking to the managers, however, I discovered that national cultural differences were deemed to be a crucial factor in their work with other nationals. According to the managers, national cultural differences caused all sorts of difficulties, from one-to-one negotiations, to the implementation of parent company directives. How I was to deal with this aspect of cross-national managerial work constituted one of the most difficult issues I encountered in the research process.

I had noticed already that managers treated national cultural difference as unimportant, as they got on with what was important in organisational terms. If cultural difference was orientated to at all, it was done as part of the work - the odd word was corrected, or the meaning of a phrase was requested as part of the work process. Cultural difference then had a very low profile in cross-national managerial interaction in the sense that it was accountably ignored, or treated as unimportant.

One of the more difficult issues I had to deal during the research involved the discovery that although cultural differences were accountably ignored or treated as unimportant as managers worked in cross-national situations, the same managers, when away from such settings, spent a great deal of time complaining about the impact of these cultural differences in the doing of their work. The challenge for me then was to switch from the analysis of the accountable meaning of cultural differences in cross-national encounters, to the investigation of managers' unsaid, unaccountable understanding and experience as they worked in the face of cultural difference. This was quite a step to take, and I did not embark upon it lightly. Having read through a good deal of work on mind, intention and understanding, I was painfully aware of the philosophical, and methodological issues in attempting to do this. At one point in the research process I spent a good deal of time trying to concoct ways in which I could get around, or sidestep, this problem. The experiential impact of cultural difference in the doing of cross-national managerial work, however, would not go away. The more I spoke to the managers, the more I learnt of the frustrations, difficulties, and emotions associated with working with other nationals.

The problems for me as a researcher were enormous. I could not observe managers' unsaid understanding and experience of their work as they worked. I could not 'listen in' to what they were thinking, or feeling as they



fixed dates, smiled and negotiated. The more I tried to tackle this problem of the unsaid, the unaccountable, the more I encountered epistemological and philosophical objections. After a period of a few months, however, I began to realise that my recognition that there was a problem here to be solved was itself a step forward in our understanding of cross-national managerial work. Encouraged by this, and realising that part of the reason the methodological problems did seem insurmountable was that this had not been done before, I set to attempting (at least) to contribute to our understanding of this aspect of cross-national managerial work.

The way I did this was to accept the limitations set by the nature of the problem, and to make do with what I could study. Being unable to listen in on the thoughts and feelings of those doing the work, I began to look around for other ways in which I could at least approach an understanding of what was unsaid and unaccountable in the doing of cross-national managerial work. Guided by the work of Wittgenstein and Coulter, particularly the aspect of their work that deals with the constitutive relationship between language, action and understanding, I developed a way of analysing the way in which managers described the cross-cultural nature of their work. In approaching national cultural categories as they were used by managers to describe their work, I endeavoured to reach an understanding of the unsaid, unaccountable ways in which the managers understood their work:

A major step towards a richer and more sophisticated appreciation of the phenomena of analytical interest to students of cognition will be taken once the lessons of Wittgensteinian and ethnomethodological inquiry are digested. (Coulter, 1991, p. 194)

Of course, Coulter's agenda is concerned with understanding in terms of publicly accountable meanings. I, then, moved on, rather radically, from the analysis of understanding for the practical purposes of working (see Chapter, 4), to another form of analysis, one that approaches what is understood as well as that which is understood for the practical purposes of working.

Of course, to claim that the use of national categories in descriptive practice reflects in any direct way how managers understand cultural differences as they work, would be wrong-headed. Managers' understanding of their work in particular organisational settings is contingent upon all sorts of factors and exigencies peculiar to those settings.

I had, then, to take an epistemological jump, and argue for a link between descriptive category use, and understanding within cross-national settings. I may be criticised for doing this, particularly from an ethnomethodological point of view, but if we are to approach an understanding of the impact of cultural differences within cross-national managerial work, we have to deal somehow with the unsaid, the unaccountable.

I may be criticised for tackling the problem in this way. There are problems with this approach, and I am wholly aware of them. However, I have at least identified the question of what is unaccountable, unsaid and undone, and I have (at least) tried to tackle an issue that is fraught with methodological and philosophical difficulties. I hope that in identifying this field, and making a foray into it myself, I will have opened up a new area for research. This approach may not be the best way to tackle the the problem of unsaid, undone understanding. Certainly, it is conjectural in the sense that we can never, in any incontinent way, access managers' unsaid, unaccountable understandings of their work as they do it: we will always, then, have to make an epistemological jump of sorts from what we do have access to, to what we do not. Whether this approach is better than a more conventional ethnographic approach remains to be seen. The onus now rests upon further research to tackle this aspect of cross-national managerial work.

*The ethnographic aspect of the study:*

From the outset, the study was ethnographic in the sense that I was concerned to learn about the meaningful reality of cross-national managerial work as it was understood and done by working managers. As I have discussed, this meant investigating cross-national managerial work at interrelated levels: learning how to understand and do such work as the managers did it; and investigating what managers understood about their work, particularly concerning the impact of cultural differences. These two levels of understanding were interrelated both in their work, and in my own understanding of their work. What they said about their work, enabled me more competently to understand what they were doing as they worked; what they did as they worked enabled me more competently to understand and assess what they said about the nature of their work.

Of course, as the study proceeded, my understanding of managers' work was not restricted to these two interrelated aspects of their understanding. I certainly learnt a great deal about how to do such work, and a lot about the nature of such work from the managers' point of view; however, as I spent more time among the managers, I was increasingly able to spot things that the managers themselves seemed to find uninteresting. The ability to do this rested upon my status as a researcher. For instance, as a researcher, I was not bound to any one group within the organisations I visited. This enabled me to get the different views of all parties to a particular cultural problem.

As I have discussed, as I talked to the managers, and observed their work, I noticed two things: firstly, that managers, in a subtle way, tended to prefer to work with compatriots, and, secondly, that among compatriots, managers often talked about other national groups. There was thus a subtle tendency to interact and group along national lines, and, through this, for there to be a gradual worsening of relationships between these groups.

Such an analysis was of a different order to the everyday understandings of the managers involved, but it did seem to reflect how their understanding and experience of cultural differences contributed to the development of costly and destructive cultural problems. Through the research, then, I learnt that although an analysis of the meaning of work, as it is understood by those doing it, is an interesting and useful exercise, certain aspects of the development of cultural problems do go unnoticed by the managers. Certainly, the practical concerns of managing in a multinational company mean that managers possess a workable knowledge of their work and their organisations; however, there are social dynamics within such organisations that take place out of sight, that managers do not encounter as part of their everyday working life. For sure, they may encounter and deal with the effects or symptoms of such social dynamics, but they may remain ignorant of the broader social dynamics themselves.

The social construction of cultural differences into cultural problems is a good example of this. Although managers have a workable knowledge of cultural differences, and also know a fair bit about the effects or symptoms of such difference within their organisations, they are often ignorant of how cultural differences develop into full blown cultural problems. This is not surprising, for although cultural difference is encountered in cross-national

settings, the social dynamics that lead to the development of cultural problems often take place in sites and settings beyond such encounters, in situations wherein the managers may not even be present.

We can appreciate, then, that the manager and the social researcher are differently placed in terms of their ability to make sense of the social dynamics of an organisation. The study of certain aspects of organisational life often requires an individual who is in but not of the organisation.

*The nature of social research:*

Through the research process, I have come to appreciate that investigating the meaningful social reality of organisational life is a very useful way to learn about the workings of organisations, and the nature of organisational practices. It must be stressed however, that this kind of analysis is as theory-constituted as any other approach to organisations.

The notion that any social enquiry is theory-constituted does not of course undermine such investigations in the sense that any action is theory-driven (if one includes everyday understanding). The danger with much analysis of organisations and organisational life, however, is that they overlook the fact that they are theory-driven or constituted. The complexity of organisational life requires then not so much that one restricts one's analyses to the understanding of those who through their everyday activities constitute the organisations, but that, both in this kind of approach, and in any other approaches - be they systematic, Marxian, or interpretive - one addresses the constitutive role of the theories, the practical concerns of the research and the researcher's activities play in the working up of research findings.

There is no one social reality of the impact of cultural differences within cross-national managerial work. As such there is no one right answer, or characterisation of the workings of such differences. In approaching the question of cultural differences within cross-national managerial work I was conscious at every twist and turn of the research process that this particular line of attack was but one of many other possible ones, and that this had constitutive implications for the research findings. In documenting the research and the research findings, I hope to have written in a style that lays out for the reader the constitutive role of my activities as a researcher, and

the theories that informed what I looked for, and influenced what I found. I have thus attempted to portray the research findings not as incontestable facts that I discovered, but as features of the research process that were worked up through the process itself.

I have written this thesis in an effort to contribute to our understanding of cross-national managerial work, while redressing an imbalance in the present literature that treats everyday cross-national managerial activities as uninteresting. In doing the research I have discovered certain things about the doing of such work that have been overlooked or oversimplified to date. What I have discovered has significant implications for the assessment of research into cross-national management, and lays the foundations for further research in this field. Furthermore, as intended, my research has also generated findings that will be of interest to managers and management trainers:

*Lessons for management:*

What then can be done about the development of cultural problems within multinational organisations? As I have discussed, the sociologist can be of use to managers in documenting and describing the development of social situations in a way that clarifies what, in the hurly-burly of managerial work, may be only half-considered. Much managerial work is concerned with making sense of situations and settings such that they can be acted upon. Making sense of what is often very complicated can take time and patience, something the beleaguered manager may be short of. The sociologist has as much time and patience as he is allowed. Sociologists may thus provide useful information to managers, useful in the sense that it clarifies certain organisational situations such that they can be better - more knowledgeably - managed.

Through the research process I have come to realise just how difficult the management of cultural problems can be. Time and time again, I visited managers who knew full well that there was a serious cultural problem in their company, but who were at a loss as to what to do about it.

There is a reason for this. As I have discussed, national cultural differences tend to contribute towards a worsening of relationships between national

groups. What makes this difficult to manage is that the social dynamics leading to cultural problems tend to take place apart from each other, i.e. among two (or more) national cultural groups. The management of cultural problems is thus very difficult because of the dual nature of the social dynamics that lead to their development. The management of cultural problems thus falls foul of the social dynamics that lead to cultural problems.

Having clarified the social dynamics of the social construction of cultural problems as much as I can, having taken time out from the hurly-burly of meetings, memoranda and mutterings to come to a description, what can I offer in the way of prescription? As a sociologist, I balk at the thought of prescribing anything, for sociologists are notoriously bad at this. I will then start by describing. I will describe the development of cultural problems in terms of what can be managed, and what cannot.

We cannot change managers' cultural roots. Managers from different countries have different cultural roots, and so cultural difference tends to be a feature of cross-national encounters to a greater or lesser extent. There is not a great deal we can do about this in the short run. However, cultural differences of the more extreme, destructive varieties could be addressed through training programmes that encourage sojourning managers to acculturate, to assimilate, to become local.

Managers must expect to be frustrated by cultural differences. Too often, managers are sent abroad with little training, but heaps of enthusiasm. It seems strange to say it, but this enthusiasm could be a symptom that they do not appreciate just how tough it is out there. Managers soon learn about the subtle impact of cultural differences in their work, and learning this can be a frustrating and lonely experience.

It is true that certain companies have attempted to tackle the potential dangers of cultural difference at this point, in the form of orientation courses. I have to say, however, in my experience of such courses, that there is often little attempt to describe the social dynamics of cultural difference, and that the characterisations of culture used in such courses are generally far too simple, in the sense that the models, figures and pie charts will mean little to the beleaguered manager in the thick of difficult negotiations.

If intervention or training at this stage is to be of any use to a manager taking up a position abroad then it should be done at the level at which the manager will experience cultural differences. The characterisations of culture and cultural difference used should be such that they will broadly match his everyday experience of them.

Cultural difference results in differences in the ways things are done by two or more parties. There is then little use in training incoming managers to be adaptable, or warning them about the subtle but pervasive social dynamics of cultural problems, if their new colleagues are inflexible in their approach, and see cultural problems as having nothing to do with them. In other words, the dangers and social dynamics of cultural difference should be dealt with at all levels within a multinational company.

Another contributing factor in the social construction of cultural problems is the political nature of national status. In the case of takeovers or of the implementation of far reaching organisational change, one's national status can contribute greatly to the development of costly and destructive cultural problems. The mutually constitutive relationship between actor and act is important here. If, as is often the case, one national group within the multinational is perceived to be in the game of empire building, then one's national status will have a broad bearing upon how one is perceived, and in the long run, how much cooperation, or resistance one will encounter. One possible point of intervention in the effort to minimise the development of cultural differences into cultural problems is here: managers should be made wholly aware of the definitional implications of their national status. Knowing that they may be perceived in a bad light because of their nationality, can only be useful, for it is only in this knowledge that they can begin to manage the effects of this.

Other factors that can and do contribute to the development of cultural problems are linguistic ability in general, and accent and vocabulary in particular. Accent contributes to cultural problems by constantly reaffirming the manager's national status: a constant reaffirmation of what may be disadvantageous may itself contribute to what may be defined as a cultural problem. Both accent and limited vocabulary may further contribute to the development of cultural problems in two interrelated ways:

Firstly, both accent and limited vocabulary may make managerial work just that little bit more difficult, furnishing subtle misunderstandings that have to be ironed out as part of the work. Meetings with foreign managers may therefore come to be defined as being just that little bit more difficult than work with compatriots, which may contribute to a subtle preference to work with compatriots. This, as we have seen, contributes at the organisational level to destructive cultural problems.

Secondly, both accent and limited vocabulary may irritate those one works with. They will compound the frustration felt within the hurly-burly of working with foreigners. The frustration, and irritation felt will feed into the definition of national status. As we have seen the definition of national status tends to take place beyond such cross-national setting, and among compatriots. Within compatriot settings, such frustrations and irritations are aired, thus compounding the preference to work with compatriots, and sustaining definitions of the foreigners which are then brought back into the cross-national settings, informing the way the foreigners are understood.

It makes sense then for a multinational corporation to encourage language training in a concerted fashion, and to recruit those who are already multilingual, for they will lessen the risk of suffering from and encouraging cultural problems in foreign assignments.

Such a characterisation of the social dynamics of cultural problems made good sense to managers I spoke to. They seem to find it useful. They appreciated that cultural differences often lead to severe cultural problems, but they were at a loss when it came to what to do about them. Some of the managers watched on as amicable relations between themselves and other national groups broke down into mistrust and conflict, through whispers and nudges. Most managers agreed that the problem could at least be alleviated in the long term through training in the social dynamics of cultural problems and in language training, but they themselves found themselves at a loss, when it came to dealing with the situation once the social dynamics leading to cultural problems were underway.

The social processes leading to cultural problems are difficult to eliminate. Training of the sort I have outlined, and the encouragement of language



training, may be steps in the right direction, but if - as seems likely - they are accompanied by an increased international interflow of personnel, then national cultural differences will pose a considerable threat for the foreseeable future.

### *Conclusion:*

In writing this thesis, I aim to have contributed to our understanding about the impact of national cultural differences in the management of multinational organisations. Having done so, I suggest that it is time to move on from the preoccupation with questionnaire-driven dimensions of national cultural difference that has dominated work in this field for the last decade. I suggest that we now move on to address the question of how national cultural differences have such an impact in the management of multinational companies.

In this thesis I have made a foray into this field. Through the process of doing so I have discovered that this kind of research is difficult, but that it can produce important and useful findings. Having identified the constitutive importance of experience in multinational companies, I then had to work up ways of approaching it. The way I approached this aspect of the understanding of national cultural differences may be criticised. This is for the good, as my work will at least have initiated a debate about this important aspect of cross-national managerial work. It is hoped that further researchers will approach the understanding and experience of cultural differences in more successful, more appropriate ways.

That said, I would be surprised if the development and application of more appropriate methods resulted in findings that were radically different from the findings outlined in this thesis. Certainly, the place of the understanding and experience of cultural differences in the development of cultural problems seems secure. I remain to be convinced that the experience of national cultural differences in cross-national organisational settings has nothing to do with the development of cultural problems.

In attempting to characterise what is left unsaid in cross-national managerial settings then, I hope to have identified an important and potentially influential field in the study of international management. If all

goes well, further study in this area could make useful contributions to the development of training methods, the development of recruitment policy and the development of human resources strategies in multinational companies. Certainly then, it is in multinational companies' interests to fund such research. Cultural differences cost a great deal of money in collapsed initiatives, failed appointments and resistance to change. The funding of research into how cultural differences lead to cultural problems will reap benefits in reducing such costs.

In writing this thesis I hope to have taken a modest step in reshifting the analytical focus, from the characterisation of national cultural differences, to the analysis of how cultural differences are understood, and acted upon in multinational organisations. Having identified the constitutive role of understanding and experience in the development of cultural problems, it is now up to further researchers to come up with better ways to explore the development of cultural problems in multinational companies.

## APPENDIX ONE: THE MEETING AT LOMBARGE

- D: Right we'll get right down to the software issues (0.4) and what they mean to the series 500 (0.4) and what they mean (1.0) therefore also to the 590  
(0.2)
- A: Okay
- D: =Brendan  
(0.5)
- A: Uh:::m (0.5) Well the two main software issues are Capital (0.4)
- D: Uhuh
- A: =Since Lorne  
(0.5)
- D: Uhuh  
(0.2)
- A: A:::nd (0.2) u:::h (0.4) the changes to the micro A.M.S ()=
- D: =Do we have a description of the changes to the micro A.M.S err Graham?  
(1.0)
- G: Yes (0.1) it's in the package that's going out to them this afternoon  
(2.0)
- D: What they really mean
- G: I've given a copy to Neil (0.1) and Mike (2.0) of what the changes=it's about a five page document just summarises what the changes are and the parameters they need to use
- D: Right  
(0.4)
- D: So (0.5) w-what is still going on as far as Capital is concerned in engineering then?
- G: Capita::l?
- D: Yeh. Sorry micro AMS.
- G: Micro AMS? (0.5) Umm:: we've (0.2) got (0.2) a (0.5) bug for Sarsens that we have to fix in the next two weeks the M.B.D.C. scheme problem (0.5) which is Nigel Brewer's next job (0.4) and when he's done that he is then starting on the autoranging work (1.0) which we're currently intending to deliver at the end of July
- D: That's final that we that's is final that we've got a clear commitment

- on the table there?  
(0.2)
- G: Yeh (0.2) Yeh and it's his top priority  
(1.0)
- D: Okay (0.2) There is no chance anyone will take it off to to t-do the job  
for something else.
- G: That is correct (2.0) A:ccording to Jeff Hatton's rules it's a customer (0.5)  
commitment with a (0.2) with a targ- with a fixed date and therefore it's  
his top priority (0.5) it takes priority over 590 kate (1.0) uhh model  
library::
- C: Will it be in the 500s? (0.8) Cos (0.2) is that July date (0.5)  
[
- D: Yeh
- C: 590?
- D: (That's) probably in the 500s=
- D: =That's in the completion of the (0.4) ()
- G: That's for the completion of 500 chain but it won't be necessarily mean  
590 from that day (1.5) It can presumably go in the following release  
(0.2) for 590 (0.4) It won't (0.3) that's the Beta release it won't be fully  
released on 500 until the Summer (0.4) full (0.2) full release (0.3) in the  
full release
- D: >When does that mean () in July is it?<
- G: It's being planned for two months after micro A.M.S. and Algard  
(1.0)
- E: Which is what?
- F: In September
- G: Well if (0.4) if (0.3) if Algard (0.5) would (0.3) well if
- D: Bloody Hell
- G: end of September if whatever Algard work (0.2) Bosch want is done by  
the end of July  
(1.0)
- D: >I thought we were going to have em released by (0.3) by err June now<
- G: Well you can't (0.5) if you want Micro M.S. autoranging in that release  
we cannot release it before we've done the mi(hu)cr(hu)o M.S work  
(1.2)
- D: >So< (0.4) why don't we stop that release and err::: and (0.2) order that  
that (0.4) that that particular feature in that err will each um and still
- G: That's what we're doing

D: release err (0.3) in June July time  
(0.3)

G: Because I was told that the (0.3) that the big things we were doing all  
had to be in that Summer release  
(0.3)

D: >I apologise yes that that's right< (0.3) >yes<

E: What do you mean by a () release or a Beta release?

G: We (0.3) we've got no (0.5) umm (0.5) in th- in the Summer we're due  
to do the next full release a fortnight like (0.2) like the update 29 release  
we did last August  
(0.5)

E Yes  
(0.2)

G: Right

E: Yes

G: =And that's supposed to include all the major enhancements that  
we're (0.4) that we've been working on

E: Okay , but you just said that that release was going to be in September  
now  
(0.3)

G: If (0.2) we want Micro M.S. autoranging in

E: Yes

G: It can't be any earlier than September

E: Then it doesn't become a Summer release  
(0.8)

G: Right=

G: Okay so is there anything else that is in that stuff that could be released  
in the Summer (0.5) I mean is there. I (0.2) this is a question (0.5) Are  
you hanging everything out 'till September for a release that could be  
available in the Summer

G: Well it depends what the Lorne Algard work turns out to  
be (0.4) if they want what we thought they wanted (0.5) then (0.2) we're  
four months away from that  
(1.0)

D: whistles  
(1.0)

G: So (0.5) if (0.1) if it's it a four months Lorne job (0.4) then that doesn't

- finish till the end of August (2.0) which would put full year release out to the end of October=
- E: =But last time I spoke to Michael Tanner about Algard
- G: If you want the Algard=
- E: = He said if Capital is (0.2) is better insufficiently (0.5) then he's (0.5) they won't (0.2) they're not going to launch the err::=
- G: =Well fine (0.5) All I'm saying is (0.4) If you want a particular enhancement in the full year release (0.2) then the full year release will be two months after that (0.5) cos when we (0.2) when we give (0.2) Germany the Beta release at the enhancement (0.3) then we freeze all the software (0.2) two months later the full release pops out the end (0.3) assuming (0.5) of course (0.2) that we've got a replacement for Doug Barton
- D: That seems err a little bit of a weak err thing to say assuming=
- G: Well. You can either decide that you want these things on the full release in which case the full release has got to wait for them (0.3) or decide that you don't want them in the full release and we can start the full release process as soon as we've got some resource (2.0)
- G: Why don't we just see what's supposed to be available then you can decide what makes sense to (0.5) produce
- D: Yeh
- G: Right
- D: Yeh
- G: Right
- F: Because
- E: So the () we're talking about here are Beta released customers
- G: Yeh
- E All the time ()
- G: Yeh (3.0)
- D: I would (0.2) personally I would like to see release on or around June or July (frankly) (0.4) otherwise you're going to (rock the boat) because we had err we had the same problem last year (0.8) Stacie's going to shout like hell=
- G: =If::: you want release in (0.2) July::: then::: we will have to freeze (0.2) next month (0.4) that virtually says whatever we've got now (0.3) plus the bug releases any bug releases that were available by the end of

- May is what's in your release  
(1.5)
- D: Well (0.3) what's wrong with that (0.2) and then=
- G: =Because starting from today I can't foresee that within a month's time we'll have a Doug Barton replacement (0.8) the chap who was coming to replace Doug Barton (0.2) who (0.4) signed us an acceptance letter and said was coming on date X (0.5) has had a better offer from his existing company and is not now coming (0.6) so we're still interviewing
- E: How long ago did Doug Barton (0.8) leave
- D: Yeh
- G: Umm (0.5) January? (1.0) January? February? (0.5) we're having a lot of trouble recruiting software engineers  
(1.0)
- D: What it means (0.3) I'm s- I'm smelling
- G: They can't they can't afford to live down here  
(0.5)
- D: I mean I'm smelling a potential problem here that we won't (0.5) we won't meet any of those commitments we're making as far as Lorsch and Sarsons is concerned
- G: Y-Yeh we don't (0.4) we don't need (0.5) if we (0.5) Nigel Cott is full time on micro A.M.S.
- D: Right
- G: Right. So there's there's n- n- no (0.4) clash risk around the umm (1.0) autoranging work (0.5) that's it's top priority
- D: O.K. Right
- G: What we haven't got is a resource to go through the whole (0.4) annual release process (0.5) we've got to run all the CTCs on every bit of software (0.6) uhh its a totally different ball game from doing an interim release so what we do on an interim release (0.5) is we test (0.8) the package that we've altered (0.3) and we (run in assistant command D.B.S) and that's all (1.0) for the Summer full release (0.6) to give everything we've done since last August to every customer (0.6) We've got to evaluate the entire lot (1.5) We've got to run CTCs on every software package
- E And you (1.5) and this (0.4) new guy that's coming in would do that?
- G: and that (0.4) yes (0.3) and that takes a good two and a half months  
(1.0)
- E: Will the new guy be able to do it in two and a half months?

G: Yeh (0.5) I mean a lot of it is just (0.6) fairly straightforward (0.4) testing  
D: So (0.3) we're looking for somebody who has a (0.2) has the experience  
of all our systems is that what you're saying?  
G: Mm:: (0.4) You don't need a great deal of experience (0.2) en-enough to  
know what you're doing (0.8) yeh (0.5) yeh  
E: You'll want a software guy as well then eh  
G: Oh yes I mean as he goes through he'll find problems (0.2) and then the  
people responsible for those areas of the code will have to (0.3) get in  
there and fix them  
(0.4)  
F: yeh  
(0.6)  
G: Now that process is (0.2) two and a half man months' of work (1.2)  
E: Shit  
G: It's - it would be optimistic to suppose from when we've reached the  
software then - that the release would be much earlier than two  
months after the freeze (0.6) if we've got  
D: >O.K.<  
G: someone full time and someone part time  
(1.0)  
D: So were gonna find out what we::: err what (0.2) what we will err can  
add and release in the Summer time right  
G: Yeh  
(0.5)  
D: Depending upon the outcome of the Algard =  
G; =That's right  
(0.5)  
D: Okay  
(0.5)  
G: Yeh  
(2.5)  
D: This is only two points right?  
G: What else d'you know  
F That's only one so far  
G: Hahahah



## APPENDIX TWO:

### TRANSCRIPT NOTATION:

]	Overlap
> Yes O.K.<	Sharp, quickly-delivered speech.
(0.5)	Pause of 0.5 seconds
(.)	Short, untimed pause
Yes:::	Drawn-out delivery
(hu)(hu)	Laughter during talk
=	No interval between utterances
()	Doubt about transcription
---	Stressed

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