

**Inter group Relationships in Organisational Decision  
Making – An Ethnographic Study**

**Robert Howard Goldfield**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of  
Bournemouth University for the degree of Doctor of Business  
Administration

**Bournemouth University**

**July 2009**

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**Abstract**

This ethnographic study is concerned with the relationship dynamics between groups jointly tasked with decision making. It seeks to answer the general question: what are the main relationship drivers and influences at work during the process of inter group activity? The research examines the issues surrounding the inter group relationship. How are relationships between the groups formed and maintained and how do they impact the efficacy of the inter group decision process? What makes the inter group relationship in organisational decision making work at a practical level? The work lies within, and makes a contribution to, the areas of social and management psychology. In commercial entities, where a Board comprising executive and non-executive members is charged with strategic decision making, a client/advisor relationship often exists with another group. In the situation researched, one group has the ultimate responsibility for making the decisions whilst a second group is tasked with identifying the requirement for a decision, information gathering, the search for alternatives and the recommendation to the Decision Group. This particular situation is not uncommon within limited companies, partnerships, listed companies and a range of other organisations and is the situation within the research organisation. Successful and effective decision making is an essential ingredient of organisational management. The result of a set of dysfunctional relationships and inefficient processes can be terminal to the organisation. An understanding of the relationship dynamics at work improves the decision process and enables managers to identify those negative elements that may compromise efficacy. Additionally, the research conclusions have implications for group recruitment and group training. The research deals with individuals, their actions and their thought processes, both conscious and unconscious. The conceptual framework for the research centers upon the relationship dynamics and relationship overlap between the individuals that are members of both groups. The subject and circumstances lend themselves to qualitative research methodology and interpretive ethnography is the approach chosen and is seen as a useful counterbalance and addition to the considerable amount of empirical work on group dynamics available to researchers. An additional dimension is added by the position of the researcher as both an insider in the organisation and that organisation's Chief Executive. This poses certain ethical issues which are addressed within the thesis and also illustrates and proposes the use of insider interpretive ethnography as a powerful management tool for newly appointed senior managers and organisational leaders. The qualitative interview is the primary method of data gathering, however, a number of ethnographic methods are employed, including the extensive use of observation field notes. The research is directly grounded in the area of inter group relations and the findings show the direct importance of the sharing dynamics of fate, motivation, values and understanding to the inter group relationship and the impacts upon trust within and between groups. The role of group leadership is examined and its significant impact on the inter group relationships is proposed. The research provides a further example of the use of interpretive ethnography by an organisational insider.



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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Introduction to the Research**

This research is directed at the general question: what are the main relationship drivers and influences at work during the process of inter group working? The research examines the issues surrounding the inter group working relationship in a commercial organisation when those groups are involved in the decision making process. The research questions revolve around the general reflections: how are relationships between the groups formed and maintained and how do they impact the efficacy of the inter group decision process? What makes the inter group relationship in organisational decision making work at a practical level? This thesis reports on an ethnographic study in this subject area, carried out by the organisation's Chief Executive over an extended period of time.

A commercial organisation is defined by its decision making; it could be argued that all organisations, regardless of their nature, structure, aims and objectives are so defined. Decision making lies at the heart of organisational activity in all walks of life, private, public and commercial. Success, measured in whatever way, financial, increased production, increased sales, lower costs, increased shareholder value; is a reflection of the success of decision making within the organisation. Managers make decisions; in my view that is one of their prime functions and responsibilities. Situations that require a decision to be made take many forms and the decision making process itself can be very simple or very complex. What is equally true is that decision outcomes can have little direct importance to individuals and/or the organisation, or can be of fundamental import and direct impact. Decisions therefore range in importance and impact to both individual and organisation. Successful strategic decision making is, by its very nature, likely to

be of fundamental importance to an organisation. The quality of the eventual outcome is going to be dependant on a number of factors that may not be clear to those making the decisions, including the various relationships between individuals and between groups and a framework for approaching and making decisions of this nature is necessary for all individuals and organisations.

A significant amount of decision making within organisations takes place within and between small groups. Strategic decision making is often undertaken by a Board of Directors and/or a senior management team acting in concert. The research investigates the inter group relationship dynamics between two groups tasked with strategic decision making. In decision making, the generally accepted process lists sequential, interrelated steps that lead to the implementation of a choice made from several alternatives (Harrison and Pelletier 2000). However, within many companies, organisations, partnerships and other bodies, the steps, although sequential and interrelated, are performed by different individuals operating within different groups. This is rarely acknowledged, or even alluded to, in the literature on group decision making. It is therefore probable that relationship issues between groups, and individuals within and between groups, is of significant importance to the efficacy of decision making.

In the situations studied, the first group, the Decision Group, have the ultimate responsibility for making the decisions, for the consequences of the decisions that they make and are legally accountable. In the research organisation, as in many others, this is the Board. The second group, termed here 'the Advisor Group', are tasked by the Decision Group with identifying the requirement for Decision Group action, information gathering, the search for alternatives and the presentation of their findings and, usually, recommendations on the decision[s] to be taken. This group is generally, but not exclusively, the executive and senior management. The Advisor Group does not have any legal responsibility for the ultimate decision that

is made, but may well be held to account in some way by the Decision Group. My practitioner perception at the beginning of the research process is that individuals have their own ideas regarding the reality surrounding their involvement in and responsibility for the efficacy of decision making. That, whilst they are aware that decision systems and methods exist, they adopt many and varied approaches to their decision making tasks and responsibilities based upon a myriad of cognitive and psychological factors that may well be unique to each individual, group and circumstance. This was not to prejudge any outcomes from the research, which is grounded in the data, but merely to indicate a philosophical start point and a basis for choosing the methodology to be adopted.

My interest in this subject is driven by my organisation's strategic planning process, its constitution and operation. In respect to the strategic planning process, the Board and senior management regularly take important strategic decisions that impact on the company and which substantially impact on the customer base, local and regional businesses and, potentially, the UK economy. The importance therefore of approaching and tackling the decision making process in the most effective and efficient ways possible is of paramount importance. This is true for those tasked with taking the decisions, those tasked with providing the information required by the decision makers and those who will ultimately be affected by the decisions made.

Ensuring the effectiveness of strategic decision making within organisations is of prime concern and interest. Whilst the recommendations of an Advisor Group will be based, to a greater or lesser extent upon search and information-gathering processes, they will be subject to other influences that may not be readily apparent to those who will make the final decision on action, or indeed non-action, such as bias, prejudice, personal ambition, personal perceptions, boundaries, ability, trust, insight, personal or group agendas and the nature of relationships.

The chosen approach and methodology is that of interpretive ethnography as an insider. The attraction of this approach to this researcher not only lies in the flexibility and choice that ethnography provides in terms of methods of data collection, but also the opportunity and the advantages to a relatively newly appointed CEO, of carrying out an in-depth ethnographic study as an significant player within the research organisation. The discussion and arguments for the adoption of this approach appear later in the thesis. As argued later, it appears to be relatively rare within academia for a true insider to carry out an ethnographic study of this kind; it appears to be rarer still for that insider to be the organisation's most senior manager and that clearly produces many challenges in terms of ethics, which are discussed within this thesis. However, one could argue that one of the prime tools available to the most senior in an organisation is that of ethnographic study with its use of observation, reflection and narrative. The research therefore seeks to make a contribution to knowledge and practice, not only from the research findings and conclusions on the title subject, but also in the application of the insider, interpretive, ethnographic methodology.

The primary data source is people, placed in a particular social setting and in a particular work environment. The research questions deal with human interaction, relationships, perception and opinion. Reflection on previous experience is also employed, as is involvement in the social setting and the operational and managerial environment. Interaction in these areas is a fundamental element of the research context and the research strategy reflects this. Data is sourced from the organisation, in texts, publications and in the interpretation of events and incidents through observation.

The literature is clear as to the origins of ethnography and its application beyond the boundaries of anthropology. This use of the methodology in industrial and non-academic or applied research is well documented. However, there is a relative

rarity of published examples of interpretive ethnographic methodology being adopted for a management research topic, carried out within an organisation, by an insider, who is at the same time researcher and head of the organisation.

Ethnography allows the researcher to use both qualitative and quantitative methods, choice being the preserve of the researcher in justifying the methods adopted in the light of the research topic and research questions. Interpretive ethnography describes the context within which the various methods available to the researcher are used to obtain data in the areas required. The approach is taken that the most effective and relevant approach in seeking to obtain the required data and answer the research questions, is to fully immerse oneself in the research process.

As I will show later in the thesis, one of the many strengths of ethnography as a context for research is that it includes a wide variety of methods that can be employed, for example observation, interviewing, group working, document analysis, while accepting as valid the researchers own experiences and involvement, past and present. In addition, an ethnographic approach can and often does lead to integrated action and examples are given later in the dissertation.

## **1.1 The Context for the Research**

Few who are involved would probably argue that group working is an integral part of management practice in most organisations. The group, and/or team usually lie at the heart of organisational activity and at no time more so than as part of everyday, organisational decision making. The use of groups in this way has intrigued and fascinated me for many years. In my view, how efficiently those groups work, both informal groups and formally constituted ones and most especially how small groups interact, impacts directly on organisational efficiency. As already stated, efficient and effective decision making is a vital skill within organisations and it often takes place within and between small groups acting in concert.

In undertaking this research, opportunity, timing and context all came together. I began the research as a relatively newly appointed CEO in an organisation that required restructure and organisational change if it was to meet the declared ambitions of its Board and stakeholders.

The research organisation is a United Kingdom major port. The majority trade is roll on roll off ferry traffic and the port is generally acknowledged to be the busiest international ferry port in Europe. Some £50 billion in value of trade passes through the port each year, representing some 40% of the UK marine trade flow (Arup 2006). This translates in one year to 2.3 million freight vehicles, 2.4 million tourist vehicles and 14 million passengers (POD 2007). The port is therefore a significant economic asset to the UK and it is generally acknowledged by the logistics industry that there is not a viable replacement for the port should it be compromised for any reason in fulfilling its economic role for the nation.

The Port of Dover is administered by the Dover Harbour Board. The organisation has no direct ownership. It is a statutory authority, established by act of Parliament. It therefore has no shareholders and no overseeing ownership entity. The stakeholder group consists of many individuals and organisations that have an interest in the port and its activities, but no direct involvement in its management or finances. Stakeholders include government, local and regional authorities, the local and national community in its widest sense, ship operators, government border agencies, ferry customers and many more. None of the stakeholder groups are represented on the Dover Harbour Board. The majority of the Board is non-executive and are appointed by the Secretary of State for Transport. However, government has no locus for trust ports and cannot intervene in its management or control of finances. The organisation is in all senses a fully commercial entity. It derives all of its income and profit for investment from its own commercial activities. It receives no grant aid or financial support from any other sources. However, it does not pay out a dividend and is not answerable to shareholders or for increasing shareholder value. The Harbour Board directly employs circa 600 staff, but over 3,000 work in and around the port area. A recent study suggests that some 25,000 are employed in the local area as a direct result of the port's location, activities and economic impact (Ove Arup 2006).

The practicality and challenges of managing such an organisation are many and varied. Chief among them in my view as the CEO is the responsibility for the efficiency of a nationally and internationally significant asset that has no direct oversight of its activities by others, save that provided by government and stakeholders, at arms length. This translates to me as the CEO as an immense responsibility to see that the organisation is managed as efficiently as possible and that its decision making processes are as robust and effective as they can be, most especially when considering major strategic issues that impact on the port's effectiveness and its future commercial and financial health.

On appointment, these issues and responsibilities were uppermost in my mind and it was clear to me that an understanding of the dynamics impacting on its group working, both inter and intra, was essential. The most prominent group relationship within the organisation and the one that clearly had the major impact was that between Board and senior management. It is this relationship that promoted my interest in the research subject and that provided the vehicle as well as the motivation for that research.

## **1.2 Inter Group Relationships within the Organisation**

In this research two groups with a formal relationship connecting them and existing within the same commercial organisation, act together and separately in some of the organisation's more major decision making processes. The first group, that I have termed 'The Decision Group', has the ultimate responsibility for making the decisions, for the consequences of the decisions that they make and are legally accountable. In the research organisation, as in many others, this is the acknowledged, organisational Board. The Dover Harbour Board [DHB]. The second group, that I have termed 'The Advisor Group', are tasked by virtue of their positions, with the executive management of the organisation and part of whose responsibility is identifying when there is a requirement for Decision Group action. This will involve some decision analysis, intelligence and information gathering, the identification of alternatives and choices and finally, the presentation of findings, usually accompanied by one or more recommendations for action. As already stated, this group is generally termed the executive management. The Advisor Group does not usually have the direct legal responsibility for the ultimate decision that is made, but may well be held to account in some way by the Decision Group and will certainly have some corporate governance responsibilities and collective corporate liability.



The first iteration of this research on inter group relationships began by examining this Advisor Group, in other words the senior management acting as a group. In the research organisation, as is not unusual, this group consists of the Chief Executive [this researcher] and his senior management team of Directors and Heads of Department. At the time of this research the CEO was the only individual who was a member of both groups, being the senior, executive manager and a Board member in his own right, indeed, at this time, the only Executive Board member on a Board of eight, the others, including the Chairman, being non-executive.

The Advisor Group are normally tasked by the Decision Group with identifying the requirement for Decision Group action, information gathering, the search for alternatives and the presentation of their findings and, usually, recommendations on the decision to be taken. The initiative for decision action usually comes from the executive [Advisor Group], rather than the non-executive Decision Group. It would have been equally valid to begin the research project with either group, however, the Advisor Group's position within the organisation is constant and all embracing; rather than the Decision Group members, whose presence and influence is more removed, temporary and intermittent. Additionally, the chosen methodology was that of ethnography.

### **1.3 Reflections on the Social Framework of the Research Organisation**

As with all commercial entities, this research organisation has a social structure and dynamic all of its own. This structure and dynamic flows from the nature of the organisation, its management and organisational structures and its people, those who work for it, those who work with it and its customer and stakeholder base.

For the furtherance of understanding of the research context, I detail here my reflections on the social aspects of the community that I involved in my research. The opinions that I detail are not expected to be unique to the organisation. They may be universal truths about organisations of a certain kind; however, that does not reduce their importance as reflections from this researcher, or as essential indicators to the research findings and as the framework upon which the eventual detailed data analysis took place.

The organisation, and the people within it, and within which the two groups exist and interact has in my view and by my observation, seven key and particularly relevant characteristics, both social and structural:

#### **1.4 Social and Structural Characteristics**

1. It has an ownership structure where there are no shareholders and no actual 'owners'. It has this rather unusual existence as a statutory body without government ownership or control. This I feel is a factor in the minds of the Decision Group members, in that they do not have an overseeing body that has a financial interest in the Board's decision making. Perhaps ironically, I believe that this makes the Board as a group more cautious, conservative and self critical than it would otherwise be in a fully commercial setting with conventional shareholders, as it sees itself as being in a more powerful and privileged position than other Boards as it has no direct oversight by owners. I also think there is evidence within the data to suggest that the group, as a body and individually, are perhaps more sensitive to criticism, actual or implied, from the general stakeholder body, the local community and government as a direct consequence of the unusual ownership situation.

2. There has been a port of some description in Dover for over 3,000 years. The formal Harbour Board organisation has an extended and well documented history and has existed in one form or another for over 400 years. It has a particular place and affection in the minds of the local and regional community and in that part of the national community with First and Second World War, wartime experiences. It also has a particular reputation for operational efficiency within the world wide ferry port community and with government. This is attested in the many documents dealing with the UK Trust Port Review (1999) and the various consultation documents of the European Sea Ports Organisation. This is coupled with high profile name recognition, nationally and internationally. One could say that the organisation is burdened by its history, high profile and therefore high expectations among stakeholders. This may also lead to a more conservative approach in terms of decision making and a mind set of 'making decisions that impact on a venerable, historical significant institution.' as well as a commercial port.
  
3. It is an organisation of many disparate elements ranging from highly specialised and regulated parts, [marine departments] to general purpose, non specialist or industry specific parts [semi and unskilled staff]. The specialist parts substantially outnumber the non-specialist. This may lead to a kind of professional arrogance in the senior team that make up the Advisor Group. They may take their position very seriously and unconsciously resent the implied interference of the Board [a Board that is in some senses temporary whilst they are permanent] in the decision process. There is some evidence for this mind set in my own initial observation of the organisation.
  
4. The organisation is in the main staffed by enthusiasts for the industry in which they work, who appear to be as attracted to the sea and all things marine, as by having a

reasonably well paid employment and a measure of security. This is true of both of the groups in question. Although this may not impact directly on the decision processes, it may well on the inter group relationship, in that here is an area where there is a clear sharing of values and motivation that may help to develop and maintain trust.

5. Staff and Board seem to be fiercely protective of their expertise and specialisation within the wider marine family. The Board are all experts in their own fields and several have held, or still hold high profile appointments. [examples: one is a Civil Aviation Authority Board member and was previously the Managing Director of a leading investment bank. One is an emeritus Professor at a high profile university and a noted, world authority in his field. Another is the retired, but still active, senior partner of a high profile City of London law firm.] One could speculate that this may lead to conflict, in that there is a little of a shared fate in their relationships. Additionally, members of one group bring to their deliberations skills and knowledge not shared by the Advisor Group members. This could tend to weaken any shared values and motivations, which in turn may weaken the trust dynamic between the two groups. It is interesting to speculate on the balance between this aspect and that in 4 above. In my view, and from observations, I believe that this fluctuates between the two groups depending on the importance of the issue being discussed. The more important the decision contemplated the more the weakening dynamic is evident.
6. The Decision Group, the Board, are all on relatively short term contracts lasting no more than a maximum of 9 years, although only one member of this group has in fact served that long. The Advisor Group on the other hand, with the exception of the researcher, are all long serving staff members [in excess of 20 years in two important cases] and in some cases have never worked for any other organisation as an employee. One can speculate that this would strengthen the mind set of the

Advisor Group in their 'professional arrogance', in that they may see themselves as the real power behind the organisation as they are the permanent custodians.

7. The Board only meet as a group for the equivalent of one working day every 6 weeks. On reflection, this can only weaken the inter group relationship as there is little sharing of experiences over the vast majority of time. This could lead to a strengthened feeling of ownership within the Advisor Group, much as directly above, and a weakened involvement mind set in the Decision Group. One can speculate that this may strengthen the conservative, cautious approach in the Decision Group as a lack of familiarity affects their deliberations.

These characteristics are in my view key to an understanding of the data and an understanding of the inter group relationship and I will be referring to them later in the thesis. There are other conclusions from the reflections on social context which I will also refer to later.

## **1.5 The Structure of the Thesis - The Research Cycles**

The research progression for the registration and eventual award of the degree of Doctor of Business Administration at the awarding University envisages a series of cycles of research over a period of years, each iteration building on the research findings of the others. Thus, three or more distinct, but highly connected cycles of research lead to a final set of conclusions and contributions, to both knowledge and practice. This thesis is therefore a formal report on that research journey, which is itself three cycles of consecutive research, conducted over four years and is both the academic journey of the researcher and the knowledge journey of the management practitioner, being one in the same person. In so doing, at its end point, it makes an original contribution to both management academia and to the knowledge base of everyday management practitioners in the area of social science and psychology.

The first iteration of research concentrates on the Advisor Group and begins the data gathering with reference to the various relationships, dynamics and processes in action, seeking threads and themes within the earlier literature and the data. Cycle Two moves the focus to the Board members and compares, contrasts and reflects on the additional data with that from the first iteration. Cycle Three capitalizes on real time changes to group membership to enrich the data and form further conclusions. Throughout, the use of general and social observation and of reflection on the social characteristics of the research organisation will provide the backdrop and additional data for interpretation. Additionally, the thesis contains reflections upon research in general and upon the methodology chosen as well as considering issues of ethics involved.

## CHAPTER 2

### Literature Review

As previously stated, this research is directed at the general question: **what are the main relationship drivers and influences at work during the process of inter group working?** It was anticipated that the research questions will centre around the questions: **how are relationships between the groups formed and maintained and how do they impact the efficacy of the inter group decision process? What makes the inter group relationship in organisational decision making work at a practical level?**

As a practicing CEO, the processes surrounding decision making are of particular interest. The efficacy of this element of management plays a crucial role in the business life of the research organisation, which is a major UK port. Small groups play a very distinct part in the decision making processes, be these specialist operational groups, engineering groups or inter departmental groups formed for specific tasks. Small group working represents a core management function and the vast majority of decisions of all kinds made within the organisation are made in and between these small groups. There is nothing particularly unique about this as certainly the researcher's experience suggests that this is a model for many organisations. This was certainly the case in the three airport companies in which I worked and in the Hong Kong Aviation Department in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where group working was the norm. However, the main strategic decisions, those that need to be endorsed or otherwise approved by the main Board, are influenced to some degree by the interaction between two particular, small groups, that is between the management group advising the Board and the main Board itself. I surmise that understanding this small inter group relationship, its drivers

and dynamics, its influences, personal relationships and impacts, should enable a more productive relationship to develop and will enable the groups themselves to address any dysfunctions and conflicts that may arise. This review studies the literature surrounding both decision making and small and medium sized group research, to better understand the nature of small group and inter group activity, to identify gaps and omissions in the literature, or clarifications that are required by further research and to contextualise the research to be undertaken.

This research is concerned with the inter group relationship during organisational decision making from a behavioural, relationship and psychological perspective. In social psychology, the classic definition of an inter group situation is provided by Sherif (1966):

‘Whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their group identification we have an instance of inter group behaviour.’ (Sherif 1966, p.12)

The literature is from that of both general management and social sciences and psychology. It is therefore logical to begin the review with an examination of decision making processes in a general sense, so as to understand the framework within which the inter group relationship exists and operates. This framework part of the review examines the nature of decision making and the processes by which decisions are thought to be made by organisational management. The review then goes on to examine small groups, their nature, formation and operation and then moves on to the specifics of inter group working as it relates to small groups. As leadership may have a significant role within inter group working, this is also examined. The review goes on to study the specific group dynamics that may be at work and examines very recent research in the area of group dynamics, in this regard trust is examined, as are the various sharing dynamics thought to be present in inter group relationships.



The literature covering decision processes appears rich and has engaged the attention of many eminent researchers over a number of years. The work on general group dynamics is also rich, however, once we study that research specifically pertaining to small, business groups the literature appears somewhat thinner and less clear in its direction as it crosses academic boundaries, for example, between social psychology and management practice. It is more challenging to find published work on small, inter group decision making and pulling together the various work on this area and adding to this body of knowledge is a legitimate subject for research. In addition, because of its very nature, this area lends itself to the philosophies surrounding action research. The purpose of the research is to understand the various core dynamics underlying the relationship between two organisational groups tasked with strategic decision making. What interests and intrigues me in respect to this research is how much real, structured, unbiased thinking and action goes into the preparation for a decision event by those tasked with recommending action to another group of individuals and what forces underpin and influence their thoughts, actions and relationship, both inter and intra group. Approaching the literature review in this way identifies the underlying threads and themes for the data gathering.

## **2.1 Decision Making and Group Activity**

Arguably, decision making is a core activity of managers and prime skill to be developed and understood by those who practice the management art. An initial literature overview search shows that decision making has attracted much research over the years and decision processes, methods and support systems are probably well understood by many of the more formally trained managers and management academics. However, it may be that their use is more limited than one would expect and may well be restricted to specialist situations where quantitative methods predominate, examples could be engineering and project management where, in

my experience of past and present organisations, formal decision processes are in general use, such as critical path analysis and risk decision analysis.

The early research and statements on decision making processes are particularly interesting when covering the period when computer power and application had just begun to spread and before there was widespread use of computers within businesses. As far back as the 1960s the 'new tools', as they were then, for decision making were detailed, ranging from the use of operational research, to statistical and mathematical modelling. At that time, Simon (1965) clearly believed that, prior to the introduction of these modern tools for decision making, the process was haphazard and uncoordinated, dependant as it was on an individual's habits, judgement, intuition, rules of thumb and routine. Later, the concept of rationality was introduced and supported the accepted flow of decision making, documented by Richards and Greenlaw (1972), gathering information, processing it, making choices from alternatives and effectively communicating the decision made. Again, at this early time, technology, in the form of computers and the use of decision making tools, was beginning to be seen as a significant advance in successful decision making, removing, as it appeared to do, the need for the traditional techniques, introducing consistency by the use of heuristic computer programmes and mathematical analysis.

The techniques formulated and published are not in themselves complicated. However, it is the behavioural, political and psychological dimensions that ultimately dictate decision making success, arguably overshadowing the modern tools, methods and models well documented in the majority of decision making literature. This behavioural element often takes place within and between small groups. The point is made clearly by Noorderhaven (1995) when he states that

‘strategic decision making in organisations tends to take place in unstructured, open decision situations. This means that the set of options as well as the set of outcomes are at best partially known’ (Noorderhaven 1995, p.4)

My interest lies within the area of unstructured decision making and the relationship between decision makers and those who carry out the search and information gathering processes, presenting the requirement for a decision to the decision makers. This inter group relationship usually exists between executive management and a Board of directors. My experience leads me to suggest that few of the decision making tools are used by the ultimate decision makers and that the presentation of results from decision processes undertaken by, in this example, the executive group, is ultimately influenced by numerous factors and constraints that are behavioural, social, political and psychological.

The second and for me the most illuminating way of defining decision making is that provided by Teale et al (2003). Here the processes are described as either normative [prescriptive], or descriptive. The normative models provide a vehicle by which decisions should be made. Descriptive on the other hand are mainly concerned with the bounded worlds within which managers normally operate.

Noorderhaven also recognises that rationality in decision making comes in many forms and divides it into four types:

Substantive; that is the objective approach where, if you carry out the right process the result must be correct.

Instrumental; the decision maker allows his/her beliefs to influence the outcome.

Cognitive; an extension of instrumental where the beliefs of the decision maker is given primacy in the process.

Procedural; a set procedure is followed.

(Noorderhaven 1965 p.5)

There is therefore an understanding that the approach to decision making in many instances is not as straight forward as applying the decision tools, using the decision support systems and accepting the outcome. Humans are generally involved, especially with regard to non-programmed situations and there are many more influences on their performance in this role than a more logical approach would at first suggest. More recently, Chu and Spires (2003) were arguing that very little research [at that time] had been conducted on human perceptions of decision strategy accuracy and effort. They go on to state that there are substantial variations in the perception of individuals to the various decision strategies available and the effort required to use them. This could have a profound bearing on the efficiency of the processes involved in the environment that is of interest to me. Chu and Spires (2003) go on to suggest that much more research into decisional behaviour and human perceptions is required.

The issues are also raised by George Huber (1980) in his discussion on group decision making, where he makes the distinction between the decision making group [the Board of directors] and the advisory or study group [the management or executive]. In my view, the distinction is often not as clear cut as Huber suggests, for example, some members of the executive will be Board members in their own right and therefore decision makers. Huber also talks of the advisory group generating some of the information required by the decision makers, when in many instances, this group will provide all of the searched alternatives and all of the information presented. He also makes the important point that disagreement and conflict will result if there is any ambiguity in the relationship between groups. The importance of the relationship between the two groups I will be researching is graphically demonstrated by the work of Jonas and Frey (2001). In broad terms their published conclusions indicate that advisors to a Decision Group will only search and present that information which supports their recommendations. Advisors will, in their view, search for more information that supports their preferred alternative than conflicts with it. They also state that friends acting as

advisors, will be more balanced in their information search and presentation. This is very interesting, as it seems to suggest that the closer the relationship between the groups, if it amounts to friendship, will result in a more balanced client/advisor relationship in decision making, when responsibilities are split. This would accord with my own observations that where the relationship between groups is close and personal, that the individuals like and trust each other, a more positive and productive environment is created that impacts on the processes between the two groups.

The question of group leadership is raised a number of times and this thread runs through this review. Huber (1980) raises the issue of leadership in groups, setting boundaries and the identification of constraints. A further commentary on the issue is provided by Stewart (1983) in her article on Perspectives on Management. Stewart deals with management behaviour in respect to decision making, but her comments are arguably equally valid for Board members acting in a part time basis as decision makers. Stewart talks of management being described in the past as being a controlled, planned organised process, where decision making is described as a logical, sequential process. She then asks us to compare these statements with the way that she sees managers actually responding to their workload, in an adaptive and fragmented way. She appears to be saying that there was at this time a perceptible gap between what was considered good practice and the logical approach to decision making and what actually happens in most circumstances. She actually goes on to comment that some literature suggests that at that time, in the early middle 1980s, there was a gap between academic thinking on these issues and managerial thinking.

We can see two definite strands to decision making. The more formal process is a logical, sequential process or processes, probably involving decision making models and support systems. The treatment of alternatives, or utilities, follows the

classical theory, what is still termed the so called normative model and process, a phrase coined in the mid 1960s. The normative model, for example, could use any one or more of statistical decision theory, linear programming, game theory and queuing theory to reach a satisfactory conclusion (Taylor 1965). This approach seeks to overcome the human dimension described thus by Simon:

‘The capacity of the human mind for formulating and solving complex problems is very small compared with the size of the problems whose solution is required for objectively rational behaviour in the real world – or even for a reasonable approximation to such an objectives rationality’ (Simon 1957, p. 198)

The second strand is the recognition that the practical management world of decision making is not entirely rational and is beset with problems of human interaction, human fallibility, lack of time and information, lack of understanding and knowledge, organisational aims, objectives and politics, internal and external pressures, personal ambition, presentational issues among many others. These issues do not lend themselves to logic models and in some cases will override rationality produced by their use. Hammond, Keeney and Raiffa (1998) recognise the dichotomy and suggests trade-offs in decision making by creating consequence tables and recognising dominated alternatives. They recognise the problem by acknowledging that there is widespread use by managers of instinct, intuition, commonsense, what is often termed gut feeling.

They recognise the problem, but suggest replacing models and processes with another model, not dissimilar from the ones that they are recognising as largely ineffective, or at least incomplete. We get closer to a recognition and discussion of the issues with Etzioni and Argyris working separately. Etzioni (1989) states that decision makers are individuals without unqualified power and wisdom, setting goals for themselves and seeking to influence the decision process in favour of those goals. He talks of decision making requiring co-operation and coalition

building and of the effects of different personalities, responsibilities and politics and introduces the concepts of rationalism and incrementalism. Argyris (1966) in an early study involving 165 top executives, observed that all groups have decision making weaknesses. He goes on to say that lack of trust, competitiveness and various barriers are significant in decision processing. Here we see recognition of the complications surrounding human relationships in decision making, substantially altering the dynamics of the processes involved, from logic models, methods and best practice, to the dynamics of human thought processes and social interaction.

An excellent continuation text is provided by Hickson, et al (1986). The authors provide an altogether different perspective to that provided by the technical [logic] books on decision making. Their case studies highlight issues of personal ambition, likening decision making to a game of manoeuvre and observing that the process in one case study had become more political and personal as careers were likely to be impacted. It is clear that they see an organisation as a set of individuals with often conflicting ambitions that have a direct influence on decision making. If we accept that this is true, then the relationship between a Board and senior management, where one group prepares and presents and the other decides, is more complicated still, introducing as it does, inter group dynamics, as well as internal group interaction into the mix. Hickson et al attempt to categorise the formal decision making processes as constricted, that which is narrowly channelled; sporadic, informally spasmodic and protracted and fluid, steadily paced and formally channelled, speedy. This is a useful indicator that can act as a framework for future research into the real world processes as opposed to what could be termed the logic approach. Not all decision making is problem solving. Some strategic decision making is not intended to solve a direct problem, but to introduce, for example, a change of policy or direction. Again, Hickson and his co authors provide a framework by postulating three modes in decision making; familiar matters, normal and recurrent, [what Simon (1957) would have called

programmed] vortex matters, weighty and controversial, [in Simon's terms probably non-programmed] and tractable matters, unusual but non-controversial.

The body of literature on behavioural psychology is clearly relevant as is cognitive psychology and general behavioral science. In terms of group interaction, the literature in these areas is again dominated by large group issues, often with racial issues and with special interest group research. However, within these areas there are useful connections to be made. In addition, some recent research has highlighted the key issue of where personal intuition fits within decision making. My research should address this point, as managers and groups in my experience do commonly refer to instinctive processes as the normal method of dealing with problems and reaching decisions.

Two pieces of more recent research, one by Jon Anderson (2000), and the other by John Patton (2003) deal specifically with intuitive decision making. Anderson's quantitative research indicates that intuition as a management style is related positively to organisational effectiveness. He suggests from his experimental research that a significant proportion of managers are intuitive problem solvers and decision makers. However, he questions the idea that intuitive managers are more effective overall. Patton supports Anderson with his further conclusions. He argues that the speed of modern communications and the speed at which business is done in the modern world require new skills in decision making by the modern organisation and manager. Patton argues that necessary adaptation and change are the drivers. Interestingly he links leadership, the decisive manager and successful decision making together and argues that education, leadership development and self development will improve decision making to the real benefit for the organisation.



I have believed for some time that intuition plays a much stronger role in decision making within complex organisational settings than is generally acknowledged by researchers and writers on decision making. However, I would suggest that more, qualitative based research is required before this can be definitively stated, regardless of Patton and Anderson's initial research results. This will be an issue of significant importance in the framing of my own research questions.

Harrison and Pelletier (2000) have gone so far as to question the very essence of management decision making and place the behavioural and psychological forces on a decision making individual at the heart of the process, rather than the formal decision making models and tools. They believe that the behaviour of the manager in this situation is primary a measure of risk acceptance against risk avoidance. They go on to support the idea that there are many other influences on the individual, but they are quite dismissive of any mathematical dimension to decision making, dismissing it as part of the illusory perspectives surrounding decision processes. I interpret this as a general rejection of structured decision making using a formal modeling process. I accord completely with this view as this is certainly my experience. The strength of an individual's behavioural influences in decision making and therefore in group activity within the decision process, is further demonstrated by Emiliani (2003). Emiliani's research indicates the strength of an individual's belief system and behavioural influences on leadership action in decision making. He goes on to suggest that the leadership competency models presently in use do not sufficiently address this linking. The interesting point to me is recognition of the strength of unconscious behaviour, even when exposed to formal, traditional, or accepted management training and models. This is further indication of what may be its importance to my research and analysis of my data.

Groups are made up of individuals, however, the complexities surrounding human behaviour, most especially in small group situations involved in decision making, make research in this area both fascinating and demanding. Linking the various bodies of research in a way that is helpful is made more difficult by the very specialised nature of most recent work, the lack of apparent linkages made by other researchers and the methodology adopted by many in the field. Three relatively recent research projects add in a significant way to my research but still illustrate the above point. The first was carried out by Fredrick Phillips (2001). Phillips was interested in the natural inclination of individuals to justify their decisions by manipulation of the decision criteria post the decision having been made. Decision model literature would have managers following a staged, formal process of criteria setting and option identification. However, Phillips's research indicates that decision makers will distort the criteria, both before and after the decision event, in order to justify the decision made [or perhaps, in the terms of my research environment, the decision they want to see made by another group]. The importance of this analysis to my own research is in terms of the motives of the Advisor Group in giving advice to the Decision Group. Phillips does make the important distinction between distortion of the criteria and distortion of the decision information. He states that distortion of the criteria happened in his experiments, post the decision, whereas distortion of information, if it occurred, did so pre the decision. This appears to indicate that in justifying a wrong or bad decision a group may be tempted to change the criteria to fit the information given. This could perhaps have relevance in the inter group situation if it depends upon the closeness or otherwise of the individual relationships, that, is the friendship dynamic referred to earlier.

In summary to this part of the review, the human relationship elements to group decision making appear to be at least as important, if not more so, than the logical application of decision methodologies and methods. Human interaction and those dynamics which influence individuals are likely to significantly impact the

effective role of small groups, both within the groups and when groups are required to interact in some way. We now go on to examine in more detail the dynamics of small group interaction and to identify where additional research should be directed and the form that the research may take.

## **2.2 Reviewing the Dynamics Within and Between Small Groups**

In the organisation of which I am a part, I am interested in the way that individual and group dynamics and inter and intra group relationships surrounding decision making impact on the decision process. How do bias, personal perspective, personal goals, prejudices, politics and other cognitive issues influence the processes, are they recognised and how are they mitigated to achieve a rational outcome?

The literature suggests strongly that the move from the personal identity of the individual to a social identity within a group is of fundamental importance to the understanding of how small groups work and interact with other groups. A significant quoted example serves to highlight the point:

‘When C.P. joined the KKK, he became a racist who despised all non-whites, but when he quit the KKK and joined a multicultural community group (the Human Relations Council) he adopted an egalitarian outlook. Even his answer to the question ‘who am I’ changed to include elements that were based on his group membership.’ (Forsyth 2006, p. 88)

The categorisation and identification elements of group membership that form the social identity theory, significantly postulated by Tajfel (1978) and later

reinforced, among other works, by Turner and Onorato (1999), appear to be a clear starting point in the understanding of what makes individuals within groups act as they do, as exemplified by the previous quote from Forsyth (2006). Indeed, it may be that many people's perception of themselves is intimately interlinked with the types and work of the groups of which they are members, almost being defined by their membership rather than by their individual characteristics. The in-group, out-group distinctions within social identity theory and the issues of who is dominant and who subservient are certain to be more complicated by the perceptions of the individuals within the two groups considered by this research, simply by the nature of their respective positions within the organisation. Throwing further light on this particular dimension of inter group dynamics may prove a useful addition to the body of knowledge on the subject.

Inter groups can be examined from several different perspectives and a great deal of research work has been undertaken in the field of social psychology, indeed some will argue that the study of intergroup relations is by definition applied social psychology (Brewer 2007). Seminal research and publication within this field has been undertaken by Tajfel, Turner and a number of associates working in the field and I will make reference to their work and that of other social psychologists in framing my own approach. The results of my research may well sit within the general classification of social studies/sciences, without making any definitive claims within the field of social psychology. However, there are clear connections to be made within the research fields of many disciplines that contribute to the generic 'general management'.

Rather than try to categorise all groups under one, generic definition, it is necessary to be more precise about the groups that are of interest in this research. To ensure that the same frame of reference is being used as in the literature quoted,

the definition of group provided by Davis (1969) introduces individuality to the thinking about groups:

‘a set of persons (by definition or observation) among whom there exists a definable or observable set of relations... a set of mutually interdependent behavioural systems that not only affect each other, but respond to external influences as well’ (Davis 1969, p. 4).

Davis goes on to make the point that groups are both a set of individuals and a collection of interdependent persons. An examination of how one impacts the other and how individuals acting independently perform in group may well be a key factor. This definition is supported by Cartwright and Zander (1968) who defined the type of group of interest here as:

‘A group is a collection of individuals who have relations to one another that make them interdependent to some significant degree. As so defined, the term group refers to a class of social entities having in common the property of interdependence among their constituent members’ (Cartwright and Zander 1968, p. 46).

Although this is dated research the definition in my view still stands. It is clear that much debate has taken place over a number of years regarding the true definition of what a group is and also, whether group and team are one in the same. For the purposes of my research they could be considered to be the same. My own research focuses on the small, inter group relationship of an organisational Board and that organisation’s senior management team. In addition, the focus of my research is inter group decision making. This narrows the literature and focuses the research on the issues surrounding specialist groups of a particular nature engaged in this particular activity. A group situation and group decision making can be viewed as either a positive or negative in terms of desirability and effectiveness. This point is made by Brown (1994) who when considering groups and group dynamics, approaches them as a positive. He clearly feels that most

group dynamics literature concentrates on the less desirable aspects of group behaviour, deindividuation, prejudice, social loafing and groupthink, whereas he prefers to emphasise team spirit, inter-group cooperation, group productivity and collective problem solving. Positive or negative the issue of group polarization in decision making is clearly a central theme and is generally accepted as a real and measurable phenomenon. Brown discusses the research at length and has, over a number of years, carried out extensive research among university student groups. A term referred to as polarization is given prominence by Forsyth (1990), stating that, 'groups' decisions tend to be more extreme than individual decisions. 'Groups don't urge restraint; instead they polarize opinions' (Forsyth 1990, p. 152).

However, much of the research conducted by Brown and others appears to be based on groups that had particular characteristics, but that did not hold ultimate responsibility for their actions and would not have been held accountable in any way had the decisions turned out to be wrong. There is no indication in either Brown or Forsyth that this fact may have affected the extent of polarization, although Forsyth goes some way by stating that the diffusion of responsibility theory may explain why some groups are prepared to take more risky decisions. Researchers approach the study of group decision making in a variety of ways. Forsyth identifies steps of decision making as orientation, what he sees as defining the problem and planning the process; discussion, the gathering of information and the search for alternatives; the group actually making the decision and the implementation. This connects well with Hickson's framework. On the other hand Johnson and Johnson (1987) prefer to identify the concepts surrounding group decision making, such as decision effectiveness, consensus, majority vote, minority control, critical evaluation, concurrence seeking, and then identifying those factors that hamper effective group decision making, such as group maturity, conflicting goals, ego of members, lack of communication, interference etc. This approach is quite different from that of both Brown and Forsyth and illustrates

Brown's contention that the approach can emphasize those things that are good about the group undertaking this role and the negative influences surrounding that particular group role.

Hogg and Adams (2001) have assembled a number of key readings on inter group relations that indicate the importance of individual relationships in determining inter group performance. Sherif et al (1961), as one of the contributors, make the important, but in my view flawed observation, that the relationships between two groups cannot be divined by studying the inter group relationships. The reason that I believe this to be flawed is that, despite the social identity issues and for this particular classification of group, the individual character traits at work inter group are not likely in my view, to be subordinated to a different set of traits when working within this type of group, unless the groups themselves are very large, for example cultural and religious groups. In addition, the extent to which a smaller group works and relates to another group as a fully cohesive body, on all occasions and under all circumstances, is at least open to challenge. Relationships and their interactions appear therefore to be a key factor.

This research will be dealing with the study of small groups. As summarized by Arrow et al (2000), the majority of early small group research was carried out under laboratory conditions. They list the early research as concentrating on groups that are established for; influencing members; for patterning interaction; for performing tasks; for improving member self-understanding. They go on to state that later research adds to the list in a way that is helpful in identifying the body of knowledge of crucial interest to my research:

Groups as information gathering systems  
Groups as conflict-managing and consensus seeking systems  
Groups as systems for motivating, regulating and coordinating member activities. (Arrow et al 2000, p.19-23)

Classification of this kind is important in laying the foundation for my research and navigating a course that draws on the published research of others in a way that places my research in context and adds credibility and value. Categorising the type of groups under research is a useful first step; however, group boundaries are hardly likely to be this easily defined and considerable overlap will undoubtedly be a factor. How relevant the results and conclusions from some of the laboratory research will be is therefore open to question. Arrow et al (2000) make the point forcibly in the preamble to their conclusions:

‘ much work done within these early and more recent streams of research shares conceptual and methodological features that also limit what we can learn from that work about groups..... Much of North American and European social psychology and the related disciplines within which small group research has recently flourished have been heavily committed to the positivist-reductionist-analytic perspective or paradigm.’ (Arrow et al 2000, p.25)

In a rather bold statement, they go on to suggest that:

‘group research seems to be approaching the limits of what can be learned about groups using the currently dominant methodological paradigm.’ (Arrow et al 2000, p.30)

It is at the boundaries, in the overlaps and in the interplay of inter group behaviour that the limitations of experiment based research into small groups may be found inadequate for this study. The reason for this is the lack of any long term commitment, ‘ownership’ of relationships and group outcomes in groups brought together artificially.

It is important to identify the parameters, the overview classifications and the accepted elements of small group research to aid understanding and to move



forward. In this regard definitions are important. What is meant by ‘inter group relationships/dynamics’, which can be explained by ‘inter group behaviour’, a term used earlier and ‘inter group relations’. The work of Sherif et al (1961) in providing definitions and explanations is quoted by DeRidder et al (1992) who provide their own interpretation of Sherif’s work. In defining the terms they:

‘.....conceive of inter group relations as a broader concept than inter group behaviour. That is, inter group relations refers to behaviour and to cognitive and affective processes between groups, such as stereotyping, prejudice, ethnocentrism, attributions and attitudes. Inter group behaviour refers in our view to instances of concrete and observable verbal and non-verbal actions of individual group members towards members of another group.’ (DeRidder et al 1992, p.4)

Brewer (2007) postulates that two kinds of behaviour are normally studied with regard to inter group dynamics, those behaviours that are prosocial and those that are antisocial. Indeed she goes on to state that: ‘study of inter group relations has become synonymous with the study of inter group conflict’ (Brewer 2007, p. 3). Much of the early research on inter group dynamics concentrates on inter group conflict and hostility. As most of the studies seemed to be concentrated on very large group interaction, such as that between racially different groups, even of nations, conflict was and is a significant element. However, the otherwise highly regarded work of Sherif et al (1961) emphasizes this point, whilst dealing with a relatively small group situation. There will be lessons to be learnt from this and other large group research and the validity of the conclusions reached in respect to largely cooperative, small groups’ research will be interesting. Absolute categorisation, in accordance with Tajfel and Turner (1986) may have disadvantages. If by categorising, a view as to the dynamics operating is restricted in order to fit with a preconceived framework or theory, then this compromises the analysis of the data. However, if the consideration of categorisation gives more structure to the research and aids the linkage to the literature, then this may be helpful. I have identified a number of issues in this area.

The first is the conflict or hostile dynamic between two groups, that is either usefully competitive, providing what one could term a creative tension, or counter productive or destructive. Teale, et al. (2003) draw on earlier research and postulate that groups, if they are competitive, are so within and between the groups and that this leads to problems and has consequences. They go on to list a number of steps to avoid inter-group conflict arising out of competition. This approach is of interest, as in any interrelated group situation some competitive elements are likely to surface and will need to be recognised and understood in terms of inter group dynamics. Experience tells us that conflict, competitiveness, even hostility, are often present in groups of individuals brought together for a common aim, with a common set of overt objectives and in the spirit of cooperation. Interesting research by Schulz-Hardt et al (2002) has studied productive conflict within groups by introducing contrived dissent. The researchers concluded that a heterogeneous group, where conflict was a natural issue, is less likely to be biased in their information gathering than would be a homogeneous group that relied on the devils advocacy approach to introduce contrived dissent. The groups under study in this research may not exhibit these traits in a clash of ingroup and outgroup interests, as one could reasonably expect that the groups, with common aims and objectives would not be as polarised as this research seems to suggest is usually the case.

An important element in the particular inter group relationship that is the subject of this research is the relative positions of the two groups within the organisation, or at least the perception of the members of each group as to their relative positions. One group may well see itself as having primacy over the other. The Board may see its position as that of a superior group to the advisor grouping by way of its legal position. The advisor group may see themselves as the superior grouping due to their position as the permanent specialists and the executive. These dominant and subordinate status issues, identified by Tajfel and Turner (1986), appear to significantly influence inter group behaviour and in their turn impact conflict and cohesion dynamics. One could surmise that any ambiguity in the relative status of

the two groups is likely to lead to some measure of dysfunctional relationship, although according to Tajfel and Turner (1986), inter group status relationships are subject to change with time.

This is a useful beginning to the study of group conflict. However, relating this to the inter group experience is greatly assisted by the work of Peterson and Behfar (2003), who are clear that moderate conflict has generally been associated with higher group performance and what they term relationship conflict associated with lower performance. They go on to indicate that performance feedback to groups can have significant, positive benefits and that evidence exists that negative feedback results in later conflict. The work of both groups of researchers seems to accord with experience and if this is translated into inter group behaviour, then these are important pieces of research in relation to my own, as they make the clear link between group performance and individual relationships. The role of conflict in group decision may be significant. Johnson and Johnson (1987) make the point strongly:

‘Controversies are a natural and desirable part of any decision making or problem solving situation. When managed constructively, controversies are not only extremely valuable but absolutely necessary if an organization is to make effective decisions and solve problems competently to maintain the organization’s viability and effectiveness.’ (Johnson and Johnson. 1987, p.224)

Parks and Sanna (1999) go further, for in their opinion, tolerance and cohesiveness result in what amounts to an excessively cohesive state, where dissent and criticism is suppressed leading to poor performance, in other words ‘groupthink’. Researchers have also formulated models to account for conflict mediated choice. However, the use of such models to explain inter group behaviour and the success

of decision making is limited. In terms of small inter group behaviour Arrow et al (2000) make an interesting statement, that early group research:

‘...showed that rivalry between groups typically worsened under close contact but could be transformed into co-operation through the manipulation of a common fate affecting both groups’ (Arrow et al 2000, p.18).

In terms of my research the two groups may not necessarily share a common fate if things go wrong and incorrect decisions are made, but efficiency in their decision making roles may be enhanced by the existence of a readily acknowledged shared responsibility for outcomes and a shared fate if those outcomes are wrong.

The signpost work on conflict in collective decision making groups is probably that of Moscovici and Doise (1994). These researchers explore many of the issues surrounding group participation and consensus in group situations, both large and small. Their observations on the nature of participation, relationships and the obtaining of consensus in conflict situations are particularly illuminating and introduce the concept of values and ethics in group dynamics. It is clear from their work that the key element is a knowledge and understanding of individual behaviour and interaction. However, there is little qualitative analysis in their work and further research may help to embed their conclusions in different and richer data.

At the heart of the work undertaken by the two groups considered in this thesis is the taking of decisions based upon advice, information and perhaps a recommendation by the one group to another. The work of Yaniv (2003) focuses on the giving of this advice and the exercise of influence within the decision making process by individuals that may be members in these types of groupings. He seeks to provide a framework to give insight to the giving and receiving of advice in decision making and he seeks to explain the influence of advice on the

processes involved. Although I would not fully support his view that this issue naturally lends itself to a theoretical framework for understanding, as I believe that physiological dynamics may be a bigger influence than is suggested and may not lend themselves to a theoretical framework approach, he does make some interesting statements regarding advice, in that:

‘I suggest that the social-cognitive function of seeking advice as a corrective procedure or support system for the individual decision maker has not been explored sufficiently.’ ‘What is surprising is that so little attention has been paid in decision research to a process so fundamental in real life. It is imperative for future research to consider the procedures by which various type of advice (e.g. qualitative verbal advice, opinions about matters of taste) are elicited and used best’(Yaniv, 2003, p. 4).

Yaniv’s work can be considered in the light of an earlier study carried out by Bonner et al (2002). The focus for this research was the influence of group member expertise in decision making. The conclusions of the research, which was experimentally led, suggests that when given advice or information, a group will give more weight to the input of their highest performing members. This would naturally impact on the eventual form of the advice given between advisors and Board, with one or other group dominated by one individual, or a small selection of group members. Whilst expressing reservations regarding the possible loss of validity in an artificially constructed group situation, there appear to be issues here of leadership and using presentational and other overt skills to exert influence within the group, and perhaps between groups. There could therefore exist an issue around expertise and recognising expertise in others, that is connected to the giving and accepting of advice and information. In terms of my research, these issues are likely to be significant.

The emotional issues surrounding management tasking has been studied in a number of ways over recent years and within various disciplines; however, work in the field of culture appears most relevant to my research and throws some interesting light on small groups acting together. A recent piece of research in this area by Fong and Wyer (2003) helps. Their work centered on cultural, social and emotional issues surrounding decision making; this is clearly relevant. Fong and Wyer found that, faced with a number of decision scenarios within controlled situations, multicultural subject groups show definite characteristics that they feel are transportable to other decision situations. Their general conclusion that emotional reaction to alternatives presented is key to understanding the final decision made is interesting and accords with other research on dynamics within Decision Groups. What is new and therefore arguably more significant, is their conclusion that multicultural factors do influence the emotional reaction to alternatives, but not in financial decision making, rather only within general decision making. This research, whilst interesting, should be treated with caution. The experiments were highly controlled, as was the background of the subjects and the decisions they were being asked to make. The value lies in the identification of the issue for further research and analysis in respect to small group decision making and inter group relations.

I have reflected in this review regarding the relationship between my research and the extensive body of knowledge on group dynamics in various published work and in many of the journals dedicated to this area of investigation and study. Since Kurt Lewin began publishing the first widely acknowledged academic works on group dynamics in the mid 1940s, cited in Marrow (1969), a continuous debate has been conducted on the many theories postulated to explain the various interactions within and between groups. The body of knowledge has drawn data from many branches of academia; from anthropology and social sciences, to management, medicine and sports sciences. I need therefore to reflect not only on what the

context of my research will be, but where and how it relates to existing theories of group interaction, both intra and inter.

Experimentation resulting in the theories of group conflict effect, discontinuity effect, conflict intensification, reciprocity and sub cultural norms etc, (Forsyth 2006) are deeply embedded in psychological and psycho analytical empirical research, that appear to this researcher to be concentrated and are attempting to explain group extremes. The published work of Bonaccio and Dalal (2006) illustrates the differences of emphasis in group research carried out using differing methodologies. In their paper on advice taking and decision making, they reflect on many intra and inter group issues. However, their approach is empirically driven and while they make assertions that ‘confidence’ between those who make decisions and those who give advice is fundamental, they do not go on to speculate where this confidence comes from, or is developed. However, it is unlikely that subjects brought into the experiments cold would exhibit much in common at an early stage. In addition, they would be, by definition, a non-specialist to the decisions and have no collective responsibilities or ramifications from their decision making. All of that said their research does provide some useful supporting data. They point out that previous research findings from Yaniv (2003) indicate that decision makers seek out advice to share accountability. Most importantly, in reflecting on the work of Jungermann et al (1999), Bonaccio and Dalal (2006) link the acceptance of advice by decision makers to the trust they have in their advisors based upon the sharing of goals.

Much of the data exists around the notions of group conflict and group cohesion as the two extremes of group interaction. This is possibly best illustrated by the place that the ‘Robbers Cave Experiment’ (Forsyth 2006, p. 448) still holds in the minds of group dynamic and leadership academics. Although clearly an artificially created situation [although the participants are reported to have been unaware that

this was the case] many of the assumptions underlying the theories of group dynamics appear to begin with the data and findings derived from this well known experiment by the Oklahoma researchers, Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood and Caroline Sherif (1961). In many cases it appears that following research started from the premise that Robbers Cave produced unchallengeable data from which to build. However, this could be in itself challenged. The nature of the experiment was contrived. There is no evidence to suggest that the participants were indeed unaware of their experimental situation and Sherif and his colleagues were quite open that the participants ‘had been handpicked’, (Forsyth 2006, p.448) they were therefore, by definition, unrepresentative of many naturally occurring groups that come together for shared reasons. The question as to why the particular children were picked is not the issue, the issue seems to me to be why was any pre-selection thought necessary if a reflection of the ‘real world’ was intended? Pre-selection compromises the validity and robustness of the findings and impact transferability to other situations. This is a particularly important consideration in the consideration of methodology and methods for my own research.

The organisational environment within which my research is conducted may make it less easy to neatly fit any conclusions into many of the existing theories of group dynamics. The Decision Group is operating at a level of efficiency that one could describe as a ‘norm’. It is neither in conflict, nor in total cohesion. Any perceived dysfunctionality may be at the margins in terms of the impact upon efficacy and, by its nature, its constitution and its membership, temporary. The Advisor Group is operating in a different environment and may reasonably be described as more cohesive. However, I doubt that it will appear to be excessively so [to the detriment of efficacy] in the way of groupthink, due in large part to its changing membership, the specialist nature of that membership and the leadership landscape within which it is operating.



It is worth taking some time to reflect and express opinions on the role of conflict and cohesion as, arguably, the two extremes of group status. In my view, they are indeed the two extremes, when one defines and views them in a particular way. This is clearly not a universally held view and Forsyth (2006) and Aldag and Fuller (1993) argue that groups that are cohesive may out perform those that are not. Depending on how this is measured of course, it runs in the face of groupthink (Janis 1982). This is best illustrated by the oft quoted stages of group development published by Tuckman (1995) as, 'forming, storming, norming and performing' (cited by Arnold et al 2005, p 454.). Tuckman infers that as conflict diminishes and cohesion increases the group works more constructively and energetically. No mention is made of the levels of both dynamics in each stage of group development, or of the negative and positive influences of the static and changing states of both dynamics. Forsyth on the other hand lists many levels of cohesion and many reasons why cohesion is a good thing, without taking a view of any negative elements to what I am terming 'excessive cohesion', where I would certainly agree with the Janis groupthink model that performance may well be impaired in that situation. I introduce the debate on conflict and cohesion at this point, as they are further elements to be taken into account during data analysis.

I speculate that excessive cohesion could be related to a level of trust that is beyond the optimal postulated by Erdem (2003). In the state of excessive cohesion, a group, for whatever reason, could be overly acquiescent and moribund, or indeed, in the Janis (1982) model, start to make decisions based on incomplete data. Here, due perhaps to strong personalities and/or strong leadership and control, or due to overly trusting group membership, there is no practical debate within the group, no challenging, no questioning of information or advice. The group is cohesive in its ineffectiveness due to one or more of these traits, but could be described as excessively so. Group polarisation may become a factor, with the group making risky or compromise decisions. (Arnold et al 2005.) One can see that this could be the case if the group is managed by a charismatic and controlling

individual, for example, Robert Maxwell, Tiny Rowland and Lord Black. I am sure that the Robert Maxwell's Mirror Group Board exhibited complete cohesiveness, but if many of the news reports at the time can be believed, it was hardly an outperforming group, either in a business, or in a social sense, if only for the fact that according to BBC News (2002) it appears to have 'raided' the group pension scheme to stay solvent. Janis (1982) raised the issue of groupthink, where usually, excessively cohesive groups under perform by virtue of their cohesiveness, in not evaluating all of the evidence and options when decision making but seeking agreement and unanimous decisions under all conditions. Janis speculates that there could be a number of reasons for this groupthink, including over estimation of the groups power and abilities, closed-mindedness and pressures for uniformity, such as the example of the Mirror Group. I would add to this over controlled leadership and of course general incompetence. While there is by no means universal acceptance of Janis's groupthink theory, others, such as Aldag and Fuller (1993) arguing for group cohesiveness as a good thing; groupthink, as an extreme of cohesive behaviour is in my view a valid explanation of a possible phenomenon.

As excessive cohesion is undesirable in intra and inter group relationships, so one could argue that a complete lack of conflict is equally undesirable. In this area I am in agreement with the findings of Esquivel and Kleiner (1997), who, building on the work of Amason (1995), seek to identify a desirable level of conflict, what they refer to as C-type. In their words, C-type makes members of the group: 'focus on substantive, issue-related differences of opinion that tend to improve team effectiveness' (Esquivel and Kleiner 1997, p.90). A level of conflict, often described as 'creative tension', within and between groups would tend to displace any complacency and would raise the level of debate and challenge between group members, in the vernacular, 'keep them on their toes'. Research in the middle and late 1990s appears to support this view, primarily, Jehn (1997) and De Dreu (1997). A number of researchers in the field at least acknowledge the

inconsistency of research findings on the effects of conflict within groups, (Passos and Caetano 2005).

In my view, the leadership framework could play a pivotal role in establishing the right environment for the positive application of the conflict dynamic, by an understanding, acceptance and a search during recruitment for the existence and strength of some common values or existing relationships among members and candidates for membership. The strength of common values, or pre-existing and positive relationships, may tend to provide the solid base of trust that would underpin the group and avoid creative tension escalating into something much stronger, that we normally refer to as 'group conflict' with all of its negative connotations for performance and effectiveness. However, this is merely my speculation at this point.

Arguably, in keeping with most groups, those that are the subject of my research exist on many levels and each of those levels has their own set of dynamics and relationships. The groups and their members can be expected to react in different ways depending on the situation they are facing. For example, when the groups are faced with high level decision making, they may well exhibit a different set of behaviours to times when they are interacting in an information gathering mode, at 'away days' for example, or when they are interacting socially.

Whilst accepting that this may well be so, the subject of my research is specifically centered on the two groups involved in organisational decision making. Again arguably, this is the time when these particular groups are likely to be under the greatest intra and inter group tension and perhaps more likely to exhibit signs of an unhelpful level of conflict and division.

I have reflected earlier on the likely importance and role of trust in intra and inter group relationships and how that is related to the dynamics observed by other researchers inside and between small groups. The typology theories of group entitativity, emanating from the concept of entitativity, has been documented by Brewer et al (2004). Here Brewer and his co workers tabulate under the headings of common purpose, type of explanation and domain of similarity a number of group member attributes that include common history, common attributes as well as values motivations, intentions and common fate. They make the assumption that these attributes do contribute to individual and group behaviour patterns; however, they do not explain the mechanics of this, its importance to group efficacy and its implications for management practice, for example, in the establishment of groups or groups formed for decision making. I intend that this research builds on the concepts outlined by Brewer et al (2004) and provides a different perspective. However, the published work of Sawyer et al (2006) produces an interesting, further perspective, in that they state that their research shows that there is little correlation between matching skills and knowledge within a group membership and the subsequent performance of that group and that their prior research showed no consistent effect of diversity. The interest here is that some group memberships [in my own Company for Board Members] place great reliance on matching skills and experience in candidates for appointment, rather than perhaps looking at more behavioural and character matching.

From the volume of published work in group related dynamics and behaviour, it is evident that this general area of research activity is perceived to have potentially significant application in management practice. I would certainly support this view as a great deal of management activity, within all forms of organisation, takes place in and between small groups. Groups are clearly complicated social settings with a myriad of dynamics, influences, behavioural traits and personality issues co-existing and interacting. How these, and the many other impacts, are influenced by the type of groups under investigation, their role within an

organisation and the nature of the individuals involved in them is not at all clear. The general manager is rarely a qualified social scientist or psychological researcher. Many generalist managers faced with the language of these areas of endeavour may feel isolated from the knowledge they feel that they need to understand the groups and teams under their management and therefore how to maximise their efficiency, or correct and combat any dysfunctionality. I would seek with my research to bring a generalist's view and to explain and evidentially support my contribution to the debate on inter group working. The review now goes on to consider the role of leadership and trust in inter group activity.

### **2.3 Inter Group Working and the Role of Leadership**

I have already touched on the literature on group processes over the past 30 years; however, its limitation to my research is the relatively small amount of small, inter group research. Although there is much valuable literature produced in the last 10 years it needs to be studied, assessed and adapted to increase its usefulness in the study of small, inter group action in decision making. The most recent research concentrates on a number of key areas. My work deals with the inter-relationship between a Board and senior management, we are therefore in a sense dealing with 'top teams'. Top team research appears to have been accepted by many working within the field, as a relevant and valid framework for understanding the nature of senior management groups. However, the work of Roberto (2003) has highlighted inconsistencies within top team literature in terms of strategic decision making. Roberto's observation that single teams with a stable composition do not make strategic choices in most organisations is true to the extent that any one team is, in isolation, tasked with such a role.

In practice the role is often spilt between groups, sometimes in the literature termed teams, where stability is apparent in one team, but not in another, for example, stability within the Board but not within the management team. Roberto argues that strategic decision making unfolds across multiple layers of the organisation and not solely within the upper echelons suggested by top team theory. He therefore suggests that top team theory is of limited practical use unless decision making is restricted to the CEO and his immediate reports. Clearly this depends on the organisation under study and is certainly not the case in my research organisation; however, top team literature does ask a number of relevant questions highlighted by Roberto, such as how often do executives interact as groups and how often as individuals. He goes on to say that identifying the key players in the decision process is key to the study of the decision making process. I am sure that this is true and is probably a key element of the approach to my research project. However, the seminal author in the area of group interactions, Edgar Schein (1988) states that overwhelming evidence exists for the theory that groups form both formally and informally throughout an organisation and that these groups develop cultures over a period of time. The intriguing issue to me is how these more informal groups meet and merge. One could speculate that in the absence of a formal process for membership they are more likely to be formations of so called 'like minded' individuals who find common cause.

The role of leadership is clearly an issue for many who study inter group behaviour, or are part of inter and inter group activity. Are these groups led and influenced, perhaps dominated, by a leader or leaders in a way that is significant in decision making? I suspect that in many instances they are. My own view is that leadership, and its counterpart manipulation, form an essential ingredient of small inter group dynamics in a business environment. This view may be supported by the recent work of McFadzean (2002) on the development of problem solving teams. In McFadzean's research, teams are made more effective and efficient by a facilitator or 'problem champion', highlighting the possibly essential role of a

group leader, be that overt or covert. She goes on to detail a model as a framework for facilitators or group leaders, however, the value of her observations to my research is more in the evidence of a leadership dynamic at work than in the model she suggests. Van der Vegt and Van de Vliert (2002) reporting on their research into intra group behaviour, point to interdependence among group members as an essential element of the dynamics at work. Although research in this area is not new, having seen studies in some depth since the nineteen forties, they draw interesting conclusions that show the role of a leader as essential if there is a conflict between interdependences. They give many examples in their report of lead manager's intervention in the group activity, to increase motivation and individual effectiveness, such as making the tasks interesting, goal oriented, more demanding, all leadership actions. This fully accords with my own experience, where the exercise of leadership, goal setting and orientation of the group, leads to more effective small group decision making. How much influence this has on inter group action, where leadership responsibilities are divided, requires further research.

Arguably, the report of decision making within the Thatcher government gives a most graphic example of a leaders impact on a decision making group [the cabinet] and an Advisor Group [the Civil Service]. Reports suggest that Margaret Thatcher provided strong leadership and gave strong opinion within her Decision Group, (Major 1999), (Portillo 2004) and heavily influenced her various Advisor Groups to achieve her own aims and objectives. Indeed, study of the literature dealing with governmental relationships during various administrations may well provide a valuable source of additional data into inter group decision making.

The gauging of a leaders influence on group effectiveness, and other elements in the group dynamic mix, is highlighted by the research of Natale et al (2004). They carried out a qualitative research study in cooperation with a number of colleagues

in business and industry. Their conclusions positively link group effectiveness with leader effectiveness. In addition, they postulate that individual personality traits within a group are subordinated in favour of the leader's projection of his/her traits and personality. This may be a rather big assumption to make in research on a fairly small group, covering 60 manager/leaders and their teams. My own view, based on my own experience, is that this effect may be short term and only applicable when linked to success, in whatever way the team measure it. A relatively new and very exciting hypothesis is proposed by Pearce and Conger (2003) in their research findings on 'shared leadership'. In essence they are saying that the concept of the sole, strong, central leader is outdated in the modern, performing organisation. They state that:

'New models of leadership recognise that effectiveness in living systems of relationships does not depend on individual, heroic leaders, but rather on leadership practices embedded in a system of interdependencies at different levels within the organisation. This has ushered in the era of what is often called 'post heroic' or shared leadership.' (Pearce and Conger 2003, p. 21)

They go on to develop this theme in terms of a model for shared leadership and assess its importance and its effectiveness in various types of organisation. Whilst my observations indicate a close correlation between their ideas and what I see within my own organisation, I feel that the influence of the effective top leader on the organisation is too easily discounted. The study of leadership has in previous years been; 'dominated by the positivist, quantitative epistemological orientation' (Kroeck et al 2004, p. 81.). The move to a more qualitative research is relatively recent in the management field and more research is required for accepted theories to emerge. Shared leadership needs to be further tested in this regard and my hope is that my research may help in some small way.



## 2.4 Group Processes and Trust

Trust between individuals is likely to be a significant driver within the inter group situation and Atkinson and Butcher (2003) have carried out a great deal of published work in this area. They studied trust within a management environment that was highly political, within which self interest and hidden agendas flourished. Their conclusions are interesting, in that they seek to highlight the problems of trust within management relationships, identify that there is a dearth of research information on the subject, state that more research is needed and end by concluding that in managerial terms trust and impersonal closeness are not essential. This may be so and yet the speculative conclusion may be that the acceptance of advice and even the acceptance of expertise within and between groups, stems from an individual trust dynamic of some kind. This seems to be supported by the work of Yuan Wang (2003) in his studies of Chinese village enterprises. It may not be sensible to compare the two sets of conclusions too closely as there may be cultural overtones that are not considered; however, Wang clearly feels that trust is an essential element in participatory decision making, and by deduction in successful decision making, although he states that it is trust in the dependability of those involved that is the key, rather than an overall feeling of trust within and between individual across a range of character traits. Intuition and emotion could be said to be closely related and so could be expected to be so within decision making processes.

Leadership and trust/confidence/respect go hand in hand. Effective leadership without the other components is, I would suggest, not possible. The Fiedler model of contingency leadership, detailed in Armandi et al (2003), supports this contention by showing that leader team member relationships are dependant on the degree of confidence, trust and respect that the group members have for the leader. Tyler's 1996, work in the area of trust in organisations with new research that

introduces the concept of shared motivation between organisational members that leads to shared trust. Tyler (2003) argues that trust is generated by empathy between colleagues based on shared drivers in terms of the motivation for outcomes. Tyler's conclusions are in large part supported by the work of Costa (2004), who finds a positive association between levels of trust and attitudinal commitment among group members. Ozen (2003) is more emphatic when making the connection between team effectiveness and trust, in stating that: 'it is only when trust is the prime value within the team that the highest levels of performance are possible' (Ozen 2003, p.2-4). Although these conclusions may feel correct, they do not explain the apparent success of some groups where trust is not the prime value, often the situation in diplomatic negotiating groups and in employment relations situations. Many factors are at play in such groups; however, it is likely that the balance of trust over conflict, and how this translates into recognition of a shared fate that ultimately leads to cohesion and success, is a key element.

As previously stated, the literature and on going research into issues of group dynamics is extensive, rich and ongoing. However, the amount of available data on small, inter group systems of the kind of interest to me is arguably less rich and could be described as fragmented. This is surprising, as the relationships that I am investigating occur frequently in many, if not the vast majority of formally constituted organisations. It is clearly necessary to draw together many different themes from the literature in order to gain a realistic picture of what may be happening in these situations. The issues of leadership [influence within and without the group] and the establishment and maintenance of trust are key themes from my research.

The building of confidence and the establishment of a social context within which individual's engagement is encouraged and valued were also identified as key

themes. Literature on all of these areas exists, but the data was gathered in very different social contexts and using very different and often non-complementary methodologies. It is therefore essential to reflect upon the literature and decide on the validity of the data to the subject of my research.

For the purposes of this research, I am treating the terms team and group as interchangeable. I tend to the indications provided by Robbins (1984) and Babbington-Smith (1979). Robbins talks of ‘groups’ being two or more individuals working on a particular objective. Babbington–Smith sees ‘teams’ as also a small number of people engaged in a common purpose. For my purposes these two definitions are indeed interchangeable. The potential for confusion is best illustrated by Babbington-Smith who goes on to use the two terms interchangeably even going so far as to say that teams are in fact groups. By these definitions, the categorisation of an Advisor Group and a Decision Group as groups within a larger team seem to be appropriate and aid the literature review.

The dictionary definition of trust as: ‘to believe that someone is honest and means no harm..... to feel that something is safe and reliable.....to entrust someone with important information.....to believe that someone is likely to do something safely and reliably.....to believe.... to expect....to hope.... Confidence in the reliability of a person or thing (Collins 1997, p. 894). Although the definition and subtleties of trust are the subject of much debate within the social sciences, there appears to be within the literature a general acceptance of the validity of the signpost to trust supplied by Coleman (1990), which has four main elements. That trust in a person allows for actions by that person that would not otherwise be possible; that the existence of trust within a relationship makes those within that relationship better off rather than worse off; that the existence of trust involves the placement of resources in the hands of those that are trusted and finally that there is a time difference between the giving of trust, one to another and the

manifestation of a trusting behaviour. This is helpful in that we can apply Coleman's signpost definition in the consideration of management practice and inter group activity in a way that aids understanding of what we mean by the word trust within this research context.

Is it that group members, indeed one could say most humans in most circumstances, prefer to operate/live/interact within a comfort zone, where they are neither overly challenged personally, nor overtly threatened. The level of comfort, or the size of the comfort zone in terms of one's environment, what is happening to and around one, why one is being asked to consider issues, or carry out tasks is, I believe, directly related to the level of understanding of the facts [as they are perceived] and of the realities. Translate this into intra and inter group dynamics and I suggest that the same will apply. There may also be a predisposition to trust among group members, where the sharing dynamics are present and also where there is a clear gulf in detailed experience and knowledge between both groups.

One may reasonably reflect that trust is going to be a significant factor in the minds of colleagues, when they consider the relationship between Advisor Group members and between Advisor Group and Decision Group. This importance is mirrored in the research by Tyler (2003), who states in his research report:

'I believe that trust is important because of the strong desire to understand how to create effective co-operation within organisations. Trust is the key because it enables co-operation' (Tyler 2003, p.1)

Although one may feel that interpersonal trust is central to establishing and maintaining team effectiveness, it is, according to recent research in Australia, a relatively recent discovery. Gillespie and Mann (2004) identify the 1990s as the years when it was realised that this was a major factor. Their research links the exercise of leadership in its many forms and the establishment and maintenance of

trust in teams. Interestingly, they also point out that they believe that shared values lead to the establishment of high levels of trust, an opinion first postulated by Bigley and Pearce (1998). Although Barron et al (1992) pointed out that one of the prime elements that distinguished cooperating members of a group from defecting [*their word*] members was trust. One quote indicates the value of their study to my work.

‘....sharing common values with team members, together with a set of interrelated leadership practices based on consultative decision making and communicating and modeling a collective, value driven vision, predicted the trust of team members’(Gillespie and Mann 2004, p 10.)

They pose three questions for future researchers:

- Which values are most important for leaders and team members to share?
- Are shared values a necessary condition for establishing trust?
- What are the differing impacts of leadership practices and shared values on the various components of trust?

(Gillespie and Mann 2004, p.10)

These are important areas for further investigation and I will be seeking to make a contribution to answering the questions posed in my research findings. Research into the nature of managerial relationships and trust had already been undertaken in 2002 and in many ways Gillespie and Mann are following on from the work of Atkinson and Butcher (2002) in the investigation of the phenomenon of trust. Atkinson and Butcher make the important point that the relevance of trust in organisational relationships is generally accepted, but that the nature of trust, how it is built and maintained remains unclear. Although I can accept that the argument is generally made, I believe the literature to be less than clear on the possible links

between trust, and shared values, motivations and fate. One interesting aspect of their research to me is their opinion on where management science is in respect to the trust dynamic. Clearly they believe that little is truly known about its effects and value in managerial relationships and they are convinced that no real theory of trust in this context exists. They do go on to state that high levels of trust [*in managerial relationships*] will be confined to just a few individual relationships. These ideas are not reflected in the work of Panteli and Duncan (2004) who dealt with trust in temporary virtual teams. In their report, they make a statement that may well have implications for my own research:

‘Trust, as a positive and confident expectation of the behaviour of another party enables cooperation and becomes the means for complexity reduction even in situations where individuals must act under uncertainty with ambiguous and incomplete information’ (Panteli and Duncan 2004 p.1)

How much is conscious and how much unconscious in the establishment of trust seems to be an area of contention in the literature. The opportunity to interview new members to the Decision Group in my own research environment may provide interesting data in this area and I will be attempting to do so before they are formally established within the group. This will enable me to explore whether or not they, and the other members of both groups, take active and conscious measures to build mutual trust, or whether other dynamics are at play that build trust unconsciously. In my own organisation, new members are co-opted on a relatively regular basis.

Erdem (2003), in her work on groups and teams, attributes the establishment of trust to: ‘a function of team members ability, integrity and benevolence and as of the members own propensity to trust’. She also makes the interesting observation that, ‘team members are careful in protecting shared knowledge against outsiders’ (Erdem 2003, p.3). We could reflect that this is a manifestation of the sharing dynamic that not only builds and maintains trust, but may explain one element of

polarisation (Forsyth 1990), (Brown 1994) exhibited by groups when new members join. Although Erdem draws her conclusions from a limited statistical study of just 7 organisations. In addition she appears to have done little field work to support her initial conclusions. However, the indicators she details appear to draw some sharing concepts together for the first time and provide a good start point for further, qualitative study.

Her later research with Ozen (2003) raises some interesting ideas regarding the nature of trust. They subdivide trust [without giving their own clear definitions] into cognitive, which I interpret as, of the mind, not immediately visible or explainable and affective, which I interpret as overt, obvious and based upon demonstrated relationship factors, speculating that the cognitive is build up early in any team or group relationship and affective trust takes its place later in the life of the team. The division between the two is also related to the emotional depth of relationships. They point out that these are not new concepts, having been proposed by a number of researchers in the 1990s; however, they decline to identify sources. These are very useful indicators in planning my own research and I expect to see evidence of these elements of trust. I also speculate that the division between the two elements of trust may well, at least partly, depend on the level of conscious sharing and that the leadership/influence dynamic will be of some significance. There seems to be some support for this from the work of Politis (2003). Once again, Politis's work is quantitative and no follow up qualitative research has, as far as I can ascertain, been published recently. His research examines the connection between trust and knowledge management. In his conclusions he suggests that team members who are trusting of each other:

‘....can anticipate an open and honest communication to a sharing of knowledge to achieve a competitive advantage’ (Politis 2003, p.6)

We may conclude that trust has an influence on the amount of knowledge shared between the two groups. That the Advisor Group action of information gathering and the setting of the boundaries with regard to optioning, and how much notice is taken by the Decision Group of this process, is crucially influenced by the trust dynamic between the two groups of individuals. This is certainly what Politis appears to be suggesting. More research is clearly required here, but this is an exciting link to the research of others. Arguably, the most comprehensive and important piece of research carried out in the area of trust in managerial relationships in the most recent past is that of Atkinson (2005). Her conclusion that: 'From the trust perspective, the findings place trust, or lack of it, at the heart of managerial relationship cognition' (Atkinson 2004, p.9) appears reasonable; however, she goes on to state:

'However, the findings also challenge the notion that trust matters and is even desirable in all managerial relationships, particularly with reference to motive-based trust'(Atkinson 2005, p. 9).

Here she is clearly challenging the research of others and appears to be questioning the shared values etc notions of trust. Certainly she is challenging the conclusions of Bijlsma and Koopman (2003), who are clear that: 'another common understanding is that trust and co-operation are closely and positively related' (Bijlsma and Koopman 2003, p.2). She has more to say on the dynamics of senior managerial relationships, around the notions of personal relationships and their connection with hierarchical position and perceived status. She ends her conclusions with a challenging statement:

'If organisational value is determined in the minds of managers as a product of political usefulness, then the assumption that developing effective interpersonal relationships, even personal ones as defined in this paper, is axiomatically good for social capital, is questionable.' (Atkinson 2005, p.9)

Atkinson admits that hers is an exploratory study and I aspire to add to the



arguments with my own research. It does however, show how little is truly accepted as indisputable fact when considering the trust dynamic in groups and teams and that may be a function of defining trust in different settings and understanding fully its dynamics in those different settings.

Atkinson's (2005) research on senior management relationships and the role of trust is empirically based and does little to add to her 2004 contribution. However, in stating the role of competence based trust and the place of motive based trust in these relationships, she at least provides conclusions based on a different data gathering methodology and analysis, that places trust at the centre of senior management relationships. This may seem like an obvious statement to make, however, for the purposes of academic research, as opposed to managerial practice, assertions must be supported by the data and the research conclusions of others. A more useful, one could almost say significant and primary, source of research data on the importance of this dynamic in business relationships of all kinds is provided by Mollering, Bachmann and Hee Lee (2004) in the introduction to a special feature on organisational trust.

Two references in their published work stand out. The first is, interestingly, a quote attributed to Confucius, who apparently stated that 'trust is a precondition and basis for all worthwhile social relations' (Confucius, cited in Mollering, Backmann and Hee Lee 2004, p. 558). More recently relevant, if no more perceptive, is the research of Zand (1972) where it is stated that: 'trust leads to more trust and distrust to more distrust' (cited in Mollering et al 2004, p. 558). This gives an interesting insight into the reasons behind the possible fragility of this dynamic between groups. Clearly stated, this assumes that trust is a precondition in the inter group relationship, arguably born of the core elements outlined by Johnson and Grayson (2003) and is at least as volatile as any of the group dynamics. One can picture an upward spiral of confidence and trust

building with a corresponding downwards spiral of distrust once the fabric of the inter group relationships breaks down. However fragile the trust between group members and between groups happens to be, and this fragility is acknowledged by Schweitzer, Hershey and Bradlow (2006) when they state that despite this inherent fragility trust can be effectively restored in most circumstances depending on the approach by and sincerity of the individuals concerned (Schweitzer et al 2006).

For the purposes of this research, and indeed to bring some clarity to what is meant by the term trust in the case of inter and intra group dynamics, it is very useful in my view to examine the conclusions of research in the marketing and sales field and in service organisations. These results, if deemed valid, can then be used as a definition template for understanding.

Johnson and Grayson (2003), provide just such a template that can be adapted for other environments and situations. They first identify two types of trust, cognitive, that is: ‘a customer’s confidence or willingness to rely on a service provider’s competence and reliability’ and what they term, affective trust: ‘the confidence one places in a partner on the basis of feelings generated by the level of care and concern the partner demonstrates’ (Johnson and Grayson 2003, p.502). For the purposes of comparison I am taking the relationship between the Decision Group and the Advisor Group, most especially during the strategic decision making process, to be analogous to the relationship between customer and supplier. This is not an unreasonable comparison to make, as the Decision Group is certainly the less experienced and knowledgeable of the two groups, and takes services, in the form of advice and recommendations, from the Advisor Group, the acknowledged holders of knowledge and expertise. Dealing with a customer’s trust in a supplier, Johnson and Grayson go on to identify the core components, as they see it, of trust in such a relationship. One can readily see the application of such thinking to the inter group relationship:

**Expertise.** Here they state that:

‘Expertise is typically assessed in terms of a service provider’s level of knowledge and experience concerning the focal service. Research has demonstrated that an individual’s perceived level of expertise enhances his/her source credibility and therefore trustworthiness.’ (Johnson and Grayson 2003, p. 503)

The Decision Group may have a notion of ‘perceived competence’, that in the light of evidence to the contrary, they are likely to think of the Advisor Group as competent, leading to a level of trust between the two groups. Johnson and Grayson’s conclusions certainly support the view that this is a more universal trust generator than my research could demonstrate in isolation.

**Product Performance.** Johnson and Grayson state clearly that customers will take particular attention of the performance of products offered by linking that performance to those they deem to be ultimately responsible. Clearly this is likely to happen within the inter group relationship. If the Decision Group are content and comfortable with overall organisational performance they are likely to link this to the performance of the Advisor Group. It seems likely that this will lead to a more stable relationship between the two groups and to the development and maintenance of trust.

**Firm Reputation.** Here, they state that the perception of a firm’s reputation (management/Advisor Group’s reputation) impacts cognitive and affective trust, in that, if a customer believes that a ‘firm’ is honest and fair and has a good reputation for doing the right things well they are more likely to trust that firm in their relationship with it. I would suggest that clear parallels can be drawn here with the inter group relationship.

**Satisfaction with Previous Interactions.** It is hardly a surprise, but nevertheless needs to be explicitly stated, that a customer's experience of previous interactions materially impacts on trust and satisfaction in future relationships:

‘Satisfaction with past outcomes leads to a perception of equity in exchange process, which enhances confidence that a partner will continue to meet his/her obligations in the future.....the experience of satisfaction or dissatisfaction potentially contributes to perceptions of both cognitive and affective trust’ (Johnson and Grayson 2003, p. 504)

It is, I believe, quite valid to apply this to the inter group relationship as this could certainly be described, in terms of the decision making process, as a clear customer/consumer relationship. The decision group could be said to be the customer of the advisor group. The Advisors are gathering information and presenting a decision event [the product] to another group. The perception of this product in the minds of the decision group could be said to have many of the characteristics of a retail product of any description and to be subject to the same or similar impacts, influences and dynamics of presentation and reputational risk.

**Similarity.** Here we see the link between some element of a sharing dynamic and the establishment of trust between the two groups. Building again on the work of other researchers, in this case Byrne (1969), Johnson and Grayson state that ‘individuals tend to display higher levels of attraction toward people that they perceive to have similar attitudes to their own’ (Johnson and Grayson 2003, p. 504). They go on to talk about the importance of common values and interests, that may well have implications in inter group research and will be the subject of some of my reflections.

**Anticipation of Future Interactions.** Johnson and Grayson state that Crosby et al (1990) were the first to speculate that there is a link between trust and the

anticipation of future interactions. One can speculate that as the Decision Group knows that there will be a future relationship and future interactions, they have a clear interest in establishing and maintaining trust in the relationship. There seems to be an assumption here that the groups will invest emotionally and psychologically in the trust dynamic, perhaps seeking ways to enhance trust rather than seek to question it. This may well be linked to other factors in the relationship, such as the strength of any sharing dynamics and the consequent compatibility between group members, both inter and intra.

## **2.5 Leadership and Influence**

Trust and leadership may well be directly linked. This is alluded to in much of the recent literature. One could speculate that leadership is bound to have a central role in the establishment of trust in a group/team situation. Gillespie and Mann (2004) certainly believe that to be so stating that: ‘leaders play the primary role in establishing and developing trust’, but go on to point out that: ‘little research has examined the specific leadership practices which engender trust toward team leaders’ (Gillespie and Mann 2004, p. 1). I have reflected on the role of leadership and influence. I speculate that the perceived leader, although not a member of the group, can have a direct influence on the dynamics of the group and in turn, on the inter group relationship. An interesting piece of research that may have value in respect to the absent leader notion, was conducted in the area of leadership and trust by Fairholm and Fairholm (2000). They contend:

‘The specific features of an organisation’s culture condition what leaders do and how they do it. However, leaders also condition the culture by their actions and beliefs. Seen this way, a leader’s primary activity is to create a culture supportive of desired values’ (Fairholm and Fairholm 2000, p.1).

Here we see opinions on both the sharing dynamic discussed earlier and the idea that the leader creates the culture. The presumption here may be that the culture, when created, influences all areas of the organisation, including intra group and inter group activity, whether or not the leader is present. They go on to say that leadership is not individual but collective and that 'for leaders to lead they need a united and harmonious environment characterized by mutual trust' (Fairholm and Fairholm 2000, p.1).

I disagree with this particular opinion. I believe that the act of leadership leads to the establishment of mutual trust, not the other way around. This will have to be tested during my research. The value as I see it of their research lies in the strong link that they have identified, between leadership, either collectively or individually exercised and the establishment and maintenance of trust. They also emphasize the importance of trust to interpersonal relationships. Their findings complement the work of both Gillespie and Mann and Bijlsma and Koopman and go some way to validate my reflections. How this then translates to inter group dynamics is not so clear from the literature.

The work on cross functional teams by Webber (2002) is of some value in identifying themes. Although cross functional teams are different in many respects to the groups that I am researching, some of the data may be relevant, as we are still dealing with individuals who are organisationally connected, in some areas interdependent and with individual behaviour in a team or group setting. Webber's research concentrated on how leadership and trust facilitated cross functional team success. Her contention that trust is a function of team selection and that the leadership role is to choose the right team for the job is useful. Her further illumination regarding the nature and importance of inter team communication is also relevant. However, her emphasis on the importance of team leadership and the role of a team leader is less useful, in that it ignores situations where there is a

champion but no nominated leader and cuts across the findings of Fairholm and Fairholm (2000) in respect to the role of collective leadership, that is, her leadership requirement undermines the notion of a collective approach and clearly some groups do work on the collective principle. Whether or not they are more or less successful in terms of decision making is not for this particular research.

One very interesting comment that she makes is: ‘...diverse value systems operate against trust development’ (Webber 2002, p. 3). Commenting on the finding of Triandis et al (1965) that functional heterogeneity was associated with low trust, and quoting Sitkin and Roth (1993) that ‘distrust occurs when an individual or a group is perceived as not sharing key cultural values’ (Webber 2002, p. 3). These are important pointers, introducing another aspect of the trust and value dynamics in groups where skills and experience may be very different. Just such a situation exists in the areas of my research.

Although one may feel that leadership and trust are closely linked and that skills and knowledge of group members is linked to both of the other elements, it gives confidence that the literature, if only in relatively recent years, supports the instinctive biases. The work in these areas over a number of years by Sheard and Kakabadse (2004) encapsulate what is known and what is postulated regarding the leadership/trust/performance/group dynamic links. Their research findings are particularly interesting and relevant. Commenting on team members and the nature of their relationships they state:

‘A lack of respect and trust can lead to a deterioration of relationships between team members, as a consequence of which people talk to one another less about key issues. This becomes a real handicap when it is time to discuss sensitive issues or complex problems.’ (Sheard and Kakabadse 2004, p. 16).

This has clear connections with inter group relationships and the efficacy of decision making. It also introduces the conflict dynamic. They establish a clear link in their findings between the exercise of leadership, as they see it, relationship building and team and individual performance. I am particularly interested in their notion of a 'leadership landscape', within an organisation and within teams and groups, which seems to me to embody both collective and individual leadership and influence. 'The leadership landscape helps those within a team to act' (Sheard and Kakabadse 2004, p. 28). This fits into my research context in its role in forming and maintaining relationship dynamics between groups that may well have up to 2 distinct leaders and leadership landscapes, or may indeed have just one dominant leader over two groups and one overriding landscape. I would personally put it a little stronger than that and state that the leadership landscape is the prime enabling element in team/group activity. This stance appears to be supported by the opinion of Mitzberg (1990), who was suggesting at that time that an organisation's members are always seeking what he terms, leadership clues, in their team and individual activity, seeking reassurance, direction, information and approval. This opinion is also supported by the findings of Vroom (2003). In his 30 years of investigation into the issues of leadership and decision making linkage, he states that the link in his findings between the setting of organisational goals by the leader and the making of high quality decisions is clear (Vroom 2003, p. 2). Whether one terms this as merely 'help' in the words of Sheard and Kakabadse, or as a prime enabling element as I believe it is, it is an interesting reflective point and some clarification may be possible from my research.

In their research on the correlation between trust and leadership, Joseph and Winston (2005) make a number of strong statements that resonate with me. They firstly establish that leaders generate and sustain trust, that trust in the leader is determined by behaviour of the leader, and that leader behaviour and organisational behaviour are firmly linked. However, crucially they state that it is their view that trust on organisations is linked to a sharing of both values and



purpose. We can speculate here that the team leader can be applied to both group leadership and to organisational leadership. However, their research centered on a relatively limited survey for data collection and the subsequent analysis relied upon various published [independent of their research] models to determine the level of trust and the nature of leadership in existence. As far as can be gathered, there was little or no interaction between researchers and the subjects of their research. I am therefore somewhat cautious in putting too much emphasis on their conclusions, without further support from complementary research. Wing (2005) talks of a leader developing a 'climate of trust' (Wing 2005, p. 7) within an organisation and how important this is to top team performance, but she fails to define trust or how it is developed. This leads us to the statement that the concept of trust, its development, its maintenance and its destruction, is subject to many interpretations and definitions.

Apart from Johnson and Grayson's core elements one can also reflect on the role and importance of leadership and its relationship with trust development and maintenance. Antecedents of trust may take many forms. It has been my view for virtually all of my career as a management practitioner, that leadership has a significant role to play. The setting of aims and objectives and the articulation of a vision for the organisation, leads to a feeling of direction and purpose that gives those associated with the organisation a sense of belonging and being a part of a dynamic and achieving whole. My view is that this is at least one of the necessary elements in building trust among those charged with strategic decision making. Put bluntly, if the feeling is 'the boss knows what he is doing and where we are going' the optimum level of trust is more easily achieved. Of course, there is always the danger in life that this trust is misplaced. In that case time will tell. This fits with the notion of perceived competence and Johnson and Grayson's core element of 'expertise'. This view is further supported by Bijisma and Koopman (2003) who state that: 'trust in leaders was found to be significantly related to

transformational leadership' (Bijisma and Koopman 2003, p. 547). They also support the findings of Johnson and Grayson in stating that:

'If others live up to prior expectations, this good repute will further positive expectations in the future, enhance the level of trust.....' (Bijisma and Koopman 2003 p. 548)

However, I have commented on the leadership landscape ideas postulated by Sheard and Kakabadse (2004). Certainly I have reflected when undertaking this review that the military context is likely to provide a fertile ground for such research as this was an area where, despite there being a fundamental and acknowledged need for positive leadership, the exercise of such leadership is often at a distance. In this context the leadership landscape is a vital ingredient to team [military] success. Larsson et al (2005) have published some valuable research work on just this area. Larsson, and co researchers, carried out extensive qualitative data gathering within the Swedish Armed Forces, focusing on the participants views on indirect leadership. Although it was clearly difficult for the researchers and their participants to differentiate between direct and indirect leadership profiles, their final model makes a significant contribution to the understanding of indirect leadership or, to put it in the form suggested by Sheard and Kakabadse (2004) leadership landscape.

In the Larsson et al model, the communication of leadership is either through a role model, such as the CEO, or through a link. The link in the case that I am considering in this research is the two groups acting in harmony. This in my view, illustrates the relationship between this indirect approach, the landscape, and the establishment or destruction of trust.

We can reflect that leadership, whether individual or collective, directly influences the environment and atmosphere within which groups operate. That leadership can

be either direct or indirect, but in either case provides a construct, or landscape, within which inter and intra group relationships are developed and maintained. The key or core elements of this development may lie in the amount of ‘sharing’ that individual group members experience and the establishment and maintenance of trust, without which group performance will suffer. This reflection is supported by the conclusions of Tickle, Brownlee and Nailon (2005), who are clear that:

‘Researchers investigating the links between values and beliefs and leadership behaviour suggest that the behavioral characteristics that differentiate one leadership paradigm from another may be explained through assessing differences in the leaders value and belief systems.’  
(Tickle et al 2005, p. 708)

Here we see what set of researchers who clearly support the link between shared values and leadership application, be that in direct or landscape terms.

I have reflected previously on the notion of a leadership at a distance, in other words on Kakabadse’s leadership landscape. The work of Antonakis and Atwater (2002) is interesting in this regard. Their findings on the concept of ‘leader distance’ lend evidence to my initial reflections. The first point that they make is that, with a few exceptions, ‘researchers in the area of leadership have not defined or discussed the concept of leader distance’ (Antonakis and Atwater 2002, p. 673). They set themselves the task of pulling together all of the available research findings and discussing possible conclusions that could be drawn. They go on to propose a model for the various levels of ‘distance’ within an organisation, that impact on both individuals and groups.

The value of their work to my research is that they have identified many of the core ideas of those working in the field regarding the nature of leader influence.

They also link the importance of trust to leader distance, providing what they perceive to be a new explanation of how trust is established in this context. However, the fact that in their view academia still does not understand the fundamental processes regarding the influencing effect of leadership is surprising. I would hope that my research is able to make some contribution to a better understanding when placed in the context of inter group dynamics.

## **2.6 Conclusion to the Review/ the Context for the Research**

I began the review by studying the generic literature on decision making, as a process and the use or otherwise of the many methodologies, methods and tools available in this field. Clearly, decision making in management is overwhelmingly a human process, sometimes individual and sometimes as part of team and group interaction. There appears to be evidence to indicate that much of organisational decision making is a set of procedures and processes that in large part relate to individuals and to the relationships that exist within the social construct of the organisation in question. I went on to study the literature relating to groups and inter group activity. A wide variety of decision making takes place in and between groups. Although the very mechanics of forming and operating groups seems to elicit certain behavioural traits that the literature suggests are unchanging and permanent characteristics. These 'theories' abound in group and inter group published research work and shape much of recent academic thinking. However, as much as certain relationship drivers clearly influence and impact the work and efficiency of group members in their decision making roles, the specific relationships surrounding the main Board and senior management inter group situation may well be influenced by other dynamics. In addition, whilst accepting the theories that already exist in this field, it may be possible to identify the subtleties in this particular relationship and working that can be influenced by positive management action. Certain 'shared characteristics' may exist between

members of these groups that are of such significance that they fundamentally influence the efficacy of the decision making when working in unison.

Leadership, both overt and covert, appears to have a significant role in harnessing the positive elements of relationship dynamics to the good of the organisation, or of introducing and/or sustaining group conflict and dissent. In this regard, one of the main drivers may be trust; what is it, how it is established and maintained and how it is restored when lost or diminished? The literature therefore raises many questions for the researcher in the inter group field. Are all inter group dynamics the same and are all of the theories surrounding inter groups equally valid? Or, how does context, place and organisational environment impact those theories? Where does trust and leadership influence those theories of group behaviour, and how important is sharing and making common cause between groups?

The literature has framed my thinking and focused my attention on the relationship dynamics that underpin the two groups of individuals. My interest as a practising CEO, is in identifying those elements that can be changed, influenced and adapted to improve the performance of the inter group working, rather than those elements that are unchangeable, permanent characteristics, inevitabilities of intergroup working. If by my research I can isolate, gain an understanding and explain the first set of elements that change within my own organisation will improve the group decision making processes in a way that would make a positive contribution to both knowledge and practice.

The research questions, covering the main objective of the research in terms of small inter and inter group dynamics, are framed with the above issues in mind.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **Research Conceptual Framework, Framing of the Research Questions**

The relationship dynamics for management groups, both intra and inter, and evidence of the underlying and underpinning issues during inter group decision making lie within the fields of social and management psychology. In addition, published research work concentrating on the type of groups of particular interest is also covered in the literature on general management and decision making. Selection of the literature was dependent on the likely application to specialist groups, operating within a closed organisation and a formal management setting. In the literature review I began by examining the basic elements of decision making and went on to examine group dynamics, both inter and intra, and the importance, or otherwise, of trust and of leadership in the small, inter and intra group relationships. Why do they do what they do and what we perceive and observe, succinctly encapsulates what I seek to highlight. How much is conscious and carried out in full knowledge and how much unconscious that happens because of personal characteristics, human interactions and relationships, internal and external pressures, and influences?

The purpose of the research is therefore to further investigate and understand the key, underlying relationship drivers that operate between one small group and another, existing for the purpose of organisational ownership and management, in which decision making is a continuing, major activity. The literature appears to suggest that the dynamics of inter group relationships are inviolate and exist within a set framework of social interaction that is, if not universal, then is at least the default situation for the vast majority of small groups that have an intimate relationship with one or more other small groups. Inter group research

predominately focuses upon the two polar extremes of group behavior, that of 'prosocial' and 'antisocial' (Brewer 2007 page 3). The social categorisation of groups is covered in detail. However, we may be able to gain additional knowledge by examining groups that do not naturally fall into either extreme of behaviour, or into definitive social categories. Small groups of this kind exist within the research organisation and may well exist in many commercial and other organisations.

I find it hard to accept that this universal characteristic of small inter group relationships is not fundamentally altered by the nature of the groups environment and operations, of the social framework of the organisation of which they are a part and of the aims and objectives of the groups, the very rationale for their existence. The two groups in question here are of arguably equal status within the organisation and are inextricably linked to the organisation and its success. At times, they may exhibit many of the characteristics of a single group whilst there being a clear inter group set of relationships at most other times. The research questions for each cycle are framed with this context in mind.

Figure 1 gives a diagrammatical representation of my research context. The two groups exist within the organisation and have separate existences, responsibilities and characteristics. They have an inter group relationship, which is represented by the degree of overlap of the two group circles. I perceive this overlap to be an indication of trust, or the relationship bond and the perception of competence, one group for another. The degree of overlap will crucially depend on a number of factors, some contained within the literature on social interactions in these settings, and some on dynamics yet to be revealed by my research. Complete overlap of the two circles would indicate an excessive cohesion in the inter group relationship, such that there would be no challenge, one group to another, and no dynamic

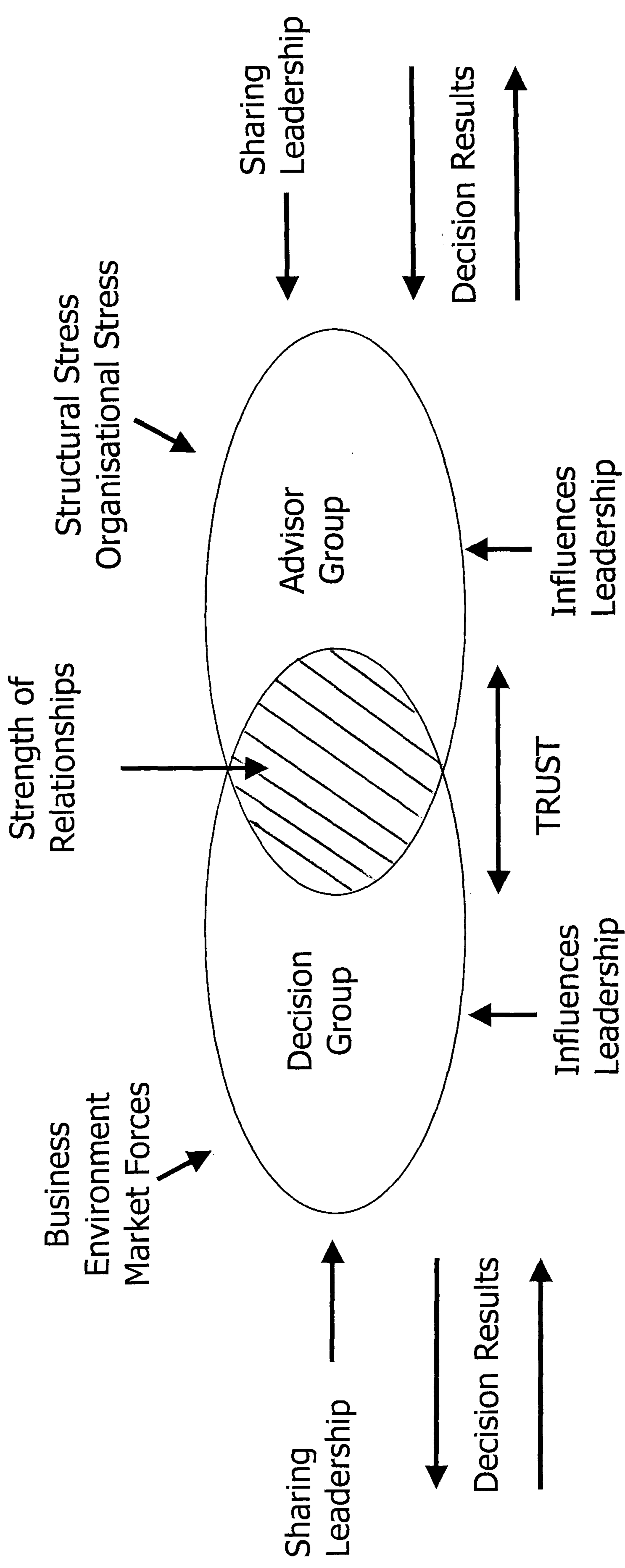
tension or questioning. No overlap of the two circles would indicate no ‘meeting of minds’ and perhaps conflict and certainly a dysfunctional relationship.

In Figure 1, the many external influences impacting each group are shown and most will be common to both groups. The overlap will be a dynamic element increasing and reducing in response to the combined influences acting upon them, separately and in combination and crucially on the subject under review or discussion at any one time [such as a decision making event]. The trust dynamic shown here is pulling and pushing at the relationship overlap with other dynamics, those of leadership and the efficacy of decision making, having a similar effect. The over arching objective of the research is to understand what relationship dynamics influence this overlap during one or more decision making events.



Figure 1

# Inter-Group Relationship



My research, and therefore the framing of the research questions, seeks to identify those relationship dynamics that dictate the amount of overlap during decision making, those that can increase or gain overlap where this is absent and to assess the role of leadership in gaining and maintaining the optimum degree of overlap desirable in this type of inter group relationship, undertaking decision making processes.

I first seek to understand each circle [each of the groups] as a separate entity and understand those external influences, stresses and pressure that impact on both, but often in different ways and with different results.

As a first step the question of how much real, structured, unbiased thinking and action goes into the preparation for a decision event by those tasked with recommending action to another group of individuals is key. Relationship issues will impact personal interactions between individuals, and between the groups themselves. An understanding of these drivers and impacts is also key to the research objectives.

By examining the personal characteristics of the group members and by investigating their motivations and perceptions, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of the underlying dynamics '*in these particular types of group*', with the hope that more general conclusions can be formed that complement the more universal truths accepted by many researchers in the field of inter group working. The research design is formulated on this objective.

The research design structure outlined from page 20, details three cycles of research, Cycles One, Two and Three. Cycle One takes the Advisor Group as its

subject, Cycle Two the Decision Group and Cycle Three a combination of both. For each cycle, a separate but connected set of research questions is asked and is then answered in the research findings [starting on page 135]. The questions for each cycle flow from the literature review and the conceptual framework for the research, diagrammatically represented in Figure 1.

### **3.1 Cycle One Research Questions**

- **How important is leadership? Do the group see themselves as a coherent group, or just advisors to the one who leads?**
- **How is this category of group formed? What starts the process and how is it managed?**
- **In inter group decision making, are decision making models used, if not why not?**
- **How is the differing role of the two groups perceived? How do the groups see themselves?**
- **How are recommendations for action arrived at by those involved?**

### **3.2 Cycle Two Research Questions**

The findings of Cycle One would provide a very early and at that point incomplete viewpoint on the main research questions and no definitive conclusions will be drawn at that stage. In examining the relationship issues it is necessary to compare and contrast the views of the members of the two groups and reflect and draw

conclusions. The objective of Cycle Two is therefore to engage with the Decision Group members, but also to begin to identify the relationship drivers and reflect upon their impact and importance to the overall inter group relationship.

The research questions follow on directly from those of Cycle One, seeking to build the complete picture. The questions are focused differently from Cycle One in order to direct the research in the areas that appear from the literature to be of significance. For example, I seek to contribute answers to the questions raised by Gillespie and Mann (page 59) when they speculate on which comes first in terms of trust and sharing dynamics.

- **Is there data to support the three concepts of shared values, shared fate and shared motivations as key dynamics in the inter group relationship ?**
- **What is the role of leadership in the intra and inter group relationships?**
- **What is the perception of Board members of the decision making process, who makes the decisions?**
- **What is the nature of trust in the inter group setting, how is it established and maintained?**

### **3.3 Cycle Three Research Questions**

The purpose of the Cycle Three research is to enrich the data that is gathered from the other two cycles. The useful coincidence of new Decision Group members and new advisor/director management provides the opportunity to engage personalities

who have little or no prior history or experience of the organisation and its internal relationships. Comparisons made on the data with that gathered during the other two cycles will therefore prove valuable in drawing together themes and threads.

Following on from the two previous sets of research questions, those for Cycle Three are targeted to bring out what may, from the literature, be the main drivers in the inter group relationship, the issues of sharing, the role of trust, its meaning, establishment and destruction and the role of leadership, leadership landscape.

- **Do preconceptions of sharing exist in new group members and how do they change with time?**
- **Is trust an issue for joining group members and if so what are the preconceptions of its nature and how does this change with time?**
- **What is the perceived nature of the leadership dynamic, its relationship with competence in joining group members, what are their expectations and how does this compare with the reality over time?**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **Designing the Research - Methodology and Method**

Denzin and Lincoln (2003) variously describe research design as being comparable to dance choreography, knitting patterns, orchestral composition and even military war games. That is to say, the process is on the surface complex, has many components, but is in any event logical, capable of explanation and valid.

Research design is also, in my view, a very personal issue. It relates to a particular researcher in terms of that individual's view of life, experience, educational exposure, lifetime challenges, failures, successes and future ambitions. It relates to comfort zones of understanding for the researcher, the ability to conceptualise and prioritise issues and the intellectual strengths that the researcher is capable of bringing to bear at each stage of the research journey. The individual hopes and expects that these skills and abilities will change, improve ones hopes, as the research and learning journey progresses. However, life and research are never that simple and the dangers of total submersion and loss of focus and objectivity are ever present. Like the working up to any other decision, it is always preferable to follow a logical process. This is especially important when the researcher is seeking to select and justify an appropriate methodological cause of action in the face of many alternatives. In the literature review, I cited Harrison and Pelletier (2000) [page 8] in their opinion that the decision making process is a series of sequential, interrelated steps that lead to a choice being made from several alternatives. It would therefore be to some degree perverse not to adopt the same process when choosing a methodology and methods for research. Although many reference texts list logical and largely sequential steps in research design, in my view, the first step for the researcher is to examine and articulate their own world or life view, as a context and a base line for the steps that follow. This, in my opinion, sets the start point for the sequential steps that follow.

The story of my research starts when I first arrived at the port in question. When I arrived as the CEO of the research organisation, I had previously been a Managing Director at 2 other organisations, covering a period of over 11 years. I was determined as on previous occasions to make sure that I maximized those first impressions and also to take my time in deciding where I was going to take the organisation in terms of strategic direction and what structural and organisational changes may be needed. Arriving as a new CEO is at the same time daunting, exciting and challenging. My remit from the Board was to take the port in an altogether more commercial direction, secure its finances that were not that secure and provide medium and long term vision for the organisation. I felt the responsibility quite heavily, whilst at the same time feeling confident that I could provide the necessary leadership and skills. I had done it previously and with a lot less background experience and knowledge to call upon than I had now. I gave myself a few months to observe and reflect; to observe how the organisation worked, how the individuals interacted and performed and how the Board itself performed and interacted with its senior management. I needed a couple of “quick wins” to indicate a change of leader and to imprint my style at an early stage. I restructured the organisation along what I would call more conventional operational lines [it had previously been divided into small business units], promoted a few, sidelined some and brought in a couple of new personalities in key, commercial positions. This gave me time to consider the long term vision and the strategic direction that the organisation, in my view, needed to take in order to be successful in that long term and face the many market challenges apparent within the industry.

Once that was clear in my own mind I had a selling job to do, to convince both colleagues and Board members that what I would propose would be the right way to go for the organisation. This required leadership, clear thinking and planning and a deep understanding of the dynamics operating within the management team, within the Board and between Board and management so that I knew how to

influence and convince. This brought me to reflecting on that vital inter group relationship between Board and senior management where the decisions would be taken and the wish to formally research that relationship and those dynamics. A better understanding for me would clearly help and perhaps a better understanding by members of both groups would avoid any possible conflicts and misunderstanding understandings as change brought inevitable stress and tensions.

The methodology and methods that I thought I wanted to use, were those that would keep as close to the natural requirements and actions [as I saw them] of a new CEO, as seamless as possible connection between my work and my research actions. This would avoid any conflict in my mind between research work and normal work, enhance I hoped, my performance in both areas and be clear to my colleagues when I came to explain why I was doing this and enlisting their co-operation. Some things were therefore clear to me in terms of approach. I needed to be able to observe and to subjectively as well as objectively reflect. I wanted to use experience, knowledge and management skills to plan, to reflect and to come to conclusions. Where appropriate I would certainly use objective data, quantitative data, however, I sensed at this stage that a more qualitative approach that allowed me flexibility in my methods along the lines I have just indicated would be more appropriate to the style that I wished to adopt as well as being more suitable for the type of data I was likely to be gathering.

As a general statement, I am drawn to action research and to qualitative methods. In the social context of my research I can conceive of no quantitative research methodology that would lead me to believe that I was gathering complete, robust and relevant data, embedded in the social context, in the area that I wished to research. I am aware of the large body of quantitative research reports, on group dynamics, group psychology and decision sciences, emanating mainly from the US and from those parts of the world arguably under heavy US academic influence,



such as Asia. I mention many of these data and research sources in the literature review. However, it is more often than not that I also explain the limitations of these approaches and the knowledge gaps that could and do result. I have no wish to 'quantify data'. Rather, in the words of Denzin and Lincoln, I aspire to:

'stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such researchers emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry. They *seek* answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p.13)

This seems to me to neatly encapsulate one of the major roles of the CEO. Having comfortably accepted that my approach is clearly centered in qualitative methodology I wanted to explore the options open to me and seek to adopt the most powerful of the methods available for my particular area of research, whilst at the same time adding to my necessary knowledge of the organisation's dynamics.

As stated by Mason:

'Once you have decided your various answers to the question 'what is my research about' and especially once you have formulated your research questions, your research is already set on certain tracks in relation to design and strategy because you have started to position it ontologically and epistemologically' (Mason 2002, p.25)

I began the process by asking myself the questions: 'what methodologies are most applicable to my research topic' and 'what are my research questions and what methods that flow from my methodology are most likely to generate the data that I need' and what is the best fit for my CEO duties and responsibilities, day to day? Mason challenges the researcher to ask:

'What is the fullest and most creative range of methods of data generation and data sources I can think of?' (Mason 2002, p.25)

Any cursory examination of the literature on quantitative research methods shows the abundance of powerful research tools available, mostly statistical in nature. This is no real surprise. To me as a new researcher the real surprise is the number of equally powerful qualitative research tools available. In many ways one is faced with an abundance of riches and making a reasoned choice becomes more difficult, but also more exciting. My research questions are clearly at the forefront of my thinking, my reflections on the way ahead for my research topic revolved around, what data will I be gathering, will it be sufficient and will it be robust and relevant?

I also reflected on data analysis. Questions such as, how will I be analysing this data, in what form will it be presented and can I cross reference against other data in the body of literature? Also, which method[s] give me the most flexibility in application and in adapting to changing circumstances as data is processed? What resources do I need and what are readily available to me? Finally, but probably most importantly, as people are the primary source of my data, what is the best and most effective way to interface and involve them and what method[s] are more likely to gain co-operation and reduce stress and possible conflict in my colleagues? In addition, I clearly did not want to in any way compromise my position within the organisation.

My primary data source is people, in a particular social setting and in a dynamic operationally, and therefore managerially, work environment. My research questions deal with human relationships, interaction, perception and opinion. My analysis will be the interpretation of human behaviour and behavioural processes within certain settings, underlying interaction, perception and opinion. I will be reflecting on my previous experience, but also my own involvement in the social setting and the operational and managerial environment. My interaction in these areas is a fundamental element of the research context and my research strategy

must reflect this. I would also be sourcing data from the organisation itself, in texts, publications [policies and procedures] and in the interpretation of events and incidents.

In assessing the data sources and examining my own approach to qualitative research I examined the sub division of research, ethnography and in particular interpretive ethnography. Interpretive ethnography describes the context within which the various methods available to me are used to obtain data in the areas previously described. Why interpretive ethnography? Ethnography has been described as the original and quintessential qualitative research method (Taylor 2002), although ethnographers ‘can and do use quantitative methods where they are appropriate’ (Schensul et al 1999, p.3). It has also been described as ‘essential to many researchers and practitioners’ [*of qualitative research*] (Schensul et al 1999, p. 3). What is ethnography that I believe it to be the context for my research, within the qualitative methodology and are there alternative approaches?

As the CEO, I am totally immersed in the life of the organisation. It seems logical therefore the most effective and relevant approach for me to adopt in seeking to obtain the required data and answer my research questions, is to fully immerse myself in a complementary research process. I am part of the organisation being researched and a member of both groups that are the vehicles for my data gathering. Indeed, I was, early in the research process, the only person who bridged the gap between both groups. I am therefore a part of the social structure being researched and I am impacting on the consciousness of those who are my colleagues and at the same time are the objects of research. An ethnographer is concerned with ‘the experience as it is lived, felt or undergone’ (Taylor 2002, p. 34). Taylor goes on to explain that an ethnographer:

‘...participates in people’s daily lives for a period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions, studying documents, in other words, collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which the researcher is concerned’ (Taylor 2002, p 34.)

As an insider ethnographic researcher, my methodology differs from Taylor’s assessment to a degree and this is discussed later. One of the many strengths of ethnography as a context for research is that it includes a wide variety of methods to be employed; observation, interviewing, group working, document analysis, while accepting as valid the researchers own experiences and involvement, past and present. For the reasons I outline previously, this is particularly important in my view of research activity. In addition, and crucially, an ethnographic approach can and often does lead to integrated action or, as Taylor phrases it, ‘action research informs later stages’ (Taylor 2002, p.35).

Good practical examples of this are provided by the work of Fraley (2004), in turning her ethnographic studies on poker players and mother-infant interactions into a tool for the better understanding of core consumer needs. Or Gerbrands (2004) and others, developing ethnophotography and ethnocinematography into educational tools for documentary filmmakers. In both cases pure ethnographic observation developed into practical application in areas not necessarily directly related to the original research [Gerbrands was researching, among other things, non-verbal communication in human cultures]. However, there are alternatives to ethnography.

There are certainly alternatives, both within and outside qualitative methodologies, that could be adopted; however, I believe that all will inevitably suffer from a distancing of the research from the social context. In quantitative work, this distancing results from the very nature of empirical research in that the settings, experiments and environments are artificially planned and are arranged as

representations. My belief is that inter group research of this nature benefits from the immersion of the researcher within the group's social construct, as both actor and observer. Distancing therefore from the subject and objects of my research dilutes the richness of the data and could invalidate much of my work and would not, in my view, reflect the actuality of the sociological context due to a lack of direct involvement in the processes at work. In terms of much of the literature on group dynamics and making assumptions based upon this published research, this is where I disagree with the positivist, quantitative approach of many others. In my view, controlled laboratory experiments, no matter how rigorously carried out, are unlikely to produce unchallengeable data in respect to social environments that exist in group and inter group activity within formal organisations. In addition, I would not be maximising the advantages I gain as a new CEO who is already, as a matter of good practice, carrying out a measure of research within the organisation.

Marcus (1998) talks of seeing the whole of a system and of a collective identity and community, all important pointers to the essential difference between ethnography and other research approaches. Ethnography allows for and encourages direct involvement and being part of the social fabric of that being researched. In the words of Banister et al (2002), 'The ethnographer participates actively in the research environment, but does not structure it, the approach is discovery based.....' (Banister et al 2002, p.34). Not only is this a reflection of what I am doing as a researcher, it validates my impact on the social system of the organisation of which I am an integral part. Discovery based data is the essence of a new incumbent's intelligence gathering in those critical early months.

As included in the title of this thesis is 'an ethnographic study' one could be forgiven for thinking that the choice of methodological approach was straightforward and has been decided well before the start of the research process.

This was not the case, but was rather a result of intense and continued reflection on the overall research objective and the research questions.

The Singh and Dickenson (2003) description of ethnography as ‘the direct observation of a particular phenomenon of interest within an organisation or business context’ and ‘the interpretation of those observations and the description written in the context of the whole environment’ (Singh and Dickenson 2003, cited in Partington, p 117) struck a chord. Additionally, I was of the opinion that I was about to embark on a journey of discovery and of personal and organisational change as knowledge increased. In my view, ethnography provides the most appropriate approach. In addition, I saw my role as in some small way, linking cultural and social anthropology with management research in a way that would give me a much more and very particular view of both the social context and the world within which the two groups and its members existed and functioned. Because of my own personal position within the research organisation and indeed within the two groups being researched, I found myself in agreement with the thrust of the observation by Coffey (1999) that ethnographic field work must have a biographical element. I see this as a statement of ‘self’ to place the research activity in context and the framework for the individual’s ontological and epistemological positions.

I was bound to have to deal with ‘self’ and my impact on and immersion in the research. Interpretive ethnography as an insider provides that unique blend of ‘pure research data’ and ‘the self as data’, that I was searching for. All of these elements were part of my deliberations.

In choosing the methodology to be followed and the methods to be adopted during the research, I was guided by my view that there would be no absolute

measurements in any aspect of my work that would be meaningful. I was not going to be dealing in absolutes; more in various shades of grey and personality nuances that do not lend themselves to either direct measurement or controlled experimentation. Any attempt to reduce data to numbers was going to seriously dilute the findings, compartmentalising data in an artificial way that would compromise reliability and rigor.

#### **4.1 Interpretive Ethnography and Management Research as an ‘Insider’**

Coghlan (2001) states in his paper, ‘managers are increasingly undertaking action research projects in their own organisation’ (Coghlan, 2001, p. 49). He goes on to speak of the immersion of researchers in their own organisation, of the power of pre understanding and the significant challenges of this approach to research, issues covered under ‘ethics’ [Page 129]. However, a year later Coghlan (2003) is stating that insider action research is still relatively neglected as an approach to management research. This seems to suggest that although insider research activity is not unknown, it is not, in his view, widespread.

The literature is clear as to the origins of ethnography and its application beyond the boundaries of anthropology. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) state that, in addition to its extensive application in anthropological research:

‘ .....ethnography has been adopted more recently as a useful methodology in cultural studies, literary theory, folklore, woman’s studies, nursing, law, planning and even industrial engineering’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 190)

This use of the methodology in industrial and, what they describe as non-academic or applied research, is acknowledged by Wellin and Fine (2002). Their argument that the role of ethnography is closely associated with an ongoing debate among

those who see a clear distinction between applied research and basic [or academic] research, may go some way to explain the relative rarity of published examples of interpretive ethnographic methodology being adopted for a management research topic, carried out within an organisation, by an insider. Although they quote examples of what they term industrial ethnography, carried out over relatively recent years by independent researchers, that is independent from the organisation they are researching, they do not acknowledge the application of ethnography within a research and social situation represented by my research. Some industrial work with significant general management content has been carried out in the USA (Fetterman 1998).

They were clearly outsiders to the organisations in question and where carrying out research within management cultures of which they were not and never would be an integral part. In recent years there have been moves to adopt ethnography as the preferred research methodology for some social research conducted within commercial organisations. There are particular examples, in organisations where marketing has a high profile and sales to specific and targeted customers are seen as an essential element. An example of this trend is the work of Desai (2004), the founder of Turnstone, a qualitative research organisation specialising in commercial research within marketing led organisations. Desai not only provides the research services, but also appears to run training courses for organisations who wish to carry out their own insider ethnographically based research.

Edwards (1999) has outlined the advantages of insider ethnographic research. His argument is focused on what he sees as the clear advantages of a knowledgeable and engaged member of the organisational community carrying out the research project using ethnographic principles. Edwards's robust promotion of insider research activity appears as one of the first publicly stated academic acceptances of the advantages of a fully engaged member of a community researching aspects of



that community's life and producing findings valid and acceptable to the academic world.

In my research I am the insider, in a particular situation within the organisation, carrying out research in which I play a distinct role. Rather than undermining an ethnographic methodological stance, I argue that this strengthens the case for its use. Wengraf (2001) appears to hold that some ethnographic research can be too external, leading to what he terms at one point in his book 'evaluative subjectivity' (Wengraf 2001, p. 347). I take this to mean that the danger lies in making subjective evaluations and deductions with insufficient and incomplete evidence due to the distance of the researcher from that being researched, or at least with an incomplete knowledge and appreciation of the social context for the research. The insider approach largely removes this threat to validity.

#### **4.2 Reflections on Interpretive Ethnographic in Action.**

'Ethnography is crucially a multimethod form of research' (Banister et al 2002, p.35). An ethnography approach still allows the researcher the option of using both qualitative and quantitative methods, choice being the preserve of the researcher in justifying his/her methods in the light of the research topic and research questions. How does this translate into choices for this researcher? My view on the processes involved is as follows. The researcher is telling a story about activity [life, or an aspect of life] within a particular social context or environment. At the very start of the research, the researcher needs to understand the basic rules that govern the social setting and the various contexts and overlapping dynamics at work. Only then can the researcher make a value judgment as to how best to obtain data and what data is available.

Observation forms a crucial element in data gathering. In seeking the very particular view the researcher is immersed in the research and in the environment of the research context. In this total engagement, observation, and the field notes that flow from reflection on the observations, provide the essential framework upon which the rest of the data builds. Singh and Dickson (2003) place observation into the ethnographic experience succinctly:

‘Observation as participant is undertaken by a researcher included in but on the fringe of the activity, who seeks understanding through similarity of experience without being a real participant’ (Singh and Dickson 2003, p. 122).

They go on to state:

‘The researcher can be seen as the instrument through which the data are observed, interpreted and transformed into an ethnographic account’ (Singh and Dickson 2003, p. 121).

Atkinson et al (2002) stress the place and importance of observation to the ethnographic approach as being a key characteristic. Pollner and Emerson (2002) also support the need in ethnographic terms for a strong participant observation, which supports my own view that this is an essential and logical first step.

In my view therefore the first steps must involve observation and, if they are available, document/text investigation. This early data can then be compared and contrasted with the literature to see if any patterns emerge that will inform the further choice of method and reflected upon in the light of the researcher’s past experience. The next step will involve direct interaction with the individuals who make up the social setting. This is likely to be accomplished by any one or more of: interviews, focus groups, other meetings, conversations and perhaps questionnaires.

Observation does not stop, but rather is informed and possibly adapted by the other methods employed. The research report, the story, will flow as the research progresses. Ethnographic texts often start with observation as the ‘entry method’, the ‘best ticket into the community’ (Fetterman 1998, p.33) and ‘it [*observation*] is designed to orient the researcher, at least superficially, to places, people, social interaction.....’ (Schensul et al 1999, p.87).

One may ask why, as the researcher in this instance is already part of the organisation in question, time should be spent on observation for ‘orientation’. Turnbull-James and Arroba (2005), when articulating their interpretation of what they term ‘reading and carrying’, highlight the importance of taking time when first joining an organisation, of understanding the organisational system and gaining familiarity with the new system. This is equally true of the new researcher, however familiar that person is with the organisation as a practitioner. Observation is therefore an essential element in orientating the researcher, not just from being a part of the social fabric and a management practitioner, but into a true researcher. This is as important a process as for any ethnographer going into a situation outside his or hers previous experience. The importance of this process is very perceptively explained by Schensul et al:

‘Ethnographic research is never autobiographical. It requires that the researcher separate stereotypes, opinions and judgments from accurate observation and effective recording of words, meanings and opinions of research participants’ (Schensul et al 1999, p. 72).

The Cycle One research period is the first step in informing and orienting. The ongoing research process, although termed Cycle Two and Three, is in fact a continuous process and did not exclude further observation and orientation, this is also continuous.

I subscribe to Fetterman's comment that:

'the interview is the ethnographer's most important data gathering techniques. Interviews explain and put into context what the ethnographer sees and experiences' (Fetterman 1998, p.37).

This view is strongly supported by Handwerker, 'all ethnographic research starts by collecting data from one person' (2001, p.12). He argues that to, as he puts it, 'construct the story', one must move from person to person, building data as one goes along. Bernard (1998) is certainly more specific in stating that:

'...depending on how familiar you [the researcher] are with the topic and informants, begin with unstructured and semi-structured interviews and progress to more structured ones' (Bernard 1998, p. 367)

The statement by Rubin and Rubin (1995) also supports this view:

'Qualitative interviewing is appropriate when the purpose of the research is to unravel complicated relationships and slowly evolving events. It is also suitable when you want to learn how present situations resulted from past decisions or incidents.' (Rubin, Rubin 1995, p.26).

Banister et al (2002) lend their support when they list the normally accepted sequential steps of ethnographic research when they state that the researcher:

1. Makes observations and draw inferences
  2. Ask people questions
  3. Construct a working hypotheses
  4. Act on it
- (Banister et al 2002, p.35)

I strongly subscribe to the opinion that ethnography should: 'provides rich and contextualized understandings of work, workplaces and occupations through observation, participation and immersion....' (Smith 2002, cited in Atkinson et al 2002, p. 220).

In drawing conclusions on both the methodology and on the data analysis it is important to consider and reflect from two other, different perspectives:

1. What do I expect to gain as a researcher from the use of the methodology?
2. What may others, including the organisation, gain from the use of the methodology as opposed to the research findings themselves?

I am making a distinction here between asking the two questions of the research itself, in terms of the findings and conclusions and the application and practice of interpretive ethnography.

In many ways the two can be answered together. I have reflected upon my reasons for choosing interpretive ethnography as an appropriate methodology and why it appears to me to be such a powerful tool. In making my decision, I am to a great extent driven by what I believed to be the normal actions of a CEO, or leader of any organisation, especially one new in post.

It is axiomatic that any Chief Executive/Managing Director/Principal Manger, is tasked with a number of responsibilities which clearly require that person to acquire and constantly update an in-depth knowledge of the organisation concerned. This knowledge must be obtained by the person concerned at the earliest opportunity and thereafter updated by a continuous process of monitoring, audit, evaluation and analysis. In most organisations a new principal manager will go on to use this background knowledge to shape the present and future of the organisation, in cultural change management, in strategic planning and in decision making. This acquiring of knowledge is therefore a very fundamental part of being a CEO/MD/Principal Manager and is at the core of managing any organisation.

Naturally, newly installed managers are likely to approach this in very different ways, especially with respect to very large organisations such as global public companies. However one can reflect that the underlying process should be, if not identical then very similar.

A large part of the process requires the person concerned to understand and appreciate the social framework and characteristics of the organisation, to observe and understand its customs and practices and to observe and reflect upon the major influencers and personalities and their interactions. In doing this, the person is gathering data and analysing it according to the business and organisational requirements at that time, seen through that person's eyes and with that person's perspective, rather than as an academic researcher. However, the process should be largely the same, even if the reflection differs according to the perspective and 'world view' of the person involved. The argument therefore is that an effective Chief Executive is by definition an insider ethnographer and must be so in order to effectively fulfil the responsibilities and requirements of the role.

Although this may be a normal activity of a CEO, I doubt many apply the process with the vigour and robustness of a researcher, regardless of the fact that to do so is likely to make the process more efficient and effective. It is certainly true to say that, although in previous times I was undertaking just the processes outlined above, I was not doing so with the rigour of an academic researcher, but more as an experienced manager, who was using only that past experience as the framework for observation and analysis. This manifested itself in a certain lack of coherent internal argument during the analysis. There was little or no literature review, there was little in the way of internal, balanced debate and argument. There was little of consciously making a case before coming to conclusions. 'Flying by the seat of one's pants' is the phrase that readily comes to mind, although that is probably unfair to the efficacy of the process. It was certainly

naturally driven, gaining validity through past experience, comparisons and past successes.

Due to the requirements of my doctoral research I have been placed in the position of reevaluating my technique and methods over a much wider range of management activities than just the inter group issues. Inevitably, observing and recording on issue of social context, individual characteristics, decision frameworks, colleague interactions and intra, as opposed to inter, group dynamics, has made me view the organisation through the eyes of the researcher as well as the CEO. The result will be a more detached assessment and analysis of what I am seeing, rather than an involved and instinctive approach. I could categorise this as a more 'scientifically' based approach, but is more correctly described as a less emotional, less instinctive and more rationally based. For example, use of the accepted methods of qualitative data analysis is relatively new to me in dealing with my every day issues and responsibilities. Coding data in order to bring out the themes is certainly a new approach and can be adapted to any number of management situations unconnected with academic research.

I will I hope gain as both a researcher and as a CEO by undertaking this journey. My methods in terms of business analysis will have a clearer form, as will my verbal and written communication. The sharing of data with other managers will be clearer and more structured as a result and arguments for action more robust and valid. I hope that the organisation will gain by its CEO undertaking what is a continuous audit and in the in-depth analysis and reflection in areas likely to improve efficacy, for example, in the understanding of the workings of groups and their relationships. The sharing of the research journey with colleagues is an important part of the process and the hope is that those rigours of academic research that enhance management practice are communicated to, and understood by others and applied in the same way. It is certainly hoped that on completion of

the research, a wide distribution of the methodology and methods employed and their applicability to management practice, as well as the actual findings, will be of some value.

### **4.3 Consideration of Ontology and Epistemology**

Implicit throughout this thesis are reflections and indications of both my ontological and my epistemological stances. In recording and reflecting on my research, the signposts for both will be detailed, but not necessarily explicitly stated at those points. At this stage in the thesis there is therefore a need to be more explicit in order to provide the ontological and epistemological framework for my approach, deductions, reflections, opinions and conclusions.

As a bold statement I find it impossible to believe in any absolutes, or in a reality that is itself absolute in time and space. In social situations ‘facts’ are at best fluid, and observations, and the reflections and deductions that are drawn from observational research, are seen through the eyes of the observer and processed by that observer according to a wide and extensive variety of impacting drivers; emotions, experiences, skills, existing knowledge, biases, character traits, social interactions, mobility, relationship dynamics, existing pressures, past pressures; even down to career, potential, place, processing skills, awareness. The ability to deduce and reflect are clearly impacted by these and many other influences and so ‘truth’ and ‘reality’, become highly subjective and highly individualistic and are time and place dependant and related. The truth, facts and reality seen by one individual, at one time and place will not be the same truth, facts and reality for another individual at another time and place, or indeed at the original time and place. I focus on my own research claims and seek no fundamental truths, as these do not exist, nor do I try to explain my research findings as a contribution to the



understanding of what is real in the management world, as that absolute reality does not exist. My reflections on self that follow [page 105] can be considered in the light of this paragraph. I am a product of my life and my time. It follows that my research, and the reflections, deductions and conclusions that flow from it, are also a product of my life and my time.

In answering the question, ‘why should my research be taken as serious, robust and valid’, the question is answered by reference to two areas. The first is my position as an experienced, management practitioner with arguably, a reasonable track record of success in managing organisations at a senior level. In my reflections, I naturally draw on my experience in many organisations of various kinds. One cannot reflect from an experience vacuum and one is naturally influenced, both positively and negatively, by one’s own lifetime experience. The second area is the robustness of the research process. I have adopted what I believe to be a highly effective and widely accepted methodology that not only fits well with my own belief system, but provides a framework for data collection and analysis that informs the research and signposts the validity of the reflections, deductions and conclusions.

Although previously described as the quintessential qualitative methodology (Taylor 2002), ethnography can span the whole range of methodologies, from quantitative to qualitative, and can incorporate both in one research project, if that is the approach chosen by the researcher. Ethnographers can therefore adopt [or more properly believe in] many epistemological stances. The acquiring of knowledge, tacit or formal and by whatever mechanism is in its turn individualistic. An example in respect to tacit knowledge illustrates the point. One can read many published work on the art and practicalities of being at war, in battle. Many works deal with tactics, fighting techniques, methods of combat and the battlefield in all its complexity. Tacit knowledge based just on these published

works has its place and is valid, however, one could reasonably reflect that the knowledge of those subjects gained on the field of battle by one intimately involved in combat, are very likely to be of a different order, contain different perspectives and perhaps lead to different reflections, conclusions, even to a different understanding and therefore a different knowledge base. The one is no more or less valid and robust than the other. Many would argue that both are required for a comprehensive knowledge of the subject, hence the establishment of Staff College courses in the Military. I would argue that they are different elements of knowledge, acquired in totally different ways about the same general subject, and equally valuable to the academics and practitioners of war and battle.

All knowledge is of itself a function of time and place, even within organisations. A knowledge base held by an individual, a group of individuals or an organisation, ebbs and flows, changes and is modified, is lost, acquired, moulded, interpreted as time and people change, live their lives and are more or less involved or engaged. Knowledge is also a function of understanding and understanding is likely to be influenced by a myriad of cognitive and behavioural drivers, characteristics and abilities. In a comment on Plato's proposition that knowledge is a subset of that which is both truth and believed (Stanford 2006), I would suggest that knowledge is that which is believed at that time and place. It is also in my view a time limited and environmentally sensitive 'commodity'. Knowledge could be said to be related to its social context and its time. Its usefulness, impact and visibility may change rapidly, or slowly, as circumstances, social and belief systems change. It would therefore rarely have an absolute quality and it would be unwise for it ever to be considered as absolute in whatever field. It flows from this that I am more comfortable to adopt qualitative methodologies that are, in my view, more likely to place time, space and social context at the forefront of knowledge and learning.

#### 4.4 Self

In my reflections I am not only asking the question ‘what do I see?’, but more ‘why do I see it this way?’ Equally, I ask myself not just ‘what am I thinking about this?’ but also ‘why am I thinking this way?’ This can be encapsulated in the phrase ‘what do I think makes me see the data as I do?’ In very many ways the power of ethnography lies in the opportunities given for reflection, primarily during and following observation. Equally, it provides the opportunity to introduce ‘self’ into the data gathering, the analysis and the story telling. This is an essential element in my view as immersion requires some element of biographical analysis. Additionally, the power of observation lies in the way that the observer sees what is around him/her and how those images and that data is processed and reflected upon. Whilst this may be interpretive ethnography’s great power, it is also its most contentious element in terms of validity and the robustness of the analysis.

‘There is by no means a taken for granted consensus over the appropriate amount of self-revelation and reflexivity that should appear in the ethnographic monograph proper. The legitimating of autobiographical ethnography continues to be fraught.’ (Coffey 1999, p. 18)

In her work ‘The Ethnographic Self’, Amanda Coffey (1999) tackles these issues directly and provides compelling, if not universally accepted arguments for the importance of ‘self’ in qualitative research activity. I support her view that biographical analysis is a necessary element of the ethnographic story telling. As she states, while ‘observing, reconstructing and retelling of people’s lives’ we are ‘simultaneously involved in biographical work’ (Coffey 1999, p. 115). This provides a framework of understanding for the reader in having some insight into how the world is perceived by the researcher. This presupposes that any researcher is heavily influenced by ‘self’. Certainly in my view qualitative research and analysis cannot be distanced to any great degree from the self.

Interpretive analysis is by its very nature a commentary through the eyes and brain of an individual, with all the biases, views, prejudices, preconceptions, cultural biases, that that individual consciously and unconsciously brings into the interpretation.

Clearly learning takes place in many different ways, but observation of the world and immediate environment, analysing what we see, interpreting what we see, hear and read and making sense of it from our own very personal perspective, all of this action makes us 'learn' and to some extent makes us what we are and provides the frame of reference we use to make sense of the world around us as we move through our lives.

I have always tried to develop the reflective side of my character. I am profoundly aware that, like everyone else, I change in very subtle ways as time goes on and as I experience life, absorb data from the world around me and interact with others within and without my immediate work, family and friends. In looking back I can recognise times in the lifelong learning process that have shaped how I see the world. The realisation at the age of around 10 years that I wanted to be at the head of my group and that to do that meant absorbing the learning that was being presented to me in a way that made examinations a race against others that I was determined to win. The first 10 years of my military life, where I was shaped by the military to perform as an efficient cog in the military machine and at the same time being presented with ways to improve my chances of rising above the average and into more and greater command positions. The excitement and satisfaction of command, however big or small, the ability to make decisions, being a professional, in my mind at least, one of the best among the very best, part of an elite. Becoming a leader and a manager and recognising for the first time that I had some skills and talents in that direction that had been dormant for the first years of my life. The pride and satisfaction of that, whilst being part of a highly

regimented organisation that prized leadership above intelligence and courage above the accumulation of knowledge. At the age of 40, the wish to control my own destiny, but not lose the elite nature of military life, [as I and others within that environment perceived it], or my ability and opportunity to lead and command. At the same time the wish to understand why I did the things that I did in leadership, management and decision making. ‘What are the real answers behind what is happening to me and how I perform in my working life?’ The realisation that a post graduate learning did not provide as many answers as I had perhaps hoped. The degree, when it came, was a way of progressing in the business and management world as I had in the military world. It did not say to me that I had all the required additional knowledge and skills and it clearly did not say a great deal about my business skills to prospective employers. It was a right of passage. The next few years were all about adaption and leading within the business world, putting my own reputation and career on the line time and time again as I found my way through the management maze. I felt myself more than fully equipped to manage organisations, as Managing Director or Chief Executive, still one of an elite, but still with no firm academic understanding to my skills in these fields. Above all was the need to more fully understand what was underpinning my management and leadership style and why it worked, or did not work, but at the same time a real thirst for knowledge.

Perhaps at the end of the day that is what has always driven me in everything that I do. Perhaps an unattractive combination of driving ambition, jealousy of others in higher/better positions and perhaps even an underlying under confidence. Life has always seemed to be a play in which for the most part I was acting a part; slightly disconnected would be an apt phrase. To walk into a room to make a presentation in front of hundreds and put on the right face, act the right part, put on the right performance for that situation, acting the stereotypical CEO, whilst understanding that actually it was largely an impersonation rather than a projection. Wanting the position and the power, but not for power’s sake, but for the freedom it brings to

manage my life and influence positively those around me, and to make decisions, always to make decisions. I can never feel anything but uncomfortable if someone else is making decisions that directly impact on me. As I get older, the range of that feeling increases; from family to employer, to employees, to local and regional organisations, to trade bodies to national government. There are perhaps control issues here, which I am aware of as a character trait and that this can be both a positive and a negative, but arguably a lot more of a negative when I am a researcher. This therefore reflects upon the ethics of carrying out ethnographic research and becomes a larger issue. Through this reflection I am aware of it and can counter it by consciously introducing counterbalances, details of which I have included under 'Ethics' (page 129).

Is ethnography just a comment on the play, being the play's critic, ready to write the piece in the local paper? It really feels like it on many occasions. What does this tell me about my view of the world? Perhaps it manifests itself in a difficulty in understanding the motivation of others who do not share my own outlook on life. It is difficult to understand and appreciate that others are driven in different ways, have different objectives to their lives and measure their success in life by using a different matrix. That indeed many are not driven at all. However, the fact that I am aware and reflect upon this and can ask myself the right questions during the research process is a positive. How I interact within and between the two groups that I am researching is conditioned to a large degree by me as an individual. It tells me that I do not see the world in metaphors and I will tend to see things in stark terms. I must guard against black and white descriptions, of coming to conclusions too soon. Also, of not enough reflection out of my comfort zone, of realising that I am not dealing in absolutes, but in shades of meaning and not making decisions and statements on insufficient data, simply to get convenient closure. This is a military and even a business necessity on occasions, but is a lot less appropriate to academic research.

## 4.5 Small Groups and My Methodology

Decision making in group settings deals with individuals making judgments based upon a number of criteria and under a number of influences. Some are procedural and transparent in nature, for example, in the use of accepted and tried decision making methodologies and models. Others are cognitive and deal with matters of human, individual interaction, values, perception, influence, bias, group interaction, personal motivation, ability, organisational culture and a number of other psychological issues surrounding human decision making and choice selection. I begin from the viewpoint that, in most situations, the procedural elements are less important; less used and has less impact on the decision process than do the cognitive and psychological. My research is concerned with the relationship influences upon group activity in decision making. The work of many researchers, recently published in this field, is predominately based upon highly structured and controlled laboratory experiments. This view is supported by Arrow, McGrath and Berdahl (2000), who, in a paragraph in their work on small groups, argue that limitations exist in the body of knowledge due to the

‘unintended but inevitable consequences of the dominant methodological paradigm within which almost all of that work [group research] has been done and of the underlying conceptual paradigm to which that methodology is tied.’ (Arrow, McGrath and Berdahl 2000, p.25).

Small group research has, in their view and it is a view that I wholly support, been dominated by the positivist-reductionist-analytic perspective paradigm. This empirically based approach, whilst adding an enormous amount to our knowledge of how groups function, does not and cannot show the whole picture.

Groups are dynamic, living entities that derive their power and their characteristics from the psychology and personality of their members. These elements are rarely obvious and apparent to the casual observer and are readily influenced by certain methodologies designed to study them. The research methodology chosen must recognise these issues and the limitations they impose. The reason that I believe that action research and a qualitative approach are ideally suited to the subject, and to understanding, is precisely because of the researcher's direct involvement in the process.

As stated by Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe (2003), although it is possible to conduct action research in a positivist way the approach is alien to many of the underlying fundamentals of positivism. In pursuing the aims of my research I am dealing with people's perceptions, their understanding and their construction of reality, in which I have a clear interest and involvement, therefore a positivist approach is less appropriate. My approach is entirely consistent with my beliefs of how management works, in that, it is less to do with procedure and process and more to do with the individual and human interaction. The reality for me is that the cognitive and the psychological neither determine outcomes, not the process, the rule, the procedure nor, in some notable cases the law, for example, the Enron organisation in the USA in 2000. Understanding oneself; ones motives, bias, prejudice, agendas, fears, insecurities, ambitions, strengths; enables one to manage others more effectively and recognise these issues in others. Why otherwise has so much emphasis put upon the concept of leadership by academia and others if only to recognise that human issues, both positive and negative, are at the heart of management and not process and procedure? A quantitative methodology is therefore not appropriate, as it would be unlikely to reveal answers, merely raise further questions. This is amply demonstrated by the recent literature on group dynamics, detailed in the literature review, which relies heavily upon the set experiment, narrowing the range of conclusions that can be drawn from the work.



## 4.6 Data Collection and Analysis

In many ways, data gathering began on the first day that I walked into my new office and began to assess the organisation that I had joined and the nature and scale of the tasks ahead of me. In walks around the organisation in those first weeks and months, talking to staff, assessing their attitudes and how they saw and interacted with the working world around them, one forms an impression of the social structure underlying the organisation [pages 16 to 19]. One also assesses the power bases in the organisation and how information flows and is used to form opinion, influence others and how decision making takes place. This is of course observation and reflection and formed the basis of my optioning with regard to an appropriate methodology and choice of methods for my further and more formal research.

The qualitative methodology offers a range of options for generating data, consistent with the epistemological position held by the researcher and outlined on pages 102. In evaluating the options and choices open to me the link between the source of the data and the method of data generation was a key element. In deciding the methods to be adopted I considered several options based upon a number of questions posed by Mason (2002) regarding the nature of research. The key issue has been to articulate and categorise my approach in such a way that the appropriateness of the method(s) chosen will be clear. Individuals are my primary data source. Understanding their individual and collective understandings and reasoning processes is fundamental, as is my involvement and immersion in the processes being researched.

My first position is that of observer and participant. It would have been entirely legitimate to base the whole of my research on these two as methods of data

collection. However, I felt that I was unlikely to be able to answer my research questions by observation alone. I had to provide the opportunity to examine specific elements in the body of knowledge on inter and intra group decision activity and also analyse the processes in respect to a known situation where I was already aware of the parameters and boundaries. Observation alone could not achieve these requirements. This element of the data is best collected by interview and that this is a legitimate and valid method to adopt in gathering evidence and increasing knowledge and understanding. In my view, the only way to gain understanding and gather meaningful data with regard to people's perception of the world in which they are operating and their place within it, is to interact with them directly. Meaningful data can only be achieved by detailed, pre interview preparation and planning and an appreciation of the limitations of the interview method. In order to understand I had to speak and interact with my colleagues, in a way that both generated data and gathered data. The qualitative interview therefore provided the most appropriate method of approach and was also intended to draw upon my experience as a manager. Certainly it may have been appropriate to supplement the interview approach with complementary methods, such as questionnaires, cognitive mapping and focus groups and I did not restrict my thinking at the planning stage. Decisions regarding complementary methods would be made in reflection, following the initial data collection and analysis during the research. Rubin and Rubin (1995), in explaining the appropriateness of a particular research purpose to qualitative interviewing, support the view that qualitative interviewing is the appropriate approach method for investigating complex relationships and events.

The interview appeared therefore a very appropriate method to employ in the pursuance of my research aim. Interviews can be categorised as being unstructured or semi-structured [loose structure] (Mason 2002), (Wengraf 2001), (Rubin and Rubin 1995) but are normally, and in my case were, a balance between the two. I discounted fully structured interviews as being inflexible and not

providing the framework for asking additional questions dependent on what was learnt or became apparent during the interview process. Additionally, my interviews were, in the categories suggested by Rubin and Rubin (1995), a combination of cultural in nature, that is they explored issues such as shared understandings, rules of behaviour and values; topical, exploring particular processes; oral histories, exploring a particular incident [decision making event] and evaluation, the opinion of those interviewed regarding success and failure of the decision making process.

I planned for the initial set of interviews to be in two parts, both parts to be carried out at the same interview. The first part was seeking to explore the general issues surrounding the decision making process as seen by that particular individual. This element was initially planned to be largely unstructured. For the second part of the interview, which followed directly on from the first part and at the same interview session, I selected a particular decision event, the decision to install an automatic ship mooring system onto a new constructed ferry berth. Selecting an event of this kind gives context to the interview answers and provides the framework for consistency across the range of interviews, that is, all of the participants are aware of it and were involved in some way in the decision making.

Selection of the decision event was based on its relative complexity, its risk factors and its perceived importance to the organisation. The installation has measurable consequences in terms of implementation. A range of options were available, that were not necessary clear at the onset of the advisory group's work and it required extensive information gathering. It required a recommendation that had boundaries that may not have been apparent to the Decision Group. Finally, the requirement for a decision was presented to the Decision Group, [the Board], both in writing and verbally, by one of the advisory group, in this case one of the Directors interviewed. I considered a number of decision events before deciding

on the automatic moorings. The value of this particular event lay in it being quite current. The final decision was made by the organisation in May 2003, to be fully commissioned in mid 2006, with the final evaluation taking place in early 2008, therefore giving an interesting level of uncertainty to the decision. In addition, for Cycle Two of the research, the event was fresh in the minds of those participating, with ongoing issues and evaluations in progress over a number of years. This event therefore provided an acceptable vehicle for research.

The second part of the interviews was planned to be semi-structured and deal largely, but again not exclusively, with oral histories and evaluation. In planning the interviews I was aiming for a semi-structured approach. My concern was ensuring that I would indeed gather data that was rich and relevant. I therefore produced a question guide [attached as Appendix A] to aid the interviews. These questions could be used to bring a semi-structured interview back on track from various positions without influencing the flow of the interview or introducing constraints upon the interviewee. It was not my intention to ask each interviewee the same questions or to follow the list of tracking questions regardless of the data I was gathering. Rather, the guiding questions allowed me to direct the flow of information I was receiving should that become necessary.

The setting for the interviews was important. I did not want to use my regular office as that clearly had connections with the normal business of the organisation and other interviews that I had carried out, under a variety of circumstances, with the participants. I wanted a relatively neutral venue, comfortable and where we would not be disturbed or distracted. I chose the head office lounge area, a comfortably furnished but private location, without telephones or visual distractions. I planned to complete the interviews for each cycle of research over a two week period thereby allowing myself sufficient time for reflection, but keeping the interviews relatively closely spaced so that themes arising could be explored

whilst still fresh in my mind. I managed to keep to this timetable. This kept the information obtained from each interview fresh in my mind for the following interviews, whilst giving me the opportunity to reflect and take notes between meetings. The interviews were recorded using a portable, digital recorder and a full size audio tape recorder and then fully transcribed for analysis.

Throughout the interviews I received positive support from my colleagues. They were all forthcoming in their comments and open and analytical in their responses to my questions. It was surprising, but encouraging, that each participant remarked that they had learnt a great deal during the interview and would reflect on their involvement. Equally surprising was the comment made by two of the three in Cycle One, that they were not sure that they had enjoyed the process of discovery that they reported had taken place. This they put down to feeling that they were facing up directly to issues that impacted their very competence as managers and having to analyse that which made them important members of the management team. In addition, I felt sure that they were feeling more so as they could not disassociate the researcher from the CEO, a point referred to in Ethical Considerations [page 129].

#### **4.7 Research Structure**

The research is designed around three cycles of data gathering and analysis. The first cycle of research, Cycle One, concentrates on the Advisor Group, Cycle Two on the Decision Group and Cycle Three on a combination of the two groups.

The Advisor Group seemed a natural starting point as I believed that the birth of many decision events happened in and around those loose groups. I selected as

colleagues for this Cycle One members of the organisation's senior management team that I understood had carried out an advisory group function. In addition, part of the investigative process would involve the research of a particular decision event which would include members from this grouping. The title of 'group' in this case can be misleading, as the persons in question change as the decision requirements change. For example, for an engineering based decision the involvement of engineers may be necessary, but may not be so necessary for a purely financial or administrative decision that does not have an engineering element. This group is therefore ever changing. The group will almost always have a sponsor or lead manager, who is likely to be a director and may sponsor a number of groups over time. Some members of the groups, regardless of subject, were permanently involved, this made the selection of interviewees straight forward as I chose those who were always involved in this advisory role.

It is particularly important in my view to interview all of the main group players for one particular event. This guards against introducing bias to the data by selection, thereby removing a dynamic or relationship that may be significant. The pool that I was drawing on was not large, no more than 12, by no means all of whom are involved in advisory group activity of this kind.

The choice as my colleagues for the first cycle, of two of the Directors, plus two of the more senior Heads of Department, was therefore dictated by the decision event and by their continuous involvement within the organisation, in Advisor Group activity. In terms of group and individual decision making these persons were always involved in the processes. They are all experienced managers with varying degrees of balance in their careers between highly specialist training and exposure and general management training and exposure. In addition, as previously stated, I knew that all of them had been part of a loose grouping involved in the decision, taken in late 2003 and in the process of implementation in 2004, to install

automatic moorings on two of the new ship berths being constructed in the Port of Dover. Although not the only decision event that this group had been involved with, it was certainly the most expensive and the most challenging technically that they had dealt with for a number of years and with the present Decision Group membership.

For the Cycle Two interviews I made no true selection, but interviewed all members of that group, bar two who were not available due to illness. The structure of the interviews was the same as that for Cycle One and I used the identical decision event.

The Cycle Three research was predicated on a set of unusual [in terms of inter group membership and change] circumstances, that provided the opportunity to enrich the data already obtained earlier. Changes in membership had happened in both Decision Group and Advisor Group. The ones within the Decision Group were more significant. The new members of that group were new to the organisation as a whole and did not have any prior relationship with other group members and with the senior management team. They had also been selected to serve in the group using a different set of criteria than previous and sitting members, more emphasis being placed by the Chairman on personality and 'fit', than on outright qualifications and industry experience. This decision had been taken following discussion of this research with the Chairman of the Board.

The rationale for the semi-structured interview carried out in Cycles One and Two was, in my view, still valid for Cycle Three. In addition, as the new members had attended at least one Board Meeting, I was able to assess my data in the light of admittedly limited, knowledge of them at a group level.

The Advisor Group I approached in a slightly different way. I carried out one informal, unstructured interview with the one other person who, since late 2005, sat on both the Decision Group and the Advisor Group. However, in order to achieve a different data gathering environment with those I had interviewed previously and to give the opportunity to hear a different emphasis on the data, I chose to carry out a group discussion of Advisor Group members.

My hope was that group conversation and interaction would introduce new perspectives. Willig (2004) characterises the strength of this type of focus group as: 'its ability to mobilize participants to respond to and comment on one another's contributions' (Willig 2004, p. 29). She goes on to state that, in this type of group: 'statements are challenged, extended, developed, undermined or qualified in ways that generate rich data for the researcher' (Willig 2004, p. 29). O'Reilly speaks of the 'creativity' of focus groups: 'ideas emerge and are introduced that the interviewer might not have considered' (O'Reilly 2005, p. 133). While these statements are generally supported by Easterby-Smith et al (2003), they do draw attention to the problems of the focus group where: 'social pressures can condition the responses gained and it may well be that people are not willing to air their views publicly.' (Easterby-Smith et al 2003, p. 106). Notwithstanding this last opinion, which because of my position within the organisation I was well aware of, I decided that the advantages outweighed the possible problems. The reason I took this view lay in the character of the participants. I was dealing with people of strong personality, secure in their place in the social order. Their security also stems from their acknowledged expertise and long service, coupled with their positions within the organisational hierarchy. I was therefore comfortable with proceeding in the hope of gaining richer data than is possible from just the focus group approach.



In this discussion group, I brought together the Directors, those that attended all of the Decision Group meetings but were not members of that group; the two executives who sat on both groups and the Company Secretary, who, while not a member of either group, sat in a particularly sensitive position in relation to both and attended all meetings. Continued observation was an integral part of my approach and regular field notes helped to maintain the social framework for my reflection on the data that I was gathering. This was particularly important during the coding process using MAXqda.

In approaching the focus group I was reminded of the proposition proposed by Janesick et al (2003), of ethnography as a piece of dance choreography. In this, Janesick makes the observation that:

‘The role of the qualitative researcher, like that of the dancer or the choreographer, demands presence, an attention to detail and a powerful use of the researcher’s own mind and body in analysis and interpretation of the data’ (Janesick et al 2003. p. 63).

Although Janesick et al speak of analysis and interpretation, the idea of the ethnographer as a choreographer suggests a level of manipulation that concerned me, especially with regard to the focus group. If I was to be the choreographer of a focus group of individual managers who looked to me as not only the researcher but also as their management leader, I would surely be tainting the data that I collected. The idea of the choreographer is to mould the dance sequence in a way that accords with that person’s emotions and interpretation. This issue was reinforced in my own mind at the 2<sup>nd</sup> ROCOLA Doctoral Conference (Trento, Italy April 2006), when the issue of my status as both insider ethnographer and CEO was challenged, in terms of my possible negative impact on any data collected from colleagues. At the conference I was challenged quite forcibly by an experienced academic, who argued that no matter what precautions I took my data would always be tainted by my position within the organisation. I did not and do

not accept this argument. For the reasons detailed previously, I have taken reasonable and positive precautions against possible contamination. I believe the data to be valid and robust and it is for others, based upon my defense of my research methodology and methods, to decide its acceptability. I refuse to believe that a researcher in my position is debarred by virtue of that position from ever making a worthy research contribution using his/her own organisation as a research vehicle and a source of data. If that were to be the case, a great deal of valuable, worthy and valid research, emanating from various management schools world wide would be equally tainted, as this is often based upon data derived from their student's home organisations.

In the focus group I therefore laid down no rules, nor did I share with the members of the group the subjects I would like them to discuss. They were already aware of my areas of interest from previous briefings, so I was content to let the discussion develop and then to ask questions of the group as time went by. I felt that this approach militated against any undue influence that I was exerting on the group. If this was indeed choreography, then it was in the nature of free expression rather than having a form and structure imposed from the researcher.

#### **4.8 Gathering the Data – Working with and in the Organisation**

The first few months for any newly appointed senior manager, and most especially the CEO, can be quite a lonely and forbidding time. You do not know anyone; you have no support systems in place, bar a very brief meeting with your new Board. You are usually tasked with some demanding objectives by your employers, who are generally expecting change and an improvement in fortunes from your predecessor, almost regardless of how successful he or she has been. You are

generally greeted with wary but polite suspicion and your every utterance is studied for signs of how it will impact individuals.

This arrival was for me one of at least 4 that I had made in the preceding 15 years so I was not unfamiliar with the feelings that such a situation engenders. I was excited by the prospects ahead of me, acutely aware that I was being studied by the organisation's people as much as I was doing the research and studying and also aware that I was going to be the agent for substantial change as I formed my strategic vision. The senior team, those that staff the advisor groupings, had perhaps the most to be suspicious about. To them would fall the major task of carrying out any of the changes I introduced, and they were clearly looking to see what my overall approach to them and to the organisation would be.

I can make little distinction between my arrival at the Port Company and formally beginning my research into group issues. The two were separated officially by 12 months, but for me they were virtually continuous. Although colleagues knew that I was carrying out academic study, they appeared to make no distinction themselves between me asking for help and cooperation in my research and my normal role in intelligence gathering. It was certainly never a matter for comment between us. The research process did have one very distinct effect on my behaviour in that, when attending meetings of the Board, I found myself analysing and reflecting on any behavioural elements that I observed, that were impacting the inter group relationship. Following any conflict within the meetings, instead of dismissing it as an inevitable consequence of group working, I tried to identify any root cause and the possible remedies to avoid a repetition. This became more pronounced in me as the research progressed and the data was interpreted and categorised.

Over a period of months, and as changes were implemented and my own strategic plans for the organisation were communicated and acted upon, my colleagues noticeably settled into a stable relationship with me. They became naturally more open with me in their opinions and ideas and more prepared to question and to challenge, me, the organisation and its direction. This I viewed as a healthy sign and entirely in keeping with past experience of how these things develop. As this happened they appeared in my view to be more transparent as individuals and as managers and it was then much easier to observe their character traits, biases and underlying strengths and weaknesses as the barriers of unfamiliarity fell away. Presumably, at the same time I became more transparent to them and I do consider that an optimum level of trust was established between and amongst us all.

#### **4.10 Interpreting the Data**

I have covered my ontological and epistemological stances on pages 102-104. These form the background and structure for the validity of my interpretation of the data. Little in life is so literal that it can be read across and taken directly as valid data. It requires a deeper reflection and interpretation and the researcher naturally draws on personality, experience and inherent skills and knowledge when undertaking that process. In addition, although the interviews provided the primary source of data, I also include my wider knowledge of the interviewees in the interpretation and the social structure within the organisation. I was conscious of being a participant and an observer of the processes being researched. As such my observational experiences and deductions as well as the qualitative interviews provided additional data.

The interpretive approach is greatly aided by the use of commonly used computer software. I used a computer based module in analysing interview transcripts. The

use of MAXqda in identifying themes, concepts and connections was integral to the analysis. The module allows the researcher to allocate parts of the interview to codes relating to content. The process, as with all interpretive processes, is both subjective and objective. It requires the researcher to allocate codes, for example 'leadership' or 'trust', or 'confidence', according to where he/she thinks the text best fits. In deciding on the coding the researcher inevitably draws upon all of the skills, experience and knowledge, seeking a deeper meaning behind the words in the interview text. Inevitably this is influenced by the researcher's own ontology and epistemology, but is no less valid for that. If the researcher has and retains credibility as an observer [and as an ethnographer, not necessarily a fully objective one] and as a recorder and reasoned thinker, then the coding will have validity within the research context at that time and place. It is therefore the consistent social reality with which I as the researcher view and consider the data that is the challenge. This vital element is supported by Silverman (2001) who makes the point that analysis is not just about methods and techniques, but about reflection and deduction. As an example of this process, attached at Appendix B are the texts for the Cycle One interviews that I coded under the heading of 'Leadership'.

The constant drive for rigour, validity and reliability, in both the research and the analysis of the data, is overlaid by my interpretation of the world in which I am working and researching. In order to avoid pure description or anecdotalism, as Silverman makes clear, the need for comprehensive data treatment and application of the principle of refutability are key.

The context upon which I had imagined Decision Groups were formed was an understanding by the participants that a process was in place, albeit informal, but well understood, by which an Advisor Group or team was formed whose aim was information gathering, option consideration and recommendation for decision action to those charged and responsible within the organisation for making

strategic decisions. I was subsequently disabused of this perception as detailed in my findings. In using MAXqda I was conscious that I was making judgments on what was being said and judgments on what I thought was behind what was being said. For example, if an interviewee was suggesting a situation where members of a group were unsure of what was being proposed, I could code this in a number of ways; under communication, leadership or confidence. What I did do was code under as many separate codes as I believed were applicable and then seek patterns within each code group. This presented a significant challenge; however, the use of the MAXqda programme enabled me to revisit selected text and compare and contrast across interviews in a way that was helpful in avoiding the obvious pitfalls of selected quotes and presumed 'facts'.

In the quoted texts, and as a point of ethics, the interviewees have not been identified personally. Each is allotted a number, 1, 2, 3, 4 etc. The numbers are bracketed on each of the quotes and all relate to the set of interviews undertaken in the same time frame, under that cycle of research.

The handling of the data and its analysis are perhaps the two areas of the research activity where an interpretive ethnographic methodology may substantially differ from that of other methodologies. The reason for this lies in the anthropological roots of the methodology and the interpretive nature of the inquiry. Denzin and Lincoln (2003) explain it in this way:

'Ethnography involves an ongoing attempt to place specific encounters, events and understandings into a fuller, more meaningful context. It is not simply the production of new information or research data' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 165).

LeCompte and Schensul (1999) build on this concept of the methodology and define interpretive ethnographic analysis as:

‘.....reducing data to a story that ethnographers can tell: interpretation tells readers what the story means.’ (LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p.2 ).

They quote Patton (1987) in listing the steps of ethnographic analysis: ‘It brings order to the piles of data an ethnographer has accumulated. It turns the big piles of raw data into smaller piles of crunched or summarized data. It permits the ethnographer to discover patterns and themes in the data and to link them with other patterns and themes. (Patton 1987, cited in, LeCompte and Schensul 1999, p.3).

As Fetterman (1998) proposes, ethnographic analysis requires perceptive thinking from the isolated pieces of data from the field of data that has been collected. In achieving this, the use of the computer programme, MAXqda, was an essential aid. This ‘coding’ of the data is referred to by LeCompte and Schensul (1999). They see this as a top down activity that relates data to categories that can be used to support analysis and interpretation. O’Reilly (2005) supports the use of such computer based tools [with some caveats] stating that:

‘.....since the analytic process in much ethnography has often been rather elusive CAQDAS [computer assisted qualitative data analysis software] can make it more transparent and more open’ (O’Reilly 2005, p. 191).

Self evidently, researcher judgment in the coding process is an essential and unavoidable element. Indeed, that is clearly the reason that this methodology is termed ‘interpretive’. In recognising this inescapable fact and in developing themes and patterns from the data, triangulation is key, or, as Fetterman states: ‘It [triangulation] is at the heart of ethnographic validity’ (Fetterman 1998, p. 93).

Silverman makes the very telling observation that:

‘The reason why ethnography should never simply aim to record the researcher’s impressions is the theoretically impregnated nature of ‘description’ (Silverman 2001, p.69).

I interpret this statement to mean that the insight gained from the literature, from prior knowledge and prior experience enables the ethnography to place impressions and observations within an overall conceptual framework and within his/her own research framework, eliminating, or at least reducing, guess work and unformed or unsupported speculation that may have little validity or reliability. Triangulation is therefore seen as an essential element in avoiding ‘surface’ observations that are not underpinned in some other way. I approached this by constant reference back to the literature and recent work of others, seeking links and connections with my own data and analysis.

#### **4.11 Reflections on Research**

Prior to undertaking my own research, I admit to a somewhat jaundiced attitude to the results of management research, usually resulting in the ‘next great management idea’. The proliferation of airport book shop management texts over recent years illustrates the point. The idea that a ‘how to do .....’ series adds to the sum of management knowledge appeared to me to be bizarre and unsupportable to serious practitioners of management. However, such an attitude is to miss the point of comment and opinion as valid research data. The very existence of such published material is in itself a commentary on the world of management. The demand, almost a general thirst, for management knowledge that has resulted in this trade in easy to digest management material shows a need among practitioners of all types, to understand the underlying truths that underpin their everyday working life and to learn. I have had that need throughout my own working life. I thought that I knew what generally did and didn’t work in terms of management relationships, but could find few explanations of the underpinning



research and data. I therefore formed the view, over a number of years, and despite some exposure to management academia, that practice was largely a mixture of experience, innate ability, instinct, trial and error and a better than passing knowledge of financial analytical tools.

Except at the margins, the results of management research did not seem to reach me as a practitioner. If they did, they did not appear to have any relevance to the problems that I was facing on a day to day basis. Certainly, I was using accepted models and methods to analyse the financial health and market position of my organisation, to detect trends and to provide the basis for some strategic decision making. However, I was of the opinion that in any crisis situation, especially one involving people, relationships, emergencies, or in a strategic situation that required a more imaginative, lateral thinking approach, I was acting instinctively and from experience. Indeed, I considered then and consider now, that it is these experience based, instinctive skills that organisations value above all else in their senior management. The question for me has therefore always been how I view management research in the light of my opinions on the role of innate ability, instinctive decision making and plain experience. I was suggesting that management is not merely a taught set of skills, but that managers, at least effective and successful ones, were born with certain basic abilities that could not necessarily be imparted at the management school, or by completing certain management courses.

There are few absolutes in the practice of management. In many areas of management, what works in one situation is not necessarily transferable to another situation, organisation or group of individuals. One of the accepted ways of answering the question, what is management? is to: 'articulate two views, the classical view and the decision theory view' (Easterby-Smith et al 2002, p.5). Although I am in sympathy with the decision theory view of management, and not

at all with the classical view; that is, that ‘managers spend their time planning, organising, co-coordinating and controlling’ (Easterby-Smith et al 2002, p.5), I do not accept that there is therefore an emphasis on the techniques of decision making that must predominate in management.

Faced with the apparent predominance of quantitative research based, model application approaches to management, many of which I found difficult to comprehend, impractical or irrelevant, at that time, I viewed all of management research with some skepticism. This contrasted with my own management induction, initial and continuation training and continuous development. This was provided, on the whole, in a military environment, where the emphasis, at that time, was on the development of personal and personnel skills and the application of these acquired skills to management situations. In other words, a heavy emphasis on the understanding of relationships and behaviours as they apply to management tasking, such as decision making and group/team dynamics and performance. I was however, aware of the comment made by Mason (2002), writing of the researcher having clear preferences:

‘While these preferences may be appropriate to the research being designed, they may equally be less to do with this than with the idiosyncratic factors in the biography of the researcher (for example, that you happen to have been trained in some techniques and not in others).’ (Mason 2002, p. 26).

For the reasons articulated by Mason and certainly for reasons to do with my biography and training, I was highly receptive to the ideas of action research allied to a qualitative methodological approach, as a means of gathering data and connecting research to management practice. However, cognisant of the dangers expressed by Mason, I was aware that my analysis and the logic of my research design must stand examination. If I was to involve myself in research of any kind, I had to be sure that it was not only a reflection on what I perceived to be ‘the real world’, but was grounded in my own everyday life as a practitioner and in the life

of my organisation. Despite the warning by Mason I see this as a legitimate and valid reason for methodology selection.

I needed to satisfy myself that the statement made by many action researchers was indeed correct:

‘This split between research and action is in many respects a false distinction and not one acknowledged by action research.’ (Coughlan and Brannick 2001, p.3).

In ending this particular section I am drawn to the statement made by Pasmore (2001) that seems to encapsulate perfectly my own perspective.

‘In science, we continue to find journals full of one sided, reductionistic research, correlational studies among a few variables, and fragmented insights offered in the prevailing genre of separate fields analysing parts of complex social systems.’ (Pasmore 2001, p.46).

Once these issues had cleared in my mind and I had found a substantial body of literature supporting what I instinctively felt to be my position, I was happy to undertake my research and my learning.

#### **4.12 Refection on The Ethics of Insider Ethnographic Research**

Any study of ethnographic and anthropological publications will quickly show that the ethics of this type of research have a high profile. The fairly obvious ethical issues surrounding early anthropological studies, especially those concerning remote communities with limited previous exposure to researchers and their methods, has been tackled in a wide range of texts by very eminent people. The very validity of data and research findings in these circumstances has been called

into question on ethical grounds. O'Reilly (2005) talks of researchers being accused of dishonesty and deception where covert ethnographic research has been carried out. Lee (2000) writes equally of the possibility of violations of an individual's rights whilst they are the subject of research. Bouma and Ling (2004) state the need for thoughtfulness and consideration in research, while stressing the importance of loyalty, honesty, and integrity.

Insider ethnographic research poses particular, ethical problems. These issues are magnified in importance by the insider's role and position within the organisation being researched, particularly so when that person is the CEO. Edwards cites Measor and Sikes (1992), who state that researchers should operate 'respect for the person, self-determination, confidentiality (Measor and Sikes 1992, p.145).

They further state that:

'researchers have an obligation to protect people from being managed and manipulated in the interests of research and that we should not initiate situations that we are not prepared to see through to their potential conclusion' (Measor and Sikes 1992, p.145).

These are profound statements that go to the heart of the ethical dilemma facing all insider ethnographic researchers, but particularly researchers who, by the nature of their position and authority, have the power to fundamentally impact people's lives. I interpret their statements as highlighting the absolute need for honesty and transparency in research activity. I also see their statements as a case for detailed planning of that activity, the need for a clear communication strategy with the research organisation and its members and the reflection needed by the researcher on the implications of any data and findings on the participants.

My concerns fall into three parts. The first is the general issue of conducting research, some of it unobserved, or otherwise covert in nature, on my own organisation, in which I have a prominent and significant leadership role. The second set of concerns surrounds the handling of sensitive data from interviews and observations. The third is the management of unexpected consequences arising from conducting research.

Observation is an essential method in my research. By definition, and as a direct consequence of my position within the organisation, I will be observing confidential and sensitive situations at most times and not always within the context of the research. However, it is my contention that the research is only valid when seen within the social framework of the groups in question. That means that the observations will be wide ranging and largely unfocused. It also means that much of this observation will be covert, or at least will remain within my own consciousness without being articulated. Such is the nature of all effective leadership and management of an activity or organisation. However, this normal management/CEO activity may, because they know of the background research activity taking place, be misconstrued by colleagues as nothing short of 'spying' and as evidence of hidden agendas that I may have in terms of managing the organisation and their professional lives. Bouma and Ling (2004) speak of the importance of participants in research being able to voluntarily withdraw from participation, but this is clearly not always possible in terms of their participation within the organisation and in the observation by the insider researcher. In addition, colleagues may feel 'used' in the pursuit of academic achievement by me, of which they will not be a part and that will be of no use or apparent value to them. Indeed, many may consider my position as both CEO and researcher as an abuse of power, although I would strenuously reject this view. Others may even see this as a sinister attempt by the Board to introduce change, or otherwise observe and critique them in a covert way. I did not in fact detect at any point the

issues I raise, nevertheless, these are clearly serious issues and I was aware of their import before I started on my DBA work.

Prior to starting my studies I pondered all of these matters; I actually mentioned them to the University interview panel as a major concern at my application interview. My concerns would have grown had I known at that time that interpretive ethnography as an insider would become my preferred methodology. In reflecting on these issues I am mindful of the comments of Heiman (2002) that 'hidden field research is the ultimate deception', as 'participants have not necessarily volunteered nor given informed consent' (Heiman 2002, p. 145).

Kakabadse et al (2003) speak of the core values of the researcher as the guide to the ethical approach. It is not possible I believe for the researcher to select a new set of core values during research from that set of values used in the working environment, or indeed in everyday life. They go on to state that research values can be either with or without ethical values. However, I do not see how this can be the case. One approaches research with a set of value judgments that are inevitably intertwined with ethical values and considerations. Research activity, morals and ethics are, or should be, a reflection of the morals and ethics of that person's everyday life. Coffey (1999) writes of exposing the body when researching and this is certainly understandable. When carrying out this kind of research one is totally exposed, and one presents a face and an aspect of one's character and values to one's colleagues that can impact on the work relationship in a profound way. The insider researcher is presenting to colleagues and to the organisation a set of ethical values in a very overt way. He/she is saying, 'this is how I will always conduct myself because these are my core values'. The researcher is saying very publicly 'this is how I think and how I conduct myself ethically' and therefore the choice of approach is vitally important for future relationships with colleagues and with the organisation as a whole. One could say

that the approach to research is defining the person and the manager in a way that will impact for all time. One's stance is therefore driven by core beliefs in the way that one conducts ones everyday life, as a senior manager and as a member of society.

My approach to these issues is to be as open and honest as I can be in my dealings with colleagues and to try to make a clear distinction between data gathering and my normal managerial duties. I was very cognisant of the position best stated by Nicolson (1996), that there are boundaries and that I must not ignore the feelings and needs of others in pursuit of my own research goals. She also places a timely warning not to select for anything on the basis of choosing people that I know to have the same opinions or points of view as myself. The issue always remains for a Chief Executive carrying out research with the aid of colleagues, as to how to be sure that you are not being told what the colleague believes you wish to hear.

I briefed colleagues at the start of the studies and I will do so at each step of the research process. I have assured participants that I would do all in my power to provide confidentiality and I have been prepared to compromise my own data needs to protect colleagues. I will offer colleagues the opportunity to read my written work and I have assured them that they will get the opportunity to read the final thesis. Where data is clearly sensitive, or participants have been indiscrete, I will reject that data in the main body of my work. I will try to maintain a certain detachment as a researcher, that does not compromise my methodology, but protects against exploitation or deception.

Even with all of these safeguards in place the researcher needs to be ever vigilant that lines are not crossed. I have been in a position several times in recent years to use and gather data from covert observation that would be useful to my research, but that would be unfair to those individuals. For example, a temporary conflict of

interest or relationship between colleagues that may have impacted their inter group working at that time, but that had to be dealt with as a management issue for me as the CEO, rather than as data for a future research project. I take the view that I would not use this data [no field notes nor any record of the occasions] but may allow them to inform me in a very general sense about the social framework within which certain groups on past experience are operating. This I believe is the ethical approach and it makes me feel much more comfortable as both researcher and manager and helps me explain to colleagues that there were limits to my involvement with them and the organisation as a pure researcher. There has to be no ambiguity in their minds as to when I am the CEO doing the CEO job and the CEO being a researcher. I never have any indication from colleagues that this is ever an issue with them and I am watching for such indications.

The above deals with the first two of my concerns; however, unexpected consequences still pose a problem. There will undoubtedly be unexpected consequences of research activity from time to time, for example, a line of questioning producing a pattern of thought in a participant that they subsequently refer to in other situations and contexts unconnected with the research subject or activity. My approach if this appears to be happening is to end the interview at that point and debate the issue with the participant. In this way the issue is brought out into the open and we are both made aware of any possible consequences. I feel this open and more honest approach gives some safeguard in this area.



## CHAPTER 5

### Research Findings

#### **5.1 Introduction**

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, this research is directed at the general question: *what are the main relationship drivers and influences at work during the process of inter group working?* By using a service industry organisation as the research vehicle and an interpretive ethnographic methodology, I have researched the issues surrounding small, inter group activity and the general issue of inter group relationships during decision making. The research questions detailed in Chapter 3, pages 81-83, emerge from the literature review and revolve around the general reflections: *how are relationships between the groups formed and maintained and how do they impact the efficacy of the inter group decision process? What makes the inter group relationship in organisational decision making work at a practical level?*

I seek to answer these general questions in the findings, but primarily to answer the direct research questions that emanate from them. The findings are presented as three cycles of research; however, the research process was in effect continuous and seamless with observation at its core, providing the initial framework.

The selection of observation field notes is necessarily subjective, in that they are informed by circumstance and the presence of the researcher to see, record and

reflect. Relevant, informative, or highlighting observation field notes are contained in various vignettes throughout the Findings Chapter.

As each cycle's findings are considered and detailed, the appropriate research question is restated. Links between the findings of each cycle are clearly stated and the thread of the general questions runs throughout the findings report.

I have used a number of reference annotations within the findings text.

- Where I have referred in the findings to the list of 7 social and structural characteristics of the organisation, detailed on pages 16 to 19, I have referenced them as SSC 1 to 7.
- Where I have referred to the Cycles One, Two and Three they referenced as C1, C2 and C3.
- Where I have referred to an Observation Field Note in the findings text, I have referenced it as OFN that can be checked against the appropriate vignette. There is also reference made to the text field note, referenced as TFN 1.

## **5.2 Findings - Research Cycle One - The Advisor Group**

This element of the research had as its prime objective, the attempt to understand and explain the underlying reasons why one group recommends to another a particular course of action regarding a decision that needs to be made, as this is one of the prime indicators of the inter group relationship. During the interviews and in the reflective times following the interviews, I was looking for threads that ran through the data that indicating mind sets, formal and informal procedures and the various thought processes that took place within one group that would impact relationships. In being both guided by the literature and challenging the literature, I was looking for themes that had been previously identified by others, evidence to support the existence of particular themes and evidence, data that may refute or run contrary to accepted thinking. In reflecting on my research it is clear that the dominant issue that impacts the answers to my research questions is that of human interaction, in other word relationships, that can be subdivided into a number of themes; leadership, trust, perceptions, motivations, confidence.

**Research questions: how important is leadership in inter group relationships? Do the group see themselves as a coherent group, or just advisors to the one who leads?**

There is a substantial thread running throughout the data and that is the role of leadership. This is noticeable in all decision making processes but most especially in those of loose groups and in intra and inter group relationships. Arguably, sufficient notice may not be paid to the application of leadership in these processes. Often the issues of trust, motivations, group and team formation and group dynamics, comes down to the role and application of leadership. This is clearly recognised by the participants in the data generation, but without a clear

appreciation of the effect leadership has upon the other variables in the group dynamics equation, including motivation, effectiveness, the ability to deliver, boundary setting and the areas of inter and intra group trust and acceptance. This all pervading influence has been detailed by Natale et al (2003). Their recent research supports the view that leadership is key to effectiveness, or alternatively, that a lack of effectiveness can be attributed to a lack of leadership. One of the managers clearly supports this view:

‘..... there is always, in my view, someone who has to take the lead in managing the dynamics of the team. Because otherwise, if you don’t have that, I think, ultimately, you’re wasting your time.’ (3)

He goes on to list what he believes are the character skills needed by the leader

‘He’s got to lead. He’s got to direct; he’s got to bring people back to the subject, whatever that might be. He’s got to provide relevant and timely information to make sure he/she gets the best out of the team players.’ (3)

Perception of group effectiveness here hinges on the existence of a clear leader, or a problem champion, and he appears to be made to feel more comfortable in the team setting if a leadership structure and hierarchy exists

‘There are the other members of the team because, there almost inevitably are different personalities; strong achievers; strong motivators; all these team dynamics come into play when you’re in a discussion about anything.....

..... coming back to the team leader, it’s quite important for him or her to understand those kinds of issues in order to make allowances for them in the decision-making process.’ (3)

Throughout, this individual stresses leadership and makes reference to order and process. This appears to reflect his background, experience and training, where leadership and structure are integral to the performance of his duties and large elements of his previous management training. We can deduce from this that it is

as important to understand the background and initial training of group members as it is to acknowledge their present performance and duties. There is an underlying need in this individual for reassurance and support during the decision process. I have seen this in other areas of his decision making work that accorded with his responses in this research. It is highly unlikely, given his position and background, that this is a lack of overall confidence. It may well be that the decision processes that he goes through in his everyday life is more autocratic in nature and relies on leadership of his services team being exercised in a more structured way than in other departments. He therefore feels more at ease, and is therefore more effective, when this model is reproduced in a team setting. This accords with the findings of Natale et al (2003) in that cultural issues [managerial culture] are key to effectiveness in that, if one is not in tune with the culture of the group this leads to passive aggressive behaviour and a dysfunctional team.

‘My experience of being involved on those kinds of teams is that the more successful teams are the ones that are being led very, very effectively. So you have a strong, focused, dynamic, motivating team leader. The ones that are least effective are where the leadership is weakest.’ (3)

‘The models or processes that are used to come to a decision-making end result, if you like, depends an awful lot on that team leader. In a sense they drive the process forward. In a lot of circumstances they will actually decide on which models, which processes, they are going to use.’ (3)

It is not surprising that, in respect of the specific decision event, this individual saw conflict and lack of progress at the initial stages as a lack of clear direction and leadership by the then Chief Executive. Interestingly, he then goes on to attribute progress in the later stages to new leadership even though, in terms of this event, the leader he identifies as being the major influence, myself, was not directly involved in the process and was not a member of the advisory team. Why should this be so? My view is that he constructs a reality around himself based upon the motivations introduced by a new leadership that he is comfortable with. He then takes this new reality into the group context, knowing that all the members of the group are influenced in the same way by the absent leader. I make this

interpretation based upon similar examples within other organisations that I have managed. We are given a further clue to this dynamic by one of the Directors when he states:

‘The project manager has a responsibility which he wasn’t allowed to have. It was given to a group and group responsibilities tend to get a bit fuzzy, and there’s an excuse for everybody not to do anything. .... and you said ‘You are responsible. Go and consult but, at the end of the day, it’s your decision. You don’t have to do what everybody else wants’(2)

This notion of the absent leader in both intra and inter group activity is very interesting and needs further research. We can speculate that the group in this case appears to be taking a lead, not based upon what the acknowledged leader wants, but from the indirect influence he brings to bear. My observations lead me to believe that effective leaders create an atmosphere which, if they are effective and trusted, allow individuals to perform at their best. This may well be seen by these individuals in different ways. Manager 3 may see it as a leadership structure within which he can formally operate as he did in his past life as an experienced operative and which he now does in his own department, which he leads in this way. The Director sees it as a statement of principle from the leader which releases individuals to perform on their own initiative. In many ways this is the opposite of the first manager’s perception. The issue of the absent leader in terms of group dynamics maybe a new twist on a far from new area of research. Kanter (2004) puts it plainly, by suggesting that leaders supply the right people, deploy them in the right jobs at the right time and provide the motivation to succeed. However, this appears to be a different element, an overall pervading influence, a culture or an atmosphere, that individuals can and do interpret in their own way in order to provide for themselves a comfort zone for performance.

One manager gives us an insight into how the absent leader[s] may influence not just the advisory group, but also the Decision Group:

‘I suspect the way in which the Board operates is largely driven by the way in which Management sets it up to operate, and the style and nature of the operation that Management presents to the Board.’ (4).

One of the threads running through the discussions regarding the chosen decision event was that one of the Directors, if not the formal leader of the advisory group, was one of its key members and was, in some ways, the prime owner of the project, or at least he was the person most associated with its management and progress. He acknowledges this himself when asked if he had pulled the project team around himself:

‘Oh, yes, absolutely. Again, not necessarily that formally but, you know... this wasn’t going anywhere near the Board unless G had given it an engineering thumbs up; that the ferry operators were on Board – at least enough of them; that K was on Board that this would work; and landside were on Board in terms of if they can actually work the system.’ (1).

He was very clear who was leading the group and yet acknowledges the influence of the absent leader on group thinking:

‘I think a lot of the tone of the decision comes from the Chief Executive, perhaps more so than I ever previously appreciated, actually. The influence on the tone... the way the organisation actually relates to itself. I guess, I mean I hope the senior team, certainly R and myself, have strong influences on that tone. But actually, at a strategic level, I think I do actually think that a lot of the direction of the organisation, for example, master planning, comes from you, ...’ (1)

On reflection, the concept of the absent leader could have much wider implications, for example, the continuing influence on an organisation when a leader leaves for pastures new. The group and team literature is rich in references to the role of leadership; however, the leadership options are mostly stated as being one of: ‘leaderless groups, groups with leaders appointed by the organisation, self-managing groups or groups that select their own leaders’ (Levi 2001, p.174).

There is also some reference to leaders ‘emerging’ in groups, arguably a very inefficient way of conducting business and largely the same as a leaderless group, as a truly leaderless group would, in my view, never function effectively. An effective manager can also be an effective leader when placed in that position [of leader], but this is not necessarily so. However, a group where it is unclear that the management responsibility and the leadership are one, will arguably lack direction and cohesion, or at least may under perform. This is supported, in my view, by the comments of the first manager, supported by the other interviewees. Does that mean that the absent leader is also an absent manager [from the group] and therefore responsible for the process? On reflection my answer to that question would be yes. In the context of the organisation represented in my research, clearly the Chief Executive is seen to be setting the tone and thereby taking the responsibility. [interviews] This then translates into a leadership perception that guides the group in its work. Arguably, the research indicates that the exercise of leadership in this case was weak and that the group did indeed lose some focus as a result, or at least did not gain it for some considerable time. There are various references in the interviews to the amount of time spent on the idea of the project, without it having any real impetus, or any agreed reason for the investment decision, almost to the last.

Clearly leadership is not only important, from the perspective of the group members; it forms a vital part of their dynamic. In terms of how it is exercised however, it is not clear from my research where the leadership function should sit, inside or outside the group. How overarching the leadership is seen within the organisation as a whole may well be an important factor.



**Research Questions: how is this category of group formed? What starts the process and how is it managed?**

As previously stated, this research was not looking into formal groups in the sense of groups that necessarily meet the criteria normally associated with the word. For example, the literature often refers to group formation as a staged process; ‘forming, storming, norming, performing, adjourning’ (Levi 2001, p 41). I would suggest the existence of another group type which I describe as ‘structural’. This type of group exists within the management structure and exists because and for that structure. Its formation within the structure often mirrors the organisation in its composition and the distribution of its membership, leadership and responsibilities. For example, it may have both a finance presence and an engineering presence. Those members, in terms of contribution and responsibility will in all probability mirror that in the organisation as a whole

The nominated group leader is usually the senior manager organisationally responsible for the area at issue, if not the actual group leader than the absent leader. The groups are often ad hoc in nature and form, reform, evolve and disperse as required by the nature of the issue at hand. Their culture and management style, in terms of formation, presentation and operation, largely mirrors that within the department or directorate that is the major contributor to the group. This follows the pattern described by Arrow et al (2000) in that group formation is both a cognitive and a behavioural process and that ‘all groups form in some context, in which people and resources are available, to serve one or more purposes via collective action’(Arrow et al 2000, p. 67). It is very much about individuals rather than formal process.

Not unsurprisingly, the expectation of team cohesion is a thread running through group formation. Although these are ad hoc groups, or maybe because they are often a fairly informal coming together of like minded individuals, the ‘specialist’ element recurs at regular intervals throughout the research interviews:

.’ I think you’ve got to have a balanced team. You’ve got to have the right people at the right moment for the issue that you’re wrestling with...’ (3)

‘...people who feel some sort of ownership of that problem tend to be the sort of people that are looking for a solution and wanting to take it forward.’ (1)

‘I think it’s partly to do with the fact that we’re a group of specialists and, almost inevitable, there is a feeling of herding cats about that ’ (4)

The research shows that the advisory groups in question form in a two way dynamic. The first element is the action of a responsible manager or director, recognising the requirement for a decision that is outside the normal scope of his/her authority or, by virtue of organisational procedures, clearly needs the endorsement of the Board. The second dynamic is action that evolves and develops as a result of normal structural, managerial activity, within departments and directorates. This is normally a result of the everyday interaction between individuals, leading to the development of ideas and the need for further information gathering and optioning before the idea develops into the need for decision action by another group.

‘Usually, with technology, there’s a champion; somebody’s keen on the idea and will say ‘let’s go and look at this that and the other’ and becomes the driver of that’(4)

‘There are various strands running through that, requiring input from a whole bunch of different people: engineers, to the landside operations, to external bodies. So one will try and find a way to pull all that together.’ (1).

In reflecting on the issue of group formation, within my definition of structural groups, the dynamics at work are efficient and effective. They reflect the culture of the directorates involved and the personalities of the senior managers charged with the responsibility for those areas of the organisation's work. The formation of groups is organic and at the same time dynamic and is not unnaturally constrained by procedure and formality. There is no 'blueprint' and therefore no set template to follow. This recognises the diversity of departments within the organisation, from finance, marketing and human resources, to marine operations, and engineering services. As stated earlier, there does not appear to be any uniformity or agreement on how and when the terms 'group' and 'team' should be used, although there now appears to be some acceptance that the terms can be used interchangeably (Teale et al 2003, Levi 2001, Arrow et al 2000, Northouse 2004).

My research interviews and my observations lead me to believe that the individuals concerned have difficulty pinpointing group formation activity, or even group identity, because they do not divorce these activities from the normal day-to-day management of their part of the organisation. Their part of the organisation is their 'team' and the other activities are sub group activity within and between teams. One could therefore say that the team is the larger entity and the group operates inside the team and between teams, using the same culture and dynamics. This may be a fine distinction, but may be of fundamental importance when one considers group dynamics in terms of cognitive and behavioural processes, team versus group. One could speculate that conflicts within business groups may often have their origin in the difference between team cultures within an organisation. This could be an important issue in respect of group formation if formal groups are to be established. It is not just the individuals that need to be considered but also the culture of the team within which they normally operate.

## **Observation**

### **Port of Dover, Performance Groups**

Some 6 years ago, the Port of Dover introduced the concept of Performance Groups. The purpose of the groups was to independently oversee the performance of key areas of the business. There were seven groups formed covering HR, finance, security, safety, customer accountability, planning and non-customer accountability. Group membership was wide and spread over the whole organisation. The groups were not allowed to co-opt members with specialist experience of the areas being overseen, nor were the relevant, responsible managers members of the group overseeing their specialism. The groups were all lead by non specialists.

By common consent the performance group concept failed. They did not meet the expectations of the senior management and Board because they were seen as divisive, time consuming and largely irrelevant to the efficient management of the organisation. It is interesting to speculate why this failure happened, as the concept appears sound in principle. My own view is that the failure was in group composition and leadership. The fundamental flaw was that the groups held no responsibility for the results of their deliberations. A group's sole intent was to uncover inefficiencies in the area that it was overseeing, with only scant knowledge of the specialist area concerned and no real appreciation of the responsible management's longer term aims and objectives. Neither were there the skills or experience within the groups, either in leadership or membership, to understand the necessary nuances and underlying drivers within a specialism. In interviews with this researcher past members wondered, at the time, why they were involved in these groups and resented the time spent away from their primary duties. They did not feel engaged in terms of making a contribution and they were certain that their efforts were not appreciated by the responsible manager and his team. The fact that they were, at one in the same time, members of one group and

the victims or another group, merely added to their sense of frustration. The performance groups are a clear example of business groups that were the very opposite of 'structural' in membership.

The groups were disbanded in March 2001. A new management structure introduced clearly defined, direct lines of responsibility [the old had a matrix structure, with business units and support providers], and the performance group function was subsumed within operational directorates, cross directorate groups and structural groups.

## **Observation**

### **Groups versus Team Culture, an Experience**

In an earlier part of my career, I was responsible over a number of years for the management of a variety of military groups tasked with a number of operational and administrative responsibilities. Group membership was usually drawn from a number of quite disparate 'teams', a term I would now use to describe them following my research. There were often a number of conflicts that were sometimes difficult to reconcile and they seemed to stem from a differing view of reality between group members. These were often dismissed by other members with comments such as 'well, what do you expect of pilots', or 'it's only to be expected from members of this or that Regiment [unit]'. On reflection, we were probably seeing in these examples a clash between group culture and team culture. Insufficient attention was being paid when forming the groups to the cultural aspects of the team from which members were drawn. Individual skills, experience, rank and interests were the criteria used for membership, without a full assessment being made of the cultural atmosphere within which they normally operated. If anything, it was assumed, if it was considered at all, that any cultural

differences would be submerged in the greater needs of the group. Looking back, this clearly did not happen. What should have been done was to form the group around members from like minded cultures. For example, someone coming from a culture where outspoken, dissenting views were encouraged and disagreement frequent, between persons of equal standing, would find it difficult to merge in a group where the predominant culture was leader led with the other members as expert advisors. Group formation clearly should never be a matter of the individual's personal skills and experience. In discussing group composition, cohesiveness and conflict, Worchel, Wood and Simpson (1992) suggest that the research tells us that: 'these elements are entirely influenced by the personalities of the members' (Worchel Wood and Simpson 1992, p. 150-152). In as much as culture may influence personality they may be right, but the cultural differences between wider teams, where it influences 'between team group formation', seems to be largely ignored.

**Research Questions: In inter group decision making, are decision making models used, if not why not?**

There appears to be an acceptance in the body of literature that the so called classical theory of decision making is: 'unsatisfactory and that judgment and intuition play an important role in decision making and therefore in group activity associated with decision making' (Lee et al 1999, p.75). The concept of bounded rationality introduced by Simon as early as 1957 challenged the classic theory and subsequent research, such as Turner (2001) has acknowledged the numerous factors the influence individuals during the decision making process. This is a useful start point for a debate on the use of models in group decision making.

My research in this area indicates a certain ambiguity in regard to models. On the one hand some interviewees acknowledged that some element of informal model

use does happen on a regular basis, but at the same interviews there were some contradictions. From a Director:

‘I like to think I try and approach things in a sensible and logical, step-wise function. I try and break down the problem until I understand the parts a bit more and build it back up again.’ (2)

‘I suppose we do make use of some tools. I have been exposed to a lot of these and I think that, probably, that bits of them rub off.’ (2)

and later:

‘Don’t always do it’ (2)

From one of the managers, when asked if he ever used models:

‘Never’(3)

and later in the interview:

‘Certainly some, I would say. I think anyone needs a recognised structure to function within. Certainly, recognised models can give you that kind of structure.’ (3)

There is a clear acknowledgment in the research, of processes taking place that involve stepped, logical thinking about issues, alternatives and information. This is particularly pronounced in those with an engineering or scientific background, which is probably not surprising, but must be viewed with reservation due to the sample size. One thread that runs through the research in terms of decision making is the acknowledgement that, on many occasions, a preferred outcome had been chosen before the processes involved to justify the outcome had been carried out, however informally.

‘.....I, like everybody else, sometimes I say ‘Right, this is what the outcome is, how do I construct a decision-making process that will justify the decision I want to get at the end’(2)

‘I feel reasonably confident in my own ability to make reasoned, sensible decisions in my area of operation.’ (3)

‘I do actually think you need to step back and say hold on a minute, there’s something else going on here, which might justify this. Is this actually something we want to do and we’ve just approached it in the wrong way? Being sufficiently flexible and think about how to justify things’... (1)

In attempting to explain these elements of my research I find myself in sympathy with Patton (2003) and his acceptance of intuitive decision making by modern organisations and managers. Patton, importantly, links training and leadership to the ability of individuals to make good intuitive decisions. Harrison and Pelletier (2000), went further in suggesting that behavioural and psychological forces are paramount in an individual’s decision making processes. My research appears to bear out these hypotheses. The most intuitive appear to be those with the most pronounced confidence in their own place in the organisation, in their own skills and their own experience. I would also say from my observations that they are also the most effective and successful overall. The best example of this that I can offer is the normally swift, effective and dynamic decision making of experienced sea tug captains, whose intuitive, reactive decision making is based largely upon experience, inherent skills and confidence.

Although this may feel correct, recent research shows that better quality decisions of greater complexity in rapidly changing environments, comes as a direct result of training (Hartenian 2003). The link between better and faster decision making and skills, experience and knowledge is in my experience freely acknowledged by some in the UK business community. The absence of formal decision making models and methods can be directly linked to the experience, skill and knowledge



of the group members. Their shared absorption in the technical elements of the organisation, enable them to use judgment and a shared natural feel, to reach the majority of decisions required of them. The problem arises when, by virtue of their acting as an advisory group to the final decision makers, they have to justify and explain their advice and recommendations. Models then become a way of justifying a decision or recommendation that has already been made, rather than as the primary aid to reaching the right conclusion. That may well be why the strategy and finance training that all senior managers in the organisation attended was considered so valuable. It was in the acquiring of skills in understanding the organisational dynamics, and in case by case justification for Board submissions, that the value lay.

## **Observation**

### **Finance and Strategy Training for the Senior Management Group**

In May 2004, on my instigation, the senior management team attended a 5 day finance and strategy course. My intention, in arranging this was to introduce financial and management models and methods to highly specialist managers who had not been exposed to this level of management training previously. My co-researcher interviewees all attended. The course covered corporate strategy and planning, competitive advantage, financial analysis, financial planning and valuation. During the 5 days a number of management decision tools were introduced to the team. For many this was their first exposure to such decision making aids. The reaction was almost wholly positive and I observed a distinct change in the attitude and application of the managers as the course progressed.

At the start there was an air of skepticism among some about the course content and one could detect some fear and apprehension at facing unknown challenges. This, I feel, was particularly apparent among the more specialist managers in the group. More than one manager had expressed a wish to be elsewhere for the 5 days. However, as the course progressed the attitudes changed. It became apparent to the managers that nobody was there to challenge their expertise in their own discipline, but that, if they were to continue to take an active role in setting the strategic agenda for the organisation, they needed a deeper understanding of the areas that the course was covering. In terms of decision making, they were exposed to a number of new methods and models and a greater discipline in reaching recommendations for financial decisions and in presenting information for Board approval. As the course had been very recent in terms of my research I fully expected to hear some reference made to the course and to the value the interviews attached to it in terms of their future involvement in decision making groups.

My observations led me to speculate about the most effective period for management training in a persons working life. A great many managers are taught management models, methods and accepted processes relatively early in their career. It became axiomatic that the best time to complete an MBA was in your mid to late twenties/very early thirties. However, the value of the models and methods taught on the course was clearly magnified by the considerable specialist knowledge of the participants. They were able to relate completely with their earlier and ongoing experiences and involvement with corporate decision making and the activity [group?] leading to a Board presentation for a decision. All said that they had benefited and all said that, in future, they would use the methods they had been taught in future situations. How then do we explain their subsequent, ambivalent comments regarding decision making models and methods and their use in the manager's everyday life?

We can speculate that this is an example of specialist experience triumphing over accepted management doctrine. The manager manages and contributes to the organisation [in terms of his group and team interactions] by virtue of extensive experience and success as a specialist. The specialist manager sees no contradiction between following precisely the specialist requirements of his/her post, usually laid down in legislation or in compulsory technical requirements and using 'intuition' in general management decision processes. However, whereas specialist decision making may work, based on years of experience and exposure to similar situations, the same approach may not be adequate in decision situations outside that manager's specialism.

We can also speculate that there may be an element of 'general management is not really a specialism at all' and therefore the tools and accepted doctrines and teachings of this specialism are not really relevant to the 'experienced manager'. This may go some way to explain the resistance to adopting the finance and strategy methods taught on the course as a modus operandi for advisory group activity in the future. There is some observational evidence to support this view in this organisation. My experience in other, highly specialized organisations is that this attitude is not untypical. One would then question the assumption made in many industries that, to be an effective manager, one has to be a specialist in the field, for example, medical doctors managing hospitals, pilots managing airlines, accountants managing anything and everything.

One may then believe that, in a specialist organisation, this course had been a waste of time and money, but that would be to miss an important point in terms of organisational team building and corporate decision making. In my view the value of the course lay in being able, in the future, to explain the central corporate decision making in terms of overall corporate strategy to the managers charged, by virtue of their specialist expertise, with its implementation. In terms of getting 'buy-in' to corporate strategy the course content is invaluable. This is a quite vital ingredient in respect to the senior management group's relationship with the

Decision Group, the Board. It does however raise issues with regard to future advisory group formation and the role of advisory group members which I shall discuss as part of the findings.

**Research Questions: how is the differing role of the two groups perceived?**

**How do the groups see themselves?**

**How are recommendations for action arrived at by those involved?**

One of the most surprising revelations from the interviews was the perception of the decision making relationship between the Decision Group, in this case the Board, and the advisory group, the senior management. I did not expect any issues surrounding the boundaries of responsibility between the two groups. To me it was clear that the Board had ultimate responsibility for high level decision making, that is to say those decisions which, by virtue of organisational procedure, had to have Board approval. The Board was therefore, by definition, the final decision maker. This was the relationship that I thought others would recognise and acknowledge. I believed that I would mainly be dealing with the dynamics of how the advisory group went about influencing the Decision Group to take a particular course of action

The interviews highlighted a quite different perception of the relationship. Clearly, the senior managers believe that they are the decision makers and the final Board merely endorses the decisions that are made:

‘I don’t actually think that there are too many strategic decisions that our Board have ever really made independently.’ (1).

‘The responsibility for getting it right rests at the Director level. Yes, ok, in a sense, and ultimately I think they’re much more of a supervisory Board to make sure that we’re coming to a reasonable set of decisions rather than, necessarily, a particular set of decisions.’ (1)

The other interviewees endorsed and supported this perception:

‘Ok. I think it’s the management of this organisation that’s got to stand up and be counted when it comes to taking strategic decision. The Board’s role, as I see it, is not just to roll over and blandly and to accept those management decisions. They can quite reasonably question but, provided they get reasonable responses to those questions – satisfactory responses to those questions – then, let management get on with it.’ (3)

‘that type of decision is taken by the relevant Director or Senior Manager and is then presented to the Board in terms of a reasoned argument as to why that’s the correct one and the Board is asked to endorse it.’ (4)

The contradiction and the disconnect is that all participants agreed that the final responsibility for the decisions that required, what they termed ‘endorsement’ by the Board, lay with the Board and yet they did not accept that it was the Board who were making the final decision. How do we explain this and what action if any is appropriate? To go back to first principles, a decision involves choosing between alternatives using a systematic approach (Lee et al 1999). This is usually a stepped approach leading to the choosing of an alternative.

It is the extent to which the group members believe that they share a common fate that binds them together, almost in terms of one group operating as two sub groups. If the advisory group feels that they take a shared responsibility for the efficacy of decision making within the organisation then the demarcation between group’s breaks down. They see no contradiction in the statements that they make the decision and the Board has the ultimate responsibility because they see it as one process and one group of people sharing the fate of the outcome.

There are two other elements that are responsible for imbedding this shared responsibility that appear to come out of the research, the role of the Chief Executive and the issue of trust. The role of the Chief Executive, in being a member of both groups, is seen as important:

‘think a lot of the tone of the decision comes from the Chief Executive, perhaps more so than I ever previously appreciated, actually. The influence on the tone... the way the organisation actually relates to itself.’ (1)

‘I think that’s a key role of the Chief Executive. The strong link between the Management Team and the Board itself is the responsibility of the Chief Executive.’ (3)

(Q) ‘Who is accountable for strategic decision-making in your view? Who, in reality, is responsible?’ (RHG)

‘In reality, I think it’s the Chief Executive.’ (4)

These statements, while quite emphatic, may actually be missing the point. The work of Pearce and Conger (2003) on shared leadership provides a guide to the dynamics at work here. They argue that the old concept of the top leader is outdated and that ‘group level, shared leadership is a phenomenon that has been given little attention’ (Pearce and Conger 2003, p. 22-26). In reflecting on what is at the heart of these perceptions of the relationship between the two groups, what may well be happening is a combination of shared fate and shared leadership. Managers in the advisory group are accepting responsibility and exercising leadership within an environment that encourages them to do so. This is accepted by the Board [Decision Group members] only whilst there is trust between the individuals involved. Certainly the Chief Executive, as the ‘top leader’, would be expected to provide the framework and environment within which the shared leadership can flourish and this sits well with the concept of the absent leader discussed earlier; however, I do not think that it is the main driver. Which brings

us to the second of the elements, that of trust. There is evidence presented in the data that suggests that the relationship between the two groups is fundamentally dependent on the trust between members:

‘... I suppose the first thing to say is if they sort of trust you with decisions you have taken before and they turned out to be right, they’re likely to be more interested. You know, they’re going to say: well, this guy knows what he’s talking about, they’ll feel more comfortable with you.’ (1)

... ‘That’s quite important in this sort of organisation, because the last thing you want is either side of that discussion loses trust in the other.’ (1)

‘I think that probably comes to some of the intangibles for the Board in terms of the degree of trust and confidence that they have in their Chief Executive and Management Team.’ (4)

It would seem self evident that trust and respect are both essential elements in a successful relationship of any kind. However, in the establishment of organisational effectiveness, shared leadership and responsibilities, one could speculate that they are of fundamental importance and underpin the whole concept of shared fate having a positive effect and being a good thing rather than a bad thing. Kramer and Tyler (1996) state:

‘Research on psychological contracts in organisations suggests organisational members often possess a variety of more or less tacit understandings regarding norms, obligations, duties and rights that govern their relationships with other organisational members’ (Kramer and Tyler 1996, p.367).

Clearly this is an essential if trust is to be established and maintained. Jonas and Frey (2001) discussed the role of friendship and trust in their research and found it to be fundamental to the building of a successful client/advisor relationship. It becomes more important when one considers that the relationship which is the

subject of this research is that between senior management and non-executive Board members. How is this trust generated and sustained? Tyler (2003) may contend that the predominant factor is a shared trust based on the motives of those involved. If the motives of the two groups are matched, or the motives of the advisory group are known, understood and accepted by the Decision Group, then trust will be established and maintained, such that a shared fate becomes a reality. Tyler (2003) also suggests that commitment to the group and enjoyment of one's job are key to motivation. My research supports the view that this is one of the dynamics at work. In the group members interviewed the motivations are clearly job satisfaction related. That was certainly the tone of the interviews and is supported by my own observations of performance:

‘So there is a personal desire to make sure that I do the best job I possibly can, because I would hope people thought that we'd done a good job on that. That's a strong motivation.’ (1)

‘Ok. What motivates people, I think, is a sense of achievement; it's a sense of being a part of that decision-making process. For me, it's that feeling of involvement; being a party to moving something forward.’ (3)

‘My motivation is... I guess, its things like pride, enjoyment, satisfaction, professionalism, wanting to do the best I can.’ (4)

So, are the motivations of the two groups matched? One can speculate, without direct evidence at this stage of the research that they are. The members of the Board are all non-executive, bar one, the Chief Executive. They are all paid a small remuneration for their work, not enough to act as any incentive to serve. I believe that all are bound and serve due to an interest in the work of the Harbour Board and a wish to make a contribution to the continuing success of ‘the UK's premier ferry port.’ One can therefore reflect on the strong possibility, that whatever trust one group has in another is based on a shared fate and shared motivations in terms of decision making.



The Cycle One was a time of discovery and surprise. The revelation that research methods work and that issues covered in the literature could actually be observed and in some cases replicated, in a non controlled, dynamic management situation, was immensely exciting to a new researcher. For example, to read that polarisation is a powerful dynamic in group interaction and then to attend a meeting and see it happen, was for me a significant moment in my life as a researcher. On reflection, these moments emphasised for me the power of observation, observation from a base of knowledge, that would have enabled me as a practitioner, if I had so wished, to make interventions to the benefit, or otherwise, of the group's work. This is potentially very dangerous and damaging. Am I as a researcher adopting the arrogant stance that, because I know, I am above the group work, observing and criticising, perhaps even interfering, because of a perceived superior knowledge? However, how can action learning take place unless the researcher takes responsibility to ensure that lessons are learnt and change happens?

This is all about having the power to act. As the CEO I have the power to act and to impose and to demand that action takes place. This use of power and responsibility, irrespective of gender, is well made by Grant (1993) and of Reinharz (1992) who writes of the general ambivalence to ethnography by feminist researchers due to its power play. They suggest in their conclusions that such an approach is not learning, but is imposition, which may well, in their view, produce animosity and resentment cause problems for long term change. I had not expected to be faced with this dilemma so early in my research and it made me question very carefully my methodological approach and most especially the role of an interpretive ethnographer on the social situation [society] being researched. Power is certainly an issue that requires analysing and reflective comment. Sondergaard (2005) in reflecting on among other things, gender and power in the research context, acknowledges that man and woman live and move in an ever changing environment of power dynamics and relationships, that overlap. This

could be said to be true of man, man interaction and of manager, managed, leader and lead. Kvale's (2006) conclusions are in general terms, that qualitative interviews are not an open and dominance free dialogue, but that this does not undermine the validity of the data, unless there is jointly constructed data by both interviewer and interviewee, in other words collusion. The crucial question is not, does a power relationship exist, but, does the power relationship impact in such a way as to question the validity of the data? I cannot ignore that a power relationship does indeed exist between me and my colleagues; however, as they were not aware of my own reflections and observations at that time they would not have been able to manipulate the data in any way, just to provide me with what they imagined I was looking for. Neither was there any collusion in producing the data. In addition, I was at all times dealing with expert practitioners, specialists in their fields and confident personalities with strong opinions and approaches to their professional relationships. Such people are not easily intimidated and impacted by adverse power relationships, or indeed the overt and covert exercise of overbearing leadership. There were no gender issues in my data gathering. This was not purposefully avoided; it was just the availability of the data at that time.

I have felt in many ways unprepared for the effects of my research. The fact that all of my staff knew that I was conducting research may have been biasing the results and tainting the learning that was taking place. I have tackled these issues by being as open and honest as I can be. I have explained my own motivations for carrying out the research and the expectation I have of the results and the actions that may follow. I have felt myself in some way diluted as a CEO by the very nature of the research, as if trust has been compromised as I bring into question long standing perceptions of the relationship between Board and senior management. These I believe to be false perceptions.

These issues have come to light as a direct result of the power inherent in the qualitative methods that I adopted for Cycle One. The CEO interviewing his senior management team and drawing conclusions from those interviews is a challenging situation, both for the researcher and for the interviewees. On reflection it is an issue both of the trust and of the leadership relationship that the researcher has with his colleagues. My situation as a researcher is considerably improved by the situation within the organisation, that of a relatively new CEO introducing significant and challenging change and questioning many long held procedures and processes within the senior management group and the Board. However, my worry was that I may have been using this to justify the approach taken for the Cycle One. Did I unconsciously select the qualitative interview method as my prime data source because that is how the power to influence is most obviously exercised? I do not believe that to be the case, as I had studied and reflected on the methodological approach extensively. I had selected the approach which was, in my view, the most appropriate for the research that I was conducting, rather than making the data gathering less challenging.

The answer to this question is no and one of the main reasons for saying this is the adoption of the interpretive ethnographic methodology as the basis for the research. Although this was not so clear to me at the time of the Cycle One work, my post Cycle One reflection and further study of the literature leads me to believe that this is the case. Ethnography's research efficacy lies in the total immersion of the researcher in the social situation and the individuals that are the subject of the research. In my view this is a very effective and powerful co-researcher relationship. I and others accept my total involvement in the organisation and in the research objectives. The openness and normal management relationship between us are well established, effective and relevant.

As an ethnographer, I am telling the whole story of the social context, not just being selective in my methods and in my reports. My interviewees are all individuals of standing in the organisation and my appreciation of their strengths and weaknesses, as I perceive them, led me to believe that they were as independent in their relationship to me as it is possible to be in such a situation. One can never completely remove the relationship of CEO from the relationship of researcher, however, the whole essence of qualitative research and interpretive ethnography is that you should not do so. What the researcher must do is constantly review these inter-relationships and evaluate and report their impacts. The Cycle One research identified issues of trust, sharing, leadership and influence; all areas were the CEO/researcher inter-relationship impact. This is clearly an area that demands more reflection and certainly more consideration in the second and subsequent cycles.

The process of interviewing was exciting, challenging and exhausting. I ended each session both drained and motivated. I got the distinct impression that the interviewees found it equally taxing. Indeed one interviewee, at the end of the interview, said that he didn't know if he had enjoyed it or not and had found it an immense challenge. I took this to mean that he had found facing up to and defending the methods he employed as a senior manager and their effectiveness or otherwise very challenging. He was perhaps being forced by the process to examine his own performance, relationships and motivations and this in front of a close colleague. Each interview produced a least one unexpected revelation that had significant meaning in terms of my research. It reinforced the point that interviews of this kind should not be entered into with any preconceived ideas. As one would expect, my research seems to throw up as many questions as answers and has changed the focus of my understanding. As I considered Cycle Two I was asking myself:

- Why does it appear to be the case that the senior team, acting as an advisory group to the eventual decision makers, do not see themselves as acting in this role? They perceive themselves to be the actual and organisationally accepted decision makers although that is procedurally not the role they are carrying out. The Cycle Two research should establish the perception of the actual Decision Group to this question.
- Leadership and trust are key elements in my findings. Are they linked, if so how, and are these same elements present in the Decision Group dynamic? Are leadership and trust linked to the concepts of shared values, motivations, fate, ambitions and are these present in the Decision Group?
- If the two groups do indeed share these elements in their dynamics, how is this reflected in the inter group relationship?
- Is there any indication of where action/change/learning may be needed, or happen as a consequence of the research? I would postulate that an understanding by all of the individuals concerned of the dynamics at work, say in the way that trust is built up and maintained between the groups or the nature of the leadership dynamic; will help in not only cementing the relationships, but in the efficient formation of groups in the future, especially as group members are recruited.

### **Changing the Criteria for Decision Group Selection?**

One of the interviewees [member 2] is intimately involved in setting the criteria for the appointment of new Board Members and in the interview and selection process. One such process was ongoing at the time of the interview (March 2005). The criteria had been set against a laid down matrix of skills, experience and knowledge, the theory being that if a candidate matched exactly the matrix then they would be ideal for appointment. Prior to, and following the development of

the matrix, member 2 expressed dissatisfaction with this process and in the course of the interview made it plain that personality and the ability to 'fit in' to the group were far more important than the matrix. This view was strongly supported by member 4 in his interview. Three questions arise from this observation. If this was so, why did the group develop the matrix at all? Secondly, what led member 2 and member 4 to express such reservations so strongly and member 2 subsequently, in the appointment interviews, to pay more attention to personality than to the matrix in coming to a decision on a new member? The third question is, does this have any bearing on the inter group relationship during decision making? As the Chief Executive, I was present at all of the deliberations regarding the matrix and its introduction. I would answer the three questions in one. It is my opinion that the dynamics of the present Decision Group is such that personalities are a larger factor than would perhaps be the case in other groups. This was referred to by member 4 in his interview. The rather disparate group of personalities could be due to the high level of specialisation within the group. They are all noted experts in their own fields and this may militate against a more cohesive group. The realisation that this was indeed the case may have been facilitated by the research interviews in such a way that the member charged with the appointments realised that personality may be the key to cohesion and not explicit skills and experience. What may this tell us about the inter group relationship? On its own probably very little; however, it may be an indicator of the importance of personality behaviour and attitude in group performance and in the building and maintaining of inter group relationships and trust. Each of these aspects was coded in the interviews and appears in the research findings where a more considered reflection is recorded.

My feelings as I embarked on the next stage of my research journey and extend the literature review are for the first time, was one of being a true, active participant in a worldwide research community. I was excited to find out what is currently being researched, but also what had recently been postulated that will throw a spotlight on group relationships.

This early research had highlighted some interesting, and to this researcher surprising results. The concept of two separate, coherent groups, one advising the other in order that a decision can be made by one of them, was clearly not as straight forward as it first appeared. I expected that it would be self evident who had the responsibility for the decision to be made and that this inevitably resulted in a clear understanding of which group was making the decisions and how the process was managed, both in the groups and between the groups. The literature and the research findings indicate that this is not the reality and that the relationship was far more complex than I had anticipated. In addition, there appeared to be dynamics at work in and between the groups that are not covered by previous research.

Four themes appear to be at the forefront. The first is leadership, both within the advisory group and out with the group, but fundamentally influencing the members. The concept of the 'absent leader' is both interesting and surprising. It seems that the influence of one who is not a member of the group, but who exerts an overarching leadership dynamic upon the group, is an essential element in the group's performance and interaction. The second theme, allied to the first, is the concept of shared leadership. An interesting work in this area is provided by Pearce and Conger (2003) who first postulated this idea. The research indicates that, although this is clearly present, it is a weaker factor that may still provide the means for improving inter group performance. Assertions that organisational effectiveness and relationships are dependant on leadership practices embedded in

a system of interdependences at different levels within the organisation is covered in the thesis conclusions. However, what is certainly lacking in my research organisation is an understanding of the dynamic at work. There is therefore a lack of its positive acceptance, or a reflection of its existence within the structure and procedures of the Board and senior management. The third and fourth themes are again linked, these are 'shared fate' and 'shared motivation'. Both of these elements help to explain the inter group relationship and the nature of trust between the two groups. Trust is seen as a fundamental element in intra and inter group effectiveness, relationship building and the avoidance of conflict. Trust appears to have its roots in both a shared fate and in the sharing of motivations between members of both groups.

- This research had been conducted only with members of advisory groups; therefore the picture at this stage was incomplete. In order to gain a more complete picture, the involvement of the second, Decision Group was necessary. Cycle Two was intended to explore the four themes in more depth and across the two groups, gaining knowledge and understanding of the dynamics at work and developing the concept of the absent leader in influencing the inter group relationship. The research questions follow directly from the findings of the Cycle One.

### **Observation**

#### **Advisor Group, Pre Main Board Meetings – Their impact on the inter group relationship.**

This observation field note is as much a reflection on my involvement in the Advisor Group, Decision Group cross over membership as it is on the procedures adopted by the Advisor Group as a body in its relationship with the Decision



Group. This note raises questions of motivation and perception on the relationship between the two groups and the control mechanisms that such groups may introduce to protect their own position and reputation. I try in this observational note to analyse my own feelings and motivations in the circumstances detailed, as they may have a substantial, indeed perhaps profound, impact on the research findings.

In order to place the situation in context, it is necessary to detail the process by which the Advisor Group formally presents issues to the Decision Group for their action. Formal presentation of information, options for action and requests for a formal decision are made in writing by way of Board papers. The papers are prepared in the appropriate department or directorate, are reviewed by the responsible Director and are subject to final approval by the CEO [this researcher]. The papers each have a nominated 'presenter', who leads the main Board discussion and fills in the detail by way of member's questions. As each of the three Directors [Operations, Finance and Development and Planning] attends all of the Board meetings, as well of course as the CEO they are also available for member's questions. Prior to January 2006, at no stage did the complete senior team meet to review the papers in advance of the main Board meeting.

A main Board meeting was held in January 2006. I personally left this meeting feeling dissatisfied with the performance of the management team, which I thought had reflected badly upon us all. We appeared to be at odds with each other on some issues. On others we seemed to be hesitant in answering questions from members of the Decision Group and, on a number of occasions, talked over one another as we attempted to address the issues. We also appeared to be unsure who should be addressing which issue. The whole meeting appeared to me to be sloppy from the management's point of view. Although I felt as I did, I received no negative feedback from the other Decision Group members, even when I drew my

feelings to the attention of the Chairman of that group. For the first time since my arrival in the organisation I felt a clear conflict between my two roles, that of Decision Group member and Advisor Group member. As a Decision Group member I was frustrated to find that the very relevant questions being asked were not being addressed in what I felt was sufficient depth. As an Advisor Group member and CEO, I was embarrassed that my team were not performing at a high enough level [in my view, but not necessarily shared by others]. On the immediate conclusion of the meeting I drew my feelings to the attention of the rest of the Advisor Group; it clearly came as a surprise to them as they expressed the opinion that the meeting had been no better or worse than any other.

I was determined to address what I saw as a weakness and, with effect from February 2006, instituted pre-main Board meetings of the Advisor Group, chaired by me. The remit of the meeting was to review in detail each of the Board papers and also review management's response to possible questions, comments and observations by members of the Decision Group. The first such pre-Board was held in March 2006. The subsequent Board meeting was, in my view, a much better performance by the management team. Following that meeting I tried to analyse, in terms of inter group dynamics, my reasoning and why I reacted in the way that I had.

In my CEO interactions with the main Board [Decision Group] and in fostering what I believed to be the right relationship between management as advisors and those individuals that made up the main Board, I was seeking to engender trust and respect and a clear perception in the mind of the main Board members that they had, in their management, a group of highly experienced, highly competent and trustworthy individuals and a highly effective advisor team. The methods by which I saw this being achieved was fourfold. Firstly, that in presenting information and options to the Decision Group, they would be aware that an

in-depth and thorough optioning exercise had been carried out and that management were not holding back on any pertinent information. Secondly, that management, in all interactions with the Decision Group, were clearly people 'on the top of their game', in terms of presentational skills and knowledge of the issues. Thirdly, that the Decision Group members should be aware of the structure of the senior team and the way that leadership was being exercised and that it was seen as clear and positive. Lastly, it is essential that the Decision Group have the firm perception that the CEO and his management team [their advisors] have a clear vision and set of objectives that accord with their own ambitions for the organisation.

I had these elements in mind well before I began this research; however, I now see that they fit into the findings to date in terms of trust development and maintenance, mutual respect and the importance of perception of competence. I also see how a clear leadership landscape was established in order to achieve what I believed to be the right atmosphere and set of relationships between the two groups and how important this was to the process.

On reflection, my reaction to the one meeting was due to a feeling that these four pillars of the inter group relationship had been compromised by what I perceived to have been a poor performance on the day. Far from believing that any relationship between the two groups was solid and stable in terms of mutual trust and respect, I clearly felt that the trust dynamic was fragile enough that it required immediate remedial action. This I now believe is not the case, but I clearly believed it at the time.

The action taken is interesting. One could argue that the pre-Board meeting is bound in some way to compromise the openness with the Decision Group by

rehearsing the Board meeting in advance and almost 'rigging' the likely questions to achieve the perceptions needed. This is not to say that there was to be any misleading of the Decision Group, or any withholding of information, although this could be a criticism levelled at such a pre meeting. I take the view that it is probably sensible to carry out an element of rehearsal pre a Board meeting and that a comprehensive review of the papers to be presented, as a group, and an agreement on the approach to be adopted [and by whom] for each subject is just sensible planning. However, there are dangers in the process in that some compromising of the relationship may tend to creep in. It may also be a danger that the group will become more dependent on the leader to show the way in all aspects of the up coming meeting and remove a good deal of the independence of Advisor Group members. This would inevitably impact on the relationships between individuals in the two groups. Is this an attempt to artificially engender and maintain trust, respect and perceived competence, merely manipulation? Perhaps, but is this not what management do in all such situations? One could argue that the answer is yes, and therefore question the reality of the trust dynamic in any of these situations, indeed the reality of truth in such inter group relationships. Trust development and maintenance then become another set of management processes, tools to achieve management's ambitions, both personal and organisationally. This may be the cynical view, but I feel that there is an element of [real.] truth here.

### **5.3 Findings - Research Cycle Two – The Decision Group**

**Is there data to support the three concepts of shared values, shared fate and shared motivation as key dynamics in the inter group relationship?**

**What is the nature of trust in the inter group setting, how is it established and maintained?**

**What is the perception of Board members of the decision making process, who makes the decisions?**

In the Cycle One findings I speculated about the sharing dynamic between group members in an inter group relationship. I stated that conscious feelings of a shared fate and shared motivations may have their origins in trust between the two groups. This reflection built on the original work of Tyler (2003) and Jonas and Frey (2001). Gillespie and Mann (2004) also introduced shared values into this mix first postulated by Bigley and Pearce (1998), but stated that this sharing led to rather than came from the trust between members of the two groups. They pose the question of ‘whether shared values are a necessary condition for establishing trust, or a condition that enhances but is not essential for trust’. (Gillespie and Mann 2004. p 23).

My own research findings would seem to suggest that the three way sharing dynamic, fate, motivation and values, are indeed pre-cursors to the establishment and maintenance of trust, both within groups and between groups that have a special relationship. I feel that this is what one would expect and would lead to a set of true inter group and intra group relationships, true in the sense of the efficacy of the group in the performance of its duties and responsibilities. The question is,

does the data, when considered in the light of the findings of others, support this viewpoint?

In assessing the importance of the sharing dynamic, as possibly the key driver in any group/team/inter group relationship, in developing and maintaining trust, one accepts that trust is fundamental to the inter group relationship itself. In considering this statement, I am cognisant of the work and statements of Costa (2004) indicating that, although researchers have increasingly recognised the importance of trust at individual, team and organisational levels, the empirical evidence is inconsistent in support of that view. I reflected on other group situations where this dynamic may be more prominent and obvious. If one were to take an extreme example of a group/inter group relationship, one may get more of an insight.

I define extreme for my purposes as a group or groups in extreme personal danger, where failure of the group would clearly have catastrophic and lasting consequences. One can imagine many group situations where this may be the case; fire-fighters, police, deep sea divers, sections of the military. I chose to study the group relationship of Royal Air Force, Bomber Command crews during the Second World War. I take as my references the works of Nichol and Rennell (2004), Peden (1997) and Taylor and Davidson (2004).

In the circumstances faced by a bomber command aircrew at that time, it is widely accepted in the reference works that efficient and effective team work [group/team activity] was an essential element in both the efficiency of the crew in carrying out their duties and in their chances of survival. As only three in ten crews could be expected to achieve the 30 operations necessary to be rested from operations (Taylor and Davidson 2004), (Nichol and Rennell 2004) survival was not a

forgone conclusion. Clearly the crews could see that they had a shared fate, we can speculate that they in most cases also had a shared motivation, survival. There is not sufficient evidence in the references that I have studied to declare that all aircrew shared the same values, although all, in contrast to the other branches of the armed forces at this time, were volunteers. Indeed there are indications that values were not always shared, for example, a few of the ex aircrew interviewed in the references expressed disquiet at their involvement in the area bombing of German cities, whilst others stated that this was never a consideration.

It is accepted among the reference authors that intra crew trust was an essential element in efficient team working. In this extreme example one can readily appreciate that the sharing dynamics aided trust development and maintenance inside this operational grouping. One can also see how fragile this team trust could be when one considers times when it was put under strain.

The reference authors quote cases where navigators, due in the main to inexperience, made errors that directly put the lives of crew colleagues at risk. In these circumstances there seemed to be little room among team members to forgive and forget, that is, all the sharing dynamic possible did not save trust from being quickly eroded. One can speculate that the speed of the trust erosion is proportional to the personal consequences of failure for all the members of the group.

The selection of individuals to fly together gives a very useful clue. There was in the vast majority of cases no pre selection of individuals into crews of 6 or 7 people. The method used was to gather as many as three or four hundred aircrew of different trades in a hangar and let them sort themselves out into 6 or 7 man crews. Once this was done the crew would start to fly together as a team. Within

weeks they would be on bomber operations (Peden 1997), (Nichol and Rennell 2004), (Taylor and Davidson 2004).

I would suggest that, in these circumstances, there was insufficient time for any meaningful trust to develop between the team members unless other factors were present first. It is clear that, from the very beginning, even before the aircrew had met each other, they could be said to share fate and motivation if at this stage not necessarily the same values. One can speculate that this would be clear enough to them even before they met up with the people with whom they would eventually fly operations. That this was known and acknowledged by the Royal Air Force may well explain the relaxed attitude to crew selection, in that, given the dynamics involved, any one crew could be expected to be as efficient and motivated as any other. There would also be a strong presumption of competence between those due to be 'crewed' even though, at this stage, they would have not had the opportunity to observe each other professionally.

I believe that this extreme example gives a guide to the importance of the shared dynamic. We would expect to see support for this view in the data, in a less extreme form, and also expect to see data that supports the link between the sharing dynamic and the development and maintenance of trust.

There appear to me to be four questions here. Firstly, is there data to support the view that the three sharing dynamics are consciously apparent to the Decision Group members? Secondly, is there data to support that the three are unconsciously in evidence? Thirdly, what is the relationship between the three and the development and maintenance of trust? Lastly, is there any data to answer the question posed by Gillespie and Mann (2004) of whether shared values are a



necessary condition for establishing trust, or a condition that enhances but is not essential for trust?

In an interview environment, there is always the danger that the interviewer will lead the participant into linking words and ideas in support of an idea or theory of the researcher's. I was very conscious of this and I made an effort to avoid leading the interviewee, or appearing to be keen to explore areas that the interviewee had not brought up in the first place. I appreciated during the data gathering that it was unlikely that direct statements would be made in support of the sharing dynamic and less likely that direct statements would be made linking sharing with trust. My approach to the analysis has been to reflect on the data, where the development and/or maintenance of trust appears linked to the inter group relationship, or to the decision making process. Conversely, I was interested in data that showed a negativity related to trust [trust destruction] such as suspicion, questioning of motives/competence, unease, all related again to the inter group relationship or decision process. In analysing the data in this way I was at all times aware of what I believed by observation to be the social and structural characteristics of the organisation, SSC one to seven, detailed previously.

What complicated the analysis was a quite marked ambivalence to the notion of 'process' in decision making in the primary interviews and a lack of conscious reflection on the role of the Decision Group by its members. This was in contrast to the Advisor Group in Cycle One, where such a lack of reflection and acceptance of process was not in evidence (C1). This often manifested itself in a rather detached attitude to the group's performance, as though the interviewee were observing rather than participating in the group activity. Some of the comments made by the group members show this:

‘maybe we don’t believe in what we want and we’re prepared to commit and push forward with it..... we will probably ally ourselves with what the executive want’ (4)

‘I’m quite conscious of that really, how little you can trust your own judgment of somebody’s management competence from their performance at a committee, because it is a performance really’(3)

On who is making the decisions, when asked that question:

‘I still think that it is the executive, not our Board’ (4)

When asked, ‘what then is the role of the Board?’:

‘they [*the Board*] make the strategic decisions, to date we haven’t’ (4)

On being asked if it is important who is making the decisions in the organisation:

‘it doesn’t matter very much, because if it did I’d be thoroughly uncomfortable and I’d be battling a lot harder than I am really’(3)

On a specific and important decision for the organisation:

‘we missed out a step and the Board didn’t notice that the step was missed out and didn’t complain early enough and ask for it’ (1)

My impression from all of the interviews was that they were more negative in spirit and content than positive and more negatively biased than had been the Advisor Group’s interviews in Cycle One. In reflecting on this point I was aware of the observation field notes that I had written and that my research was taking place in a very specific context in terms of the inter group relationship and also in a particular point in the organisation’s history. This is of course true of all such research and in terms of the ‘ethnographic story’, it is important that the conclusions from the analysis take this into account.

There is certainly a wide variation of opinion and statement in the interview data that covers the extremes of perception, both of the intra group and inter group relationship; from positive:

‘.....a relationship between Board and the management, which has both a feeling of shared common objectives, common cause and actually quite liking each other’ (3)

‘it was quite clear that night that everyone was all going in the same direction’ (4)

‘.....I am comfortable that I can sleep at night and not worry about that.....I am comfortable with those that are running the business’ (4)

‘...the trust between management and Board I think is based on mutual respect’ (2)

‘I am nevertheless comfortable because the day-to-day running of the business is to them [*management*] and they obviously have much more knowledge of the day-to-day running of it’ (4)

On the relationship between the two groups:

‘I think that it is, well, it’s perfectly friendly’ (1)

‘you tend to accept to a large extent management ability and what they are doing’ (2)

and the negative:

‘if I had to choose between the collective professional competence of the management and the collective professional competence of the Board, I’d go for management’ (3)

‘I would think that management doesn’t really look forward to Board meetings terribly, because it’s a lot of work to get all the papers out, it’s tiring, the late nights, a lot of eating, there are these people who breeze in, debate, criticise and then bugger off, I expect it’s all rather irritating’ (1)

‘I think we’ve gone a little bit off actually, recently’ (2)

‘I’m not terribly comfortable with the specific way it’s working at the moment where we’ve got, as we were saying earlier, some small group dynamics going on..... I think they’re a sort of, an accident of individual personalities coming together at a point in time’ (3)

‘So ‘why haven’t we been shown it, was there a reason why we didn’t have it?’ You know, then it sort of feeds itself, doesn’t it. You know, ‘what else aren’t they showing us? What are they doing behind our backs?’ Well, it festers, doesn’t it? (4)

‘I would say it’s affecting the decision-making atmosphere, rather than the decision-making process. I don’t think... my feeling is at the moment it’s just a little bit dysfunctional’ (3)

I reflected on why there should be such a wide variation in opinion. There appeared to me to be very little consistency of opinion, certainly much less than was apparent from the Advisor Group. There were other contradictions throughout the interviews, mainly centered around the role of the Board and on who in fact was making the decisions [referred to above]. All of the interviewees at some point alluded to the fact that management actually made the decisions and yet all also made it plain that the Board made the decisions. Can we explain in terms of the sharing dynamics and the concept of group trust: the range of comments and opinions, the apparent contradictions, the apparent ambivalence and detachment displayed by the group members?

I reflected on the hypothesis of ‘optimal trust’ put forward by Ferda Erdem (2003). She suggests in her research findings that positive aspects of trust and distrust are realised simultaneously:

‘At an optimal level of trust, while team members trust each other and express their views freely..... they also exhibit signs of distrust in searching for diversity, defending alternative solutions, being less dogmatic, retaining a degree of skepticism, inquiring and criticizing (Erdem 2003, p. 229).

I interpret her research to suggest that an efficient relationship, that which achieves the objectives it sets itself, either inter group or intra group, will establish an optimal level of trust that at times will exhibit wide fluctuations, but will maintain a level that ensues the efficacy of the relationships. I can reflect that my interviewees were doing no more than exhibiting this optimal trust level in their responses.

In reflecting on the other questions and issues that are raised in this part of the findings I have taken a very particular view, taking into account both the social context and the harder data, in postulating my ideas as to what is happening. There are certainly indications from the interviews that the sharing dynamic exists on a conscious level:

‘...if you imagine that you want something, a relationship between a Board and the management, which has both a feeling of shared common objectives, common cause, actually quite liking each other, engagement with what’s going on, enthusiasm.....’ (3)

‘I think we should share a long-term vision for the port as a facility and as a business. I think we should share a vision as to the role it has as a trust port’ (1)

‘not going to go anywhere very positive compared with another relationship where the Board and the management are one together and are pulling together and all moving ahead in the same direction’ (2)

‘that the Board is functioning and delivering its objectives, then I will happily engage with whatever game is put in front of me, in terms of which issues are there for discussion’ (3)

‘you can have all the strategy in the world, if the executives won’t deliver it, there’s no point in having it. So you have to have them working with you, otherwise it’s not going to get anywhere’ (4)

We have seen above that the optimal level of trust hypothesis may explain that dynamic in this particular time and place. In order to understand why this time and place are fundamental to understanding, we need to examine the data on the social and structural context one to seven detailed on pages 16 to 19. The power of the interpretive, ethnographic methodology lies in the opportunity it gives the researcher to place the data and the analysis into a context of time and place that is so essential to understanding. This is not merely a snap shot, but is an appreciation of the environment and interactions that are taking place that naturally impact upon the research data. They are not themselves being directly researched. It is my view that the social framework or context does not change over a relatively long period of time, but the social interactions within that framework can and do change over relatively short periods of time.

Perhaps the best example of this is the basic and normal family unit. It could be said that most stable families will have a social framework which is itself stable and relatively long lasting, whose members probably share many things, including values and motivations. Within this social framework there will be relatively short lived social interactions that result in the odd bout of disagreement and argument, petty feuds, misunderstandings and upsets. These interactions do not destroy, or even necessarily reflect negatively upon, the basic social framework and one would be taking somewhat of a risk in judging the whole family unit on its short lived social interactions. I hope that I am cognisant of this in my own reflections.

On reflection, the following is my analysis and appreciation. There is a presumed level of competence that the Decision Group has in the Advisor Group. They have a reasonable expectation that management is knowledgeable, skilful, experienced, professional and competent, all phrases used in the interviews by all of the participants. Members of the Decision Group are relatively temporary in the organisation (SSC 3) and apply to join for motives that are other than monetary, or

power; usually for reasons of interest/history/gaining of knowledge/public profile/government profile (SSC 4 and 5). The Decision Group is naturally cautious due to the possibility in their minds of a charge of lack of accountability and responsibility to a higher body, such as shareholders (SSC 1). On the other hand, the Advisor Group is highly skilled and knowledgeable and takes pride in being acknowledged experts within their industry.

It could therefore be said to be a natural mismatch in inter group terms, leading to a natural tension in the inter group relationship. The relatively little time that the Decision Group spends within and working for the organisation militates against more involvement in the day-to-day operations of the business. This carries over into natural Decision Group territory, strategic decision making. The groups have largely shared motivations and largely shared values, coming as they do from similar interests and motives; however, they do not share fate. The Advisor Group [management] see themselves as the guardians of the organisation and the real decision makers (C1). The Decision Group largely acknowledges that this is the situation in their interviews.

My observations appeared to show a collective sensitivity in the Decision Group, which I believe to be the result, at least in part, of the relative fragility of the sharing dynamics leading to a corresponding fragility in the trust between the two groups. This may well be compounded by the accountability issue above, in that the Decision Group are also sensitive to stakeholder or public criticism of decisions made without recourse to a shareholder or owner group.

**Text Field Note One [May 1994, February 1995, January 1998, July 1999]**

**The Decision to Build a Second Cruise Terminal and its Influence on Subsequent Inter Group Decision Activity.**

Two of the research interviewees in Cycle Two mentioned the decision made by the Board in May 1994 to build a second cruise ship terminal. Both interviewees suggested that this decision had been badly handled by the Board [Decision Group] and that the experience had to some extent coloured their approach to the inter group relationship ever since that time. They both stated that the level of trust regarding the Advisor Group's presentation and delivery of major capital projects had been affected by this episode. Their contention was that the cruise terminal had been sold by the Advisor Group at the various presentations on misleading commercial and financial arguments [not intentionally] and the building itself had been over engineered for its purpose, without including any flexibility for additional uses.

This researcher was not with the organisation when the decision was taken to build and therefore an examination of the files and notes dating back to the original decision making process begun in 1994 was carried out (Dover Harbour Board Archives 1994, 1998).

Despite exhaustive study of the relevant files and minutes it was not possible to find any record of one definitive presentation by the Advisor Group to the Decision Group and no record of any definitive decision to proceed with the build of the second cruise terminal in all its detail. What appears to have happened is that the discussions regarding the desirability of building were debated over many months, perhaps as long as 3 years, at many different meetings. The decision to build was actually a number of related decisions over something approaching two years, all leading to the final construction beginning. Although there was a final



Board paper authorising the capital spend, there is no supporting debate recorded and nobody present during this time can recollect a final presentation and debate on the detail. Why then, given this history, was it thought important and relevant enough by two of the interviewees, independently, to mention this as a somewhat of a defining moment in the inter group relationship? Additionally, does this tell us anything about the nature of inter group relationships?

From the way that at least one of the interviewees referred to the issue of the second cruise terminal by saying that they would never let this kind of thing happen again, this is clearly an important indicator and maybe a significant moment in the inter group relationship. The interviewees appeared to be suggesting that the Decision Group had been misled and yet the textual evidence suggests that the error, if indeed there was an error, is one of procedure and if so one could strongly argue that the fault lies equally with both groups. Self evidently the issue of a certain amount of breakdown in the trust dynamic is an element. It may also be that the issues detailed in Observation Note One have been influenced to some extent by this earlier incident in the relationship. However, one could reflect that leadership is a key component here.

My Cycle One findings found an apparently strong link between the exercise of leadership and the amount of trust developed and maintained between groups. Sheard and Kakabadse (2004) develop the idea of a 'leadership landscape'. This landscape, they argue, helps those within a team to perform. I interpret their research to mean that the leadership landscape sets the framework within which the team or group carries out its work. The elements of leadership that comprise the framework may be debatable; however, I would agree with Mitzberg (1990) that, leadership clues include seeking reassurance, direction, information and approval. The framework therefore requires leadership to provide the right information at the right time to reassure group members in terms of the veracity of the information

they are being given. I state in the literature review that the importance of organisational goal setting by the leadership is, at one end, argued by Vroom (2003), a prime enabling element and at the other by Sheard and Kakabadse (2004), as a help. I would argue that the cruise terminal incident may be largely due to a lack of leadership, in that the decision was not sufficiently tied, by procedure, to the organisational goals in such a way that the two groups had complete reassurance and 'buy in' to the eventual decision. Such a buy in would demonstrate a shared motivation and reinforce the shared fate dynamic, reducing future conflict and maintaining trust between groups. The lack of clear direction and argument within the texts provides evidence for this view, as does the apparent lack of a clear presentation by the Advisor Group at which all details were examined and debated.

Atkinson and Butcher (2003) talk of two types of trust; that which is based on interpersonal interaction with a particular individual, within a particular relationship and impersonal trust, based on role, systems, reputation or position within an organisation, what I have termed perceived competence. They give no indication as to the relative importance of each type. Comparing their research and that of Erdem (2003) one can suggest that the balance between the two types contributes to the optimal trust level. If one is stronger than the other it may give some indication of the rate at which trust will be eroded or destroyed by events. One could speculate for example that interpersonal trust based upon relationship and character interaction is likely to be stronger in an absolute sense than trust based upon reputation, as individuals may well value close contact and knowledge as a basis for their own conclusions, rather than the distance of impersonal trust which would be based upon the opinion of others.

One could speculate that, in the research organisation, the personal relationships are not well established. Members of the Decision Group appear rarely to meet outside their very restricted time as group members. They rarely meet with the Advisor Group members other than in joint meetings [amounting to no more than 8 working days per year]. Personal relationships, both inter and intra are therefore weak and this element of the trust dynamic can be assumed to be weak:

‘When groups are composed of people who are unfamiliar with one another, the emerging relationships are fragile. Empirical studies indicate that in new relationships, people often trust one another as an act of faith before they have sufficient experience interacting to know whether that trust is warranted.’ (Arrow et al 2000, p.223)

It follows from this argument, if one agrees with Atkinson and Butcher (2003) and the references they quote, that the main contributor to the optimal trust level is impersonal, that which I have referred to as ‘perceived competence’. In the particular time and place that this research was conducted two issues dominated in the minds of the interviewees, the construction of the second cruise terminal (TFN. page 182) and the construction of two new ferry berths (OFN. page 186). In both cases the competence of the Advisor Group has been questioned, despite the relative success of the enterprises:

‘I think it was over-designed. I think we should have learnt our lessons in engineering control from crews too [cruise 2], which we clearly didn’t. I wouldn’t have built that great big office/docks place and I never imagined it was going to be like that’(4)

‘..... whether we shouldn’t have thought about much more economical ways of doing it, rather than doing the same as before only bigger and grander and more modern. And we’re kicking ourselves, or some of us are kicking ourselves on the Board, that we didn’t challenge the original specification’(1)

‘I can’t think of any way of organising the Board that would have prevented the AMEC thing [cruise 2] from happening, because, because if you could have thought of it then the management would have prevented it from

happening. Nobody wanted it to happen. You know, it's all about what happened after. And there were some, some tensions there, and a bit of sort of blame floating around,' (3)

The consequent lowering of trust between the groups is evident in the observations [second cruise terminal and 8 and 9 berths] and in the interview transcripts and can be attributed to both a different perceived fate dynamic [the expected criticism of both stakeholders and public], a lack of control by the Decision Group on their own processes and decision fate and a questioning of the perceived competence of the Advisor Group.

An important element is missing in these speculations and reflections and that is the role of leadership. We deal with that in the next part of the findings.

### **Observation**

#### **Ship Berths 8 and 9, Construction and Commissioning – An Indicator of the Nature of Trust Between Groups?**

The construction of two new RoRo ferry berths, completed in the early part of 2005, represents the single largest capital investment project (circa £28 million) ever undertaken at the Port of Dover and by the Dover Harbour Board. The decision to make the investment was taken by the Board in July 2002 following a recommendation by the senior management. The detailed specification for the two berths was not included in the presentation by the Advisor Group and the Board made the decision based largely upon the principle of providing additional ship berth capacity, rather than on a detailed description of what was to be built.

The berths were constructed against the agreed timetable and commissioning started in January 2005. Early in the commissioning period it became apparent that the berths were suffering a number of defects and this led to some unsupportive customer ship operators making statements to the press regarding the specification of the berths. These comments duly appeared in two national newspapers. The detail of the defects is not important in terms of this observation. What is interesting is that the defects were classified by engineering management as expected 'teething' problems and rectification would cost the organisation less than half and one percent of the investment cost. In addition, most of the defects were covered by the 'design and build' nature of the contract with all rectification costs being the responsibility of the contractor.

The reaction of the majority of the Decision Group was that of embarrassment and concern, expressed as an apparent loss of confidence in the Advisor Group. This manifested itself in the short term in more critical questioning of presentations made to the Decision Group members on unrelated matters. Although there was a reasonable and acceptable explanation for the defects and there was no criticism leveled by anyone regarding the resolution to the problems, **the fact that a critical report appeared in the national press was taken badly by the majority of the Decision Group members. This appeared to result in a temporary breakdown of confidence and trust between the two groups.** The question for the researcher is, what might this show us about the nature of trust between groups and what might this apparent fragility of the trust dynamic tell us about the inter group relationship in this case?

My research findings raise the issue of 'perceived competence' that is, the level of competence that the Decision Group members 'assume' in the Advisor Group and its members until shown evidence to the contrary and the effect this may have on the establishment and maintenance of the trust dynamic. My data also appears to

show that trust as an inter group dynamic, although essential to the relationship and acknowledged as important by the members of both groups, is more fragile than may appear the case on first examination. We may also wonder at the role of personal impact that is the effect of the actions of others within one group as perceived by the members of another group. Atkinson (2005) may provide a link within her recent research when she raises the question of political usefulness and the dynamics of senior management relationships. She appears to suggest fragility within relationships allied to personal impact and even to status. She was even more specific in her 2003 paper on trust in managerial relationships stating that:

‘Managerial relationships are often characterised by politics and the pursuit of hidden agendas and self interest. Competing perspectives and personal motivations can conspire to render even the most innocent of acts subject to scrutiny and suspicion’ (Atkinson 2003, p.1).

To what extent the inter group situation can be described as a managerial relationship is a debatable point; however, it seems to be valid in the wider sense of the phrase and in terms of the group’s clearly shared organisational responsibilities.

One could postulate from this observation field note that a Board member [a Decision Group member] who, as a non-executive is largely in the hands of Advisor Group members in terms of the effectiveness of decision making within the organisation, [this may be a step too far in the findings from this research, but the speculation is still valid] is more sensitive to criticism and more sensitive to perceived impact because of the lack of control of their personal ‘fate’. In other words, the breakdown of trust is fragile because the shared fate dynamic is in itself fragile. The next logical step in this thinking would be that the phenomena of ‘perceived competence’ that appears in my Cycle Two findings is itself fragile and in effect a misplaced perception in new members to a Decision Group. A healthy dose of skepticism would appear to be more appropriate, not committing oneself to a shared fate, or indeed to any sharing dynamic’ until more evidence is available .

This would of course be highly undesirable in terms of quickly building or maintaining group cohesion, although it is by no means unknown to this researcher.

### **What is the role of leadership in the intra and inter group relationship?**

I earlier reflected on the role of leadership and on the concept of leader influence in a wider context, the 'absent leader' hypothesis. I referred in the literature review to the link between trust and leadership and the work of Fairholm and Fairholm (2000), in respect to a leader's activity in creating a supportive culture of shared values within groups. I stated in the review that I disagreed with their research in the matter of the establishment of mutual trust, where I believe that the act of leadership leads to the establishment of mutual trust, not that leaders need that environment to exist in order to lead. I also expressed an interest in the work of Sheard and Kakabadse (2004) on the concept of the leadership landscape within an organisation and its groups and teams. I went on to reflect on these ideas in the light of my own data.

I have expressed the opinion that the role of leadership is a crucial element in inter group relationships and often overlooked by researchers in empirical studies into group dynamics. The Cycle One data showed an apparent correlation between the efficacy of the management processes within the Advisor Group, and that group's mutual support and intra relationships, with the exercise of leadership influence, either overt or perceived. I was therefore interested to see if the data from this Cycle Two contained a 'leadership thread' that was clear and relevant, that is, that positively or negatively impacted the efficacy of the Decision Group and/or its

sharing and trust dynamics, or the inter group relationship. I surmised before the interviews took place that leadership within the Decision Group would be centered primarily on the role of the Chairman of the group and secondly on the role of the Chief Executive, de facto leader of the Advisor Groupings and also the researcher.

I considered that the leadership dynamics were going to be very different within the two groups. The reason for this is that the personal relationships within the groups are very different. The Advisor Group is operating within a set management hierarchy and within a clear responsibility structure that is absent within the Decision Group. The Advisor Groupings have a set of long established personal relationships that lead to a strengthened interpersonal trust dynamic, this is not true of the Decision Group (SSC). The Advisor Groupings have a relationship that is also based on observing and interacting with each other's professional competence. The competence trust is not just 'perceived', but is a living dynamic in the relationship profile and directly impacts at every working level. Within the terms introduced by Atkinson and Butcher (2002), this would lead to a strengthened impersonal trust dynamic. One can also speculate that the optimal trust level should be exceeded in such a grouping and that the trust between group members would be substantially less fragile than that of the Decision Group. The leadership landscape postulated by Sheard and Kakabadse (2004) would therefore be very different for each group in isolation and the overall organisational leadership landscape would be heavily influenced by the Advisor Group dynamics. If that were to be the perceived case within the organisation we would expect the interview data to reflect a bias to the CEO's leadership profile, even within the Decision Group, rather than the de facto leader of the Decision Group, the Chairman. This should be the case almost regardless of the two personalities involved. I was therefore struck by the unanimity of opinion among all of the interviewees on the leadership role:



‘that’s your role, [*the researcher*] to try and stimulate them, which you are’.  
‘We’re sitting on one side, they’re sitting on the other side and you’re in the middle mediating between the two groups.’ (4)

‘you [*the researcher*] are putting quite a lot of demands on them, much more than you’re putting on the Board members, to justify themselves’ (3),

. ‘.....if you believe in something then you will lead by example and people will follow you. So I think leadership is important’(4)

‘I think that leadership for a chief executive is very important. I think the Board needs leadership too’(2)

‘what that’s doing is putting quite a lot of trust and weight in my mind on you, because I suppose my viewpoint is only acceptable if I’m thinking ‘well I really don’t think she’s any good but I trust [*the CEO*] that you know, he’s going to be seeing that.....’ (3)

‘.....the chief executive, you and more particularly your predecessor, no doubt had a great influence over that, but the other groups, the other divisions, including finance, I think didn’t get much input into it.....’(1)

‘I think the chairman has a more general responsibility for, if you like, quality control of them [*decisions*]... ‘ (1)

‘...it’s up to the head of the group, if you like, to make absolutely certain that the right tone is set and followed all the way through.’ (2)

I was also struck with the clear opinion among all of the interviewees that the leadership landscape was indeed biased to the CEO and his Advisor Groupings.

‘I think the chief executive has a particular responsibility for those decisions, also because the Board makes its decisions on the basis of recommendations and information that pass through the chief executives team, and the chairman has a particular responsibility for the decisions’ (1)

‘I think setting the tone it always comes from the top. The chief executive with the management, I think that it’s less in the Board in a way’(2)

‘a Board often reflects the Chief Executive’(4)

‘The chief executive leads and serves as well. He leads his chief, his management team’.....’ the chief executive is responsible for the quality of the management team and their processes, the rigor of their processes.’ (1)

‘....essentially the role of a Board is to support the management and especially the chief executive’, (3)

This may of course explain the contradiction among the Decision Group as to which group is actually making the decisions, as opposed to which group has the actual and legal responsibility for making decisions.

There appears to be a clear link in the research between personal relationships, respect, trust, efficiency and the style and philosophy of management. This last is, in my view and supported by the data, heavily influenced by an effective leadership environment.

My research is not primarily concerned with the complicated concepts of leadership within managerial relationships, a subject that has attracted a substantial and continuing amount of research activity. I wish to establish that leadership is an issue within inter group dynamics, reflect on the nature and relative importance of this leadership influence and establish by my research possible linkages with trust development and maintenance. As a final statement on the issue of the leadership landscape, this quote from member 2 encapsulates the thrust of the Cycle Two research findings:

‘hopefully the Board and the management will work together but not as two separate teams where almost the Board in the worst case would be isolated because management wouldn’t want the Board interfering with what they quite rightly see as their running of the business’(2)

Coming after the Cycle One, I had expected the Cycle Two interviews to hold few surprises in terms of process and outcome. In fact, I found the interviews with the Decision Group members to be far more challenging in terms of data gathering and far more illuminating in terms of personal attitude and behaviour patterns than I

had expected. In three of the four interviews one question resulted in a stream of information, not all of it relevant to the subject of the interview. This indicated to me that there existed undercurrent of opinions within and between the groups that had no outlet for expression. No inter group procedure had been established by the leaders that would allow free debate and expression on all subjects. There was clearly some frustration among the interview members on these points. I found it quite difficult to keep the interviews on track as the participants wanted to debate other issues. In all cases the interviewee answers were clearly being coloured by my relationship with the person and by numerous issues that were largely irrelevant to the research, Board issues going on at the same time. Not only did these things make the interviews quite challenging they have made the analysis equally challenging. This was not all a negative effect for there was much data on situations and issues that were not apparently important at the time, but became increasingly so with time and when I had time to reflect on the research. These problems and issues are clearly a challenge to any insider ethnographer. However, the resultant data did prove useful and illuminating. Knowing what was and what was not relevant data was greatly aided by insider knowledge.

I did however learn from the experience. Firstly, I should not have made assumptions on the conduct of the second set of interviews from the experiences of the first. Each is a discrete set, with its own challenges and requirements. I should have appreciated and planned for this. Secondly, I should have been more cognisant of the prevailing mind set of the participants and planned the interviews accordingly. I tended to plan the interviews for the convenience of the participants and I in terms of time spent at Dover, than by considering the live issues that may impact on the interviews. For example, one of the interviews took place directly before a Board meeting when the participant's mind was probably focused on what was to come. I could have turned this to my advantage in terms of data possibilities, but at that time I did not appreciate the significance of the timing issue.

#### **5.4 Findings - Research Cycle Three – New Members and the Focus Group**

I have stated that the time and place of this type of research is crucial to understanding, and my view that this strengthens the interpretive ethnographic methodological approach I have adopted. A coincidence of time and place within the subject groups provides the opportunity to enrich the data gathered in Cycles One and Two and add to it by approaching the two sets of research questions from a different perspective.

In the later part of the Cycle Two research activity, two newly appointed members joined the Decision Group [Board]. The candidates were at that time unknown to the existing members and to management and there were therefore no professional or personal relationships with either group. In addition, one of the Advisor Group members was appointed as the second, executive member of the Board making him the second person, as well as this researcher, to be both a member of the advisory groupings and the Decision Group.

This provided an opportunity to enrich the data by exploring the various issues, attitudes and perceptions before the data became in any way altered by direct exposure to the groups and their interactions. I intended to carry out qualitative interviews with the new members before they formally met and interacted with the established Board members. I timed the interviews before the new members had the opportunity to spend much time with me. This provided the opportunity to gather data before any preconceived ideas could be formed. My intention was to explore the nature of perceived competence in the Advisor Group and the nature of the establishment of trust with members who at that time had no previous exposure

to the organisation. I was in addition exploring the nature of any shared motivations and values in advance of their establishing relationships with existing group members and assessing what preconceptions they held. I then intended to repeat the interviews for one of the members after a set period of exposure to group interaction, in this case 6 months. I additionally interviewed a member who was appointed in June 2005 following a 6 month period of membership. This provided some comparative data that may throw further light on the inter group relationship issues.

For the second executive member I was exploring any change in perception of status and role and any impact this may be having on his previous contribution to the Cycle One findings. I was also exploring any possible impact on his attitude to the Decision Group relationships and to his Advisor Grouping colleagues.

I expected to gain additional insight into the relationship between the groups and to be able to expand on the relative importance of trust, leadership and the sharing dynamics. However, although these threads that I have explored and reflected on within the findings of Cycle Two are one interpretation, I am conscious that there are other issues within the data that would benefit from further analysis. In addition, further comparative analysis between Cycle One and Cycle Two added additional, relevant data.

The Cycle One and Cycle Two findings highlighted a number of key issues in the understanding of the inter group relationship dynamics between two groups tasked with decision making. Perceptions and personality appear to be key drivers of the inter group relationship through their impact upon trust, within and between the groups. Leadership is a factor, in that the leadership framework, or 'landscape', impacts upon the development and maintenance of trust. The purpose of Cycle

Three was to bring together all of the research work in a way that is meaningful, valid, and makes a real and original contribution to the body of knowledge. An essential element of this cycle of research was to enrich and re-examine the data. The recruitment and arrival of newly appointed members to the Decision Group [Board] provided a significant research opportunity. On appointment, the new members were unknown to the existing members and to management and therefore no professional or personal relationships existed with either group. In addition, in late 2005, one of the Advisor Group members was appointed as the second, executive, full member of the Board making him the second person, as well as this researcher to be both a member of the advisory groupings and the Decision Group.

Qualitative interviews were carried out with the new members shortly after they formally met and had their first interactions with the established Board members, but before any true relationships had been formed. The interviews were also timed before the new members had the opportunity to spend much time with me and with the management team, thereby providing the opportunity to gather data, hopefully before any preconceived ideas were formed, other than those the members already possessed.

The research explores the nature of perceived competence in the Advisor Group and the nature of the establishment of trust with members who had no previous exposure to the organisation. The research was intended to explore the nature of any shared motivations and values in advance of members establishing relationships with the existing group and to assess what preconceptions they held at that time. The intent was to repeat the interviews for one of the members after a set period of exposure to group interaction, in this case 6 months. This provided some valuable comparative data.

For the second executive member the research explores any change in perception of status and role and any impact this may be having on his previous contribution to the cycle findings. It also explores any possible impact on his attitude to the Decision Group relationships and to his Advisor Grouping colleagues.

The observation field notes are contained in vignettes within the text. The recording of observation field notes is an integral part of the ethnographic process. Although this activity was continuous throughout the research period, only those observations relevant to the analysis and findings are included in the thesis

Bruni (2006) defines the act of ethnography as ‘the tracing of connections’ and of ‘interpreting the data according to our own ideas, preferences and opinions’ (Bruni 2006, oral conference quote). The themes and connections that have emerged from the Cycle One and Cycle Two of this research have, in my opinion, indicated the central role of trust to the inter group relationship, its establishment and maintenance and the impact of its destruction and subsequent rebuilding. The two cycles also appear to show that the level of sharing among inter and intra group members has a substantial influence on the level and maintenance of trust, in and between group members. The overarching influence of leadership is a thread that runs through the research findings, appearing to be the glue that holds the inter group relationship together in the face of the inevitable stresses and strains of organisational decision making, split between two diverse and distinct sets of individuals. The leadership impact appears lessened by a higher level of the sharing dynamics, as closer understanding and appreciation militates against polarisation and undue conflict.

The composition of the two groups under research has changed quite significantly since the completion of the data gathering for the Cycle Two and during the data

gathering and analysis for this cycle. Two members left the 8 person Decision Group and later, three new members joined. The three new members had been recruited using a slightly different skills and experience matrix and with a different mindset in the group's leadership (OFN. Page 163 & 201). An organisational restructuring in September of 2005, actioned by this researcher, introduced a new Director to the Director's group and promotion to General Manager for two of the senior management team included in the Advisor Groupings. The Cycle Three research was therefore conducted in a slightly changed context to the earlier two cycles. To a degree, those that participated in the data gathering would be to a degree feeling their way in their new roles within an unfamiliar social framework.

**Do preconceptions of sharing exist in new group members and how do they change with time?**

**Is trust an issue for joining group members and if so what are the preconceptions of its nature and how does this change with time?**

Although the question had to be asked, it is hardly surprising that when asked a direct question regarding the role of trust in inter group relationships, all interviewees agreed that it is an essential element to the efficacy of that relationship.

‘ You need trust, that you can trust people, you know, when your expert is saying things, that you can trust it's what.. you can believe what he says’  
(Focus Group)

‘The usual key to that (*the relationship*) is trust’ (Member 6)

well, you would trust the management, based upon your own experience’  
(Member 5)



One may say that it is an obvious statement, but why should this be so? I would speculate that the idea of trust, rather than the actuality of its existence, in any relationship, or set of relationships, is a basic cognitive feeling. It may be that as individuals enter relationships for whatever reason they start that relationship with a basic set of assumptions. These may range from an assumption that the others involved in the relationship share a similar view of the world around them, until it is proved otherwise. There may be a basic assumption of goodwill; however that is interpreted by different individuals. There may well be a basic assumption of honesty and a level of integrity. There may also be a basic level of trusting, especially if individuals have choice in joining the groups to which they are attached. Why would one join a group in the knowledge that there can be no trust in the relationships to be formed? This seems to run contrary to logical reasoning and normal human behaviour and should be the position, unless there are other more overriding factors governing the reasons for joining, such as financial gain, information gain, or status issues. It is therefore hardly surprising when interviewed that group members put trust as one of important elements in group relationships. However, it is important to reflect on what they may mean by the word trust. There is data to suggest that trust and an assumption of competence in others are closely related. In addition, trust and respect appear to be used interchangeably, respect being a reflection of assumption of competence in others:

‘What I am looking to see is a degree of respect..... it doesn’t work unless that dynamic exists.’ (Member 6)

On trust development: ‘it’s the professionalism and the way things are presented..... that mistakes are not made.....hitting a certain standard of performance ‘ (Member 5)

‘we could share trust and mutual respect and that we could trust in other people’s views and opinions, even if we don’t agree with them’ (Member 6)

On who to trust: ‘people who smile, people who are a little bit relaxed, people who I know I can trust, people who are professional’ (Member 5)

In new group members this assumption of competence must largely come from limited evidence of actual competence and may instead come from a view of what other, existing group members have seen and been involved in, also for matters of status, role and reputation. One can also speculate that these assumptions will be influenced by the extent to which the new group member feels that others share his/her world view, attitudes to life and role and even to the extent that they match in terms of life experience and present life situations. One could pose the question, 'how much of a bond can be formed by persons who share life experiences and attitudes'. One could assume that the more matching that is evident, the more likely it is that the word trust will be used when defining the nature of a particular relationship. Certainly, it seems to be a set of feelings, based upon past experiences and general judgment regarding people.

When asked what leads to trust:

'track record.... Have I actually got confidence in these people, in a persons' character, in a persons ability' (Member 5)

' you observe, you listen and you evaluate what you hear and see and you make a judgment about people' (Member 5)

'I like working with people I like' (Member 5)

When speaking of a past group experience and lack of trust:

'people who were there with totally non shared values and with totally different outcomes in mind, with totally different thought processes'  
(Member 6)

In this regard, the following Observation Field Note is particularly revealing.

## Observation

### **Membership Changes in the Decision Group**

Some of the participants in the Cycle Two interviews talked of a certain dysfunctionality, as they phrased it, within the Decision Group. This was attributed to the knock on effect of the personality traits and actions of one particular member who was a relatively recent joiner to the group. This observation deals with the issues surrounding that particular event and the aftermath in terms of inter and intra group dynamics.

The individual concerned had been interviewed and appointed following retirement from an organisation where a substantially more confrontational relationship existed between groups. He had occupied a senior position within the organisation and appeared to bring this confrontational approach to his membership of this Decision Group. His actions in adopting this approach resulted in some polarisation within the group and a lowering in the level of trust and respect the Advisor Group had with the Decision Group. The evidence for this is that the Chairman was seriously considering having the individual removed from the group earlier than planned. In the event other issues intervened and the individual left the group after some 2 years.

In observing these events I was struck with how quickly polarisation occurred within the group. This manifested itself by a discernable split within the Decision Group into at least two opposing camps. One coalesced around the particular individual concerned and adopted a more confrontational approach to the Advisor Group and its relationship with the Decision Group. The other camp largely maintained the pre existing relationship. The Advisor Group began to distrust the motives of the first camp and this led to a very obvious deterioration in the overall relationship. My view was that the Advisor Group individuals began to doubt the Decision Group's competence and intellectual vigour, which, if left unchecked,

could easily have resulted in the management team attempting to bypass the main Board decision process. Not unsurprisingly, the polarisation and the issues associated with it in terms of mutual trust, appeared largely to disappear once the particular individual left the Decision Group.

Following the findings of Cycle One and Cycle Two and with reference to the literature, I have reflected upon the circumstances surrounding this observation and tried to draw some conclusions. The issue seemed in my view to be a combination of: a mismatch of personalities, a person whose experience and management practice had been in a substantially different environment to that of the Decision Group and an individual with an almost totally opposing set of values and motivations from the other group members. What was happening at each combined meeting was that the individual concerned, on all occasions and for reasons not directly apparent, used the papers to question the motives and competence of the advisor team. He professed not to understand underlying issues and consistently referred back to what appeared to be unrelated and irrelevant [according to the Advisor Group members] past experiences of his. All of his questions, for whatever reason, appeared designed to find fault and to reject recommendations. This combination, being so fundamental it seemed to the inter group relationship, had what can almost be described as a catastrophic effect on the efficacy of the Decision Group. The truth of this is the fact that the Chairman was, at one point, prepared to bring the issues to the attention of the Office of the Secretary of State, who was formally responsible for the original appointment.

One could argue that this was just a manifestation of an overly sensitive Advisor Group and there is some evidence for this view. Once the individual had established his pattern the management team hardened their attitude in what can best be described as a 'we are the experts and we know best' way. This group therefore exhibited polarisation against the confrontational camp in the other group.

I have reflected upon this observation in terms of my own research findings and those of others in the field. Clearly it is impossible to truly understand this person's reasons, approach, motivation or personality in any depth from a distance, in addition, this researcher is not a psychologist and no such study was possible. He was never available for interview and is now not in a position to add to the sum of knowledge in any other way. In all probability many other dynamics were at work here; however, one can speculate that two areas had a substantial bearing. The first is a possible lack of a common understanding and approach between the individual and the rest of the Decision Group, most especially with the group leader, the Chairman of the Board. The second revolves around the role of leadership and how the exercise of leadership could have influenced events. There is a possible third element, and that is the cohesion of the Advisor Group due to their strong feeling of 'ownership' of the organisation and the implied threat that this individual posed to the Advisor Group.

By definition, the purpose of application review, interview and selection is to ensure that an individual is fit for the job to be undertaken and the post to be filled. This individual was arguable not fit to carry out that role within the research organisation and yet he had prevailed over other candidates in open competition. One could therefore argue that the criteria for selection must necessarily have been at fault in this case. Examination of the documentation regarding his selection shows that a major factor in choosing a suitable candidate had been location [locally based] and involvement and knowledge of local issues, both political and social. In addition, the job specification for the post was drawn up according to a framework of the presumed skills, knowledge and experience required of the Decision Group as a whole. The framework made no mention of personality and character traits nor gave any guidance to the interview Board on what the existing Board may find acceptable in a new member of their group. On mentioning the personality issues to the Chairman following the resolution of this particular problem, he acknowledged that the emphasis on interviewing and selecting had to

change; from experience, skills and knowledge, to background, group experience, and personality. I will cover this in more detail later in the cycle report as it directly impacts the contribution to knowledge and practice.

I would speculate that this particular individual had little in common with his fellow group members, or with the Advisor Group members. He did not share background experience. He clearly did not share understanding if his protestations in group are to be taken at face value, that he did not understand the reason for the papers or why particular decisions were being sought. I would also suggest that his extensive background experience of senior management in non-commercial, highly bureaucratic, rigidly structured organisations without an operational or service remit, skewed his work values in such a way that they did not mesh with the research organisation in any meaningful and practical way. He shared neither motivation for being in the group, nor a common purpose for the work of the group. This is not to say that he was either wrong, misguided or obstructionist, just that his understanding, personality and experience profile did not appear to fit the group.

How leadership is exercised in these situations is a full area of research in itself. The exercise of leadership is an element in the observed situation, both from the perspective of the Decision Group leader, the Chairman and the Advisor Group leader, this researcher. The DG leader decided to let the situation develop and attempted to address the issues privately with the individual [who professed not to understand the problem]. It was only close to the end date that he formed the opinion that removal was the only option. The situation was taken out of his hands by subsequent circumstances not relevant to this observation. As Advisor Group leader I chose to let the DG leader know of my concerns and suggest early removal. I then influenced my own team to address the issues with robustness, but cognisant that their overall relationship with the DG would inevitably suffer if the situation was allowed to continue.

Here it could be said, we see the speed at which the group becomes fragmented, dysfunctional in the view of one Board member, by the introduction to the group of one person who clearly did not share a world view or experiences and values with the other group members. The fragmentation was quick and damaging.

In relationships that have already formed within and between group members, the limited evidence on which assumed competence was based on first formation will, over time, be replaced by the results of actual performance and interaction. The trust dynamic may then alter as group experience replaces assumption with fact. One can speculate that the extent to which the trust dynamic alters is related directly to the difference between assumption of competence and actual competence exhibited in group action. This could be an important point in relation to recruitment to groups. Arguably, more often than should be the case, the focus in recruitment interview for any small group membership of the type studied in this research focuses on the candidate and not on the group itself. This leads to the candidate providing evidence under questioning, which is then used by the interview panel to decide if that person should join or not. However, it is equally valid for the candidate to interview the panel and for the two elements to explore their world views, the existence of any sharing dynamics and the existing social framework. If this is not done one can speculate the disappointment on both sides may result. The extensive use of psychometric testing in recruitment processes in many organisations is interesting in that, in my admittedly fairly limited experience, test results tend to be compared to an ideal profile or person specification, or to identify ideal character traits, which in themselves do not get compared with the overall group profile. A more useful application of the technique may be a profile comparison exercise that makes no judgment on the individual's psychometric profile, but derives its advantage by matching the profiles of members.

## **Observation**

### **The First Annual Review of Board Effectiveness, its Importance in Terms of Inter Group Dynamics.**

Although not a PLC or a Limited Company, Dover Harbour Board, as a statutory body, has made the decision to follow, in all respects, the Combined Code on Corporate Governance (July 2003) (Financial Services Authority Listing 1<sup>st</sup> November 2003).

Code Provision A.6.1 (p.11) (2003) calls for organisations to carry out performance evaluation of the Board, its committees and its individual directors and to report the fact in the annual report and accounts. In March 2005 Dover Harbour Board carried out its first evaluation under this provision. This evaluation followed all but two of the research interviews for Cycle Two. It is interesting to both observe and speculate on the impact of the research interviews on the evaluation process, as it relates to the Board carrying out its Decision Group responsibilities and in its relationship with the senior management Advisor Group. The evaluation process consisted of individual members commenting on various aspects of the Board's work. As the only executive member I was asked to comment on the relationship between Board and senior management.

Almost inevitably considering the timing of the evaluation and the research interviews, interviewees all referred to the evaluation process in their interviews. The very act of carrying out an evaluation seemed to prompt Decision Group members into a self critical and confrontational frame of mind, questioning the very basis of the inter group relationship when that is clearly not the purpose of the evaluation as envisaged in the Combined Code. Although all group members scored the relationship between Board and senior management as 'good' or better



on the evaluation forms, the interviews seemed to prompt a more critical attitude in terms of organisational decision making. In other words, the comments did not match the evaluation scores. On reflection and in view of the findings of Bigley and Pearce (1998) and Gillespie and Mann (2004) we may speculate that the reason for this apparent loss of trust may be twofold. The first is the concept of perceived competence that I refer to in the literature review and that appears in two of the interviews. The apparent acceptance of a level of competence in all things is fragile and easily damaged by perceptions, however flimsy the evidence of a lack of competence that lead to those perceptions. The second is that of the sharing dynamic. If a situation arises that casts doubt upon the sharing dynamic between groups; one may conclude that, as this is the fundamental driver of inter group trust, the trust between groups will quickly break down, or at the least be damaged. In terms of the second cruise terminal, the perceived 'pushiness' of management, highlighted by interview member 2, in wanting the capital investment at all costs and therefore implicitly against the feelings of the Decision Group [although it is this group that actually made the decision] led the members of the Decision Group to question the motives and values of the Advisor Group. In this way the matter of trust between the two groups is brought into question. I will comment more in the findings.

**What is the perceived nature of the leadership dynamic, its relationship with competence in joining group members, what are their expectations and how does this compare with the reality over time?**

Not surprisingly, the role of the group leaders appears to be an important factor in the anticipation of trust between groups when new members join.

'The Chairman obviously has a huge role to play in making sure that this facility (*trust*) exists around the Board table, and the Chief Executive' (Member 6)

‘The trust has to be part of the organisation, but it has to come from the Chairman and the Chief Executive’ ( Member 6)

‘The process means trusting the Chief Executive.’ (Member 5)

‘The Chairman should clearly lead the Board and the Chief Executive should clearly lead the organisation’(Member 6)

When asked to elaborate:

‘In the inter group relationship, ultimately the group CEO, (*Board Chairman*), but acting through the CEO or MD of the management team’ (Member 5)

This data also supports the concept of a leadership landscape, an environment within which the two groups operate, both independently and collectively and provides supporting data for other research findings on the role of leaders in engendering and maintaining trust (Joseph and Winston 2005). However, in new group members, these may be merely statements of expectation rather than actual experience, although likely, because of the past history of the individuals to be based on past group experiences. Perhaps more relevant are the views of longer serving group members. One would expect that this group will have more definite views based upon actual experience of the groups inter relationship, rather than just an expectation of what that relationship may be. This seems to be the case when asked about the maintenance of trust in the inter group relationship:

‘It’s leadership. I think that the leaders of the two groups, they’ve got to be seen to be setting the pace and making it clear to the members of their individual groups that it is important to work together’(Focus Group)

‘is there something about having somebody who’d facilitating or sort of trying to guide the group in the direction of whatever that objective is, rather than relying on a group of people to sit down and..... somehow reach the end point’ (Focus Group)

The data suggests that the leaders set the scene, produce the environment and atmosphere within which the groups interact. This accords with basic thinking where one could speculate that poor leadership in whatever form will impact the inter group relationship negatively and may indeed overcome the sharing dynamics to lower the level of trust.

‘A functional Board has trust and there is good interaction between all of the people without fear, without discomfort. The Chairman obviously has a huge role to play in making sure that that facility exists around the Board table, and the Chief Executive.’ (Member 6)

I was particularly interested in this cycle of research, in investigating the existence or otherwise of the sharing dynamics amongst the newly arrived members of the groups. Did they acknowledge any sharing in the groups? Was such consideration of how much they inherently shared with other members a major influence on their decision to join the groups and the organisation? How did they see these dynamics impacting their group relationships, both intra and inter? This element of the data was a surprise, as the opinions expressed in both interviews, and in the focus group, was uniformly overt and supportive of the presence and importance of the sharing dynamics. What stood out to this researcher was the use of the phrase ‘common values’, which seems to be the important element in the minds of the colleagues. In addition, the linkages to a common motivation and common understanding were clear throughout. As these interviews were conducted with relatively new members it is possible to reflect that the question posed by Gillespie and Mann (2004), page 59, is partially answered by this, albeit limited data, supported by the Cycle Two findings. One of the interviewees could draw upon past experience. In reflecting upon a past group experience where the group had recovered from a bad patch with the injection of new members:

‘they are very successful, they’re proactive, they’re energetic, you know, they’re efficient and it’s because these values, I think, these sharing dynamics are present’ (Member 6)

‘it is so important to have that shared value’ (Member 6)

[they were successful] ‘because we had actually given them a common value to work for’ (Member 6)

‘....the strongest teams have been formed when there’s been a common purpose that everyone has been driving towards and everyone identifies with’ (Member 5)

‘I think that there is a clear sign up to a specific purpose with, in other words, the company’s visions, values etc.’ (Member 5)

Interestingly, while the two new members of the Decision Group talked of having to have common values and how this impacted trust between the groups and the efficiency of the two groups working together, the focus group of Advisor Group members seemed primarily concerned that the two groups shared both purpose and understanding. The Advisor Group seemed to be concerned that they should be able, in all circumstances, to get their point of view across and that the Board, the Decision Group, understood and shared the vision being presented and the methods being suggested to achieve the common purpose:

.....’objectives and commonality of objectives of what leads to effective [inter] group performance’ (Focus Group)

‘if they are exactly the same [the objectives] you know, the two groups are as one.....if they are separate groups with separate objectives inevitably there’s going to be a problem.’ (Focus Group)

‘I mean I can work well with people who I can generally predict how they’re going to view something....’ (Focus Group)

The trust of the Advisor Group members seems to be conditional on the Decision Group sharing purpose with them and sharing their level of understanding, a tall order for non-executive members of most Boards, due to their lack of continuous exposure to the organisation at a management level. I speculate that this reflects ownership by the Advisor Group, stemming from their more intimate involvement

and everyday commitment to the organisation. This could lead to a protective or polarized position with regard to decision making. They are likely to be more trusting of a Decision Group whose members understand and share their feelings in this area, perhaps stemming from experience as Advisor Group members in other situations and organisations. This should be no real surprise and was indicated in the research findings of Byrne (1969) cited in Johnson and Grayson (2003):

‘individuals tend to display higher levels of attraction toward people that they perceive to have similar attitudes to their own’ (Byrne 1969, in Johnson and Grayson 2003, p. 504).

It is interesting to speculate how deep the sharing dynamics are in the psyche of members of each group. Some may be quite obvious from the interaction of the two groups, intra and inter. Phillips and Loyd (2006), when they researched diversity among group members, categorise these as surface issues. They also refer to deep-level in terms of diversity and state that this is where values and attitude sit. This accords with my own view that it is not always apparent from surface conversations and interactions to ascertain the attitudes, or deeper seated character make up of individuals. This often surfaces when individuals are under stress or pressure of some kind, or see themselves as vulnerable in some way and challenged or endangered as a result. This makes recruitment to groups based upon identifying core sharing dynamics a considerable challenge.

The Cycle Three research was undertaken during a time of significant turbulence in the inter group relationship, related in the observations. The junction of this perceived change in the relationship, the addition of new members to the Decision Group and the promotion of Advisor Group members within management, provided the opportunity to explore additional data unaffected by the data gathered in the other two cycles. The hardening of attitudes and opinions expressed by new members to both groups was a surprise. Opinions were expressed from previous

inter group experience, untainted by the research organisation and arguably more powerful as a consequence. The central role of trust within the relationship, the impact and importance of leadership within each group and the existence of the sharing dynamics in establishing relationships in the early stage of membership were all strongly present in the data. Effective leadership is seen to be relatively 'light handed', not overt control, but rather measured influencing and agenda setting, providing support for Kakabadse's (2004) proposition of a leadership landscape. Not surprisingly, the Advisor Group see themselves as the prime movers in the relationship, shaping and to some extent controlling the decision agenda. The new members also see the relationship in these terms, whereas the older members in Cycles One and Two have a different viewpoint, probably coming from longer exposure to past decisions and their consequences. Perceived competence is two way, from and to each of the groups from new members, before being impacted by experience and by the debates within the groups as new members become more familiar with issues of importance within the organisation.

This last cycle of research reinforced the ethnographic methodology in an unexpected way. It appeared that, as opposed to the reaction of colleagues in Cycles One and Two, the members of the focus group and the new members of the Decision Group interviewed individually, appeared enthused with helping the researcher with reflection and in finding 'answers' that may help the inter group relationship. Opinions within the focus group were expressed more openly than previously and with colleagues suggesting avenues for further inquiry. In the individual interviews, the colleagues had no background within the organisation to refer to and seemed to accept without question the dual role of CEO and researcher. Again, as with the focus group, there seemed to be little hesitation in their responses to questions and they also suggested further lines of consideration and aided reflection. This was in many ways responsible for the more definitive opinions expressed and the 'hardness' of the data on trust, sharing dynamics and leadership. I reflected that at least in the case of the new members, they had no

preconceived ideas of how the relationship would develop. Their only expectations appeared to be entirely positive and supportive of management, untainted by further experience within the organisation. In the case of the focus group, I surmised that the group members had become used to seeing their CEO as a researcher and accepted it as a normal course of events. I took this to be some justification of the approach to be as open as possible regarding what was being researched and recorded.

### **Observation**

#### **The Pensions Committee – A Further Reflection on Inter Group Relationships**

The Pensions Committee of the research organisation draws its trustees from a number of sources. Three Board members sit on the committee. This includes one of the Executive Members [this researcher], the Board's Deputy Chairman, who is the Chairman of the Pensions Committee and one other non-executive Board Member. Two members of the senior management team [Advisor Group members] as well as the CEO sit, as do three pension group nominated trustees.

The Pensions Committee [for the purposes of consistency in description I will refer to this committee as the Trustee Group] have two primary inter group relationships, one with the organisation's main Board and one with the senior management group [Board Advisor Group]. The two relationships are complicated by inter connected membership, that is, several of the trustee group members are members of one or more of the other groups. One [this researcher] is a member of all three groups. The very different and in many ways conflicting aims, objectives and responsibilities between the main Board and the Trustees Group, proscribed by pensions and company law, could easily lead to inter group conflict. The fact that it appears not to do so in this case makes reflection on why this is so an important contributor to this research. I have therefore taken some time to observe the group

from a researchers viewpoint and the inter group relationship from the standpoint of this research project.

This observation needs to be seen in the context of the pension scheme as it stood in 2006/2007. The scheme is final salary, defined benefits and, following a 3 yearly review in 2005, the scheme for the purposes of the FRS 17 statement in the 2006 accounts is in a slight surplus. There is perceived to be no substantial threat to the funding position, or to the scheme's benefits. Provided that the organisation remains profitable, the main Board has made a commitment to maintain the final salary status. The scheme is contributory and the employee's contribution is increased by 1% with effect from April of 2006. In addition, the main Board agreed to a one off substantial cash payment into the scheme to offset some of the deficit.

While the intra group relationship is interesting, I will only reflect on it where I believe that it impacts the inter group relationships with Board and senior management team.

I would describe the two inter group relationships as conflict free in all situations and one of mutual respect and trust. At a superficial level one could suggest that there is no conflict, because there is nothing within the relationships that could lead to conflict. However, a deeper level of analysis is possible.

The pension scheme is not in any kind of crisis. It is well funded and well administered. The organisation is in profit and is expecting to remain so and can therefore afford to maintain the defined benefits status. Membership of the Trustee group is stable and the members appear committed to their responsibilities. They appear well trained to carry them out, attending as they all do regular briefings and conferences. This group therefore, from my observation, places no great burden or other strain upon the inter group relationships. They do not demand of the other groups anything that they are not prepared and equipped to give. They appear to



be perceived by the other groups as professional and knowledgeable and to be doing a difficult job well, taking financial and management pressure off the other two groups. The inter connections between the groups clearly aids communication and understanding.

I have reflected on this observation in terms of my research. One can speculate that the main dynamic at work here may be one of optimum trust emanating from a high level of perceived competence in the trustees group by the other groups. This would be aided by the membership profile, but also by the lack of challenge to the objectives of the other groups. They may see this group as highly competent, but also not threatening. Although in their separate groups, outwith the trustee group, there may be conflicts and divisions, the sharing dynamics, both within the group and between the other groups, when acting as Trustee group members is likely to be strong. Inter group, they can be said to share aims and objectives [purpose]. They all want the scheme to succeed and for the same reasons. For the same reasons they are likely to share motivation and indeed fate. Interestingly, the relationship may throw some light on the shared understanding dynamic. The overall level of understanding of the trustee group's issues and responsibilities is probably only shared at a parochial level. The main Board members and the senior management team have little exposure to pension issues and their understanding in this area is likely to be weak, or at least much weaker than trustee group members. My observation and experience is that the other groups trust and respect the level of knowledge built up by the trustee group and are happy enough not to understand the intricacies that make the trustee group effective. In the presence of the other sharing dynamics and perhaps in their strength, they are happy to accept a lower level of understanding than may normally be the case. The lack of drama surrounding the administration of the scheme may well give other group members a sense of security and acceptance of a situation that, in other areas, would make them question and feel uncomfortable. There is also the fact that the trustees are jointly and severally responsible in law for many of their actions and this may well be a factor.

Cross group membership is clearly an issue here and one could speculate that this is one of the keys to an effective inter group relationship. To what degree full cross membership would result in the maximum possible inter group effectiveness is debatable. There is some evidence that this does not happen in the research organisation, where full Board membership is carried over into several committees of the Board, such as Audit, Nomination and Remuneration. In these cross over cases personal and organisational relationships also appear to cross over and issues at one committee are often carried over. This would tend, in my view, to compromise the efficacy of any one subordinate committee [group]. This does not appear to happen in the case of the trustee group, perhaps because, although there is some cross over, it is relatively small but at a high level [Deputy Chairman, CEO, Director of Finance].

While the above analysis of the dynamics at work appears to be the most reasonable conclusion, based upon observation and the involvement of this researcher over a number of years of membership, others may argue that there are other interpretations. It could be argued for example that the trustee group is actually ineffective, being too cohesive, not dynamic enough and too dependant on consultant advice from both actuary and investment managers. Following on from this statement it could be that the overseeing role of the main Board is equally ineffective, with members taking the view that independent specialist advice will avoid obvious pitfalls and in any event the scheme is well funded and the organisation profitable, so no problem. Cross over membership between the groups would, in this case, compound the complacency.

While these would be acceptable questions to ask, it is not my view that this is the situation in either of the groups. I base this conclusion on the amount of time, effort and training that the group undertakes the level of specialist knowledge within the two groups from those with banking and accountancy background and the quality of debate within the two groups. In addition, both groups question in detail the advice and guidance from the independent specialists and show no level

of complacency in their deliberations. Additionally, on at least two occasions in two years, the trustee group has undertaken its own research on particular subjects and thereby saved the scheme considerable, additional expenditure. The commitment level is high and is matched by the amount of non-specialist knowledge built up over a number of years.

It is also interesting to speculate on the role of leadership in the trustee group and how this impacts the inter group relationships. Leadership of the trustee group is naturally vested in the Chairman. In this case the Chairman exercises a 'light' form of leadership with a 'first among equals' approach. This appears to work well, emphasising in terms of the leadership landscape, the individual expertise of group members and their individual contribution to the whole. This is in keeping with what one could speculate as the perceived and actual specialist nature of the group and the special relationship it has with the other groups.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this research has been to examine the relationship dynamics between [and within] two groups within organisations that have a formal relationship during the process of decision making. The research has been focused on answering the general questions: what are the main relationship drivers and influences at work during the process of inter group activity? What are the issues surrounding the inter group relationship? How are relationships between the groups formed and maintained and how do they impact the efficacy of the inter group decision process?

The fundamental importance of this research is its further study of the relationship dynamics within and between organisational groups and the impact that efficient and effective inter group activity by the people involved has upon an organisation's ability to fulfil its aims and objectives. In addition, academia and learning benefit from a deeper understanding of one of the pillars of organisation activity, namely the workings of two groups that are mainly involved in making collective decisions. Most formally constituted organisations are defined by their decision making, group activity. Decision making lies at the heart of organisational activity, impacting as it does on financial performance, operational performance however defined and on the setting of goals, aims and objectives, that is, the setting out of the very reason for the formation and continuing existence of the organisation. Decision outcomes most often have, by their very nature, a direct impact on organisations and on the individuals within organisations. Successful group decision making is therefore likely to be of fundamental importance to an organisation. It is arguable, that a significant number of the more important decisions faced by an organisation,

however defined, are made by group or committee activity and often involve inter group activity (Levi 2007), (Brown 2000), (Hogg and Tindale 2003), (Forsyth 2006), (Hogg and Adams 2001), (Lee et al 1999).

The research vehicle was two groups tasked with the management and strategic direction of an organisation, being the main directing or supervisory Board and the senior management acting as an advisor group to that Board, this being a common structure within many commercial and non-commercial organisations of various kinds. The relationships formed and maintained within and between these group members and the character and behavioural elements of those individuals became, over time, the key focus of study in the research.

Whilst there is an abundance of advice in management literature, both academic and popular, on how individuals and groups interact and on various mechanisms and models for decision making, [2.1, page 23] it is difficult to identify any formal processes for making decisions, intra and inter group, within the target organisation other than within engineering, or other technical projects using well understood and widely used project/engineering management methodologies. The early research data shows that formal decision making models and mechanisms are not a key factor in either group and the lack of a formal process in other than engineering and technical matters is not considered material by the decision group when receiving advice and recommendations. Rather they rely on reputation, past performance and present perceived and actual competence of the advisor group. In addition, the level and perception of the leadership dynamics within the organisation leads to a level of trust in the actions of the management groupings and the efficacy of their decision making within management. There is little or no questioning or challenging of the advisor group in this area.

Without the use of formal models and other decision processes, the gathering of information, optioning and the presentation of recommendations to the decision group by the advisor group takes on more importance. Without objective methods

of arriving at decisions, the processes become more subjective and are therefore more readily influenced by other group dynamics. One can speculate as to how widespread this situation is in other organisations. Past experience by the researcher and those who provided the data for this research suggests that this is indeed common place and by no means confined to the research organisation.

‘.....I, like everybody else, sometimes I say ‘Right, this is what the outcome is, how do I construct a decision-making process that will justify the decision I want to get at the end’(2)

‘I feel reasonably confident in my own ability to make reasoned, sensible decisions in my area of operation.’ (3)

‘I do actually think you need to step back and say hold on a minute, there’s something else going on here, which might justify this. Is this actually something we want to do and we’ve just approached it in the wrong way? Being sufficiently flexible and think about how to justify things’... (1)

As the research progressed the emphasis and focus changed to the more subjective elements of the group relationships. Once decision making becomes more subjective, it is influenced by issues of group and individual relationship, bias, other agendas, instinctive actions, internal and external politics, career influences; in a more profound way than would be the case if decision making was totally objective [if indeed that is ever possible]. The interaction of group and personal dynamics upon the efficacy of decision making becomes more marked. A deeper analysis of the dynamics of the various drivers reveals the underlying key elements that may make or break the inter group relationship.

This thesis does not attempt to directly research trust within and between groups but rather, acknowledges that it is a significant factor that may well influence in both a positive and negative manner, the dynamics identified by this research. There are indications that this is so from the literature, most especially in the work of Kramer et al (2001), Meyerson and Kramer (2006), Brewer and Kramer (1986), Rousseau (1989). Rousseau speaks of group members that: ‘live by the codes of conduct that

bind them' (Rousseau 1989 p180). Kramer et al states that 'trust plays a prominent role in the emergence of cooperation within groups' (Kramer et al 2001 p 174) and Brewer and Kramer (1986) of the link between group collective beliefs, and social group identification directly influencing the level of trust within the group. Meyerson and Kramer (2006) talk of the traditional sources of trust being: 'familiarity, shared experiences, reciprocal disclosures.....' (Meyerson and Kramer 2006 p 416). Trust is clearly a factor and the linking of these research findings to that of the body of knowledge on trust could prove a fruitful area for further, detailed study.

Balanced and effective inter group relationships appear to possess and share distinct characteristics. Erdem (2003) supports the view that there is an, 'optimum level of trust' within effectively performing groups and between groups that have a distinct relationship to each other. I reflect that there is also an, 'optimum level of cohesion' within and between the groups. In these groups, conflict would not be absent, but would be counterbalanced by cohesive elements within the various relationships. This cohesion is neither excessive, thereby restricting groups interaction such as debate, [perhaps dominated by one strong individual], nor absent altogether, thereby resulting in constant and destructive conflict.

The later research data highlights the place of the individual within and between the groups and places 'instinct' and 'past experience' at the heart of the group relationship dynamics. There is little evidence in this research to suggest that the absence of formal decision processes is deemed significant by either of the groups. Rather, the personal and group overall relationship and how this is fashioned and maintained by the appointed leaders, is clearly of prime importance in establishing the credibility of both groups to each other. There is no consensus as to who is making the final decision, but neither is there any feeling that this should be important or indeed even formally established, provided that the relationship is being seen to be effective. Once trust is compromised, the issue of responsibility becomes an issue, until the normal dynamic is re-established. This tends to support

the view that it is personalities and individual relationships and how these translate into the level of trust and group and inter group cohesion, that shape inter group effectiveness, rather than processes, procedures, rules and terms of reference, however robustly drafted.

Throughout the research the role of leadership within and between the groups was a recurring theme running through the data, although its overall importance to the various inter personal relationships is by no means clear. However, it appears that for effective inter group relationships, leadership within each group needs to be overt and positive, visible and effective. Not surprisingly the data suggests that group leaders appear to create an environment within their respective groups that aids trust development, maintenance and cohesion. They appear to do this by effective control of processes and procedures and creating a positive and workable atmosphere and environment, that is at one in the same time encouraging, influencing individuals, while controlling situations and potentially divisive elements. Effective group leadership that positively guides and 'chairs' the group seems to be an essential element of group cohesion, bonding and overall effectiveness, reducing the chances of conflict and removing the drivers of conflict; extracts from the research data serve to show this:

'My experience of being involved on those kinds of teams is that the more successful teams are the ones that are being led very, very effectively. So you have a strong, focused, dynamic, motivating team leader. The ones that are least effective are where the leadership is weakest.' (3)

'He's got to lead. He's got to direct; he's got to bring people back to the subject, whatever that might be. He's got to provide relevant and timely information to make sure he/she gets the best out of the team players.' (3)

'I think the chief executive has a particular responsibility for those decisions, also because the Board makes its decisions on the basis of recommendations and information that pass through the chief executives team, and the chairman has a particular responsibility for the decisions' (1)

'...it's up to the head of the group, if you like, to make absolutely certain that the right tone is set and followed all the way through.' (2)



Effective leadership could be said to be essential to establish trust recovery once it has been negatively impacted by events.

The combined group leadership could be said to create a positive and effective leadership landscape, within which inter group trust can be maintained and the groups be thereby free to concentrate their efforts on the efficacy of their work. The proposal that there is a phenomenon termed the 'absent leader' was established early in the research [page 139]. Here, the influence of the established and effective leader within the groups and outwith the groups, is a factor throughout the organisation. The opinions, aims and objectives of an effective leader, as well as the leader's values and expectations, tend to permeate the organisation at all decision making levels, regardless of the physical presence of the leader.

'I think a lot of the tone of the decision comes from the Chief Executive, perhaps more so than I ever previously appreciated, actually. The influence on the tone... the way the organisation actually relates to itself. I guess, I mean I hope the senior team, certainly R and myself, have strong influences on that tone. But actually, at a strategic level, I think I do actually think that a lot of the direction of the organisation, for example, master planning, comes from you, ...' (1)

The importance of this proposal is that the advisor group membership, whilst constantly changing and not always including the acknowledged leader, will maintain a consistency of thought and advice process, based upon that leadership, rather than the physical presence of the leader. In addition, the operations of sub committees of the groups are likely to retain leadership influence regardless of membership and therefore maintain a consistency of debate and decision making. This is all particularly relevant where the organisation is carrying out a significant change programme, or where it is establishing its main aims and objectives, vision and laying down guiding principles. When an organisation is facing difficult and fundamental issues and challenges, the exercise of effective leadership during times of decision making is particularly important and the establishment of a leadership

regime that leads to the absent leader phenomenon, itself becomes of significant importance. However, the acceptability of that leadership depends to a great degree on the personalities, views and motivations of the organisation's individuals. What they share and have in common may be much more important than what divides and defines them as individuals.

## **6.2 The Contribution to Knowledge and to Practice**

The contribution to both knowledge and practice asks the question: 'by virtue of this research, what do we know now that we did not know before'?

*The prime contribution to knowledge lies in the identification and consideration of the role and importance of certain 'sharing dynamics' among members of groups, both intra and inter, and how the existence and strength of these dynamics impact the interpersonal relationships among members of both sets of group.*

*The contribution to management and organisational practice lies in the application of ethnography to the role of the senior and prime managers within an organisation, as an 'insider'.*

### **6.2.2 The Sharing Dynamics: Values, Motivation, Fate, Understanding**

The first area of contribution centers on the subject of trust between and within groups and how what is termed within this thesis 'the sharing dynamics' of values, motivation, fate and understanding, influence trust within and between established, formal groups. The research study and volume of published work on the subject of

trust in relationships is extensive and this thesis does not seek to study trust as its prime topic. However, what we can now see more clearly as a result of this research, is that trust is the prime generator of intra and inter group efficacy and that this is fundamentally influenced, negatively and positively, by the strength of certain sharing dynamics over and above those previously identified and discussed in the literature. As detailed in the findings, the conclusions build on the recent work of a number of eminent researchers, specifically, Gillespie and Mann (2004) [on the building blocks of trust, shared values and leadership], Tyler (2003) [what is organisation trust and how is it developed?] and Atkinson (2004) [relationships within senior management groups and the role of trust]. Tolor et al (1989) linked close interpersonal constructs to the degree of trust in groups, claiming a direct relationship. *I contend that what group members share in terms of their values as individuals, their perceived fate when things go wrong, or indeed go right, their motivation for being in the groups in the first place and prepared to undertake the work involved, is a key factor. Their sharing of understanding when presented with options, arguments, debate and recommendations, both between and within groups, aids trust development and maintenance and defines the relationships within the groups and between the groups, to the extent that their efficacy is based upon this sharing.* My research shows not only the existence and role of these dynamics, but strongly suggests that the strength of personal relationships and the ability of groups, both inter and intra to blend and work effectively, is inextricably linked to the relative existence and strength of these dynamics.

The relative importance of identifying what it is that promotes trust within groups is emphasised by Erdem and Ozen (2003) in their statement that behaviour that promote trust within an organisational culture increase team effectiveness. My contention is that behaviour will be influenced by the strength of the various dynamics at play, including the sharing dynamics of values, motivation, fate and understanding. Tyler (2003) makes a further link between trust and the connections between people and groups, stating that motive, character and intentions, what he terms ‘social trust’, are key to organisational growth and survival. My research

findings aid understanding by further identifying those shared areas of character to which Tyler refers. The recent research by Song (2007 & 2008) on reciprocation 'in group' and 'out of group' indicates that levels of trust increase when there is reciprocation in the group's individual relationships and that this is measurably stronger in the group setting than it is outside of that setting. My observation on Song's work would be that this reciprocation is more likely in a close personal relationship. Arguably and perhaps superficially, such relationships benefit greatly if a certain sharing of world view is present. Thus my empirical research may help to transpose Song's theoretical conclusions into a practical context.

Throughout my observations of the organisation, the relationship between senior advisor group members and the decision group members was clearly an issue, in that the sharing dynamics appeared mismatched and the resulting trust relatively fragile. This was surprising considering the business and operational success of the organisation, as apparently perceived by its major stakeholders, government and the local community. These positive statements are made in the light of the minutes of the Port Consultative Committee, the Port Users Group, The Council meetings of the British Port Association and the European Working Group and various informal meetings with government officials. If my observation on the statement made by Gillespie and Mann (2004), [as to whether shared values are a necessary condition for establishing trust, or a condition that enhances but is not essential for trust] is correct and the shared values do come first, then establishing that new appointees to groups do indeed share the values of the organisation and their prospective decision group colleagues seems very sensible and could guide this and other organisations with their recruitment procedures.

The importance of a shared *vision* in collaborative groups is outlined by Gray (1989) and she links this to a joint, shared motivation towards the attainment of that group vision. This is supported by Huxham (1996) in identifying key relationships in collaborative organisations. My own research indicates that this relationship interaction is perhaps deeper and more complex and that looking beyond the

sharing of a vision raises the question of why certain individuals may wish to share a vision of the future. In other words, is the more they share on other levels an indication of their propensity to share a vision as a member of a group? This research strongly indicates that the answer to that question is yes. The research also adds value to the work of Yzerbyt et al (2009) and Judd et al (2005), in identifying and detailing those dynamics that add to intergroup distrust and misperception, but that improve intergroup collaboration. Yzerbyt's work on stereotypes [what others think] and metastereotypes, [the way that others see], that in his view impact the initial set of relationships in the inter group situation raise the question of the influences that lead to a certain set of beliefs. I believe that my conclusions help to bring clarity to the influences at work.

Jones et al (2009) when studying inter group misunderstandings and conflict, refer to the importance of a 'common frame of reference', mentioned also by Gaertner and Dovidio (2000), for both ingroup and outgroup, to avoid issues arising that damage the relationship. What Jones et al and Gaertner and Dovidio do not do is speculate on what underlines this common frame of reference among group members and how these might be identified and managed when it comes to considerations of group recruitment. My research conclusions help in identifying key dynamics that may contribute to establishing and maintaining a common frame of reference, both within and inter group.

Hickling (1994) has commented upon the importance of sharing knowledge and the importance of mutual understanding in the efficacy of group work in the gaining of collaborative advantage, stating that there is a direct link. This research supports that view. Naturally, not all groups are seeking collaborative advantage as a prime objective. Nevertheless, if one replaces 'collaborative advantage' with 'attainment of group objectives', then 'sharing' in many dimensions is clearly a recognised factor within his research.

### **6.2.3 The Application of Insider Interpretive Ethnography For Senior Managers**

The thesis provides a linked report of a research journey and the application of ethnographic principles and to a set of circumstances, situations, observations, relationship dynamics, data gathering and analysis over a unique period in time. This period in time has been unique, as all such times are unique, in that those precise situations, circumstances and observations will never be precisely replicated again. In drawing conclusions and making interpretations a deeper understanding of relationships in the small group setting has been sought, but also a deeper understanding of the organisation and its social framework [1.4, page 16] and also of the researcher's place within this framework and the influences brought to bear, and their consequences. The data has been mapped, analysed and interpreted with an expectation that by doing so a deeper understanding of the inter group relationship and a more effective and efficient set of group dynamics and interactions would result.

By definition, as these are existing and functional groups, the research has been dealing with a fast changing set of relationships. Not only have members of both groups arrived and left the organisation, circumstances and situations have been constantly changing and the relationship dynamics have fluctuated accordingly. However, this has been part of the research journey and has provided additional and somewhat unexpected opportunities to further enrich the data and embed the reflections and conclusions in new situations and the start of new relationships.

In the early part of the research, the processes and procedures by which organisational decisions are made and how non-specific groups in organisations interact in general terms was the focus of the first stage of the journey. In company with the overall data gathering method employed, the qualitative interview, the role of observation and ethnographic reflection was introduced and expanded. At this

stage the researcher was establishing the ethnographic framework for further action and data gathering. This led to a justification of the methodology and method for this particular research project and a deeper understanding of research processes for the researcher.

The application of interpretive ethnography as not only an insider in the organisation, but its management head, is a strong theme within the research and the thesis. The contribution to knowledge and to practice made by this research relates to the research questions regarding inter group relationships in strategic decision making that flow through the research. However, the proposition is that insider interpretive ethnography, engaged in by the head of the organisation, is a justifiable and relevant methodology for management research, most especially with regard to management practice and the furthering of management knowledge within organisations. This is an essential skill of managers newly joining organisations and most especially of the Chief Executive, or senior executive manager.

The thesis seeks to make a contribution to the debate towards a general acceptance within management research that there is such a thing as management anthropology, which is every bit as challenging and as relevant to academic research, as social anthropology. Much of what is detailed and proposed is not new, but builds on the work of others in the area of ethnographic practice. However, some new approaches are made in the application of the methodology by an organisation's Chief Executive and perhaps throw more light on the role of the new appointed CEO as that person approaches the first few months in post and on the continuing role of the CEO in the development and management auditing of the organisation.

Ethnography is a well established methodology within anthropology and the social sciences (Atkinson et al 2002), (Denzin and Lincoln 2003), (Silverman 2003), (Willig 2004). It has developed over many years to encompass research projects across a wide diversity of organisations, groups, industries and social settings.

Although the use of ethnography in commercial and management research has been established for some time, the use of the methodology by those within an organisation or social setting that is as an insider is a relatively recent phenomenon and has been largely confined to the marketing, sales and social enterprises, such as the prison service and health care sectors.

The application of insider interpretive ethnography for management research is less well established and that of an insider who at the same time holds the primary responsibility for the organisation in question is less well covered by research literature (Bruni 2006), (Fetterman 1998). The use of the methodology in this context presents a unique set of challenges for data collection, analysis and ethics. It also provides a platform for observation, reflection and action that gives a unique and powerful perspective to the research. It also provides for a radically different approach for senior managers in assessing their organisation and the introduction and management of change. In my research I am an insider, in a particular situation within the organisation, carrying out research in which I play a distinct role. This is particularly relevant to the newly appointed CEO, Managing Director, or principal manager, who wishes to conduct an in-house and detailed evaluation of the organisation prior to introducing fundamental change. My research and thesis form the framework for such an evaluation, detailing the methodology and methods that can be used and the ethical issues associated with those methods. This application of interpretive ethnography also presents some unique ethical issues, not least a possible challenge to the validity of the data gathered due to the position of the researcher as at one in the same time, participant, researcher, observer and leaders. I have approached these issues openly and in a way that I hope will guide and inform others who seek to research their organisations in the way that I have done.

I have reflected previously on why it is that there is not a much wider and well published acceptance of interpretive ethnography within management research. [4.1, page 93]. It is possible that the reason has much to do with the debate that began in the 1990s and indeed a debate that is still ongoing, on the role of



qualitative research within management, the debates surrounding action research and the continuous debates around the question of where management research lies; in the social sciences, within mainstream science, or as a separate and distinct entity. Ethnographic research encompasses the whole spectrum of research methods, from quantitative to qualitative. However, as previously stated, ethnography has been described as the quintessential qualitative research method and that places interpretive ethnography by the insider clearly within the social sciences.

It is my view that this is by no means universally accepted and any research emanating from such a methodology may have an acceptance problem within the world family of academic research. One could speculate that non academics approaching institutions and individuals within that world, seeking advice on appropriate research methodologies for carrying out research within their own organisations, may meet some resistance and strong arguments to adopt a more positivist approach. This is borne out to some extent by the attitude and operations of the many management consultants engaged by organisations. They are rarely, in my view, prepared to adopt a qualitative stance on any project for which the client is paying good money. In many ways this may well be the fault of the commercial world in wanting what they perceive as ‘hard data’; statistics and ‘hard facts’ to inform and justify their own strategic planning decisions. The old cliché that; ‘the only thing one knows about forecasts is that they will be wrong’, did not in my experience seem to deter organisations that I have been involved with from paying substantial sums of money to consultants to produce forecasts, that have no qualitative research element and that they suspect will be inaccurate.

Although insider ethnographic research is far from rare, and the debate on its application has been ongoing since the early 1990s, there appears to be little published work within general management, where the Chief Executive and the main managerial force within the organisation, is also the inside researcher. The CEO, as both the holder of the prime managerial responsibility and as the

researcher, places particular challenges and responsibilities on that person's shoulders. These responsibilities lie mainly within the areas of strategic planning, change management, governance, financial strategy and management, administration, leadership and ethics. They place a particular difficulty on the use of interpretive ethnographic methods; the gathering of data, analysis of data, the ethics of research, confidentiality and on report writing. I believe that by adopting insider interpretive ethnography as my methodology, in the context of my organisation, research topic and research environment, I am able to advance in some small way the place of insider, qualitative research within the practice of management and make a contribution to the body of research knowledge.

#### **6.2.4 Organisational Practice**

In this part of the conclusion I ask the question: what can managers and organisations do now that they could not do before?

As I show when I reflect on the importance to my own organisation, I contend that my research has thrown significant light on the practical issues of change in inter group relationships and how dysfunctional groups and dysfunctional inter group relationships can be tackled from the point of view of changing membership to strengthen the sharing between members. This provides a firm indicator, whereby groups can analyse their own personal relationships, interactions and performance and it provides guidance on addressing either dysfunctionality, or mere under performance in decision making, in a positive and practical way by membership recruitment and retention.

The findings and conclusion indicate an area for consideration during the formation of groups, and particularly in the recruitment of members to an organisation Board. When a Board or organisation is seeking new members, they often lay great emphasis on the skills, knowledge and experience that they are looking for in a new member. In my experience, senior management teams often do the same thing. It

is not uncommon for a matrix of skills and experience to be produced and used as a guide in drawing up person specifications. The success or otherwise of this approach is outside the limits of this research; however, my findings suggest that more effort should be concentrated on a matrix of personality and character traits, where the existence of shared values and motivation are highlighted in identifying those candidates for appointments that more closely match the sharing profile of the organisation and its Board or senior management grouping.

My research supports the view that a successful outcome is more likely if emphasis is placed upon what the candidates for appointment share with the existing group members in terms of personality and personal drivers and not just a mechanical list of skills and experience used in isolation. This is by no means a new observation, as the work of Cable and Judge (1997) testifies. Their research identified at that time that recruiters were taking more cognisance of the world view and values of job applicants as compared to the values of the organisation they were attempting to join in order to identify a suitable match. In a further work, they describe it as “job seekers goals, values, needs, interests and personalities have been compared with organisation’s cultures, pay, systems, sizes, structures and values” (Judge and Cable 1997, p. 359). This comes very close to my statement regarding the importance of the sharing dynamics to recruitment in and between groups. Alderfer and McCord (1970) and more recently Highhouse et al (2002) also investigate and make the link between organisational values and those of the individual that are recruited, introducing the idea of the personal/organisational fit (P-O fit) and recognising its importance in choosing the right candidates for entry. I suggest that my research focuses on further sharing dynamics that, if taken into account formally, help to build up the picture of the right P-O fit.

The use of psychometric testing has increased significantly in recent years, with personality tests often forming an important element in the recruitment process. The tests seek to match individual to organisation, however, it may be argued that the tests are often one sided, in that they test the individual and result in a

psychological profile, but do not test the organisation and its senior opinion forming managers to show best P-O fit, Barber (1998). My research supports the view that more emphasis could be placed upon testing both sides of the recruitment equation, in the light of what is 'shared' between them, as well as what is not shared in terms of world view. Barber (1998) suggests that, while applicants for posts are often the subject of research, organisations do not as a whole have a deep understanding of their own recruitment actions and their effects. This suggests that the elements that impact most profoundly upon group and inter group interaction, relationships and efficiency are not as a whole well understood at an organisational level and may not be sufficiently taken into account at recruitment in the manner suggested by this research.

Gillespie and Mann (2004) reflect that: 'leaders play the primary role in establishing and developing trust', but go on to point out that: 'little research has examined the specific leadership practices which engender trust toward team leaders' (Gillespie and Mann 2004, p. 1). My research indicates that one role of leadership, recruitment to the group, can influence the relationships within the group and that group leaders would do well to take into account the matrix just detailed when making their judgments.

One of the Observation Field Notes deals with changing the criteria for decision group selection. It shows that the group, at least in its leadership, has recognised that personality, and a shared 'world view', is at least as important in choosing the right people as skills, knowledge and experience expressed as a matrix for recruitment. My research would appear to support this view. From a member of a recent [to this research] selection panel

'if I had to choose between somebody of integrity, overall intelligence, common sense, common sense, and honesty, as against somebody who had certain specialised knowledge.....I would always choose the former.  
(2)

‘I think that’s where a lot of corporate governance now is going wrong. Its going into ticking boxes, playing games, but the really important thing, which is to do with the quality of somebody’s personality and honesty, integrity and I value very much commonsense rather than specialised knowledge, is more important to me within a group’ (2)

Just as important would be the assessment of a candidate’s attitude to the organisational objectives and vision, the management philosophy and the leadership landscape. This can only be achieved by familiarity with the organisation and its personalities, most especially what I term its social characteristics and it would seem wise to introduce a settling in or probation period for all new decision group members prior to offering a, first appointment.

### **6.3 Future Research**

This research has identified the existence and to some extent the importance of the sharing dynamics of values, fate, motivation and understanding to the inter group relationship. It has identified and reflected upon the link between these dynamics and the establishment and maintenance of trust, inter and intra group, the establishment of an optimum level of trust and also of cohesion and the role of leadership and leadership influence in establishing and maintaining the connections between all of these dynamics. Further research will be needed to establish the strength of the various influences of the sharing dynamics of values, fate, motivation and understanding and the mechanism by which they influence trust and cohesion. Management practice would certainly benefit from further investigation on the existence of an optimal level of cohesion inter and intra group and how this can be established and maintained.

There is a wealth of published material on management and organisational leadership. However, its role in small group relationships and specifically its role within and around the sharing dynamics and the formation and membership of

small groups continues to be a fruitful area for further research. Leadership is exercised in many and varied ways depending on circumstances and individual experience and approach. How and to what extent the exercise of leadership impacts the other dynamics and with what result is of significant interest.

Arguably more important in the field of further research practice is the clear need for more examples of insider, interpretive, ethnographic research being conducted by senior managers within organisations and the application of this research methodology by newly appointed Chief Executives/Managing Directors when considering the introduction of organisational change programmes. The methodology provides such managers with a powerful and effective investigative and planning tool, but more published examples are needed to embed the methodology into management practice.

**Stage One Interview [general issues surrounding group decision making]**

Objectives:

1. To identify the main drivers and the personal philosophy with regard to strategic decision making.
2. To investigate the interviewee's perspective on the organisation and how it goes about making strategic decisions and the interviewee's role in the processes. To answer the 'how do you feel' and how do you see' questions.
3. To identify underlying attitudes, biases, approaches, view of the world in which the interviewee makes decisions.
4. To probe the interviewee's attitude to group based decision making, and the interviewee's place within the group. [does the interviewee see him/herself operating in terms of a group]?
5. To investigate the interviewee's opinions on the Board's decision making success.

**Stage Two Interview**

Objectives:

1. To investigate the role of the interviewee in a particular decision event, [DE].

To identify the steps carried out in the group DE.

3. To identify the conscious and unconscious actions of the interviewee during the group activity.
4. To answer the 'why were things done that way' questions.
5. To identify the motivations and perceptions during group activity.

5. To investigate the interviewee's attitudes to the Decision Group and the interviews relationship with group members, in both advisory and Decision Groups.

### **Stage One**

**How do you view other people's involvement? Who are you, what is your role, a short career history?**

**What do you understand by the term strategic decision making?**

**How do you view your role in strategic decision making?**

**What is your view on decision making models and methods?**

**How do you perceive the way this organisation carries out strategic decision making?**

**What do you see as the processes at work?**

**What is your role in decision making by the Board?**

**Do you see it as a group [team activity] if so why and how does it operate?**

**Who controls the process, what are the steps to the process?**

**How do you approach your responsibilities to group DM?**

**How do you feel about your role?**

**How did the group interact and why do you think that was?**

**How does it help you in your day to day work?**

**How does it reflect upon you as a manager?**

**What role does it have in defining your position in the organisation?**

**What role does it have in your ambitions for yourself and your role?**

**Do you see yourself as a group controller? If so, how do you control the group process? How do you influence your colleagues?**



**What is your relationship with colleagues during this process? How do you view them and how do they view you do you think?**

**How do you view the Board's role in DM?**

**How do you influence the Board's DM?**

**Why do you wish to influence the Board's DM? What is in it for you?**

## **Stage Two**

This stage of the interview is based on a decision event within the organisation. The event chosen is the introduction of powered moorings on the new berth 8 and 9 construction. I want to take you through the process involved in the Board making the decision to invest in this new technology.

**What was your role in the decision process?**

**In your view, how did the idea come about?**

**How was it progressed in the early stages?**

**What influenced you in pursuing this? Who did you see as the prime movers and who did you see that you had to influence to go where you wanted to go?**

**How was the group formed, who decided and why were those individuals chosen?**

**Who was involved and did they see themselves as a group?**

**How was work apportioned?**

**Who agreed and who disagreed? Why, how was it handled?**

**How was information gathered and what information was gathered?**

**Who decided the boundaries of the information gathering and why were they chosen?**

**What options were considered and why?**

**Were options known about but not considered? Why?**

**How did you assess the strategic implication of the investment?**

**Was decision making models methods or support systems used at any point?  
If not why not, if so which ones and why?**

**What discussion took place, with whom and what?**

**How was the approach to the Board decided and acted upon?**

**How was the presentation produced, by whom and how? Who decided the content and why? What discussions took place and who was involved?**

**How do you view the Board's role? How was it handled?**

## APPENDIX B

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 5 - 5  
**Code:** leadership

So you need input from more than one person to get the right balance of the information. With too many people in the equation you can never get a decision, the organisation sort of atrophies, and doesn't make any decisions, because it can't agree between itself what it ought to do. I would rather have a buy-in from my peer group – that doesn't mean to say that you've got to get that – at some stage, somebody's got to grasp it, because somebody's got to be responsible and grasp it and say 'right, if we can't have a decision; if we can't agree on it, then this is the decision'. As an organisation ourselves, we've sort of floundered between two extremes rather than grasp the middle where we can agree to discuss decisions, but somebody's got to take responsibility at the end of the day. It's nice to be popular but, sometimes, the right decision is unpopular. In fact, one of the problems we have had in the past, any decision would have been the right one; no decision was the wrong one. That's the danger of group thinking, because you don't make any decision at all. Sometimes it's better if you make the unpopular decision; at least you've done something to move forward.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 7 - 7  
**Code:** leadership

I think it's the personality of the Managing Director. I wouldn't say he wanted to be popular; he wanted to get buy-in for the decisions because he felt that it is only by getting buy-in from everybody into the decision, that it would be implemented properly. There's a great deal behind that. If you do get buy-in from your colleagues, they will implement. If people disagree with your decision they can be obstructive sometimes. I think we've had a number of strong personalities and it got to the stage where most people felt they had a veto, or a right of veto, over anything, even if it wasn't their specialty. Some decisions were being made, but some of the important strategic decisions weren't being made. A change of culture in the organisation was needed.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 11 - 11**

**Code: leadership**

.....this organisation, in master planning terms, I'd describe it as you, the Chief Executive. Ultimately, I think, the final decision has to be yours for the strategic direction of this organisation. Rightly so, that's what you get paid for. But, I would hope that in taking on that responsibility you do take full account of all of the inputs from that strategic team in coming to that decision. On some issues you will get full agreement from the team; on other occasions there might be widely ranging views and it might be more difficult to actually make that decision.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 15 - 15**

**Code: leadership**

Ok. I am talking about the team. I think the leader of the team, be that the Chief Executive, be that Project Team Manager, be that the Chairman of that particular group, there is always, in my view, someone who has to take the lead in managing the dynamics of the team.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 17 - 17**

**Code: leadership**

Because otherwise, if you don't have that, I think, ultimately, you're wasting your time. You can wonder down the road of blind alleys; you can meander, if you like, over the ground and, ultimately, that can prove unproductive.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 19 - 19**

**Code: leadership**

He's got to lead. He's got to direct; he's got to bring people back to the subject,

whatever that might be. He's got to provide relevant and timely information to make sure he/she gets the best out of the team players. They'll all have something to bring; they'll have different areas of knowledge, different skills, different views and the team leader's role is to get the best out of those into actions.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 10 - 10**

**Code: leadership**

I think you've given responsibility and authority to individuals rather than groups.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 21 - 21**

**Code: leadership**

.....relationships between the other members of the team are going to be important. Managing those relationships is one of the key roles for the leader of that particular team.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 29 - 29**

**Code: leadership**

There are the other members of the team because, there almost inevitably are different personalities; strong achievers; strong motivators; all these team dynamics come into play when you're in a discussion about anything, be it a strategic decision or just a departmental decision-making process. There are those who speak out and speak their mind for their case very, very forcefully and there are those who are quieter and still manage to get their point across, and there'll be others that are the strong silent type who don't say very much at all, and all of these things come to play in that forum. Again, coming back to the team leader, it's quite important for him or her to understand those kinds of issues in order to make allowances for them in the decision-making process.

**Text: Weight: 100**

**Position: 15 - 15**

**Code: leadership**

Being held responsible for your actions and perhaps having to report them in public, if the Delivery Committee is public; being shown not to have done things in front of your peers. We do things in a much more open way:

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 14 - 14**

**Code: leadership**

No, I think what I'm saying is: take the decision at the right time; you can't keep every option open. All I'm saying is don't close out the ones that you don't have to close out until it's necessary to do so. Eventually, as you progress along a path with a series of decisions, you're effectively closing out various sorts of branches of that path that you had available previously. All I'm saying is don't leap too far ahead and close out ones, which you might later think are correct.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 47 - 47**

**Code: leadership**

No, no. I think if he thinks the team is weak or he needs to change the team then he should do so, because he needs to be confident that that team is the most effective that it can be in helping him to take the right decisions to the Board at the end of the day. I think he has a responsibility to make sure that the Senior Management team is functioning properly and is adequate.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 20 - 20**

**Code: leadership**

I suppose the first thing to clarify is when you're actually making a decision and when you're merely signing things. In an ideal world, as a manager of other managers, quite a lot of the decisions, which are notionally

deferred because of rank or procedure, are already made and you're merely being invited to endorse or approve the decision.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 19 - 19

**Code:** leadership

That's always the problem when you've got a single person, unknowingly or knowingly, you know the result that you want to get and you don't go through the process with, perhaps, a bit of an open mind to say 'I wonder what the answer's going to be?'. You know where you want to get to beforehand, so you structure the argument; you're not actually making a decision. You're structuring the argument to justify the decision you've already made. I think that's the danger, especially when you get single people making decisions.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 51 - 51

**Code:** leadership

I think, again, you can come to a consensus, and if it's unanimous, well, fine; not much of a problem, I guess. If it's a unanimous decision, well, let's go with it. If it's not, then, again, it's the role of team leader to actually make that final decision on where to go and how much information to actually gather. Be that internally, within the organisation, or externally, or probably a combination of both.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 24 - 24

**Code:** leadership

As I say, it can flatter, because you might feel that the person who is passing the decision up to you is giving you an opportunity to underline your position as the team leader or the boss. I think that's not always helpful. Again, there's a good reason for 'counting to ten', as it were, before reaching that decision.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 39 - 39**

**Code: leadership**

Well, I actually have to try and stand back from it sometimes, particularly if I don't have a clear view I will try in those circumstances make sure that I'm not influencing things unreasonably, because you can influence things quite easily without really knowing it, although sometimes with more success than others, obviously.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 71 - 71**

**Code: leadership**

I think that the first point is that there is no easy answer. My experience of being involved on those kinds of teams is that the more successful teams are the ones that are being led very, very effectively. So you have a strong, focused, dynamic, motivating team leader. The ones that are least effective are where the leadership is weakest.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 41 - 41**

**Code: leadership**

... might have to take the relatively obvious course, check that it's sensible, or make sure that there isn't a better option and just run with it. I tend to the view that while you're making decisions when they're required is rather better than making no decisions, even if, occasionally, you get one wrong. Well, I can think of people in the past you just have a phobia almost of making a decision and always just want to keep going round the loop again and question what we all agreed 3 weeks ago. There are one or two examples in this organisation that you'll recognise as well as I can. Left to their own devices they'll never make a decision about anything.



**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 71 - 71  
**Code:** leadership

The models or processes that are used to come to a decision-making end result, if you like, depends an awful lot on that team leader. In a sense they drive the process forward. In a lot of circumstances they will actually decide on which models, which processes, they are going to use.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 43 - 43  
**Code:** leadership

Clearly I give those to individuals to come up with and feed in that element into this decision. Other times you need to go and talk to some people to find out their views.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 81 - 81  
**Code:** leadership

Well, whilst I very much respect the use of tools, models, in helping one come to a decision; I do think they are just that. They are a tool; they are not a means to an end. They are part of the tool chest in trying to come to that decision at the end of the day. But there's an awful lot more that goes into the mix to come to the right decision and knowledge and skill is part of that mix. Knowledge, skill, leadership; all of that goes into the mix at the end of the day to help you come to the right decision.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 87 - 87  
**Code:** leadership

You can probably get a better team dynamic and a better team interaction going as a result of leading on that front, on the knowledge and experience front, than

perhaps if you led on a model. It's what I would describe as a more technical approach, using these models and all the rest of it. The advantage, I would guess, is that you get more out of a team in that way.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 50 - 50**

**Code: leadership**

I think it's partly to do with the fact that we're a group of specialists and, almost inevitable, there is a feeling of herding cats (?) about that [laughs]. For example, when I'm talking about consultation I'll be talking to one of my Deputy Managers, my Duty Managers, a Controller or Supervisor, Shop Steward... I won't necessarily be saying to them *I'm thinking about this decision, there's these three options, what do you think about them...* I'll ask them in general conversation what they might think about an aspect of a particular option and just listen to their answer and see whether or not it adds something to my understanding of it or not. I think the difficulty with the group of specialists is that, inevitably, they're taking decisions within their own specialism for much of the time.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 54 - 54**

**Code: leadership**

.....find it quite difficult to disconnect my vision from where, sort of, I feel I want the organisation to go to, which, actually, is pretty strongly aligned with what I think is your vision, and I don't think we disagree about it.

**Text:**

**Weight: 100**

**Position: 93 - 93**

**Code: leadership**

..... was involved in a Change project: C1.2, I remember it well, about how we could improve the mooring process at [name inaudible] and a very interesting project it was. I personally put in a lot of hard work and a lot of time into trying to move that project forward.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 58 - 58  
**Code:** leadership

Yes, I think leadership is setting the tone and direction. I try to set a tone within the operation's directory, which is all about action plans. *What are we going to do; who's going to do it; how are we going to do it.* I am quite action orientated rather than sort of waffling how we're going to be the best in the world. You know, we're going to do this; we're going to sort that problem out by such and such a time.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 58 - 58  
**Code:** leadership

I think that is what leadership is about and direction and making sure people actually understand what it is you expect of them. Once they're clear about that you can sort of stand back a bit.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 99 - 99  
**Code:** leadership

Purely because we have, and you in particular, Bob, have said we must prove ourselves to be best in class as far as the market is concerned. We must consistently prove that we're doing things in the right way, at the right price.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 52 - 52  
**Code:** leadership

Would we get better decisions with wider consultation of the senior management team on issues or would we merely get slower decisions, or would we even get worse decisions because there is a school of thought that says that committees... you know a maximum of three people, one with a casting vote.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 107 - 107

**Code:** leadership

Well, good question. I am trying desperately to remember who the actual Project Manager was. I think it was Steve Robinson, but I wouldn't say that he was the champion of powered moorings. I was certainly keen, whether or not I was unduly influencing the team, I don't know. But I had what I call good, sound reasons for pushing the proposal forward. Also Mike Krayenbrink, Director of Port Operations, was also keen.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 111 - 111

**Code:** leadership

The Board Paper was produced largely by the Project Manager with a lot of input from the Head of Engineering. Not too much input from me. I would say that, and certainly from the point of view for Mike, Director of Port Operations, that beyond those four, there was very little input from anybody else. There were several alterations, several drafts; individuals made individual contributions to that draft.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 124 - 125

**Code:** leadership

**Q.** at any time was there a notified, known leader of that group doing the things we've talked about earlier?

**A:** In this particular example, I would say that there wasn't really. Yes, there was a Project Team Leader but, in terms of what we've been discussing in the last hour, probably not.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 66 - 66

**Code:** leadership

In terms of something that actually takes you by surprise in the meeting, the other technique is to say: *jolly interesting, we'll need to take that away and think about that*. So you try to make sure that a decision you feel is going the wrong way isn't actually made. You back out of it in saying well, let's not make a decision about that, let's go away and think about that a bit more and re-present the proposals. At that point, you can actually think about whether what they've been saying actually did make sense. Fine, in which case you amend the proposals or, alternatively, you explain why, on reflection, that that idea actually isn't a good idea.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 127 - 127

**Code:** leadership

I think, probably individuals within that group, the stronger personalities, manipulated, if you like, that particular group. Not in a conscious or negative way, but purely because they were who they were and they were in the position they were in.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 139 - 139

**Code:** leadership

You will never eliminate the strong-minded individual person from dominating and influencing, over-influencing, a particular project group. You'll never eliminate it; what you can do is mitigate the effects of that particular person or that particular alliance. Again, I think that comes down largely to the skill of the leader of that team; he/she has got to recognise that and be able to deal with that in order to get the balanced judgment out of that team at the end of the day. It is a skill and I've seen some very skilful people in that role. I've also seen some less skilful people in that role.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 78 - 78  
**Code:** leadership

From the customers' perspective, that's 6 or 8 minutes of sitting there doing nothing, which seems like 12 minutes... and the cost and injury. So that's the motivation. Those three things led me to say let's see if we can find something.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 79 - 82  
**Code:** leadership

Who was asking those questions? I mean was it just you? Who exactly thought it was a problem?

**A:** I think, again, I think one sets the tone.

**Q:** What, you set the tone?

**A:** Yes. This is a problem! So, other people sort of agree, yes, it's a problem, let's see what we can... So, I guess, one probably does need to set a tone when there's a problem.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 82 - 82  
**Code:** leadership

So, if you take long-standing desire to do better with a potential technical solution, it suddenly begins to gel and you think *oh, there might be a way forward here*. Let's put enough 'oomph' with the leadership core in the process to start the ball rolling again.

**Text:**  
**Weight:** 100  
**Position:** 84 - 84  
**Code:** leadership

I think through discussions with Graham about whether or not this might be just hot air or, potentially, a feasible technical solution. The moment I entered discussions with Graham, I, we, came to the view that this might actually technically feasible, then I will somehow or other have said: *right, let's go for this, let's see if we can do a proper trial.*

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 93 - 96

**Code:** leadership

Who was leading this process? Or, was there a leader of the process?

**A:** I'm not sure there was and I'm not even sure there is, quite honestly. I guess, it's Operations and the Operations Directorate.

**Q:** Is there any individual?

**A:** Again, not obviously, to my mind. In pure hierarchical terms, it's something that's been going on in engineering at the moment that will have some effects on Landside. I guess then it's an Operations Director role. But, no, it strangely hasn't got a champion.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 90 - 92

**Code:** leadership

he success, or otherwise, of this thing will depend heavily on whether the masters trust it. So, if the Board does not want to give it a go from day one, then you can forget it. It wouldn't be worth a candle. If they can't be sufficiently persuaded, as it were, of the concept, that it should be adequate and give them the confidence, then you've lost before you started.

**Q:** So who did you feel you had to influence then in the process?

**A:** Well, I think the most important people were the Masters.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 96 - 96

**Code:** leadership

Usually, with technology, there's a champion; somebody's keen on the idea and will say 'let's go and look at this that and the other' and becomes the driver of that. I am not conscious that's happened in this case, and I think that's a problem really we need to resolve; who's actually leading this.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 96 - 96

**Code:** leadership

One of the things that's broken down, in my view, in the last 5 years – even if it was functioning properly before, which I don't think it was – is a project management capability. Project Management is more than setting up some project teams and a manager and then just, I don't know, a sort of review every month, two months in order to deliver. It's probably, in my mind, sufficiently important that there is a group of people who are specifically tasked to follow through on mooring. Why do I say that? I say it because a. it's multidisciplinary, there are Marine, Landside and Engineering implications in the physical doing of it and, secondly, because there's a lot of money at stake, both in terms of money and the potential payroll savings. So, it's potentially a big deal and, therefore, need to get the right people working on it; because if it is a good thing to do, then it should have a significant role and making sure that we can fund all the other things that we need to.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 94 - 94

**Code:** leadership

We had to have an alignment of the engineering people. Yes, this is technically feasible, we think... and the nautical side *yeah, we think the ships might be up to this*. To a lesser extent, although nonetheless very important, was Robin. It was going to be his star, his contract and he'd actually need people who are going to push the buttons. Actually, they'd be very different people, because they'd look rather less than like guerrillas and more technical, so there is... And then you, I think if you had listened to it and just laughed out loud and said *you can't be serious*, then it would have been difficult to push it to the Board without the... Well, I think if you had been passive about it, that might have been possible, but if you had been actively against, then I think that would have



been difficult; simply because it's a new departure. So, it's all about aligning the ducks in a row so that when you go to the Board, even though the Board members might think... they can see management lined up to a man all saying *this is worth a go*, even though we don't actually know whether it's going to be successful.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 102 - 102

**Code:** leadership

Head of Engineering was taking a personal interest in it but I'm not aware of an engineer specifically detailed to look at the mooring system. It's quite interesting, because the Development section, for example, doesn't have any mechanical engineers in it, just civil engineers. The mechanical engineering that we have is in the Maintenance section. I'm not sure that I've seen – I'm not saying that it doesn't happen – much interplay with the civil project engineers and the mechanical guys on the maintenance side. We, maybe, have a shortfall here that we don't have any chartered engineers any more, we used to. It's quite interesting, because we've got this big, expensive complicated kit, increasingly complicated kit, and we've got thousands of people being carried by it and we identify it as a significant business risk area – and we know we've dropped spanners in the water... and through mechanical failures – so that's interesting. Part of the problem, in terms of ownership, is who has the overall responsibility to own it. I guess, I could argue myself that perhaps I ought to take leadership of the concept because it actually saved money in Landside operations. You know, we've been quite passive about it and said *well, fine, if it works, that's great*.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 107 - 110

**Code:** leadership

**A.** Whose aim is it?

**A** I guess, it's the Operations Directorate.

**Q** Again, is there a person who is saying that?

**A** Well, yes, I suppose Mike is saying that. I suppose, perhaps... does it throw up a law in the linking of departmental and corporate objectives? Is it

one of Landside's objectives to deliver automated moorings? [First part of sentence inaudible] ... in terms of changing the staff arrangements, do they need training? It isn't our objective to deliver automated moorings. I'm not sure it's the Engineering Department's objective either, from memory.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 112 - 112

**Code:** leadership

if I'm honest about it, I guess it sort of comes in steps, doesn't it. There is no way that, unless I was really behind it to give it a go, it would happen.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 117 - 117

**Code:** leadership

Maybe if there had been a departmental team, which included Kevin or one of his mariners, there would have been a better understanding of what needed to be done to ships. Maybe it suggests something that nobody knew or nobody understood from the manufacturer. I don't know where that problem has come from but it seems to have been a risk that wasn't identified earlier. Again, I don't know what the outcome of that is at the moment.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 119 - 119

**Code:** leadership

We're talking about this process still? I guess, from my point of view, I'm sitting here thinking *I haven't got a decision to make yet* and, therefore, I haven't asked myself those sorts of questions or even particularly sought to think about them, other than how many fewer people we could manage with if we get to the point of realising automation.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 27 - 27

**Code:** leadership\teambuilding

Ok. What motivates people, I think, is a sense of achievement; it's a sense of being a part of that decision-making process. For me, it's that feeling of involvement; being a party to moving something forward. That can be pretty liberating, actually. In the right circumstances it can be quite a 'high'. It's that personal involvement; of being part of the process that actually moves forward and gets to the right decision. Of course, the reverse of that is that somebody in team isn't happy with the decision and feels quite de-motivated by it. But, generally speaking, if the team dynamics work properly, there will be far more good experiences and motivated people coming out at the end of that process than there are de-motivated, disillusioned people.

**Text:**

**Weight:** 100

**Position:** 90 - 92

**Code:** leadership\teambuilding

.....the success, or otherwise, of this thing will depend heavily on whether the masters trust it. So, if the Board does not want to give it a go from day one, then you can forget it. It wouldn't be worth a candle. If they can't be sufficiently persuaded, as it were, of the concept, that it should be adequate and give them the confidence, then you've lost before you started.

**Q** So who did you feel you had to influence then in the process?

**A** Well, I think the most important people were the Masters.

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