CHAPTER THREE: FIFTY-ONE SAMPLED DECISIONS: SIFTING THE DETAILS

SETTING OUT THE DATA

In this chapter, empirical inquiry begins into how decisions, generated in this one small unit by academics working at the coal face, compare with the sorts of decisions and their settings studied by Hickson et al (1986a), and, going back further, Allison (1969; 1971). The study inquires into how informants in such academic settings generate and respond to their sampled decisions. What sorts of explanatory comments do they make about the decisions they generate? Where do they go to compile details in decisional content? Who is included in the process? Who is excluded? What systematic data analysis methods may be set up for the purpose of ethnographic sifting? Selection of cases for study may well result in clear pictures to show how higher education units stand out from other types of units. For the purpose of this introductory study, the open pile sort data analysis procedure gave a useful beginning. The procedure is explained below in Chapter Four "The First Pile Sort Sample: Thematic Analysis". For later, more advanced studies of similar data, triadic comparisons using balanced incomplete block design format promise fruitful departures (Weller, 1988).

As the three chapters in this Thesis Part Two unfold, it will become clear how initial outcomes sought for the study have been largely confirmed and begin to fall away behind the focus of inquiry. Yes, this higher education unit seems to be unique in many respects. Staff members, together with their decision making activities, seem to be shot through with professional independence of thought and action. Decisions generated by them seem to reflect strategic, as well as routine concerns. Moreover, they are quickly opened up, by Informant A, to richly detailed classifications which begin to look quite different from the Hickson et al tripartite classification of decision types set down above as a key point of focal theory.

By the end of this Thesis Part Two, it will be seen how different directions of inquiry now press for attention. Quantities and kinds of decision categories are beginning to "blow out". There now arises a new danger of over-intellectualising the topic in seeking to elaborate ever new categories and types of decision. One imperative in social research is to remain close to informants' own articulations about data as the search for sociological fact, also an omnipresent imperative in social research, must be kept in sharp focus (Jones, 1985a; 1985b).

It will also become clear, as the argument proceeds, how further complexities arise as key outcomes of the study. Moreover they relate closely to concerns unique to higher education. Decisions were sampled from academics throughout the unit in interviews ranging across several weeks. The researcher followed the Hickson et al format (1986a). Each decision was clearly worded at the top of one item card. Rationale details for the decision were then compiled below on the same card. The researcher took care to use folk language phraseology derived from the EDD organisational culture. This principle was followed by asking informants to dictate details to be entered on the cards. Entries on cards were then shown to the informant for confirmation of accurate terminologies and rationale details. The researcher assigned the collected fifty-one decisions to a randomised numerical order using a random number table (Weller and Romney, 1988, pp. 33, 86). The results are compiled in this report as "Appendix One: Fifty-One Sampled Decisions" (pp.201-14).

Sampled decisions presented to Informant A, the head of the department, are deeply and widely categorised by him, and that aspect of the study occupies the central place in this Thesis Part Two (see below, Chapter Four, pp. 88-93, 95: Figures Six and Seven). There is a deep cultural thrust given by this articulate informant towards a centre of interest where "teaching and learning aspects and situations" are compiled closely together (see below, p. 95, Figure Seven). Decisions grouped under "how to do things and how to make changes" interact with decisions grouped under "who will do things and selecting staff". This interaction forces Informant A to struggle with the problem of sequence: how things may be seen to line up in administrative order to govern his daily work schedules. Mutual enculturation between researcher and informant grows more evident in the data compiled. Further along again, in Chapter Five, the researcher's own responses to data identical with that for Informant A show his reaching towards additional categories of decision: a move which displays a dangerous tendency towards over-intellectualisation. As the thesis proceeds, it will become clear how Bradford Studies propositions begin to be seriously called into question for higher education

units like the EDD. The position is also highlighted when due attention is given to Burton Clark's views on "trickle-up" perspectives (Clark, 1983a).

Developing Complexities Bring a Turning Point to the Study

Discussion at this point reaches directly into the core thesis. General questions drive forward the empirical aspects of the inquiry. What sorts of decisions are generated by these busy professionals working in this lively academic setting? How will the decision sample relate to background and focal theoretical ideas considered so far? How will staff members themselves relate to such data, which, in some cases, proved so hard to extract from a strangely clouded reality lying behind the foreground clamour of organisational life?

Empirical aspects of the study get under way, sifting through some finer details. The chapter looks closely at decision items, set down on small cards, together with their summary rationales. The report at this point presents a descriptive survey of all fifty-one sampled decisions, together with commentary upon certain decision makers and the details they used for compiling their sample items. This material makes progress in answering basic research questions about how academics' decisions may look, what kinds of details will be likely to go into their formation, who typically gets involved in the process, and how they may be categorised by independent observers.

In Chapter Four, the report sets out results of the first item pile sort. The researcher asked Informant A to arrange twenty-one randomly selected decision item cards on a table to collect them into groups of his own choosing. Charts set out in that chapter, depicting cards arranged on a table by the informant, give the developing picture about the data gathering process applied to sampled decisions. Along the way, the study now notes their characteristic arrangements, and draws descriptive comparisons across categories generated within the organisational culture. Figure Six occupies three double page layouts (see below, pp. 88-93); while a further summary of that chart is found in Figure Seven (see below, p. 95).

Chapter Five sets out results of the second item pile sort. In that procedure, both Informant A and the researcher process identical data to study how both may use the new categories for further sampled items. Discussion and analysis of the material then presents identifiable patterns arising from large aggregates of fine detail, and draws out their

significance. It is important for the reader at this point, therefore, to scan forward through Chapters Four and Five, to note how presentation and layout issues have been handled in the production of final copy (see below, p. 88, and passim: Figures Six to Ten).

In this section of the report, then, it will be seen how complexities arising from this form of data and its analysis both confirm certain outcomes beginning to emerge from the study; and at the same time open up the field in clearer terms for further studies to be made along similar lines in similar settings. Following the opening readings and discussions, it became necessary to locate and enter one lively higher education field work site. Willing informants were found who would process data in this way. The researcher needed to test whether received outlooks on decisions and decision making might be seen to break down. The procedure allowed new configurations to get under way. Three forms or categories of decision found in focal theory sources now give way to the real possibility of more or less than three for this small unit operating at the bottom of a lively system.

Research outcomes derived in this way may not just impinge upon understanding conglomerates of data. They may also entail methodological suggestions for further work. Such an outcome is the case here. Following these introductory remarks, compilation of the fifty-one sampled decisions is set out and discussed. This forms a background for discussion and analysis of outcome ideas. There then follows detailed illustrative description of significant decision items. An overall pattern emerges for the complete sample, helping the reader to fill in a detailed picture of the assembled data. The section at that point then turns to the two later chapters to present results of the two pile sort procedures. Prior to turning to the fifty-one sampled decisions, certain key general ideas developed so far in the study need to be set down so that they may clearly be brought to bear upon the argument now developing at the level of detailed data. To that task the report now turns.

Key Points in the Developing Argument

Three key points from earlier discussion connect with the argument now developing and gaining momentum in this chapter of the study. These are now identifiable as follows: the *non-directive imperative* as a background assumption in understanding higher education settings; the *problematic nature of the dual/ triple rationality framework* for under-

standing decision making in organisations; and the ubiquitous *problematic of the standard operating procedure form of decision making*, now taking on a "ghost in the machine" form of life.[1]

Non-directive imperatives. The first key point, the non-directive imperative, requires that interactions in higher education be couched in terms of mutual respect, and was introduced above in the opening discussion section. Appealing to ideas about professional autonomy among members of a guild, it was asserted that "all levels of the operation in higher education units may show marked strategic and executive decision making forms" (see above, p. 3). This was further underlined in that section by an interaction pointed out there between Bradford Studies outcomes based upon studies at the "top" of a wide range of organisations and Burton Clark's views about there being "much discretion at the bottom" and "much that trickles up and happens by slow accretion" in higher education settings (Clark, 1983a, chap. 4, p. 132) (see above, pp. 1[illegible], 34-5) Such points noted during the opening phases of the study brought out tensions between "top" and "bottom" notions about decision making and the implied significance of what types of decisions may characteristically occur in differing levels of differing types of organisations.

Dual/triple rationality problematic. The second point, the dual/triple rationality problematic, introduced above in Chapter Two, was made clear when views of Allison (1969, 1971) and Hickson et al (1986a) were brought together for comparison and contrast (see above, pp. 46-50). The tripartite nature of Allison's theory, it was suggested there, differed markedly from the tripartite nature of Hickson's theory in certain significant ways. Hickson's theory was assertedly bipartite, that is to say, reflecting "dual rationality" incorporating ideational complexity and political heat; but, in effect, it remains tripartite (Hickson et al, 1986a, Figure 6.1, p. 166) Duality, for Hickson, seen in the decisional complexity/politicality interaction, remains underpinned by "rules of the game" (Allison's standard operating procedures). This logical move effectively gives unacknowledged support to Allison's tripartite viewpoint incorporating rationality/ politicality/ organisational routine.

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[1]The idea is borrowed from Ryle (1949), The Concept of Mind.

Standard operating procedure form of decision making. The third point, the standard operating procedure problematic, introduced above in Chapter Two pp. 47-8, uses Clark as a benchmark for key understandings in higher education studies, and looks closely at the structural points of comparison in the theory for both authors. This point reveals the core of a *linearity doctrine* at work in the field. Sequence is assumed as an imperative for both theoretical understanding about decisions and decision making in academic debate on the topic, as well as for clarity of purpose in practical settings down at Meek's coalface in administrative work currently under way (Meek, 1984, 1987b). Hickson uses a sequence in which "rules of the game" are placed prior to the "matter for decision" (Hickson et al, 1986a, p. 166). In so doing, he relegates to little more than a permanently present background influence, a phenomenon, which, to Allison, amounted to a ubiquitous and autonomous organisational process in recurrent decision making. Standard operating procedures, for Hickson, are given a "ghostly" presence in the scheme of things: "rules of the game" denied a clear exposition or outline by way of consolidating the argument. A close examination of the two sources has suggested that a possible gap remains in Hickson's viewpoint because, as has already been noted in this report, he does not attend to Allison in the literature and consequently the gap in ideas found between the two sources is not discussed. The report now turns to outline procedures for compilation and analysis of data generated by informants.

SAMPLED DECISIONS: DESCRIPTIVE CATEGORIES

The researcher gave broad initial categories to the randomly numbered sample of decisions, to get a generalised first picture of the collected data. Which decisions were taken individually, and which were taken collaboratively, in either small or large groups? Which were taken within broad and narrow resource contexts, and with short or long term effects? Was the sample evenly distributed across these descriptive categories? Figure Five (see below, overleaf) shows how the sample was then spread across categories of group size and resources affected, giving a broad quantitative picture.

There is, of course, room for differing interpretation on these initially broad and tentative descriptive categories. But data description needs to begin somewhere, and a useful place to begin is how the ethnographer sees it whole in terms of group process. Data material

generated in this activity was extensive. Each decision was itemised, together with its detailed rationale. How this material may best be displayed to the reader presents a constant challenge. Data prior to interpretation must be set down in some readable way, so that discussion of outcomes may proceed in an open setting.

The researcher carried out both the generation of the descriptive categories and the placement of items within them. The argument that independent coders might have been brought in at this point to check the descriptive categories and the placement of items needs comment. The project undertaken here made use of ethnographic methods and related assumptions. Among many other ideas, this means that the idea of a team of researchers working to collate and code a large body of data is considered to be outside the boundaries of the project.

In ethnographic research the lone researcher's perceptions are taken seriously. Judgements are self-tested in isolation over time. Charts compiled may be taken back to informants for comment. Such feedback, however, is not always taken at its face value. The very selection of informants remains an issue to be constantly resolved by the ethnographer alone. Moreover the research outlined here was a beginning project. The data collected was tentative and adventurous. Later projects using extra resources may perhaps build upon this early work. Plans to carry out further work with teams of independent coders and larger scale data collections need to await outcomes from this initial study.

In the following section of the report, each item category is introduced by detailed description of one example. The rest of the examples are then indicated by listing each decision's random sample number, together with the decision stipulated, copied from the top of the item card. The rationale statement is excluded from this presentation, to assist the initial broad scanning of data. If the reader is interested to look up particular items, to note their rationale statements, this is facilitated by **Appendix One: Fifty-One Sampled Decisions** (see below, pp. 201-14). The short descriptive survey that now follows proceeds through seven separate categories: taking in solo, collaborative small group, and collaborative large group decisions. Further space is then given to a review of collaborative large group decisions, since they hold interest for revealing certain aspects of the political culture within the unit.

Solo decisions within a narrow context, carrying short term effects. Material outlined on the item card implies that the actor made the decision within an exclusive sphere of influ-

ence. An example for this group is *sample decision numbered fifteen*, "a decision by one member of staff in media studies to alter the content of colour slides used for a particular lecture in a course on photography". The item outlines plans for a single activity by a single actor undertaken for a purpose which is clearly identifiable as specific to that person. A lecturer in photography has drawn limitations around content for a particular class presentation. The decision reaches back into the person's academic and aesthetic scales of values and ideas about students' capabilities.

Other items compiled are:

> (17.) A decision by the receptionist to raise the question of some non-availability time given each day to allow catch up on required work which continually accumulates.
>
> (22.) A decision by one member of staff in media studies to allocate personnel to a particular job on the St. Albans campus.
>
> (24.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to give to certain students photocopied handout materials relevant to assignments in their programs.
>
> (27.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to take a 'class talk' class during the following week.
>
> (35.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to have a meeting with an accounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week.
>
> (37.) A decision to discuss with a member of the teaching staff in the department the idea of a short course (three to five days) for engineering students.
>
> (40.) A decision to have titles for a video compiled on new equipment at the St. Albans campus.
>
> (42.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to incorporate an article on the problem of plagiarism in writing in a teaching program.
>
> (47.) A decision by one member of staff in media studies to list the tasks/ functions/ responsibilities to be taken alone by a member of staff new to the department.
>
> (48.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to consult on a series of assignments with a third year student whose work is in a different discipline area.

Solo decisions within a narrow context, carrying long term effects. Material as outlined implies that the actor, once again, made the decision within an exclusive sphere of influence, but was focussed upon long term concerns. An example for this group is *sample decision numbered one*: "a decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to commence

FIGURE FIVE SAMPLED DECISIONS: ITEMS IN CATEGORY LOCATIONS

		NARROW CONTEXT: Actors and Physical Resources Affected		BROAD CONTEXT: Actors and Physical Resources Affected	
		SHORT TERM EFFECTS for actors and physical resources affected	LONG TERM EFFECTS for actors and physical resources affected	SHORT TERM EFFECTS for actors and physical resources affected	LONG TERM EFFECTS for actors and physical resources affected
SOLO DECISIONS		15. 17 22. 24 27. 35 37. 40 42. 47 48.	1. 6. 11. 12. 16. 21. 23. 25. 26. 29. 31. 38. 43. 44.	9.	4. 7. 18. 28. 32. 34. 39. 45. 49. 50. 51.
COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS	SMALL GROUP		3. 14. 33.		2. 5. 8. 13. 19. 20. 46.
	LARGE GROUP				10. 30. 36. 41.

higher degree studies". The item indicates one academic's concern about career advancement. Pressure to produce formal academic research output conflicts with pressure to develop departmental programs. Outcomes from this decision may take years to emerge. Along the way, there will arise many kinds of effects ranging from adjustments to program details derived

from new readings, to deep personal adjustments in the academic's outlook and daily work practices.

Other items compiled are:

> (6.) A decision by one member of staff to limit service attendance on the St Albans campus to one day per week only.
>
> (11.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to collaborate on a handbook for students in business/ law: links with other staff and universities.
>
> (12.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre not to work full time in the department at this point.
>
> (16.) A decision by the administrative assistant to attend certain courses of study for the purpose of keeping up with changes being implemented.
>
> (21.) A decision by the receptionist to record more detail in photographic orders taken in reception.
>
> (23.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to rewrite/ extend/ expand the course material in nursing (bridging studies).
>
> (25.) A decision by the receptionist to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organization.
>
> (26.) A decision to collaborate on academic publications with a member of staff in a department receiving service support.
>
> (29.) A decision by the receptionist to list ideas for planning layout of the reception area in the proposed new location: Building D.
>
> (31.) A decision to delegate to a member of the support staff the function of compiling appropriate materials and drafting short letters of reply: to be signed by the staff member for the unit coordinator.
>
> (38.) A decision by one member of staff to limit the topic of an academic research project: to investigate the phenomenon of mathematics anxiety in the mature-age student.
>
> (43.) A decision by the Pro-Vice Chancellor to allocate the petty cash management duties to the administrative assistant.
>
> (44.) A decision by one member of staff to approach another member of staff in the department to act as mentor for the purposes of guidance in studies for the Graduate Diploma in Education undertaken in another institute.

Solo decisions within a broad context, carrying short term effects. Material as outlined implies that the actor was focussed upon short term concerns over a broad field of application. The sole item for this category is *sample decision numbered nine*: "a decision to compile materials on a program: its promotion, administration, delivery and follow-up: summary sheet:

model; elements, learning centre 'in-house' publications". It is a solo decision, and came under "short term effects" because it was framed to meet requirements of a one-hour meeting that was coming up soon. The academic will turn to compile draft materials for a report to the chancellery on the work carried out by the Learning Centre section of the EDD. The materials to be prepared, however, covered the whole range of interests of all individuals and groups within the EDD.

Solo decisions within a broad context, carrying long term effects. Material as outlined implies that the actor was focussed upon long term concerns over a broad field of application. An example is *sample decision numbered four*: "a decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to teach in the Community Health Nursing Course in October of this year (now April)". A member of staff agrees to teach in a certain course, following previous practice. Although the head of the department seems to have made the decision (taken the running), the academic has been asked The academic has agreed. This is the decision. It seems to exist in space somewhere between the two individuals. Analysis does not need to proceed far to make this important point. The most particularised decisions are not necessarily attached to individuals, even though they seem to define their particular interests and futures. In this case, the decision to agree has been made within a social context that remains open to further empirical inquiry and ethnographic sifting.

Other items compiled are:

> (7.) A decision to raise people's consciousness about the limited space and resources in the media studies area.
>
> (18.) A decision by one member of staff in media studies to adopt and develop a consultative, collaborative, and interactive approach to photographing a client.
>
> (28.) A decision by the administrative assistant to contribute to ideas in planning the layout of spaces in the new location for the EDD.
>
> (32.) A decision to send a memo to all deans and heads of departments offering to address new staff to inform them of EDD's role on the Footscray campus.
>
> (34.) A decision to build up the workload at Western Hospital in order to lend more weight to priorities in that direction.
>
> (39.) A decision to remain on a fence between two professional fields of development: the VUT and its areas of academic work and the Western Hospital and its areas of academic work.
>
> (45.) A decision to encourage conference attendance by EDD staff.

(49.) A decision by the administrative assistant to agree to work on the St Albans campus as well as on the Footscray campus.

(50.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to shorten initial consultation times with students commencing their preparations for essays and assignments.

(51.) A decision to carry out some work in another faculty on campus - to reciprocate an approach already made.

Collaborative small group decisions within a narrow context, carrying long term effects. Outlined material implies that the actor made the decision within a specific consultative context. An example for this group is *sample decision numbered three*: "a decision to resolve the problem of the air conditioner". It arises out of a context of three people occupying an office space in cramped conditions, and the description of the decision on the item card refers to previous discussions among the three people. The group have decided to do something about an intractable problem. It concerns their daily health and physical comfort in hot weather. Plans for action are not specified. However, the item remains a clear decision, since points of action may well arise in the future, as the matter is reconsidered. What the decision asserts is that something will be attempted, and that the matter will not be allowed to rest, as in the past. For these reasons the item represents an interesting kind of decision. In general, all items compiled for this report carry overlapping family resemblances, all the way along from the highly structured and detailed, through the more broadly based and openly structured, to those that seem vague and empty of purposeful content. These last must not be ignored, for they too make up the cultural domain of decisions in organisations.

Other items compiled are:

(14.) A decision to authorise the administrative assistant to sign orders and requisitions.

(33.) A decision to employ another member of staff to assist in running programs for business/ law.

Collaborative small group decisions within a broad context, carrying long term effects. Outlined material implies that the decision was made within a broad context, looking to long term effects. An example is *sample decision numbered two*: "a decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to give to two colleagues an outline of things to think about for the summer school four week program". The decision is to list points for discussion within a

group of three academics. The content covers the summer school program being planned, and an evaluation session carried out by participants at the end of the program.

Other items compiled are:

> (5.) A decision to redevelop a one year course in basic chemistry: Foundation Studies Chemistry.
>
> (8.) A decision to use a new system of computer technology in conducting equipment loans to students.
>
> (13.) A decision to offer a new program to students in Business Law A.
>
> (19.) A decision to mainstream into the yearly cycle of programs a winter school program recently piloted by a small group of staff in the department.
>
> (20.) A decision to hold a planning meeting about a new program to be developed: five to six week initial program offering: general English language classes; English for academic purposes; academic writing skills.
>
> (46.) A decision by two members of staff in the learning centre not to cancel classes for individual consultations in the final week prior to an assignment due date; but instead to hold classes as usual for group consultations on common problems about essays.

Collaborative large group decisions within a broad context, carrying long term effects. Material outlined implies that the actor made the decision within a large group context. An example is *sample decision numbered ten*: "a decision made last year to change the format of First Year Nursing Tutorials for Chemistry and Physics." It reveals how the actor is engaged in an on-going three-way interchange with groups across three departments: the EDD, Nursing, and Chemistry, and it is clearly implied that the decision has been fashioned around requirements expressed within all three spheres of influence. Changes are being made to the format of tutorials in a first year course. Students, also, are being consulted on the matter. Once again, the matter falls to widely held ideologies expressed within the EDD. How content is presented to students seems to hold equal importance with what content is presented.

Other items compiled are

> (30.) A decision to relocate some of the EDD staff to work on an alternative campus
>
> (36.) A decision to develop an appropriate layout of the new EDD facilities.
>
> (41.) A decision to finalise the location of EDD in the new amalgamated university.

Scanning through all fifty-one sampled decisions confirms that informants have given wide ranging and detailed material. Even within the one category, this remains clearly the case. Questions of how decisions are made in small campus units, together with who gets included and excluded, are substantially, if only partly, answered by this kind of material.

Narrow context solo decisions directed at short term effects, alone, range across diverse areas of interest. Reading down the list, these are academic teaching content, availability times, allocation of personnel, student handout materials, scheduled special presentations, planning meetings, course development, educational technology, dealing with plagiarism, induction of new staff, and working across discipline areas. Moreover, each item carries fine detail in its rationale statement. At a second point in the domain, narrow context solo decisions directed at long term effects also range widely across diverse fields of interest. These touch upon starting a higher degree program of studies, limiting service attendance, student handbook writing, part time work, course attendance, filing details in orders, course material writing, workplace politics, academic publication, planning for physical layout, delegation of functions, academic research project development, petty cash management, and mentor networking. Again, at a third point in the domain, narrow context collaborative small group decisions directed at short term effects , while numbering only three items, still range widely. These move from problems with the air conditioner, to requisition order signatories, to employment of a new member of staff.

In the face of this notable range of detail, it might be concluded that decision making in this unit is indeed open and widely democratic. But that conclusion would not be justified. Inclusion of individuals can result in exclusion of others. In the hubbub found in the material surveyed above, much yet remains to be studied and analysed. The point may be made by bringing together two theoretical propositions from the list compiled above at the end of Chapter Two. Clark's point about there being much discretion practised by academics at the bottom of systems and units seems well supported. But Dahrendorf's point about understanding the legitimation process as central to showing how modifications take place in the technical, political, and social conditions for the formation of conflict groups, remains both interesting and demandingly problematic. How and where does legitimation work out in practice? Where may we go, and what do we need to study, to bring out and understand more fully the *locus of legitimation* for academics to form their decisions in such wide ranging ways? In the section that follows, materials descriptively surveyed above in this section

are more deeply interpreted and analysed in pursuit of research questions and theoretical propositions compiled.

SAMPLED SOLO DECISIONS: INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

A need for re-assessment of the way forward now begins to emerge from this discussion. Given problems in the lines of theory discussed so far, where, then, lie the social grounds of decisions and decision making? Where, and how are decisions initiated and formed in this particular social context? Two analytical problems now seem to dominate the inquiry. The first is the growing place of the researcher in the calculus of data theory, in particular, how the researcher's own biases have influenced probes and outcomes in the interviews and their charts. The second is the increasing presence and status accorded to dialectical conflict theory in this study: now a well established issue in focal theory. For this way of seeing how social dynamics take shape and hold force now begins to offer ways out of an analytical dead-end. This has developed around inabilities in received decision making theory to draw useful distinctions between where decisions in this higher education social context may be seen to be born and where they may not.

Turning now to matters of interpretation, we may note at this point that the sampled decisions are widely scattered among the categories given. This occurs across both of the broad and narrow contexts and between the groupings of decision makers. All categories are represented to some degree, although five of the twelve cells are empty. Staying with the chart as set out in Figure Five for a moment, some tentative but significant points may be made for the EDD.

In point form, broad quantitative outcomes may be set down as follows:

a. solo decisions, taken for *long term outcomes* across both narrow and broad contexts, seem to hold a strong place, with twenty-five of the fifty-one items (approximately forty-nine percent of the sample);

b. solo decisions *overall* hold a very strong position with thirty-seven of the fifty-one items (approximately seventy-two percent of the sample);

c. no items fit easily into collaborative narrow and broad short term contexts;

d. no items fit large group collaborative narrow context for long term outcomes;

c. one cluster of four large-group collaborative broad context long term decisions invite a closer look at their details.

How may these outcomes now be related to ideas raised in the current study?

There is a strong connection here with ideas about the perceived autonomy of actors in the setting. But further features which may turn out to be unique to the setting now begin to stand out. Points "a." and "b.", together, sit in tension with points "c." and "d.". Whereas solo decisions range across both short term and long term fields of operation, collaborative decisions touch only upon long term concerns. What seems required is a search for decision making in which large groups deliberate upon short and long term concerns, taking in the work fields of small groups. If such decision making exists, it did not, at that time, appear uppermost in the minds of informants. This is an important point. It needs further elaboration as the thesis develops. Do large groups of academics come together to deliberate upon matters pertaining to small groups which cover narrow context and short term outcomes? Presumably they do so. Boards of studies, faculty forums, even departments, deliberate upon what small groups within their ranks, course units, and the like, will be expected to do. But short term? And within a narrow context? What would be some examples of such decisions, and what would they look like? In contrast with the present study, would they be more salient in the minds of informants from other units?

If such decision making occurs, is this activity relatively less significant for academic life? How and by what means are these decisions followed up? Turning back again to the numerical dominance of solo decisions, is academic life, by contrast, relatively dominated by personal concerns? It may be reasonably assumed for a small academic unit like the EDD that informants gave, in face-to-face contact with the researcher, those decisions they perceived as important for study. If this is the case, then their collective view of academic work may be largely given in terms of ideas about personal autonomy and immediate strategic substance.

The professional independence point may be further confirmed by noting the high level of elaboration among ideas in many of the sampled decisions tendered. The point is developed further in this chapter where collaborative decisions are set out and reviewed. It is also true for long passages of the interview transcripts.[2] High levels of expectation about

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[2] **Appendix One: Fifty-one Sampled Decisions**, p. 201, decisions numbered 17., 18., 19., and 20. show high levels of elaboration of ideas. **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 252-3, "INFORMANT: Yes, . . . sometimes; the job ranges greatly . . . but because there is

professional autonomy seemed to prevail as thirty-seven of the fifty-one decisions (approximately seventy-two percent of the samples were taken in solo mode.[3] Moreover this phenomenon also appears to have been reflexively present in the minds of many informants. The point may be confirmed by noting many explicit comments as well as ideas implied in the decision sample and interview data.

The interview transcript for Informant G is most interesting in this regard. This person tendered the sample decision to change the format of the Nursing tutorials for Chemistry and Physics, sample decision numbered ten. It is also worth noting the spread of influence this informant held across the Learning Centre Staff Portfolios, ranging across Engineering, General Program, Mathematics, Economics and Accounting, and Teacher Education.[4]

Care in the selection of such articulate and cooperative informants is crucial to the success of an ethnographic study. This is the person who offered important insights on difficult modes of operation felt while trying to expand further the boundaries of the unit's work into a wider range of discipline specific departments. "One step forward and two steps back" was the speed required in some settings, as the remark on advances into Chemical Engineering suggested: "It probably needs, fairly soon, another half step forward".[5] Politically charged issues such as these are reserved for further space later on in this report, where further case study data is given interpretation and detailed comment. These are found in later relevant sections (see Thesis Part Three: Decisions and Decision Making: Chapter Six).

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a relationship sometimes students can presume on that and feel that you will always be available", where both the content and the elaborated mode of discourse show how the informant struggles with the emerging nature of difficult interpersonal work roles.

[3]**Appendix One: Fifty-one Sampled Decisions**, p. 204, decision numbered 9., the sole occupant of its cell in Figure Five, is an interesting case in point. The coordinator of the Learning Centre Section takes responsibility for a highly strategic exercise in provision of information to high level decision makers in the university.

[4]**Appendix One: Fifty-one Sampled Decisions**, p. 204, decision numbered 10.; **Appendix Three: Academic Staff Areas of Skill and Interest**, p. 326; **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 275. Informant G was most helpful on political climate and related conflicts. Issues of boundary expansion, enclaving and resocialisation of the innovation are most vividly revealed in the data from this informant. In later sections the study will return to such data in fine detail.

[5]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 279 [G28].

In conclusion to this section, solo decisions stand out as dominating the decision making scene in this small academic unit. The tension revealed between solo and collaborative decisions carries some curious dimensions of contrast. Broad context decisions carrying short term effects seem to be absent from the minds of informants. The same holds for group decisions within a narrow context carrying short term effects. None of those are easily found for listing as such. Many decisions are highly elaborated, underlining deep professional autonomy in the setting. There is a notable diversity of range forthcoming from informants. In such terms, but at a surface level of analysis only, the survey has begun to answer questions about types of decision and decision making unique to small campus units. The report now turns to consider collaborative decisions compiled in the sample. How may these be related to key questions and points of theory at this introductory level of study?

SAMPLED COLLABORATIVE DECISIONS: INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

Collaborative decisions seem to be equated with long term outcomes in the minds of informants. What form do they take? May they be grouped thematically? Do they share common features beyond the categories imposed upon them? How do they answer listed research questions? How do they relate to theoretical propositions? The study of sampled collaborative decisions calls up questions about rational, political and organisational process approaches to decision making. Whereas sampled solo decisions may, from time to time, touch upon deep political veins running through the organisation, it may be assumed that collaborative decisions invariably do so. Bradford Studies models of decision and decision making will be used in this section to interpret and analyse the data. One illustration for each of the three models will be drawn from the Head of Department's interview transcript. Each will be studied as a step forward into an analysis of the sampled decisions set out in the following pages. It will be seen in this section how Bradford Studies models remain problematic for this social setting. They become both illuminating and confusing for understanding and explaining these sampled decisions in this small campus unit.

One abiding question remains throughout this section: does Bradford Studies theory sufficiently distinguish between decisions *per se*, and decision making *per se*: between sampled items as outcomes and the processes that bring them forward? It will be suggested

that the two ideas are too closely linked up within their detailed theoretical framework. Items reviewed in the present study may be too easily classified as arising out of two or more discreet processes. This applies even to some sampled solo decisions, notwithstanding their clear executive and strategic import, and that they are not "top" decisions in the Hicksonian sense of the term. So Bradford Studies theory will be found to be unhelpful as a starting point for analysis. There arises, from the present study, a need to move on ethnographically. The study then proceeds, in the following Chapters Four and Five, to probe what informants themselves have to say about decisions and decision making in the setting.

To facilitate discussion at this point, sampled collaborative decisions are set out overleaf on pages 72-4. Headings used in the layout separate broad and narrow contexts, as well as long and short term effects. Each item is displayed with its number on the randomised list, together with the decision title in bold type and the detailed rationale statement.

Bradford Studies Models of Decision Making:

"tractable-fluid", "familiar-constructed" and "vortex-sporadic"

The three decision types noted in Hickson (1986a) may be illustrated from the interview transcript for Informant A, the head of the department[6]. The report now turns to note in detail the grounds for placing, not centrally, but only marginally, certain powerful ideas from Hickson et al into a broadly evolving network of theory being developed from the study.

Hickson's tripartite model draws useful distinctions for understanding how decision makers at the top of a wide range of organisations carry out their work. By any reasonable assumption, higher education organisations should be no exception in the application of the theory. Taking on such ideas represents a further step forward and deeper into decision making dynamics. In discussions with informants, however, the framework was put to one side for the data gathering phases of the study. This was done to avoid undue influence upon informant response, and shallow research coding for predictable items. How to facilitate going deeper into social process in pursuit of understandings became a central issue for the study.

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[6]**Appendix Two: Transcripts of Audiotape Recorded Interviews**, pp. 215-31.

Collaborative Small Group Decisions: Narrow Context With Long Term Effects

(3.) A decision to resolve the problem of the air conditioner.

This decision involves three people being located in one office space fully enclosed with only a single door outlet. In summer months there is conflict over the use of the air-conditioner: when it is on it causes asthma for one person; when it is off it results in headaches for the other. The use of a personal electric fan is no help during hot weather. This problem should be resolved in some way; it is a seasonal problem.

(14.) A decision to authorise the administrative assistant to sign orders and requisitions.

This decision involves new and broader functions and responsibilities being allocated to staff following the amalgamation process. Devolution of what were previously regarded as higher responsibilities are being moved down the line to support the wider developmental work of senior decision makers.

(33.) A decision to employ another member of staff to assist in running programs for business-/law.

This decision involves a response to an increase in demand for help from students in the faculty of business/law. In the first semester of 1991 there was a doubling of enrolment in faculty programs in business/law A and B and a commensurate increase in demand for support services offered by this department. Chaos occurred on some occasions when booked rooms were too small for the students wishing to attend.

Collaborative Small Group Decisions: Broad Context With Long Term Effects

(2.) A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to give to two colleagues an outline of things to think about for the summer school four week program.

This decision involves the requirement that after a four week English language program an evaluation session is to be held. Outline lists provide a focus for discussion during the session.

(5.) A decision to redevelop a one year course in basic chemistry: Foundation Studies Chemistry.

This decision involves a course that has been running for three years. The problem concerns bridging year studies and arises from the differing natures of the two student groups: students without a background in chemistry studies (many of whom lack interest in the field), and they require the unit on their way to their preferred option of non-science studies: for example, business studies; students with significant backgrounds in chemistry studies (many of whom have a high interest in the field), these are heading into science courses.

.../

Collaborative Small Group Decisions: Broad Context With Long Term Effects (Continued)

(8.) A decision to use a new system of computer technology in conducting equipment loans to students.

This decision involved realising inadequacies in the old system. Contact was made with a colleague on campus who had been using a system in the library for the past 6 to 12 months. This system was investigated. The program was modified and installed at the beginning of the semester. Using the old system, the loans were entered manually by key board - date, student number, and so on. The new system uses menus/ windows and a bar code system, accessed by wanding equipment.

(13.) A decision to offer a new program to students in Business Law A.

This decision involves running a supplementary program for students of non-English-speaking background with no background in Australian law. New materials required will be strongly linked to lectures given by mainstream lecturers in the subject. Classes in the department will follow up on the lectures and focus upon comprehension activities, English language development, and note-taking skills. Language development focuses upon the vocabulary of the discipline, together with the contextualisation of terms being studied. A discipline specific specialism is entailed.

(19.) A decision to mainstream into the yearly cycle of programs a winter school program recently piloted by a small group of staff in the department.

This decision involved filling a gap that existed in the support provision to NESB students in out-of-semester programs. It proposed a model for materials production and development which was repeatable in a number of discipline specific contexts. It has run three times. It was designed to allow new staff members to orient quickly to the program. Even discipline specific people could easily adapt the package. It is a vocabulary extension program based on the assumption that NESB students require appropriate schemata for spring-boarding into their respective academic programs.

(20.) A decision to hold a planning meeting about a new program to be developed: five to six week initial program offering: general English language classes; English for academic purposes; academic writing skills.

This decision involves planning programs that will meet/match student needs with staff availability and is very problematic. Newly appointed staff in this department have flexibility and practise a significant degree of autonomy in the development of programs tailored to meet the needs of their respective client departments. They elect to take one or more of the programs, considering students' needs for general English language programs. Balance is needed between group cohesion (learning together and from each other) and the benefits that accrue from growth away from the centre, looking outwards to their respective client departments.

(46.) A decision by two members of staff in the learning centre not to cancel classes for individual consultations in the final week prior to an assignment due date; but instead to hold classes as usual for group consultations on common problems about essays.

This decision involves an awareness of student needs. Group consultations are considered more equitable because there are those who "won't step out of their skins to ask for an appointment". Strategies for reaching shy students need to be developed.

Collaborative Large Group Decisions: Broad Context With Long Term Effects

(10.) A decision made last year to change the format of First Year Nursing Tutorials for Chemistry and Physics.

This decision involves a cut-back in the chemistry component of the nursing course: 28 hours back to 18 hours per year. Mainstream lecturing could commence half-way through the first semester. A program was offered for the first six weeks for students who lacked a chemistry background (head-start program). There was a three-way communication in the process of making the decision: centre teaching staff; nursing teaching staff; chemistry lecturing staff. All of the orientation students are being consulted on this matter as well.

(30.) A decision to relocate some of the EDD staff to work on an alternative campus.

This decision involves the fact that EDD must be university-wide following the VUT amalgamation process. There are now 4 campuses: FOOTSCRAY, from Footscray Institute of Technology; WERRIBEE, from Gilbert Chandler Dairy Research Centre; MELTON, an entirely new construction, Teacher Education and TAFE; ST. ALBANS, from Western Institute of Technology. We are now expected to have a presence on each campus. What sort of presence is not yet clear: neither the type nor the size. Dissemination of knowledge and experience must occur.

(36.) A decision to develop an appropriate layout of the new EDD facilities.

This decision involves leaving this old building and bringing the whole Learning Centre together (including the staff in the Peter Street Annexe) in a new location in D Building; which at the moment is empty on three levels. The preference at this stage is for the fifth level contiguous with Teacher Education. Following the decision on location there will be decisions on the physical layout. The coordinator of the maths and science project is presently responsible for surveying people's needs. The decision has been slipped back to August (1992).

(41.) A decision to finalise the location of EDD in the new amalgamated university.

This decision involves locating EDD as an academic unit within the structure of the university. It was brought about largely because the newly appointed Vice Chancellor was against the idea of the department remaining as an independent unit. There are three options being considered: -the department would be incorporated into Teacher Education; -the department would be incorporated into the Student Union; -the department would be incorporated into an academic faculty as an independent department. The third option would emphasise the academic nature and functions of the department and be most favourable.

Two examples from the interview transcript for Informant A illustrate powerful variables identified in the Hickson et al theory. The first example outlines the informant's growing work with occupational health students. The following passage from the transcript gives the data, alphanumeric codes identify the location of the item in the transcript:

> [A61] I run summer schools, bridging courses, and most of my free time now, is spent on an individual basis with mature-age students in a remedial type situation. So again, a little bit of serendipity, but also a working along established routines, in your terms working through the bureaucracy, but having the runs on the board.

> [A62] And the final area that has just come up is occupational health and safety where again I was involved in a peripheral way in setting up this course, but mainly because of my experience with mature-age nurses: they've asked me to look after the mature-age occupational health students in a remedial sense, which is where I'm off to at three o'clock.

This *tractable-fluid decision process* may be confidently labelled so, due to its congruence with a certain number of variables isolated in the Hickson materials (Hickson, 1986a, p. 117). On the one hand, on the negative side of the scale, there is evidence for absence of influences arising from the following variables: delays, impediments, required sources of information and variability of information. The informant's confident series of staff appointments to assistant positions backs this judgement.

As if riding on a swell of funding from the national government in Canberra, there would be few impediments put in the way by locals when it came to preferences exercised by the informant in the use of such funding. On the other hand, there are also positive indicators in the following variables: "some scope for negotiation"; some "formal interaction" through meetings and committees coupled with faster decisional speeds in the form of less time taken to reach a decision; and decisions being taken at the highest level: in this case, often directly between the informant as head of department and the director of the institute (Hickson, p. 117). As Hickson et al have noted, this decision process is "steadily paced, formally channelled, and speedy" (p. 117).

Further examples for this type of decision making may be compiled from the sample set, as follows. From the three *small group items signifying narrow context with long term effects*, we may select one. Leaving aside the two matters of the air conditioner (3.), and the signing of orders and requisitions (14.), as decisions holding less interest at this point of analysis, we may select the employment of staff to assist in running current programs (33.). From the nine *small group items signifying broad context with long term effects*, we may select one. Largely covering course development matters, endemic in academic life (2., 5., 13., & 20.), we may select as tractable fluid the mainstreaming of a successful winter program into the yearly cycle of programs (19.). All four *large group items signifying broad context with long term effects* may be selected. Changing the format of tutorials (10.), relocating EDD staff to work on an alternative campus (30.), developing layout of new EDD facilities (36.), and finalising the location of the EDD in the new amalgamated university (41.),

may all be seen as arising out of a tractable fluid type of decision making. The process may well be commonplace in a small unit where there is a high level of cooperation and/or a congruent sense of mission built up over time. The group of six items now stands as set down for further study (33., 19., 10., 30., 36., & 41.). But some surprising outcomes await further analysis of these items in the light of Bradford Studies decision making theory.

By contrast, a second example identified in the interview transcript for Informant A opens up a range of information sources by seeking them widely among extant literature and broad academic culture. In this section of the interview Informant A outlines his decision to draw clear conceptual boundaries around growing circles of influence in EDD activities. The following passage gives the outline:

> **Ethnographer**: [A26E] Where did that idea come from? . . . Having student mentors?
> **Informant**: [A26] It arose out of the environment of the times. It's part of our holistic philosophy towards what I call intervention strategies and what I'm trying to do is link together . . .
> [A27] I'm trying to work on this device I call an intervention strategy model, which talks in terms of three variables:
> under learning and learning strategies; things which I have to very carefully target: for example:
> firstly, the target of the intervention;
> are we looking at an individual student; a group of students; a support service group; institution or the general community? So I am being very broad in my definition of what is a learning centre. So it isn't just students; it can be staff, support staff, or in fact more into the families of students.
> [A28] I think we have to very carefully define what is the purpose of our intervention: is it a remedial intervention; is it a preventative intervention, which is in parallel with lectures; or a developmental and broadening function involving all of those.
> [A29] And finally the method of the intervention: is it myself; an agent of myself; or an educational technology.
> [A30] So what I am trying to do is take a broad picture of what it is to intervene in the students' learning process.

This *familiar-constricted decision process* also closes off lines of negotiation in and through committees and meetings. For the main line of decision tracks through the informant's growing ideologies and outlooks about the nature of the field: development education at the tertiary level. Around Informant A, at that time, was assembling a tight circle of like-minded colleagues intent on reform of the system in the direction of more effective

intervention in student work. The controlling idea about this form of decision, drawing upon Hickson (1986a), is that the process is "narrowly channelled" (p. 117).

Turning now to review sampled items isolated for this section of analysis, a strange outcome arises. All six of the items may also be seen as arising from a familiar constricted type of decision making. Both the employment of a new staff member to assist in running current programs (33.), and the mainstreaming of a successful winter program into the yearly cycle of programs (19.), may also arise from processes that are "narrowly channelled". They may be tracked through committees and meetings, where, despite an overtly democratic structure, they may proceed through quite constricted lines of negotiation and communication within such meetings. Such matters require further empirical confirmation. Moreover the same may well apply to the large group items (10., 30., 36., & 41.). Changing format of tutorials, relocating staff to another campus, developing an appropriate layout of facilities, and finalising location of the unit within the amalgamating university, stand with one foot in either analytical category. They may all be processed through narrow channels among familiar ideas and ideologies found in close knit personnel.

A third example worth noting at this point derives from data taken from conversations and observations made throughout the duration of the study. It was the protracted issue of the place and status of the EDD unit in the wider developing campus, and contrasts, again, with the previous two examples given above. As well as taking form in the researcher's ethnographic journal, the item emerged in the sampled group as item number forty-one (above). The EDD began life as a service department, without the status of being widely accepted as a full academic department: with powers to independently develop and accredit courses. The head of department often expressed his concern to work towards the acceptance of the EDD as an academic department on the campus. This *vortex-sporadic decision process* displayed all of the listed characteristics in classical form (Hickson et al). As amalgamation of campuses got under way in the Australian higher education context, all members of the EDD showed concern about what the future held for their own newly developing department. The sources of information about progress in the decision varied across levels of expertise; and variability in confidence about such information was high. Much information circulating among informants about this issue came from personal contacts; and there were seemingly interminable delays and impediments said to be put up from a range of points that blocked attempts to come to finalised certainties.

The researcher kept well away from this decision, making no attempts to gather formal data on the topic. It was too "hot" to handle at that time: too political in its implications. If the researcher had networked widely among academics outside the confines of the EDD, seeking out opinions about its proper status and future on the campus, the resulting information may have compromised the growing relations within the field work site. In such ways are researchers held in by boundaries about what is permissible, and what is not. But the very constrictions themselves speak volumes to us about the power of the social processes we are trying to probe. The controlling idea for this *vortex-sporadic form of decision process*, given in the literature, is that it is characteristically " informally spasmodic and protracted" (Hickson, 1986a, p. 117).

All six decision items reviewed above may also be placed in this third category. Given differing political circumstances among academic units, the matters for decision could well be seen to hold much political heat. From the employment of new staff and the mainstreaming of successful programs, to tutorial format change, relocation of staff, layout development, and post amalgamation location; all such matters may become " informally spasmodic and protracted". Case studies may be mounted to confirm further the process for each of these interesting decision items. But what would be the point?

A commonplace idea in social research warns against the futility of going all the way around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar. It underlines how research is more than mere intelligence-gathering. It is no small irony for the present study that the researcher, to this point, has found that one may be over busy counting the Zanzibarian cats of decisional forms while remaining only within the boundaries of one's own mind: processing data from the first selected informant in one small social setting very close to home. As a starting point for analysis, Bradford Studies theory now seems called into question.

Bradford Studies Models of Decision Making:

Problematic Outcomes Cause Realignments in Developing Focus on Data:

Views about a three-fold range of decision processes derived from the Bradford studies give a nominal explanatory framework to issues that were to surface from time to time during the later data-gathering phases of the study. It is one thing to know that these forms of

decision making exist. It is quite a different task, however, to try to find out why and how they develop as they do. Why do people like the Vice-Chancellor, or the Dean, or the Head of a Department seem to deliberately muddy the water about certain issues (and not others) and so start the process off toward vortex-sporadic development? Is it done deliberately, or not? Is it typically about certain sorts of issues, and not about others?

In the analytical discussion of data and findings in social research, significance cannot always be equated with congruence. The fact that there is clear congruence between theoretical and data details may not amount to very much in the long run. Glancing ahead in this section of the report, it may be seen how, in two contrasting interviews reviewed below in Chapters Six and Seven, those from Informants G and D, a Dahrendorfian point of view is given theoretical support. This comes about through a detailed picture of the politically problematic nature of the empirical research setting based upon informants' input. At that later point in the accumulating analysis, through exploration of polar opposite constructs discernible in data compiled from informants' interview transcripts, the loci of legitimation begin to emerge in places which belie Hicksonian tripartite theory.

A need for re-assessment of the way forward now begins to emerge from this discussion. Given problems in the lines of theory discussed so far, where, then, lie the grounds of decision? Where, and how are decisions initiated and formed in this particular social context? Two analytical problems now seem to dominate the inquiry. The first is the growing place of the researcher in the calculus of data theory, in particular, how the researcher's own biases have influenced probes and outcomes in the interviews and their charts. The second is the increasing presence and status accorded to dialectical conflict theory in this study: now a well established issue in focal theory. For this way of seeing how social dynamics take shape and hold force now begins to offer ways out of an analytical dead-end. This has developed around inabilities in received theory to draw useful distinctions between where decisions in this higher education social context may be seen to be born and where they may not.

Before leaving this brief introduction to the sampled decisions, we may note the possibilities for further research questions arising from patterns of data in Figure Five above. Empty cells in the charts are as interesting as occupied cells. How might one proceed to collect more sampled decisions that will occupy the empty cells?

One answer for collaborative large and small group items would be to scan the work of committees and their published materials. This activity would certainly garner sample items.

But there are problems. Some committees operate as the chairperson's rubber stamp for decisions already formed and brought to the agenda. Others do this for certain strong members not in the chair. How may decisions be sorted? How may research separate those processed piecemeal from those modified by committee process? Are there grades of modification?

Although important, such work would still not satisfy curiosity about decisions taken outside the formal committee structure. For example, are there large group collaborative decisions taken for narrow context short term outcomes outside of the committees? For this to occur one would need to imagine a large network of academics coming to agreement on some quite fluid and tractable matter. Imagine a faculty forum or academic department deliberating upon a matter which involves a small group dealing with short term decisional content. Perhaps, more frequently, in academic circles, by contrast with industry circles, the small group would be told to go away, deliberate, and report back. The lines of contact would need to be open and clear. Where might one go on campus to seek out such decision making events? Such highly problematic research work may well point to a useful direction for the future.

In this chapter section certain basic research questions have been partly answered. The reader may now scan backwards through the displayed sampled items for a picture of sampled decisions from one small academic unit. Decision items sampled have been shown to display diversity of executive, strategic and professional content. Clark's point about professional independence is well substantiated. Although discretion is seen to be confirmed, much yet remains to be considered about the nature and attributes of such discretion. Ideas about "mystery ridden" decisional settings are beginning to emerge as items are seen to be illusive of clear categorisation in terms of Bradford Studies decision making theory. Questions of how decisions are made, who is included and excluded, the attendant circumstances, are now more clearly prepared for further analytical work. How do key informants themselves view the process and its outcomes? How may the researcher's own presence in the setting have influenced outcomes? The sections that follow move more deeply into such questions.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FIRST ITEM PILE SORT: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

THREE THEMES EMERGENT EARLY IN THE DATA GATHERING PROCESS

Prior to moving forward through analysis of pile sort data derived from discussions with the Head of the Department, it is useful to return to the earliest interview contact to review some key ideas which led into the opening of the data gathering phases of the study. As a close review of the transcript of the May 1987 audio-taped interview reveals, the Head of the Department (Informant A) was willing to detail very clearly his philosophy and plans for development of the EDD.[1] It is important to note how there are clear directions in purpose and outlook for the developing department in remarks made in the interview. One example is the following:

> So I'm making the department, partly through me, personally, and through my lecturers and tutors, become an integral part of the learning process for identifiable groups of students: mature-age nurses; mature-age occupational health people; English-as-a-second-language students and students of written and oral communication: all in some way, have, as a component of their course, a visit to EDD or a visit from EDD to them.[2]

Such remarks contrast, however, with clearly articulated "grey areas" in which the political stakes and stands of actors yet remained to be fought out. The following exemplifies

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[1] **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 224-7: "INFORMANT: I would talk in terms of efficiency and effectiveness which are the catch words of the day . . . There are problems . . . there are some students who demand to see me [personally] and if I refer them to the centre, they get a little bit upset", presents a graphic account by an actor sharing the details and the drama of a vision.

[2] **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 226-7.

this significant outlook: " . . . around that time, there is a bit of a grey area when he . . . [the previous head of the department; not interviewed for this report] was away on leave and I was brought in as acting head and all that sort of business . . .[3]

The politically charged dramaturgy of the interview setting develops in the opening paragraph. The remarks get right down to the milieu and the politics. References to taxonomic details outlined in a scratch diagram clarify elements in the conflict. The informant mentions moves for support for local area primary and secondary schools, such moves "underpinning the philosophy of the whole department".[4]

The interview opens with what may be argued as the main problematic focus of interest in the mind of the HOD. He outlines the development of the learning centre idea and its relations with other parts of the department and with the wider environment. Attention then turns to other backdrop "givens," such as the audio-visual functions of the department. These facilities have continued to develop, and now figure as a solid backdrop to the more innovative and volatile student support through academic skills development: "This is almost a brand-new initiative . . . [the learning centre] started in 'eighty-five; CTEC funded; and we developed it really from scratch. And then things like ESL, Basic Science, Mathematics . . . [within the learning centre]".[5]

A recollection of the interview recalls images of academic small-talk culture. Ideas were scratched out over diagrams and sketches. Anecdotes developed about the serendipitous nature of developments, often laced with legendary tales of moves made and won or lost. There develops, in the interview transcript, a sense of the urgent and complex nature of the enterprise. In response to the question about decisions at council level, the following passage reveals important elements: "INFORMANT: Very little I think, . . . The Council were notified later".[6]

The remarks warrant close interpretation, for they bring together three significant factors:

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[3]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 217.

[4]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 216.

[5]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 216.

[6]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 218.

* the existing head of depar ment seeing his career elsewhere;
* the environment of uncer ainty and turbulence in educational development work;
* the highly political context of participation and equity funding.

The answer obtained fails to sound final in its composition. Clearly, even at this early point in the data gathering process, many areas of explanation would beckon further inquiry for adequate answers about process.

Three distinct themes emerged n the brief analysis recorded in the transcript at this point:

* *stakes and stands* as conceptualised by Allison and other commentators (Allison, 1969, 1971; Baldridge, 1971);
* *the diminishing power of standard operating procedures* ("SOPs") as a perceived reduced sense of purpose by actors in Canberra, operating in the field nationally (Allison, 1969, 1971);
* *values maximisation as a rational actor ploy* in the pursuit of organizational development and strength (Allison, 1969, 1971).

"The idea of decision is a theory" writes Christensen (1976), encapsulating the central notion of the essence of ultimate decision as remaining "impenetrable to the observer," and "mysterious even to those who may be most intimately involved," as was remarked by President John F. Kennedy and recorded as a touch-stone idea in Allison (1971).

The following remark lays hold of a similar sense of mystery in decision maki g:

> Putting those three things in the melting pot, and having my position as coordinator of the participation and equity scheme going then , it just seemed to be a sort of a natural step fo the directorate to ask me to move into DED. *So it was at the . . . at the assistant director . . . as the final lever in this and it didn't requi e an act of council. The council were notified later* [emphasis added].[7]

[7]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 218.

It was such sorts of ambiguities and tacitly held obscurities that drove the researcher on at this point.

Moreover, the following interchange brings out an overriding political context for this central process of events. Running with the notion of support given and accepted at certain strategic levels in the organization, a further probe in that direction gets this result:

> ETHNOGRAPHER: So, in actual fact, this shows a lot of support at a very high level.
> INFORMANT: Yes. That is one of the reasons why the department has done well over the last couple of years. *Not only the acting director, but at least two of the heads of school, and several of the heads of departments are all very supportive of the things we are doing . . .* [emphasis added].
> It does have full support of the council as well, although they were not the initiators.[8]

It was becoming clear at this point that decision making in this unit would offer an opportunity for observing processes below the level of "top": a focus for important literature on decision making to date, in particular, the Bradford studies' materials (Hickson et al, 1981, 1986a, 1986b, Hickson, 1987).

What were the prospects here for testing this body of theory in higher education settings? If such sorts of developments as the EDD could take place outside the direct ambit of a council and its formal deliberations, then what was the nature of the process, and how best could it be researched?

THE ITEM PILE SORT PROCEDURE

Alongside the more unstructured inquiries made with informants in this study, the sampled decision data has been given a more structured treatment. Domain clarification, carried out over a long period at the beginning of the data gathering phase, moved the field of

[8]**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 218-19.

inquiry into those sampled decisions which informants were able to offer from their current fields of concern.[9]

The process began with item free listing. The researcher noted both strengths and weaknesses in the process as outlined in Weller (1988, p. 16). But certain points need to be taken critically. One significant point about item free-listing given by Weller, "cultural relevance of concepts and domain", seemed to be well in evidence in the listed sampled decisions. A second point given, however, "ease and naturalness of task completion", was not so evident in a number of cases. Some informants gave worthwhile items only after a period of gentle interrogation by the researcher.[10]

Accordingly, against the advice of Weller, informant ease and naturalness in a free listing or pile sort task may well be misleading. Criteria for successful research remain much more problematic. If "ease and naturalness in a free listing task" are held in the forefront of the lone researcher's mind, confidence may be undermined when informants fail to produce data immediately and fluently. Emerging from the present study is a concept of invisibility associated with key social properties. Informants seem to remain unaware of certain key elements in the social environment: in the present case, examples of specific decisions which are currently "in the air" but not readily available through fluent articulation.

Weller's outline of imperfections in item free listing may well be equally misleading. Criteria given look to fluency and volubility of item production as signs of successful outcomes:

> Sometimes it is difficult to find appropriate generic terms to start the listing process or lists may not be productive (lists are too sparse) (p. 16).

Such criteria remain demandingly problematic. The lone researcher may well be hemmed in by psychological constraints about moving forward into a new field work site: trying to develop both ideas about a problem and helpful personal relations among new informants.

Weller (1988) goes on to give clear and useful guidelines on conducting unconstrained item pile sorts, the next structural step up from item free-listing. Figure Six (see below, over page), indicates how Informant A sorted a pile of twenty-one cards taken from the randomised

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[9]**Appendix One: Fifty-One Sampled Decisions**, pp. 201-14.

[10]**Appendix One, Fifty-One Sampled Decisions**, for one example of the process: **Informant K: Academic Staff: Media Studies**, pp. 317-22.

set. Informant A accumulated five separate item piles and gave clear comments upon each. The categories are headed with his labels at the top of the chart, and his comments are recorded beside the piles. Item piles differed markedly in quantities of cards. Following Weller, " the informant, rather than the researcher" chose which attributes of decisions would be used to determine similarities and differences (p. 20).

Informant A: Descriptive Responses to Item Pile Sort Activity

The following outlines the process by which Informant A made comments upon the first decision sample item pile sort from randomised sampled decision cards (see below, overleaf, Figure Six). Some descriptive comment is now given for each category in turn in order to build the argument. No attempt is made, at this point, to give analytical comment upon outcomes. Such discussion follows the descriptive task that now begins.

Category one: morale and support. Category one on the chart comprises one item: a decision by one member of staff to approach another for mentor support in a study program on an outside campus (see below, p. 88). It is a professionally important item, as it falls directly to guild community issues and the support for morale available to members of the EDD. Informant A comments as follows:

> This decision underpins morale and the on-going development of staff. It involves two staff members on a matter outside of the direct, . . . central area of the department.

In terms of domain development, these comments raised a distinction between " matters outside and inside the direct, central concerns of the department". Although this decision item was compiled by another member of staff, the informant was able to identify the two staff members involved in the decision.

Category two: structural decisions. Category two on the chart comprises five items: all decisions in which resources as objects and commodities are being moved into the direct line of people responsible for their care and use (see below, pp. 88, 89). Informant A is clear on

the terms of reference for this category. His remarks relegate such decisions to a lower level in the normal scale of operations:

> This group - is something to do with the structural decisions affecting the department - the receptionist signing orders - etc., etc. These are sort of second order things which help the department to run.

In terms of domain development, these comments now introduce a distinction between "first order matters" and "second order matters" which help the department to run. A further comment introduces the idea of structure:

> They are structural type decisions. Well, in the case of Building D, the proposed layout is very much a structural thing. It doesn't matter where we do our work - where we are doesn't affect what we do - but this would assist it, if a good decision were made. So it is a second order thing.

There are now developing certain significant domain distinctions: matters outside and inside of the direct central concerns of the department; first order matters and second order matters which help the department to run; structural type decisions and non-structural type decisions.

Category three: advertisement. Category three comprises one item: the decision to send a memo to higher decision makers throughout the campus to inform all people about EDD roles, functions and resources (see below, p.89). Informant A remarked as follows:

> The third category is in the area of advertisement. It seemed to stand out from the others. Clearly different from the structural decisions, clearly different from that one [category one].

The informant added remarks which seemed to see this move as promoting "ownership of functions and development of specific responsibilities". Although this may look like a central concern to an observer, Informant A moves it to one side with the following comment:

> These are decisions which concern our relations with the wider university. They belong more to an administrative category.

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA: FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

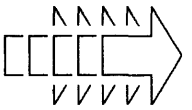
CATEGORY ONE:
MORALE AND SUPPORT

A decision by one member of staff to approach another member of staff in the department to act as mentor for the purposes of guidance in studies for the Graduate Diploma in Education undertaken in another institute.
This decision involves pressure for increasing qualifications, together with a request by lecturers conducting the course that students seek a mentor as part of course requirements. The mentorship was readily agreed to by a colleague in the EDD.

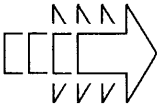
"This decision UNDERPINS MORALE and the on-going development of staff. It involves two staff members on a matter outside of the direct (if you like), the direct, central area of the department."

CATEGORY TWO:
STRUCTURAL DECISIONS

A decision by the receptionist to record more detail in photographic orders taken in reception.
This decision involves three columns of information compiled on photographic orders taken in the reception area of the Department: date of order; cusotmer's name; order type: develop and print; colour slide; enlargement; re-print; or black and white film. Should film go astray at Kodak, these sorts of details are requested to assist in the search. Internal requisitions for payment may be processed more accurately on the basis of this information.



A decision to authorise the administrative assistant to sign orders and requisitions.
This decision involves new and broader functions and responsibilities being allocated to staff following the amalgamation process. Devolution of what were previously regarded as higher responsibilities are being moved down the line to support the wider developmental work of senior decision makers.



A decision by one member of staff in media studies to list the tasks/functions/responsibilities to be taken alone by a member of staff new to the department.
This decision involves an assessment of the complexities of particular jobs such as photography shoots: "one-off" jobs. Typical complexities are: number of people required; amount of equipment; type of equipment such as colour/black-and-white; the nature of the final product; the target audience of the material produced. The newcomer's prior knowledge of the client and the task/equipment will influence allocation to sole responsibility for the job. In the case of this newcomer, a drift is taking place towards increasing responsibility with increasing experience and expertise.

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY TWO (CONTD.):
STRUCTURAL DECISIONS

A decision to compile ideas for planning the layout of the reception area in the proposed new location of the EDD in Building D.
This decision involves a directive to begin thinking about the ideal layout in the new location. There has been no further exchange of information at this point. Requests will probably be for: a larger area to rectify the present cramped conditions, especially when the area is being used by two or three people at once; better overnight security for the cash register and other valuables kept in the area; retention of present items of equipment: computer, printer, typewriter, etc.

A decision by one member of staff in media studies to allocate personnel to a particular job on the St. Albans Campus.
This decision involves a response to a request for a photographic session from the St. Albans campus. Diary entries required checking for times available. A discussion was required on who will go. It was decided that two people would go and that the following Tuesday afternoon would be the time. Film and equipment were selected. The car was booked.

"These are SECOND-ORDER THINGS which help the department to function."

CATEGORY THREE:
ADVERTISMENT

A decision to send a memo to all deans and heads of departments offering to address new staff to inform them of EDD's role on the Footscray campus.
This decision involves the streamlining of communication and the incorporation of support staff more closely into the central functions of the department. A skills development opportunity for support staff is being utilised, with the intention of optimising ownership of functions and development of specific responsibilities. Both support and feedback to support staff on their work roles and functions will be enhanced.

"These are decisions which concern our relations with the wider university. They belong more to an ADMINISTRATIVE category."

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY FOUR:

TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FIVE)

HOW TO DO THINGS: HOW WE WILL CHANGE THINGS (SEE ALSO OPPOSITE PAGE)

A decision by one member of staff in media studies to adopt and develop a consultative, collaborative, and interactive approach to photographing a client.

This decision involves a departure from traditional methods of work which proceed by attempting to find out what the client wants. Quite often the client does not know what they want. The new approach uses consultation in which alternatives are offered for consideration by the client, leading to a final decision on the nature of the image made by the practising photographer.

A decision made last year to change the format of First Year Nursing tutorials for Chemistry and Physics.

This decision involves a cut-back in the chemistry component of the nursing course: 28 hours back to 18 hours per year. Mainstream lecturing could commence half-way through the first semester. A program was offered for the first six weeks for students who lacked a chemistry background (head-start program). This would allow mainstream lecturers to deal more quickly with revision of basic concepts. There was a three-way communication in the process of making the decision: centre teaching staff; nursing teaching staff; chemistry lecturing staff. All of the orientation students are being consulted on this matter as well.

A decision by two members of staff in the learning centre not to cancel classes for individual consultations in the final week prior to an assignment due date; but instead to hold classes as usual for the purpose of group consultations on common problems about essays.

This decision involves an awareness of student needs. Group consultations are considered more equitable because there are those who "won't step out of their skins to ask for an appointment". Strategies for reaching shy students need to be developed.

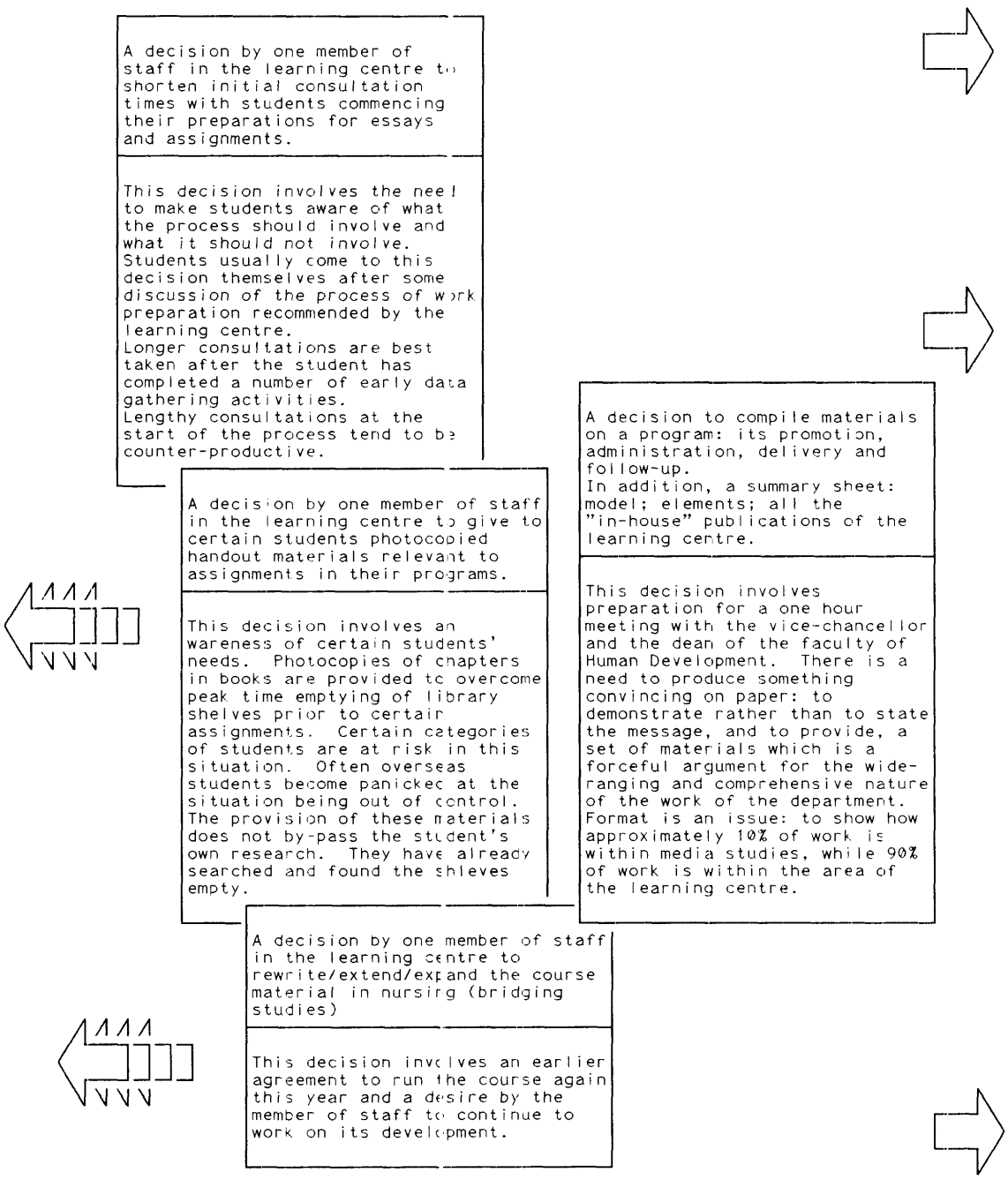
"These decisions (along with category five) are to do with THE CENTRAL CONCERNS of the department, that is, the teaching and learning situations. But I have separated them because they are slightly different sorts of decisions. One is talking about how to do things - how we will change the format of tutorials in chemistry and physics - how we do it. Category five decisions are about who will do it - setting the staff in place."

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY FOUR (CONTD.):

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FIVE)

HOW TO DO THINGS: HOW WE WILL CHANGE THINGS (SEE ALSO OPPOSITE PAGE)



"I would have to think more about THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN, for example, THE SELECTION OF WHO and THE SELECTION OF WHAT was going to be done. There may be parallels across both that I can link up. And so the relationship between these decisions [category four] and these decisions [category five] could well be linear - no, not linear - consequential (see p.288 for further comment and discussion)."

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY FIVE:

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FOUR)

WHO WILL DO THINGS: SETTING THE STAFF IN PLACE (SEE ALSO OPPOSITE PAGE)

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to consult on a series of assignments with a third year student whose work is in a different discipline area.	This decision involved the student making an approach to EDD and the member of staff being nominated. During discussions with the co-ordinator of academic skills and language learning, it was revealed that the member of staff usually responsible for students in the discipline area concerned was fully booked.
A decision to employ another member of staff to assist in running programs for business/ law	This decision involves a response to an increase in demand for help from students in the faculty of business/ law. In the first semester of 1991 there was a doubling of enrolment in Faculty programs in business/ law A and B and a commensurate increase in demand for support services offered by this department. Chaos occurred on some occasions when booked rooms were too small for the students wishing to attend. There was discussion within the department [EDD] concerning the appointment of another member of staff. It seemed that there would be funding available.
A decision to hold a planning meeting about a new program to be developed. Students' needs and interests and their availability; availability; and learning centre staff availability and interests will be discussed to establish a five to six week initial program offering: general English language classes; English for academic purposes; academic writing skills.	This decision involves planning programs that will meet/ match student needs with staff availability and is very problematic. Newly appointed staff in this department have flexibility and practise a significant degree of autonomy in the development of programs tailored to meet the needs of their respective client departments. They elect to take one or more of the programs, considering students' needs for general English language programs. Balance is needed between group cohesion (learning together and from each other) and the benefits that accrue from growth away from the centre looking outwards to their respective client departments.

FIGURE SIX: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): FIRST DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY FIVE (CONTD.):

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FOUR)

WHO WILL DO THINGS: SETTING THE STAFF IN PLACE (SEE ALSO OPPOSITE PAGE)

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to teach in the Community Health nursing course in October this year (now April)

This decision involved the head of department walking in to speak and giving a reminder of last year's course. He asked if it was enjoyed. The reply was yes. He asked if it could be done again. The reply was yes. He gave the commencement date: 6th October. The member of staff diaried the date.

"And this is really what I am doing this morning. I'm starting to think about putting a new staff member on. We have SET WHAT WE ARE DOING (category four decisions). We are [now] going to SELECT THE PERSON to fit into it. So it is very much this way [indicating the cards showing category four IN LINEAR ORDER before category five]."

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to agree to take a "class talk" class during the following week.

This decision involves two other members of staff who appeared by the desk of the decision maker and explained the circumstances and how it might/might not be necessary to run the classes. An agreement was made.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to give to two colleagues an outline of things to think about for the summer school four week program.

This decision involves the requirement that after a four week English language program an evaluation session is to be held. Outline lists provide a focus for discussion during the session.

A decision to discuss with a member of the teaching staff in the department the idea of a short course (three to five days) for engineering students.

This decision involves meeting current areas of need. Engineers recently reported well on a short course in essay writing. However it is felt that a course could be constructed that is more tailored to their needs: technical writing; structuring of materials: abstracts/ headings, sub-headings/ engineering conventions in referencing, presentation styles, nomenclature. A related decision is whether a pilot program could be conducted for current post-graduate students in the mid-year break.

In terms of domain development, this category introduces ideas about " matters concerning advertisement [about roles, functions and resources] and relations of these ideas to administration".

Categories four and five: the teaching and learning aspects and situations. Categories four and five were considered to be interactively linked by Informant A. Together they comprised fourteen items, seven in Category Four and seven in Category Five (see above, pp. 90-3). Those in category four concerned changes in the ways that informants were carrying out roles and functions: preparing materials for class, ways of approaching clients, and scheduling meetings with students. Those in category five concerned meetings and schedulings to direct staff members towards certain new areas of work. Comment began as follows:

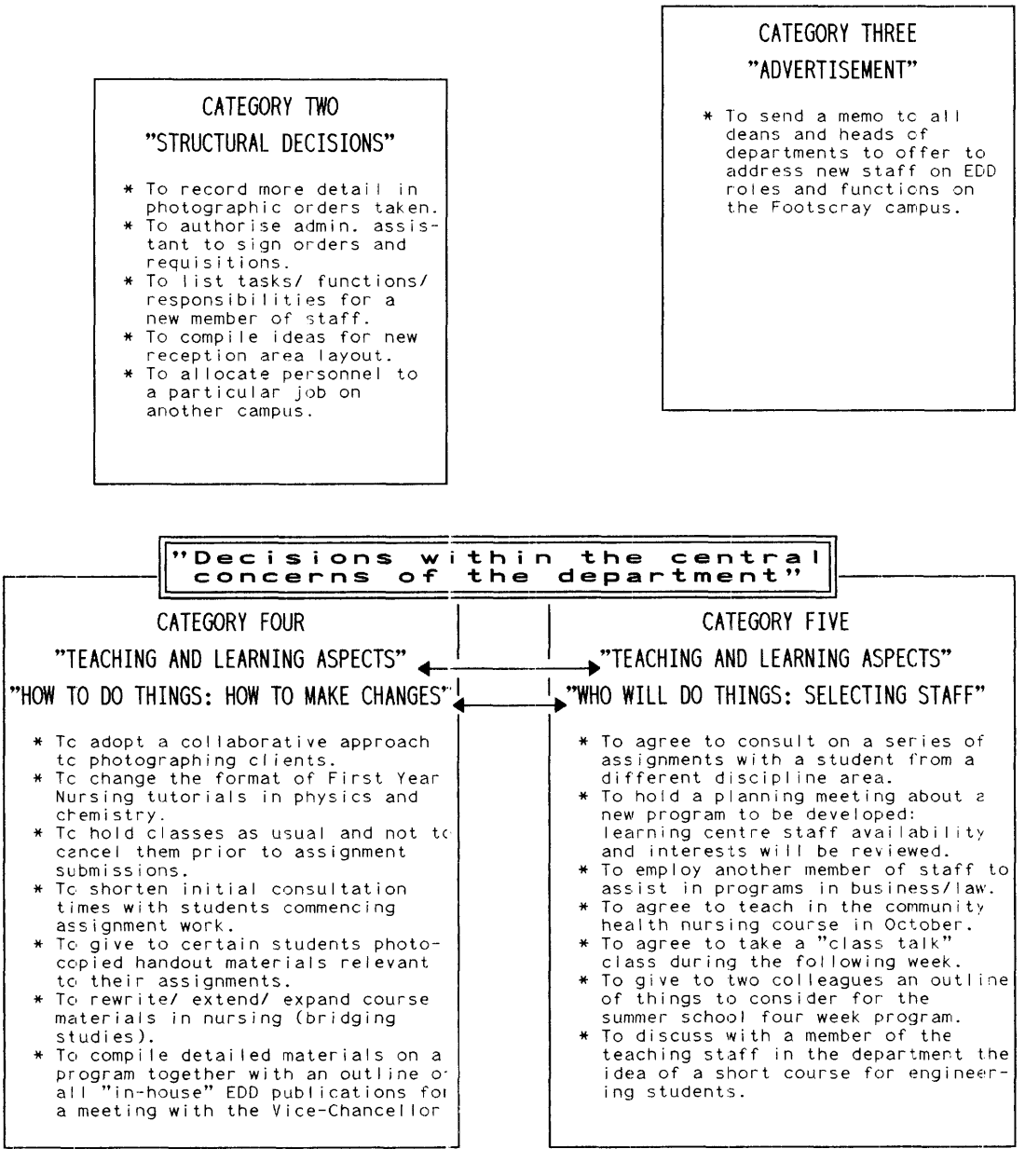
> Now these two categories [looking beyond to categories four and five, by way of comparison], I actually would have put a bridge over - as they are to do with the central concerns of the department, that is, the teaching and learning situations.
> But I've separated them into columns because it seems to me that they are slightly different sorts of decisions.

At this point comments became reflectively tentative as the problem of categorisation was clarified further:

> One [in category four] is talking about - how to do things - how we will change the format of tutorials in chemistry and physics - how we do it. So, it's almost like - now, I'm not putting this well, but - different from category five - which is almost who will do it type stuff. This [item in category five] is setting the staff in place. This [item in category four] is setting processes in place: that might be the best way to put it. Who will teach the community health nursing course - in category five. Whereas how we will teach is a category four.

Emerging at this point were the following domain distinctions: decisions within the central concerns of the department; which are superordinate to two pairs of categories: decisions on how we will do things coupled with decisions on how we will change things; and decisions on who will do things coupled with decisions on setting the staff in place. Such domain distinctions are outlined in headings across the top of the charts (see above, pp. 88-93).

FIGURE SEVEN: PILE SORT DATA
FIRST DECISION SAMPLE: PATTERN IN THE SORTED PILES
INFORMANT A: (Head of the Department)



"The decision on WHO comes slightly before the decision on WHAT. FIVE would come before FOUR. Now that would be starting a department from scratch. IT COULD WELL BE THE OTHER WAY, IF WE HAD A ROLE TO PLAY AND WE WERE SELECTING MEMBERS. So the department that is running would go like this [shifts them around so that category four comes before category five]. And this is how we are going to do things [category four]: we will select someone to fit into that program [category five]."

Informant A: Analytical Responses to Item Pile Sort Activity

Further comment by Informant A at this point is worth considering because it brings out how an interaction gets under way between these two central categories. In social research generally, it is to the mundane and ordinary recurrent actions of individuals and groups that we must turn for data gathering and analysis. This one instance, one articulate informant's cluster of responses to a discrimination task given at the heart of the professional setting, serves not to act as a basis for generalisation to all other such settings. It serves, rather, as a departure point into further inquiries which try to see how relations between parts of a coherent system make sense only to each other; and how "the system itself [makes sense] only in relation to other institutional systems, as part of a wider set of relations" (Evans-Pritchard, 1965, p.112). We may follow along with Informant A as he grapples further with trying to understand how his profession works and how he recurrently tries to solve its problems:

> A decision made last year to change the format of first year nursing tutorials for chemistry and physics - now that is a decision about how we will carry out a certain tutorial function.
> Whereas the decision to employ another member of staff to assist in running programs for business/ law, is who will do it. I was trying to separate those two categories [four and five]. They both come under the umbrella of our central concerns.

At this point the researcher suggested an alternative grid for arranging the categories to allow for more than one discrimination down the side as well as along the top. Informant A responded by arranging the categories into a somewhat multi-dimensional pattern represented by Figure Seven (see above, over page). Piles of cards are scattered around the table in a more "structural" sort of relationship, as indicated graphically on the chart.

Comment upon the new arrangement became focussed upon how categories four and five interacted to form their own coherent system:

> I would have to think more about the relationship between, for example, the selection of who and the selection of what was going to be done. There may well be parallels across here that I can link up. And so the relationship between these decisions [category four] and these decisions [category five] could well be linear - no, not linear - consequential.

Analytical discussion further along in this section will return to Informant A's reference to linearity at this point. Linearity, or sequence, in decisions and decision making, now emerge as clearly problematic in this study. Later on in his commentary, Informant A brings out how linearity may get collapsed in a consideration of how piles of cards may be arranged and re-arranged to try to represent actual causal relations in the decision making processes being studied.

It is sufficient, at this point, to note how clearly articulated the research problem becomes in the hands of this busy professional:

> For example, if we decided on a certain staff member to assist in the programs in business law, then one of these decisions might be affected.
> [Ethnographer: "So some might be precursors to others"]
> - that's right, yes. It's a bit hard to think of all of these at this stage, but I could see a relationship like that [turns the groups of cards for categories four and five on their sides]: quite easily, if we were starting a department from scratch.

This remark, starting the department from scratch, brings out the point of change idea which lies at the heart of this research report. EDD, along with all other units making up its network of connections to the wider campus and the world beyond, functions continually at the point of change; and members of staff constantly reflect this reality in their actions and talk. Comment continues: grappling further with sequence:

> The decision on who, comes slightly before [the decision on] what. Category five would come before category four.

Informant A has prioritised personal and political matters before the technological and resource management matters. Further comment brings out the two-way nature of the causal directions able to be traced:

> Now that would be starting a department from scratch. It could well be the other way around, if we had a role to play and we were selecting members. So the department that is running then would go like this [reverses the order of the two card groups categories four and five]. And this is how we are going to do things [category four]. We will select someone to fit into that program.
> And this is really what I'm - this morning - I'm starting to think about putting a new staff member on. We have set what we are doing. We are going to select the person

to fit into it. So it is very much this way [indicating the cards showing category four placed in linear order before category five].

He concludes with the idea of collapsing the two categories and trying to draw out implications:

I think that there are also other relationships between them [categories four and five]. If I were to "collapse" [four and five] - just put all these together for a moment. As I was saying, I think there is an intimate relationship between who is to do [something] and what is to be done. I think that the structural things also have a relationship here [indicates the piles of cards shifted into a new arrangement]. We can have this as a sort of centre of the department: a dialogue or a dialectic going on as to who is to do what. And who is to support. What structures are we going to put in place to support these people [indicates category two] ? Had we had more decisions to consider, then there would be more discussion on what is the structure to keep this little unit going.
This one [category one], is a very important thing for underpinning the morale: the ongoing development of staff. So it's not a who does it or a what does it: it's sort of a thing to keep the abilities of staff high. So that is almost like a structural thing, but it is a different order.
This one [category three] is much more of an administrative thing in our relationship with the university. That one [category three], to me, sits out by itself. Whereas these over here have quite an interaction with each other.

The informant has given the idea of a "dialogue or dialectic" about "who is to do what"; and other concerns range around this configuration according to structure and support.

THE OPENING FIELD OF INQUIRY

In respect of research methodology, the item pile sort procedure gave useful results. Informants agreed that decisions needed to be collected, compiled and sampled. Informant A completed the task in detail and gave comments suggesting possible outcomes. There appeared to be a useful match between research problems being aired at the time and the item pile sort task. Carried out in a semi public office space, those who saw the table where the cards were scattered, expressed interest in the layout and ideas. As the procedure got under way, the researcher was able to relax into concentration upon developing commentaries and further questions arising. The audio tape record proved useful for later writing up.

Within the body of theory selected and outlined for this developing thesis, the dual/ triple rationality problematic has been further highlighted by the open ended nature of the informant's initial categorisation. Both the number of categories and their nature, together with the varying quantities of items, suggest that the field is being opened out for further useful inquiry. Moreover, analytical comments given also suggest that much further discussion might be forthcoming on sampled decisions, like these, raised and sorted among academics working in small units. The high number of items categorised by the informant as "central concerns" supports the non directive imperative. Since many items derive from other academics working independently within his group, the procedure has immediately confirmed that executive acumen flourishes at the bottom of this system and its units. But such outcomes now lead to further important questions. What is the nature of this "discretion" (Clark) so clearly exercised at this level, in this unit? What are some of its attributes?

Also, within the body of theory, three broad terms have been linked in the analytical comments given by Informant A. First *linearity* shades into *consequentiality* in the way that he argues about staffing needs interacting with resources of different kinds, together with their developing structure. In his own terms, "how to do things" interacting with "who to do things". Second, both terms also shade into ideas about *causality*. How staffing and resources are lined up alongside each other has a direct causal bearing upon outcomes for his developing department. These then relate to his ideologies about efficiency and effectiveness. The whole equation , of course, may also be seen the other way around: ideology drives resources/ staffing; or staffing/ resources. Either way, a putative logical connection now links linearity, consequentiality, and causality, and that idea remains problematic for this developing thesis.

We may note how Informant A himself tries to reach beyond such ideas. He suggests how linearity may get collapsed in relation to decisions and decision making. The idea arises out of discussions about the status of categories four and five, "how to do things" and "who will do things". The point also highlights the two-way nature of causal relations able to be traced between items identified as decisions and decision making events and developments. Put most simply, it is not clear whether staff arise from the work or the work arises from the staff, although the reality remains much more complex than this simple proposition. Informant A himself raises the possibilities of other relationships active between his two central

Categories Four and Five, not to say the others: Categories Three " structural" and One " morale and support".

In conclusion, it may now be noted how the contribution given by Informant A, through open pile sort procedure, has advanced the thesis. It partly answers key research questions about the nature of academic's strategic decisions and decision making in this small unit. It probes certain theoretical propositions about legitimation, loose coupling, and Clark's " trickle up" effect dynamically at work at the bottom of the system. It also highlights key points in the developing argument, as noted above. Observations will be compiled for these aspects in the final sections of this Thesis Part Two.

In the following chapter, the report outlines how materials generated at this point were taken a further step up in structured pile sort procedure (Weller, 1988). Research work had successfully begun to peel away some of the perceptual layers that seem to hide social realities about decisions and decision making from outsiders' observation. It became time to probe further to see how both informant and researcher lined up together on their expanding perceptions. To that section of the developing study the report now turns.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE SECOND ITEM PILE SORT: THEMATIC ANALYSIS

PLANNING THE SECOND PILE SORT SETTING

As a follow-up activity to the first decision sample item pile sort procedure carried out by Informant A, the researcher then moved on to deeper work with a second decision sample (see below, pp. 104-11). Informant A was asked to take a second sample of item cards from the randomised decision sample.[1] These were then duplicated and one set was taken to one side by Informant A, the other by the researcher. The intention was to study how both would independently sort a further group of item cards according to the new categories generated by Informant A (see above, Chapter Four, pp. 88-93, 95). If usual assumptions held about mutual enculturation into new settings, then both pile sorts might reveal strong lines of similarity. Such an outcome would suggest a confirmation of the new categorisations. On the other hand, dissimilarities might also point up useful ideas for further analysis and inquiry. Outcomes of both pile sort processes are set out in Figures Eight and Nine (see below, pp. 104-11). The results for all the Figures Six, Seven, Eight and Nine are combined and graphically summarised in Figure Ten (see below, pp. 114-15).

In general anthropological terms, such a procedure touches upon the question of mutual enculturation between the researcher and members of staff at the field work site. The degree to which both would process cards alike may suggest a level of like-mindedness developing in the social setting. Certain research methodological issues would become highlighted through such a process. How far is the researcher "learning the culture", to the point where he may make accurate predictions of typical responses by informants? Such an outcome is widely held to be desirable in social research. It represents a major step forward in

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[1]**Appendix One: Fifty-One Sampled Decisions**, pp. 201-14.

a cross cultural study. How far may this be construed as useful: perhaps as a growth in worthwhile knowledge about the setting?

On the other hand, how far may this also be seen to be "going native": a somewhat futile process, with little prospects for new knowledge generalisable to other settings? In the present study, such matters came to a head as they materialised in data analysed at this point. They brought to a standstill certain directions of inquiry; while bringing into the forefront certain new directions arising from the interactions of theory and data. The developing discussion in this chapter now sets out to trace those processes. But before such development gets under way, some description of the second decision sample pile sort activity is warranted.

The Second Pile Sort Activity: Setting Out the Data

Figures Eight and Nine use graphic conventions to indicate which item cards were sorted alike and unlike by Informant A and the researcher (see below, pp. 104-11, where the two charts are set out in sequence: Figure Eight, pp. 104-7; and Figure Nine, pp. 108-11). Item cards framed in double lines indicate those which both respondents placed in the same category. Among these items are a decision by the administrative assistant "to attend certain courses of study for the purpose of keeping up with changes being implemented", and a decision by one member of staff "to commence higher degree studies". They were categorised by both Informant A and the researcher as Category One items: "underpinning morale and the on-going development of staff" (pp. 104, 108).

Item cards framed in dotted lines indicate those which were placed differently by the two respondents. Notable among these is a decision by one member of staff "to limit the topic of an academic research project: to investigate the phenomenon of mathematics anxiety in the mature age student" (p. 104). This item was placed in Category One by Informant A and in a possible Category Six by the researcher (p. 111). Also notable are a decision by one member of staff in the learning centre "to have a meeting with an accounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week" (p. 106); and a decision by one member of staff in the Learning Centre "not to work full time in the department at this point" (p. 104). Much research interest at this point turns upon where and how such dotted lined items were placed by Informant A and the researcher. Categories range across four pages for each of the

charts, while the following two page summary condenses the data for faster scanning (pp. 114-15).

It is important to note that Figure Ten assembles and summarises data from all of Figures Six, Seven Eight and Nine. Graphic conventions used for that procedure are as follows (see below, pp. 114-15). Decisions are listed in their categories in two type faces. Those in plain faced type indicate dec sions sorted in the first decision sample as set out in Figure Six (see above, pp 88-93). Exa nples of those now listed in Figure Ten are decisions "to adopt a collaborative approach to photographing clients"; "to change the format of First Year Nursing Tutorials", and "to hold classes as usual, and not to cancel them prior to assignment submissions". All are listed in Category Four for both Informant A and researcher response (see below, pp. 114-15).

Those in bold faced type indicate decisions sorted in the second decision sample as set out in Figure Eight (Informant A response) and Figure Nine (researcher response). Examples of those now listed in Figure Ten are decisions "to incorporate an article on the problem of plagiarism"; "to alter the content of colour slides used in lectures"; and "to offer a new program to students in Business Law A" (p. 114, Category Four). Those decisions listed in Figure Ten marked "*", listed in both plain and bold faced type, indicate an accumulating base line of agreement between the two respondents in the sorting procedures. This feature suggests commonly held assumptions ideas and outcomes for the pile sort. These hold interest for the developing study and are given analytical attention further along in this chapter.

Those decisions in Figure Ten marked with "?" suggest disagreement between the two participants in the pile sort procedure. Notable among these is a decision by the Receptionist "to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation", listed under Category Five by Informant A, and Category One by the researcher. Also notable is a decision "to have a meeting with an accounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week", listed under Category Four by Informant A and Category Five by the researcher. Such disparities also hold interest for the developing study, and are also analysed and discussed further along in this chapter.

The next step in this discussion brings detailed interpretation into the descriptive task. This marks a transition from description to analysis, and it is to that transition task that the report now turns.

FIGURE EIGHT: PILE SORT DATA: SECOND DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A RESPONSE TO NEW CATEGORIES:

(See also below, Figure Nine: for researcher's responses to the same items.)

CATEGORY ONE:

"Underpinning morale and the on-going development of staff."

A decision by the administrative assistant to attend certain courses of study for the purpose of keeping up with changes being implemented.

This decision involves the VUT phasing out the word processing package Multimate and phasing in the Word Perfect system for use by students and staff. New skills are now required and two courses were attended this year on Word Perfect. These were taken in the Faculty of Business at the student village.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to commence higher degree studies.

This decision involves setting aside both work and unpaid time for study. It is understood that if the present position held by the member of staff becomes tenured, then there will be competition for the position from others with higher degrees. There is concern about the nature and degree of this pressure, given the career pathway which the member of staff has followed, emphasising service to the department through teaching and development of programs. In universities, it seems, research is more highly valued for career advancement than teaching. There is a sense of resignation that research must be pursued.

A decision by one member of staff to limit the topic of an academic research project: to investigate the phenomenon of mathematics anxiety in the mature-age student.

This decision involves having access to students in a particular category being studied. The topic - mathematics anxiety - is a phenomenon often encountered in mature-age students studying on this campus. A successful study could contribute significantly to effective teaching on campus.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre not to work full time in the department at this point.

This decision involves the management of life priorities such as family, lengthy commuting, teaching load, and academic study. The production of a handbook for students in the field of business/law in collaboration with a member of staff on a neighbouring campus may turn out to be profitably related to a research project undertaken for a higher degree. Pedagogy and learning styles of adult students in business/ law are the field of interest. At this point there is some confusion about the way forward and a need for guidance.

FIGURE EIGHT: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): SECOND DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A RESPONSE TO NEW CATEGORIES:

(See also below, Figure Nine: for researcher's responses to the same items.)

CATEGORY TWO:

"Structural: second-order things which help the department to function."

A decision by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor to allocate the petty cash management duties to the administrative assistant.

As the assistant to the head of department, this member of staff is to have more responsibilities following amalgamation. The new directive was outlined in the Finance Manual.

A decision by the administrative assistant to contribute to ideas in planning the layout of spaces in the new location of the EDD.

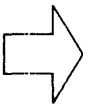
This decision involves trying to get a separate room for word processing and related teaching, instead of this function being located in another person's office where cramped space and distractions from other work areas hamper teaching. The present arrangement of computer terminals in line along one wall at the back of an already crowded work room allows for individual tuition, but small group tuition requires a different arrangement of the physical space. Further requirements are a printer for each terminal as well as a Word Perfect package.

A decision by the receptionist to raise the question of some non-availability time given each day to allow catch up on required work which continually accumulates.

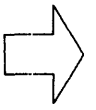
This decision involves striking a balance between recurrent duties: being readily available to provide assistance for document presentation and balancing this with achieving outputs in document production. The issue will be mentioned to the head of department and/or the head of the learning centre in the near future. Immediately following the move to the new location may be the right time.

CATEGORY THREE:

"Advertisement: concerning our relations with the university: more administrative".



[NO CARDS PLACED BY INFORMANT A IN THIS CATEGORY]



A decision to delegate to a member of the support staff the function of compiling appropriate materials and drafting short letters of reply: to be sugned by the member of staff on behalf of the coordinator of the unit.

This decision involves the question of adequate publicity: information dissemination: to function as proactively as possible; and in order to react to requests. Because of widespread acceptance of the new university status following amalgamation across four campuses a precursive decision has been taken that human resource people are to report only on university-wide issues in the interests of the generation of a feeling of unity across the university; and against the possibility of highlighting differences between units/ departments/ schools.

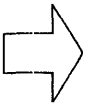


FIGURE EIGHT: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): SECOND DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A RESPONSE TO NEW CATEGORIES:

(See also below, Figure Nine: for researcher's responses to the same items.)

CATEGORY FOUR:

TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FIVE OPPOSITE)

"How to do things; how we will change things."

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to incorporate an article on the problem of plagiarism in writing in a teaching program.

This decision involved the member of staff finding a newspaper article alerting readers to the problem of plagiarism in a professional area. An academic article: PARAPHRASING AND PLAGIARISM was then identified for use with students in class work. Referencing is required even when ideas are rewritten using different terminology from the material in the source: a frequent oversight made by students.

A decision by one member of staff in media studies to alter the content of colour slides used for a particular lecture in a course on photography.

This decision involves scanning books and magazines for images that correspond to the lecture subject; and consideration of the students' degree of image literacy. The possible impacts of images also need to be considered.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to write and publish a handbook for students in business/ law in collaboration with a colleague who works in the same field on a neighbouring campus at a different university.

This decision involves an on-going relationship of three years in which ideas and materials have been co-developed and shared in the two depart-ments. This particular handbook has been the subject of planning for 12 months. Half a day per week is to be used on this project. It is to be compiled on a word processor and will be sold to students on both campuses.

A decision to offer a new program to students in Business Law A.

This decision involves running a supplementary program for students of non-English-speaking-background with no background in Australian law. New materials required will be strongly linked to lectures given by mainstream lecturers in the subject. Classes in the department will follow up on the lectures and focus upon comprehension activi-ties, English language develop-ment, and note-taking skills. Language development focuses upon the vocabulary of the discipline, together with the contextualisa-tion of terms being studied. A discipline specific specialism is entailed.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to have a meeting with an accounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week.

This decision involves the culmination of a few "one-off" conversations with the two people concerned that led to a decision to request a firm meeting between the three individuals concerned. It took one conversation and two phone calls to organise - on a Monday morning.

FIGURE EIGHT: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED): SECOND DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS INFORMANT A RESPONSE TO NEW CATEGORIES:

(See also below, Figure Nine: for researcher's responses to the same items.)

CATEGORY FIVE:

THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ASPECTS AND SITUATIONS (SEE ALSO CATEGORY FOUR OPPOSITE)

"Who will do things; setting the staff in place."

A decision by the administrative assistant to agree to work on the St Albans campus as well as on the Footscray campus.

This decision involves agreeing to meet with people at the At Albans campus who do similar work to members of staff in the EDD at Footscray. Discussion is required on the further development of work skills. There is a need to see whether certain broad functions that go beyond secretarial services at Footscray:
- tuition of students in word processing;
- design and production of desk-top publication;

could be developed fruitfully at St Albans.

A decision by the receptionist to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation.

This decision involves the ever changing employment scene and the need for enhancement of qualifications and relevant skills. This can be done through attending such courses as word-processing and desk-top publishing; a short course on Word Perfect has been taken. Familiarisation with up-to-date software packages is continually required. Receptionist skills and functions also require constant review for the purpose of conveying the best possible impression to visitors to the EDD as well as having the requested information for queries in the form that is precise and up-to-date.

A decision by one member of staff to limit service attendance on the St Albans campus to one day per week.

This decision involves the allocation of time and resources available to the range of duties built up on the Footscray campus. Provided that services on the Footscray campus can be adequately met in the remaining available days, one day per week will be spent on the St Albans campus for the purpose of initiating, developing, and assisting in provision of support services in the Maths/ Science areas. There is no outside support in these areas at present at St Albans.

FIGURE NINE: PILE SORT DATA: SECOND DECISION SAMPLE FROM RANDOMISED ITEMS RESEARCHER RESPONSE TO NEW CATEGORIES:

(See also above, Figure Eight: for Informant A's responses to the same items.)

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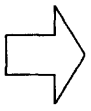

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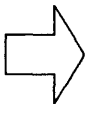

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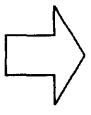

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(See also above, Figure Eight: for Informant A's responses to the same items.)

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POSSIBLE CATEGORY SIX:

THREE DECISIONS THE RESEARCHER FOUND DIFFICULT TO PLACE IN THE NEW CATEGORIES:

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre not to work full time in the department at this point.

This decision involves the management of life priorities such as family, lengthy commuting, teaching load, and academic study. The production of a handbook for students in the field of business/law in collaboration with a member of staff on a neighbouring campus may turn out to be profitably related to a research project undertaken for a higher degree. Pedagogy and learning styles of adult students in business/ law are the field of interest. At this point there is some confusion about the way forward and a need for guidance.

A decision by one member of staff in the learning centre to write and publish a handbook for students in business/ law in collaboration with a colleague who works in the same field on a neighbouring campus at a different university.

This decision involves an ongoing relationship of three years in which ideas and materials have been co-developed and shared in the two departments. This particular handbook has been the subject of planning for 12 months. Half a day per week is to be used on this project. It is to be compiled on a word processor and will be sold to students on both campuses.

A decision by one member of staff to limit the topic of an academic research project: to investigate the phenomenon of mathematics anxiety in the mature-age student.

This decision involves having access to students in a particular category being studied. The topic - mathematics anxiety - is a phenomenon often encountered in mature-age students studying on this campus. A successful study could contribute significantly to effective teaching on campus.

Informant A and Researcher:

Descriptive Responses to the Second Pile Sort Data

Comment in this section may usefully begin by focussing upon broad commonalities in the two responses. These are threefold and may best be reviewed by broadly scanning Figure Ten. First, across the top of the double page spread given to these charts, Categories Two and Three ("Structure" and "Advertisement" respectively), suggest the highest levels of like-mindedness: with one only "familiar constricted" item that was categorised by both respondents within the two spots presently in focus (pp. 114-15). This somewhat stable phenomenon may be labelled *recurrent administrative stability in decision making*. Secondly, moving down the chart, and scanning across the centre of the two pages, taking in "decisions within the central concerns of the department", and focussing upon items in bold face labelled "?", it may be noted how all researcher response plain and bold faced items ("*") arguably follow in the footsteps of Informant A, with only two exceptions. Since we have already noted how Informant A sees categories four and five as somewhat interchangeable according to sequential priorities at the point of change, we may label this comparatively fluid phenomenon as *politicality undermining linearity in decision making*. Thirdly, across the bottom of the double page spread, differences about notions of "morale building" in relation to academic work status decisions bring a contrasting dimension of dispersion to the developing picture. These concern formal research programs at the centre of life priorities expressed by staff members. Since these sorting phenomena are so closely associated with category one and its attendant morale building connotations, we may label these *imperatives arising from academic work status positions*.

Recurrent Administrative Stability in Decision Making. Categories Two and Three showed high levels of commonality between the two respondents. In considering the range of data that could have been included or excluded at each point in the sorting process, these categories seem to remain unproblematic. Ideas of "structure" to support the work of the department, and "advertisement" to spread operating information to other units, gave little cause for confusion in the sorting process, as outcomes would suggest. The one decision which was swapped over by the two respondents: "to delegate to support staff a number of short letters/ standard document compilation tasks" warrants some comment. Informant A seemed to

see it as "familiar constricted" (Hickson et al), that is, normal and recurrent, comparatively well known, with limited and non-precursive consequences: putting it in category two: "structure". The researcher saw the matter in similar terms, however, placing it in a different category. One consideration is to note how both categories are not too far distant from each other anyway. Does this minute phenomenon amount to a (minute) confirmation of Hicksonian theory? Are both respondents following the invisible theoretical path put down in the Bradford studies?

Politicality Undermining Linearity in Decision Making. The pile sort story for categories four and five reveals a different kind of stability from that outlined above. All items in categories four and five for researcher response are labelled "*", with only one labelled "?" (pp. 114-15); and that one so labelled can be found in Informant A's category four: a movement across categories that still holds it within the same broad domain distinction: "decisions within the central concerns of the department" (p. 114). Comment now needs to focus upon the two remaining items marked "?" in categories four and five for Informant A: "to write and publish a handbook for students in business law" and "receptionist to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation" (p. 114). These, along with the third item, "the meeting concerning arrangements for orientation week", may all be seen as familiar matters to be processed in a way which is constricted.

It is important to note how this interpretation sees these three items as *least contentious* (among the three types given by Hickson et al) but only *less political* (not *least political* as in tractable fluid matters). This confirms a significant level of politicality endemic to categories four and five. The point may be coupled to Informant A's observation that the sequential arrangements between items so categorised (precursive issues) tended to break down under speculations about the changing nature of the point of change under review ("If we were starting a department from scratch . . . "). We may recall how the two decision types seen as the most/more political by Hickson et al are the vortex-sporadic and the familiar constricted (respectively); and then go on to note how these item types seem to be firmly located among the "central concerns" given by the two respondents in this chart. Once again, it may be asked whether this strange congruence in pile sort response across two respondents confirms Bradford studies outcomes. The response to such a question may well be yes.

FIGURE TEN: PILE SORT DATA
PATTERN IN THE SORTED PILES: ACCUMULATING ITEMS
INFORMANT A (Head of the Department)

CATEGORY TWO

* To record more detail in photographic orders taken.
* To authorise admin. assistant to sign orders and requisitions.
* To list tasks/ functions/ responsibilities for a new member of staff.
* To compile ideas for a new reception area layout.
* To allocate personnel to a particular job on another campus.
* **To allocate petty cash duties to the admin. assistant.**
* **To contribute to planning layout of new spaces.**
* **To raise the question of some non-availability time.**
? **To delegate to support staff a number of short letter/ standard document compilation tasks.**

CATEGORY THREE

* To send a memo to all deans and heads of departments to offer to address new staff on EDD roles and functions on the Footscray campus.

"Decisions within the central concerns of the department"

CATEGORY FOUR

* To adopt a collaborative approach to photographing clients.
* To change the format of First Year Nursing tutorials in physics and chemistry.
* To hold classes as usual and not to cancel them prior to assignment submissions.
* To shorten initial consultation times with students commencing assignment work.
* To give to certain students photocopied handout materials relevant to their assignments.
* To rewrite/ extend/ expand course materials in nursing (bridging studies).
* To compile detailed materials on a program together with an outline of all "in-house" EDD publications for a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor.
* **To incorporate an article on the problem of plagiarism.**
* **To alter the content of colour slides used in lectures.**
* **To offer a new program to students in business law A.**
? **To write and publish a handbook for students in business law.**
? **To have a meeting with an acounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week.**

CATEGORY FIVE

* To agree to consult on a series of assignments with a student from a different discipline area.
* To hold a planning meeting about a new program to be developed: learning centre staff availability and interests will be reviewed.
* To employ another member of staff to assist in programs in business/law.
* To agree to teach in the community health nursing course in October.
* To agree to take a "class talk" class during the following week.
* To give to two colleagues an outline of things to consider for the summer school four week program.
* To discuss with a member of the teaching staff in the department the idea of a short course for engineering students.
* **Admin. assistant to agree to work on the St Albans campus as well as on the Footscray campus.**
* **A member of staff to limit service attendance on the St Albans campus to one day per week.**
? **Receptionist to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation.**

CATEGORY ONE

* To make an approach to another member of staff for mentor support in further academic studies.
* **Admin. asistant to attend certain courses of study.**
* **Staff member to commence higher degree studies.**
? **Staff member not to work full time at this point.**
? **Staff member to limit topic of research to study mathematics anxiety in mature age students.**

FIGURE TEN: PILE SORT DATA (CONTINUED)
PATTERN IN THE SORTED PILES: ACCUMULATING ITEMS
RESEARCHER RESPONSES

CATEGORY TWO

* To record more detail in photographic orders taken.
* To authorise admin. assistant to sign orders and requisitions.
* To list tasks/ functions/ responsibilities for a new member of staff.
* To compile ideas for a new reception area layout.
* To allocate personnel to a particular job on another campus.
* **To allocate petty cash duties to the admin. assistant.**
* **To contribute to planning layout of new spaces.**
* **To raise the question of some non-availability time.**

CATEGORY THREE

* To send a memo to all deans and heads of departments to offer to address new staff on EDD roles and functions on the Footscray campus.
? **To delegate to support staff a number of short letter/ standard document compilation tasks.**

"Decisions within the central concerns of the department"

CATEGORY FOUR

* To adopt a collaborative approach to photographing clients.
* To change the format of First Year Nursing tutorials in physics and chemistry.
* To hold classes as usual and not to cancel them prior to assignment submissions.
* To shorten initial consultation times with students commencing assignment work.
* To give to certain students photocopied handout materials relevant to their assignments.
* To rewrite/ extend/ expand course materials in nursing (bridging studies).
* To compile detailed materials on a program together with an outline of all "in-house" EDD publications for a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor.
* **To incorporate an article on the problem of plagiarism.**
* **To alter the content of colour slides used in lectures.**
* **To offer a new program to students in business law A.**

CATEGORY FIVE

* To agree to consult on a series of assignments with a student from a different discipline area.
* To hold a planning meeting about a new program to be developed: learning centre staff availability and interests will be reviewed.
* To employ another member of staff to assist in programs in business/law.
* To agree to teach in the community health nursing course in October.
* To agree to take a "class talk" class during the following week.
* To give to two colleagues an outline of things to consider for the summer school four week program.
* To discuss with a member of the teaching staff in the department the idea of a short course for engineering students.
* **Admin. assistant to agree to work on the St Albans campus as well as on the Footscray campus.**
* **A member of staff to limit service attendance on the St Albans campus to one day per week.**
? **To have a meeting with an accounting and economics tutor concerning arrangements for orientation week.**

CATEGORY ONE

* To make an approach to another member of staff for mentor support in further academic studies.
* **Admin. asistant to attend certain courses of study.**
* **Staff member to commence higher degree studies.**
? **Receptionist to take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation.**

POSSIBLE NEW CATEGORY SIX

? **Staff member not to work full time at this point.**
? **To write and publish a handbook for students in business law.**
? **Staff member to limit topic of research to study mathematics anxiety in mature age students.**

However, there seem to be some further considerations emerging from field work in this particular social setting.

Later analytical comment will try to bring out how this phenomenon suggests an ultimate theoretical failure for linearity modes of understanding decision making in higher education settings. This idea, that politicality undermines linearity in decision making becomes increasingly important in relating this case study to special circumstances endemic to higher education settings. If linearity falls away as a useful mode of explanation, what then may be brought forward to take its place?

At this point, some expository comment is warranted upon the precursive variable raised in the Hickson et al studies. According to that theory, where politicality increases, precursiveness decreases, and *vice-versa*. A commonplace affirms how "committees are the oil in the wheels of the university"; and this is well encapsulated in Hickson's tractable fluid decision type. As politicality increases from this point in the typology, however, it becomes increasingly difficult to see how one decisional item leads fluently (or "fluidly") on to another; or to see how one more comprehensive and complex item may be progressively stitched together along lock-step and/or ever-expanding boundary-crossing lines of progress towards finalisation.

Informant A and Researcher:

Analytical Responses to the Second Pile Sort Data

Imperatives Arising from Academic Work Status Positions. Category one at the bottom of the double page spread raises further questions that carry the argument into the drive towards academic work status positions. Focussing comment upon items marked "?", we may note how two included in category one by Informant A are relegated, by the researcher, as residual items, to occupy two out of three places in a possible new category. Whereas Informant A looked to the "morale building" category; the researcher sought refuge for these in a new category. In this section of the chart, a level of confusion seems to prevail.

The four items marked "?" warrant closer comment at this point because they bring to categorisation issues certain special characteristics endemic to higher education settings. These may be given under two broad but increasingly powerful ideas, closely associated. The first is

a deeper subjective dimension touching upon personal political imperatives that reach out towards significant others outside the boundaries of the departmental academic staff. The second is an absence of boundaries around interests which seem to stretch away in a number of directions at once. For the particular kinds of interests encapsulated here stretch back indefinitely into the past chronicles of decision makers' autobiographical stories and, looking into the future, may change and develop further in details and intentions in quite unpredictable directions. Linearity in decision making assumes clear beginnings and endings for the decisional process. It looks for clear boundaries around groups involved and interests developing. To note this clearly, it is necessary to look closely at the rationale notes for each of the four items in question. These notes are recorded at the bottom of each card. This discussion will now: interpret each item in detail in the light of these ideas; then go on to comment upon the ways in which the items were processed differently by Informant A and the researcher.

Highly Personal Dimensions in Certain Strategic Decision Making Processes. All four items under review show staff reaching out towards a more "cosmopolitan" network in the development of their work. A deep sense of self-interest is evident, coupled to a complex array of requirements to take into account the interests of others and how these may be harnessed towards each of the tasks currently targeted. The decision to limit research to "mathematics anxiety in mature-age students" indicates how that person is trying to link in with wider theory in formal academic research and seeks useful information pertinent to students on or off the campus both inside and outside the field of mathematics study. The decision maker is committing a great deal of personal effort to the task over a long period. The decision by the receptionist to "take steps to further secure the position occupied in the organisation" is, for academic support staff, a counterpart item to the above. A wider network for these members of staff is informally built up on all campuses. Such persons are seen smoking and lunching together on and off campus. At staff gatherings they frequently sit together in an isolated group. Research needs to turn to these groups for a fuller picture of campus life. The rationale notes for this decision point towards the departmental environment and how this may best be served in the interests of a better image for the EDD (see above, p. 115). The third and fourth decisions under comment here were made by one member of staff: "to limit work to part time at this point"; and "to write and publish a handbook for

students in business law". Deep indeed is the personal political dimension in this pair of decisions. The rationale notes almost cry out for understanding of the intense pressure that this academic feels coming from all directions in the career setting. It is a familiar story in academic work. There are many miles to go with this one: many drafts, changes in direction, shifting alliances, interruptions to progress, and changes of heart about developing details.

Unboundaried Interests in Certain Strategic Decision Making Processes. The same four items also display an absence of boundaried control in their formation and development. Unlike other items confidently processed in the pile sort activities, these four bring a new problematic to bear, arising from contention about what precisely is in contention. For the reality underpinning such decisional processes constantly changes and is subject to change from strong outside influences. Even long-term physiological health has a bearing upon the integrity of decisions put together to try to bring some order to bear upon situations felt to be under high levels of stress. Turning to the stressed academic struggling with whether or not to work part-time to allow work on a handbook for students, such problematics are further confirmed. Political forces get mixed up with deep personal motivation and capacities for creative imagination in this, as in all four items under discussion. The decision to limit research to "maths anxiety in mature age students" needs no further comment to elaborate how this decision stretches back endlessly into the autobiography of the actor and stretches forward through time toward endless possibilities of outcome finalisation. Decision formation shades into decision implementation which, in turn, shades on into decision finalisation; with the further complication that it is never clear which of these three comes first, or which follows on from which. A typical conversational interchange might run as follows:

"What did you finally decide to do in your thesis?"

"Well, that question wasn't really answered until I had finished writing the darn thing!"

Likewise, the decision by the receptionist to "take steps to further secure the position in the organisation" seems to show similar characteristics. Looked at one way, the decision to "take steps" toward some goal is clear, finalised; looked at another way, it is vague: what kinds of steps are being considered, to what purpose, and with whom? Many and varied are the ways in which the receptionist might seek to carry out such a decision (implementation). Since these may well redound upon decisional details, progressive formation to clear finalisation is seriously called into question.

It is no surprise, therefore, to find that the two respondents moved these items in different directions. Informant A saw the receptionist's decision in terms of his ambitions for the person and the department: calling it a "who does it" kind of decision, placing it in category five. The researcher focused upon the personal dimension and, fresh from the interview which generated the item, saw it in terms of "morale", placing it in category one. Informant A saw the "research into maths anxiety" decision in terms of the decision maker's personal dimension and, seeking perhaps to confirm support, saw it in terms of "morale", placing it in category one. The researcher, steeped in focal theory as outlined in this developing report, looked only at the decisional problematics outlined above and sought refuge in a possible new category six.

THE CLOSING FIELD OF INQUIRY

The open pile sort approach to dealing with the decision sample data allowed the study to move forwards in directions determined by one key informant; and, in such ways, departures from researcher generated biases were recorded. The report has now begun to set down clear details about what actors think and how they react about decisions they generate; and to range these details alongside counterpart responses made by the more theoretically aware researcher. Moreover, this task has brought forward outcomes from deep within the field of academic administrative work, since data was generated at a field work site where intense pressures for change and reactions to change were endemic in the setting. Progress has been made on all of these three fronts. Further comment now needs to bring out details about the nature of that progress, and then go on to outline further details about the way forward for the report.

Outcomes of Thesis Part Two: Finer Details Outlined in Decisions and Decision Making

Informant A's new categories have brought us one small step away from the tripartite classification of Hickson et al, basing the study, as much as possible, upon the views of informants themselves. The beginning researcher's developing instincts suggest, at this point,

that if the present direction of inquiry is continued, there is a possible "blow-out" looming on the number of categories likely to be generated. This suggests the need for gathering and processing similar sorts of data in more systematic ways. Balanced incomplete block design pile sorts, a sub-group of triadic comparison techniques for gathering similarity data from informants on openly listed data, would allow a more controlled study of data from a sample of informants across a range of case study settings (Weller, 1988, Chaps. 5 & 8). This whole process might become fruitless if taken too far. There seems to be a deep research problem at the heart of the matter. Moreover the problem seems to arise from the very nature of social process in higher education. In this context, the researcher may never be able to get around to thoroughly testing the Hickson tripartite categories in comprehensive terms. Perhaps the present gains are sufficient to suggest a query hanging over such a detailed decisional typology as Hickson's applying piecemeal to higher education settings. The most that can be acknowledged here is the beginning of a documented new direction for the topic and field in higher education.

Clear theoretical tensions have now become isolated through the present study. These now affect the further development of the argument. Non-directive imperatives, drives towards autonomy and independence of thought and action, endemic to higher education social settings, vary in their impact upon decisional process over levels of structure and politicality. They seem, on the basis of the present data, to reach their greatest intensity of influence within centres of morale/support; where individuals and small groups interact and compete in academic work status groups. The debate on dual/triple rationality in decision making rapidly deteriorates under the kind of detailed inquiry made in this study. The topic offers little to clarify the status of the standard operating procedure as a notable theoretical unit, and how it may be seen to contribute to ways of explaining how decision making works in these settings. This point will need to be raised again in later analytical work in this study.

When dialectical conflict theory is given a place in the discussion, a new place may be found where explanation becomes much clearer. Recruitment to interest groups may well be seen to be at the heart of the standard operating procedure mode of decision making. For the moment, at this point in the study, the status of standard operating procedure as a unit of explanation brings a halt to progress centred around notions of linearity, what Hickson frequently seems to refer to as precursiveness: the idea that decision making process goes forward in step by step progression.

This halt to progress, taking the form of logical confusion, may be seen in the workaday administrative field where decision makers try to make sense of their ever-changing settings ("If we were starting a department from scratch . . . . [we would reverse the two categories four and five]"). It is also seen in academic debate on decision making where linearity frequently intrudes into the foreground logic employed in certain sections of the discussion.

A brief review of Hickson's views on problem complexity is useful at this point. Hickson et al (1986a, 1986b, 1987a and 1987b) and Wilson et al (1980 and 1986) cite Allison, but the extensive literature they present does not substantively develop Allison's triple rationality thesis. Hickson's dual rationality theory argues that:

> There is no type of process that can be explained only by reason of complexity or of politicality alone, in relation to which variables of only one appear. Both concepts are always needed, though they differ in relative import from decision to decision (1986a, p. 188).

He stresses the need to concentrate upon process, but with a bipartite focus upon rationality and politicality. Allison's tripartite focus appears lost, or overlooked.

Curiously, a careful reading of Hickson et al rediscovers it in the diagrammatic model of decision making given (ibid., p. 166). The diagram distinguishes an organisational level from a decisional level and locates the organisational "rules of the game" at a point prior to the raising of the "matter for decision". Dual rationality of complexity and politicality then take over dominance of the process. The source of the idea is not emphasised in discussion, leaving it to the reader to infer that Hickson et al's organisational rules of the game corresponds with Allison's ideas about standard operating procedures. This is unfortunate, because Allison gave ideas about how standard operating procedures were able to carry their own rationality and decisional outcomes from start to finish. In scholarship generally, where there is loss of complexity in explanation, conflation is usually suspected.

From this point forwards, further progress in the study requires some sort of break away from this impasse. Linearity in decision making process needs to be left behind, with its implied reliance upon boundaried considerations; notions of starts and finishes to the decisional process; and concomitant lack of a socially dynamic dimension through linear thinking. Such a break away needs to move towards a more multi-dimensional point of view.

Imperatives arising from academic work status positions now seem to hold a central place in the developing picture of accumulating complexities. All of the above seems to confirm that higher education organisations are unique. They are, *sui generis*, their own special type of organisation. Since their history is short, their theory is little developed. Much work now seems to face the research scholar to try to advance explanation in the field of decision making. In the process of this attempt, difficult and complex questions must be faced, and not eschewed.

The Developing Program for Thesis Part Three: A Search for New Explanations

Ideas about decision making typically proceeding through linear accretion seem to break down under close analysis and discussion. Ethnographic analysis enforces a need to rejuvenate theory centred upon such ideas. Realigned theory now presents an opportunity to work towards a more multi-dimensional picture of decision making. This different point of view needs, first of all, to break out of boundaries assumed to be traced around decisional content.

A major problem derives from the fact that decisions under examination are typically presented, in their representational forms, as outlines on paper: enumerating accumulated detail and rationale notes. The sampled decision, it seems to be assumed, also pictures its own process towards finalisation. This remains true, when we consider how each version of the decision, lodged in a filing cabinet along the way, is typically labelled as " the decision to do such-and-such at that point in time". This fallacy lies at the heart of the research problem. The representation cannot do two things at once. It cannot represent both a process and an outcome.

To put the matter in a more socially dynamic context of inquiry, paraphrasing Dahrendorf: it is " social structures", and not sampled decisions as outlined on paper, which " are capable of producing within themselves the elements of their supersession and change" (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. viii). For, as Dahrendorf goes on to point out:

> Social structures not only are subject to change but create permanently and systematically some of the determinant forces of their change within themselves. Among these forces certain groups are paramount, the conflict of which may lead to modifications of existing values and institutions (p. viii).

The picture now needs to be redrawn in terms of the unit's social structural life, which, in no sense, may be construed as bounded, in the chronologically phased and linear sense of that term.

Certain key aspects of social structural interactions, together with what may abide among their influences, may appear permanently set in place at any point. It needs to be noted, however, that they imperceptibly change over time and are never static. For example, they typically take place in enforced coalitions. These are social settings where actors are required to interact in groups that they have not chosen for themselves. Forced to work among groups and individuals over a period, such groups and individuals must deal with outcomes in social structural developments over the said period. Perceptions about authority relations are central, not peripheral, to this process. This enforced coalition idea encapsulates many of the fixed or rigidly held aspects of social interactions.

Where, in this schema, we must ask, lies change? Conflict is at the centre of the picture, for it is conflict that brings about the need for new decisions. Displacement, which is another term for social structural change, takes place among authority relations that concern persons, ideas, programs, and strategies. Keeping these important details in mind, it becomes now possible to see how fluidity and resurgence take place, attached to decisions and decision making set in place within fixed and rigidly held components of social structure. Such a picture, now emerging from this section of the study, will become increasingly detailed as interpretation and analysis proceed further.

One key question not yet raised is how such developments, in dynamic social settings, may result in standardisation imperatives that seem to be fossilised into standard operating procedures. According to dialectical conflict theory, conflicts are resolved only through displacement followed by laying down the grounds for future conflicts. To return to the present study, since the program needs to develop suitably non-linear ideas of power and authority and their roles in higher education decisions and decision making, a number of procedural implications in research now need to be clarified.

The program requires careful exploration of actors' polar opposite constructs, to note what is being rejected, as well as what is being affirmed, in social settings. We need this process to assist in probing the "invisible world" that lies behind what actors say they are doing and why they are doing it. There is something "hidden" that needs to be understood, defined, and brought forward into the foreground clamour of organisational life. In this extended logical space, the researcher's developing picture of the EDD work setting, even the informants themselves, from the Head of Department down, are not very sure about what they are describing themselves as doing. This state of affairs, now brought to light by the study so far, amounts to an endemic irony in social research. What the researcher is looking for must largely come from informants themselves, so that the inquiry focus may remain close to their own ways of seeing and talking. But this reality typically remains hidden from both themselves and the researcher. Such an irony falls to research method issues and needs to be resolved in some way through the process of data presentation, interpretation, and analysis.

The study to this point has tried to remain faithful to tenets laid down at the beginning. Decisions were to be sampled. They were to come from actors themselves at all levels in the system, and presented in ways that remained close to their own ways of seeing, set out in terminologies close to their own culture. The decision sample was briefly reviewed at the beginning of this Thesis Part Two, which led to extensive layouts of descriptive data and extended analysis as developed in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Two further considerations need to be raised at this point, to keep the complex issues from focal theory in the foreground. Has the idea of decisional categories been so fundamentally called into question in this section of the report that the whole categorisation idea has been seriously undermined? If "vortex-sporadic", "tractable-fluid" and "familiar-constricted" are not so mutually exclusive any more; and the more so when applied to higher education settings; then what might be developed as counterpart categorisation in higher education theory? Perhaps the answer is none? A second consideration is that one possible overall interpretation of the research activity in this section of the report is to say that the researcher is now beginning to think and react more like Informant A about the "central teaching and learning aspects" than Informant A is thinking and reacting like the researcher. This may cast serious doubt upon the idea of the researcher ever "catching up" with what is going on among informants. Commonalities in pile sort activity have built up a base-line of agreement;

divergences reveal how some are more divergent than others; a heightened sense of politicality seems to be found in most items where divergences occur.

The following two chapters in this report return to review interview data from four further key informants. A revised agenda now takes the foreground of analysis. Can the grounds of decision in this higher education setting be clarified in non-linear terms? How may decisions be seen to get under way outside of an explanatory context that requires clear beginnings, endings, boundaries and finalisations? To that task the report now turns.