

## CHAPTER SIX: DECISION MAKING AND POLITICAL CONFLICT

### ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The study now turns to review the broad scale of depth interview data collected over a long period. It is important to note along the way how this material is never far away from observational data and, consequently, references will also be made to observations and documents during this analysis. The researcher's personal interests necessarily guide the process. Depth interviews of two key informants have been brought forward for detailed review and discussion, while others are left to one side for supplementary comment. As has been discussed earlier, informant selection is an on-going process in any study (see above, p. 16). It holds a central place in the political process of social research. The rationale for the final selection and culling of depth interview material will be made clear as this section of the report unfolds. Interpretation is at the heart of social research, which also means that theory and data are constantly interacting in these passages of the report. It remains now for the researcher to take care at all points to see that explicit signals are given when theory turns upon data, or *vice-versa*; also, to note where interpretations move from level to level, or across a range of points of focus.

Before the analysis of material for Chapter Six begins, however, it is important to glance at the layout of this Thesis Part Three: Decisions and Decision Making. It has been set out to reflect two separate processes at work in the study. The brief history of the project with its accumulating effect upon the researcher's outlook demands attention. Also, traced in detail is the process of analytical closure upon the growing theoretical tensions found in the developing data. Both these processes, progress through time and analytical closure, are important for full development of the argument, as the report now goes on to explain.

The first process echoes what has gone before in this report. The researcher's intellectual progress in the study has so far been mapped and set down as a bid to give clear

guidance to the reader. This points out where matters began with research interests and questions, how they led along certain theoretical and methodological paths, and where they have come to rest now with the data collected. There can be no account of extended progress in any study by a lone researcher without some autobiographical element included to show how perspectives may change over time. In ethnographic inquiry generally, as reflected above in Chapters Three, Four and Five, the researcher's developing relationship with people at the field work site is central to the larger picture coming forward in the report.

The second process is a new departure that enters at this stage, but it will closely parallel the first. Analytical process requires clear links to substantive ideas being researched. It brings into play such logical ideas as are necessary for drawing distinctions and making links and inferences. Analytical process connects logical ideas to developing substantive ideas, where theoretical propositions begin to be seriously questioned.

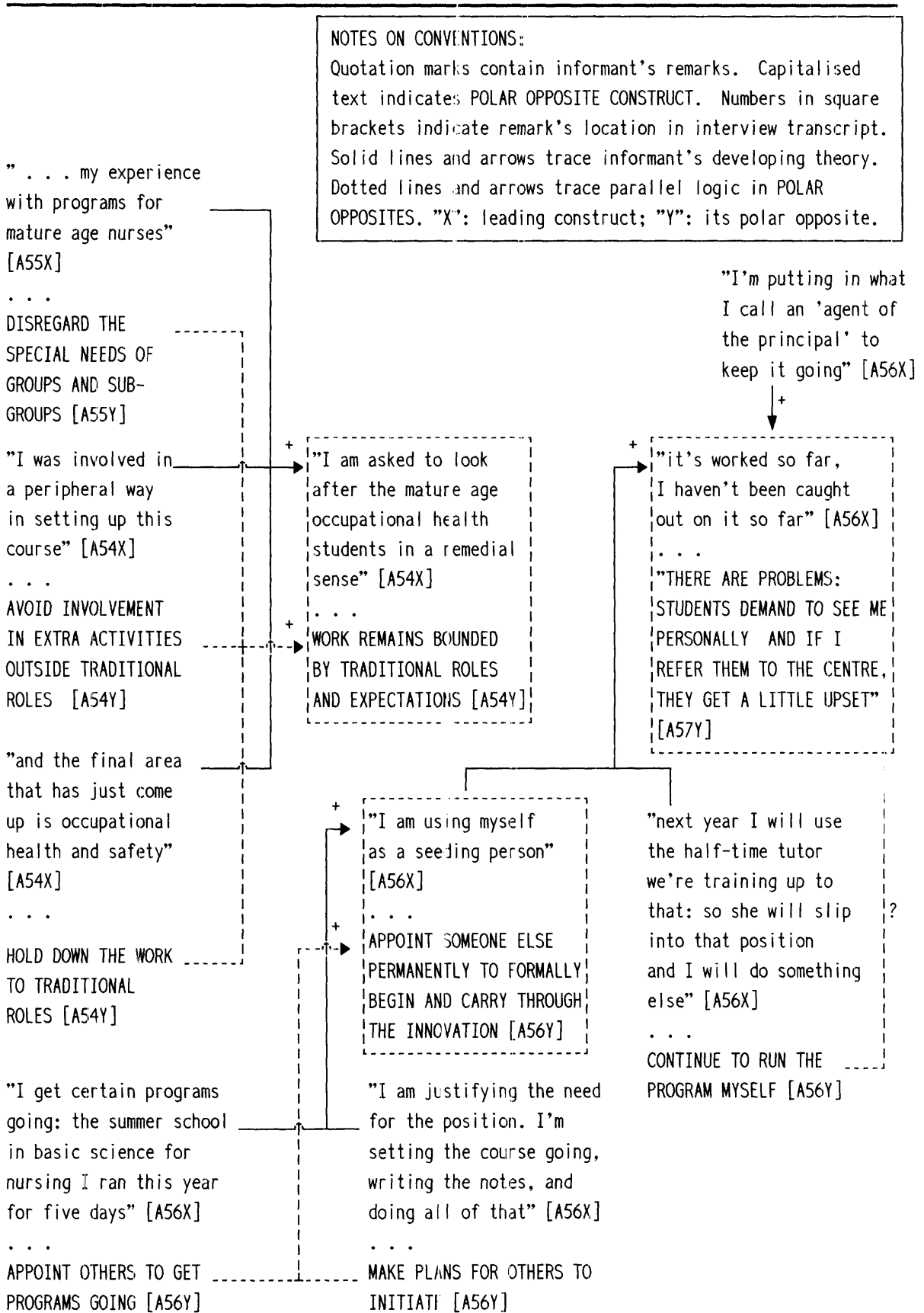
A brief example, by way of introduction, is warranted at this point. Figure Eleven (opposite) sets out several key remarks taken from the interview transcript for Informant A.<sup>1</sup> They give his account of developing work for the department. We see how he strategically places himself at the point of change, so that he may then remove himself by appointing a new staff member. Such successful outcomes may or may not take place. He needs to work carefully, avoid offending others' sense of territory, yet strategically and incrementally expand the EDD scale of operation. Certain unstated ideas may usefully be seen to lie behind his key remarks (Jones, 1985a; 1985b). Note that items are labelled to show their paragraph number location in the interview transcript (A01, A02 . . .). Also, the chart gives the status as a leading remark ("X") or as its polar opposite ("Y"), against which the informant might be reacting at the time. Polar opposite "Y" constructs may derive from widely held assumptions taken from the ethnographer's journal observations or, sometimes, as remarks given by informants themselves (note [A57Y] given in Figure Eleven opposite). They are important because they give support as points against which informants were forming ideologies and establishing points of legitimation. For example, the following remark:

"I was involved in a peripheral way in setting up this course" [A54X];

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 226-7.

**FIGURE ELEVEN: INFORMANT A: LEGITIMATION:  
FORMED AGAINST POLAR OPPOSITE CONSTRUCTS**



carries at least one widely accepted unstated assumption against which he may be reacting:

*avoid involvement in activities outside traditional roles [A54Y].*

Academic staff appointed to fixed positions may choose to limit their work within the traditional boundaries of such positions. Exploratory Innovation and change are unlikely to occur in such circumstances. Figure Eleven traces a remarkably circuitous path from the base line of his previous experience (A55X), all the way through to the remark: "... it's worked so far ... I haven't been caught out on it so far" (A56X). We may note how his own key remark forms a polar opposite construct at that point: "*There are problems: students demand to see me personally and if I refer them to the Centre, they get a little upset*" (A57Y).

We may also note a point about logical order, in particular, how Informant A builds his theory of academic development work. For this does not necessarily follow interview transcript sequence. Two items at paragraph fifty-six, "It's worked so far ... " (A56X) and "Next year I will use the half-time tutor we're training up to that ... " (A56X) remain problematic on the questions of causal and procedural sequence. It is not easy to see which follows which, and/or which causally depends upon which in the flux of organisational life.

Where is the locus of legitimation in all of this? Where are the committees, the sequential lines of meetings, the points of plateaux showing progress in decision making, and how may boundaries be traced around decisional content?

Against such analysis, the "tractable-fluid" and "familiar-constricted" decision types of Hickson *et al* begin to sit uneasily above an apparent vacuum of legitimation. At this point, all that can be said, is that the informant's growing theoretical logic concerning his developing academic work seems to belie such theory. Circuitously, the informant's account traces how he is placing himself at the centre of change so that he can remove himself later, while remaining present. Strangely, the process appears, all at once, to be vortex-sporadic *and* tractable fluid *and* familiar constricted. These remarks, however, jump ahead of the program, for the main purpose at this point is to introduce the layout of Thesis Part Three.

## DIALECTICAL CONFLICT THEORY

Making more detailed use of dialectical conflict theory to interpret the two contrasting interviews chosen for this Thesis Part Two brings further progress to the study. The process brings forward some usefully elaborated explanations of how decisional processes may be getting under way at the level of social process. Up to this point, ethnographic sifting of sampled decisions has been found useful for initial criticism of Bradford Studies theory. There now appear limits to such theory when applied to the lively small group settings typically found at "the bottom" in higher education work group settings. Decisions and decision making may not hold within themselves the forces that turn them towards their differing orientations and lines of progress. Instead, it is groups of people that do such sorts of things. People in authority relations seek to legitimate their various stands along lines of conflict and against developing anxieties about how their programs will run and be received. So, it is to the social behaviours of individuals caught up in small groups that we must increasingly turn for some insight into what is going on.

When the focus turns towards what informants in this higher education setting say, and leave unsaid, about their decisional concerns, newer and more explanatorily useful outcomes begin to come forward. In particular, through further exploration of polar opposite constructs discernible in informants' interview transcripts, loci of legitimation begin to emerge. These firm up in a variety of location types that are not included in the focal theory raised at the outset of this study. As noted briefly above (p. 130), such places range across developing areas of academic interest. These serve as counterparts to the personnel and charter requirements for development of conflict groups, as outlined by Dahrendorf, drawing upon views of Malinowski (Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 135, 6). They also take in patterned recruitment to positions of domination and subjugation. They derive from organisational saga (Clark). They show up as seemingly phantomised forces pushing incremental change strategy harnessed to the task of radical change. They foster, as fermenting agents, the escalation of conflict through articulation of manifest interests that, in turn, lead to well laid grounds for continuing (dialectical) conflict. In parallel with this analytical focus, highly problematic areas are revealed, at this point, for developing further programs of empirically, theoretically and practically focussed research work.

Thesis Part Three examines two contrasting interviews taken at the centre of the data gathering phase of the study. The first interview was with Informant G, a highly articulate member of staff, who appeared concerned about political issues across the campus. This person held the field for EDD on certain crucial political issues arising between conflicting units across the campus. Informant G saw how the politics of the social setting decided the degree of success within that setting. EDD would not expand its programs further into the wider campus without getting the politics right. Such progress, at the point of the interview, was blocked. The interview with Informant G seems to give the picture through the eyes of a loner. His interview transcript gives a highly reflective response to probing questions, and, as such, presents a deeply personal point of view about a highly difficult set of political circumstances then developing around his formalised academic concerns.

Informant D, by contrast, a staff member with more senior responsibilities as head of the Learning Centre, appeared highly experienced in managing the local politics required in establishing the Learning Centre sub-unit of the EDD. It was this person's conference paper that was discussed at the beginning of this report (see above, pp. 20-2). In parallel with the ideologies put forward in that paper, this person presented as constantly busy at her tasks. She showed concern that personal and material resources among staff were well matched to organisational functions and outputs. Following her invitation, the titles listed below were reviewed from her desk, and are given here as they reflected her developing agenda for the Learning Centre unit: Burrows, R.: (1982) **Students Must Write: A Guide to Better Writing in Course Work and Examinations**; and (1983) **Scientists Must Write: A Guide to Better Writing for Scientists, Engineers and Students**; Wajnoyb, R. & Green, C. (1990) **Afterthoughts: Voices from Australian Radio**. Other titles on the topic of essay writing for students had been earmarked for sections and sub-sections labelled "academic writing style". Loose leaf binders were also lined up on her desk and their titles, also, reflected this person's busy development agenda: **Summer School Programs**; **Winter School Programs**; **In-Semester English Language Classes**; **Promoting Disciplines - Specific Support**; **In-Semester Academic Skills Classes**; **Introduction to the Services of the Learning Centre**; **Orientation Week**; **Recommended Professional Reading**; **A.S.P. Strategic Plans**; **End-of-Year Excursion-Based Language Program**; and **Presenting an Overview of the Support Offered by EDD's Learning Centre**.

## A Framework for Depth Interview Transcript Analysis

Each lone researcher forges anew a set of tools fashioned for the analysis of uniquely accumulated data. Sources of ideas about data analysis range widely across approaches, methods, and personal points of view. The analysis of depth interview transcripts in this study draws upon ideas from Agar (1979): for "pervasive and recurrent themes" in cognitive anthropology (p. 14); and Jones (1985a; 1985b): for detailed guidelines directed at the concrete handling of bias on both sides of the interview fence. It also follows the researcher's personal viewpoint as this constantly develops new models and ways of seeing new problems met in the field. Facing the analysis of so-called "raw data" can be daunting for the lone researcher. Resolution of such tension lies in realising that data is never "raw". Acceptance of, and discussion about, the influence of the ethnographer upon data gathered brings its own important form of rigour to the research process; a point taken already in this report (see Chapter Two above). As Jones (1985a) puts it well:

Depth interviewing can never involve a simplistic 'face-value' treatment of data. We have to think beforehand, during and after the interviews about what is likely to, is, and has affected the data obtained in the interview and the relationship we are involved in (p. 53).

Taking this idea seriously entails accepting that all new research work breaks fresh ground across all dimensions of data analysis.

It follows then, that a framework must be found that allows several principles to work freely, and all at once, with the developing process of analysis. The first point to note is that the framework applied needs to avoid the charge that the researcher is using it to impose rigid presuppositions upon the data. For obvious reasons, this would invite the charge of extreme question begging. Following this principle then, there needs to be some form of flexibility built into the system of analysis employed. This requirement means that alternative interpretations of data must be seen to be able to sit easily alongside those favoured by the researcher at the point of publication of the study.

A further point to note is that the framework must allow the material to be presented in a readable format for the report. This means that the manual problems of pagination and format warrant close study. How may each interview transcript be deconstructed, rendered

problematic for both the researcher and the reader, and then followed for presentation among the pages of a conventionally printed report? The constructs, with their shaping phrases and clauses, which were identified for mapping in the interview transcript chart for Informant A, numbered one hundred and eight. The compilation was no small task for the researcher, and a fascinating study in its own right. The report reader's short and long-term levels of interest, however, may well not stretch to a close and detailed reading of such lengthy material. A presentation strategy must also be considered. Wall-sized flow charts may accurately represent complex data, but that medium surely falters when it comes time to communicating ideas clearly to readers within the binding covers of a book.

A third problem is the question of where and how the report may introduce substantive theoretical comment into the general framework. The question of keeping social science ideas to one side for the data gathering phases of this study has held central importance. Will the framework allow theoretical labelling to take place where this may be useful? How may this be inserted without causing readers' confusion?

A further problem, again, concerns differing levels of analysis and how these may be accommodated. Data accumulated from a string of depth interviews reaches across from the personal and idiosyncratic face-to-face utterances of ethnographer and informant (the detailed and concrete), at one end of a continuum of abstraction. From that point the line moves through the more generalised middle range, often bringing in the legitimating scripts that are to be found in any goal-driven organisation (the more generalised and widely familiar utterances). At the opposite end are broad abstract propositions where theories of change and philosophies are talked around (abstractions at the highest level of generality).

One important distinction in the development of a framework turns upon separating out legitimating script from sincere belief (Jones, 1985a, p. 50; 1958b, p. 58). The former typically records "a well rehearsed script that we produce [for the interviewer, or, more critically, perhaps in inadvertent cooperation with the interviewer] about what we do and why, and about what we think is important and worthwhile about what we do, and so on" (1985a, p. 50). Sincere belief, however, may present a different picture. This may reflexively give to the researcher clear views about "which is which"; having much to say about "the things that confuse us or move us or distress us" (ibid, p. 50). How will the framework deal with such differing levels of analysis?



Two final problems face the researcher: the preservation of complexity and the analysis of dramaturgy. As scholars widely acknowledge, there is deep complexity to be found in any ethnographic research setting. Will this be shown graphically and felt intellectually in the layout of data? Finally, there is the question of dramaturgy. For the point where domination, subjugation, control and power differentials are played out in any interview setting is also closely linked with all the problems mentioned above. How will such sorts of problems be dealt with in the framework of analysis? Danger lies in the possibility that such matters will simply be glossed over and ignored as if they do not exist: as if "everything in the garden is lovely": congenial and cooperative among the informants and their intruding ethnographer.

### The Data Analysis Process

Jones (1985a; 1985b) gives usefully clear guidelines to the lone researcher for analysing data derived from depth interviews. Beginning with rough copy on large pieces of paper, the researcher wrote down constructs that seemed important to the informant. There were one hundred and eight such constructs for the interview chart compiled for Informant A. Of ten, for each of these constructs, polar opposites were also compiled and noted. This convention, to make use of paired constructs, derives from Jones (1985b, pp. 60-1), who cites Kelly (1955). The process uses the idea that people afford meaning to their personal constructs through contrasts explicitly or implicitly given in either the foreground or the background of their discourse.

Although clearly an arduous task, taking much of the researcher's time, this compilation process has several advantages. It avoids the rarefaction of data through excessive summarising and consequent drift away from expressions used by informants. It both preserves and deals with the interview as a whole, also giving a close study of minute details in each interchange or other unit of data. It mirrors the traditionally anthropological value of combing the data repeatedly for what it says by probing for both positive assertion and subtle suggestion, frequently revealed in the "Y" polar constructs. For what is not asserted at any point of interchange may also be brought into focus by this method and given due significance. An example of this process has been set out above (p. 133).

The process developed further as the researcher then drew lines to link those constructs that appeared to belong together in the mind of the informant and then went on to compile notes on the reasons for those linkages. The intention with this process is to try to represent theories which informants might be developing. These are typically about how persons, groups, ideas and actions are causally or associatively linked in their organisational experience.

The report now moves directly forwards into the body of the depth interview data analysis. Not further elaboration about the process, but direct experience of it, is what is now required. It is in the analytical penetration of data, and not in its mere description, that new insights are to be met. To that part of the project the report now turns.

## INFORMANT G

The study now turns to examine a picture of organisational life centred on how one actor responded to situations that led him on finally to talk about absolute frustration. Researchers need informants such as Informant G. They are needed badly for providing any prospect of progress in understanding organisational process. They are ready, any time, to talk through the problems and to see them whole. They give us the culture, without trying too much to interpret the material for us (Spradley, 1979: 1980). Moreover, they are highly able: articulate in their turn of phrase; honest about their own lack of progress; cooperative about time given to the grounds of problems; and well experienced in the setting. They are sensitive to the points of view of others. In particular, they can elaborate those of their adversaries in the conflicts encountered. Readers of the interview with Informant G will be struck by the well-rounded picture of dynamic organisational conflict that comes through.

The interview transcript is presented below, with paragraphs numbered for reference in the data analysis section.<sup>2</sup> Current frustration is the focus of his comment. That frustration must be painted using the tantalising hues of success and partial fulfilment. No standard operating procedures have yet been set in place for dealing with problems of how to expand EDD operations into neighbouring units across the campus. This raises questions about the

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<sup>2</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 275-86.

standard operating procedure as a genre of social action. Where does it derive its power? How can a standard operating procedure be formed, authorised and established, which goes directly against currently felt hostilities and disagreements? For if there were such entities identifiable in the social setting occupied by EDD work activities, then the innovation would be seen to be diffused throughout its host organisation (Levine, 1980). That the reality is very far from this goal is part of the burden of the following section of the report.

In reading the following analysis, certain logical points need to be kept in mind. The interview transcript moves through time in linear sequence. As such, it does not present the informant's developing theoretical logic, which needs to be reconstructed in logical space. Analysis searches out lines of causality. Reconstructing the informant's theoretical logic carries the major burden of this thesis section.

### Escalation of Conflict

The interview transcript for Informant G opens by identifying a locus of legitimation in the developing academic interests given in the interview. A departmental open door policy brings a stream of students seeking help on a range of academic skills development problems.<sup>3</sup> The informant tells how he works along with a sister institute, the Western Institute, which was later to become amalgamated with the Footscray Campus and would add its presence to the steadily accumulating Victoria University of Technology. Further to this mode of development, recruitment to new positions of domination and subjugation is given. This process is clear from certain "X" constructs: "Sometimes they ring up or come by . . ." (G03X); and "Sometimes a student has been referred . . ." (G04X). But also, a close study of polar opposite "Y" constructs gives useful additional weight to the social process argument, as in: *meet them only in scheduled classes* (G03Y). Also, against (G07X) "Probably my brief would be science and maths . . . my main area is in biology, chemistry and physics . . . but seeing now that I am doing a psychology degree, that is starting to creep in too", the polar opposite: *confine work to predetermined areas* (G07Y) adds to the argument. They name certain modes of work that Informant G avoids. Meetings with students in scheduled

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<sup>3</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 275.

classes are not the only, nor the most significant, way of meeting with them. The informant's work settings are not confined to set boundaries around areas of discipline content or modes of interaction: "I was on loan to them [teacher education] for some basic fee which they paid to EDD" (G11X/Y). Finally, this actor seems to avoid the Parsonian negative process, dedifferentiation, as with many others included in this survey of interviews. Proliferation of new roles in wider settings is at the centre of EDD ideology: ". . . so they can use this knowledge to develop their nursing skills: becoming more aware of the different personalities they might meet" (G09X). As Bourricaud (1977) outlines, commenting upon differentiation as a "cardinal point" in Parsons' theory of action:

Differentiation [as splitting or proliferation of roles], provides the actor with an escape from the dilemma [faced] when [he or she] must contend with adversaries holding views diametrically opposed to [her or his] own (p. 195).

Informant G deals with problems in academic skills development teaching. These are pointed out to him during interviews with a range of students, and with their more approachable, problems oriented lecturers. He sees solutions as setting up further role-centred units of endeavour, with students from a wider catchment area than previously serviced, and with staff from other units yet unmet. There are no limits to this person's energy directed at ideas fostering imagination and program innovation.

There is, however, a negative, more conflict-ridden side to this Parsonian social process. It is outlined, again, by Bourricaud. The idea carries overtones of conflict theory, which, it must be allowed, can be traced in some lines of Parsons' theory:

When a growth process encounters obstacles, however, differentiation is neither an inevitable result nor an optimal solution to the problems to be faced. The mere fact that tycoons, engineers, and the general public enter into a period of tense relations no more guarantees that a transition to a "higher form" of organisation will take place than the troubles of adolescence necessarily presage happy adulthood (p. 195).

The situation, for Informant G, may yet go up or down, as further analysis in this section will go on to explore. Dedifferentiation, for the EDD, could well take the form of a halt to expansion in roles and settings or a down right contraction in them: what Levine might call "enclaving of the innovation" (Levine, 1980).

Moving further through the interview transcript, three polar opposite constructs underline how members of staff in the unit work against a background of continuing potential conflict.<sup>4</sup> These "Y" constructs are united under the one notion that lecturers in higher education cannot be relied upon, universally, to welcome ideas on their teaching methods and modes of delivery: "It is not something that you can leap into; and always you get a very great difference in reaction to it" (G26Y). One elaborated case on an interstate campus is used to legitimate the need for a "slow and steady" strategy (G27Y).

I guess the strategy is slow and steady. We have heard of other situations: as in Adelaide, last year, where the person who was in charge of the developmental unit there: the person who is in charge of it, apparently rubbed a lot of the other lecturers up the wrong way. That person would sit in on the lectures and proceed to tell the lecturers where they could improve. And of course, I don't think that is the way to go at all.

There is a long list of items coming forward at this point that outline what EDD members of staff do not do. EDD members of staff do not assume a "frozen organisation" where change will not come (G21X). They do not proceed only through work with members of the teaching staff outside the unit (G21X). They do not proceed by openly stating goals and strategies (G21X). They do not overlook personal contacts as opportunities for further progress (G23X) and they do not maintain non problematic approaches to other units on the campus (G23X).

Strangely, if polar opposite "Y" items are listed from this interview, they begin to look like a populist textbook treatment of up-to-date management strategies:

- \* openly state goals and strategies
- \* assume that people welcome opinion on their work
- \* work directly with professionals in the organisation
- \* assume a frozen organisation where change will not come by itself
- \* maintain a non problematic approach to change

Reversing the reality emerging from this interview, rules for the way forward among managers begin to look like the following: make clear to everyone the goals and strategies; find out as

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<sup>4</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 278-9.

much as one can about the organisation (as if it will stand still long enough for that purpose); begin at "the top", and go to work there to establish firm control of the situation; understand, non problematically, how the organisation works, and that will provide answers to management problems and likely improvements. In the light of this evidence, certain questions arise. Since lines of interpretation have traced such clear pathways around normalised or commonplace channels of organisational understandings, just what has been going on in this small campus unit? How have such apparently subversive modes of work become so well entrenched in the organisational culture?

Further significant material in the interview transcript traces the outlines of a clear organisational saga developing around the figure of the head of the department.<sup>5</sup> Polar opposite constructs in relation to this social reality emphasise how newcomers, however highly recommended, often lack power at the outset in the local setting (G45Y). Informant G has given clear connections between the head of the department's long-term standing on campus and the growing success of EDD in penetrating the other units. This saga is closely associated with the idea of incremental change strategy harnessed to the task of radical change.<sup>6</sup> This point finds legitimation through a series of small steps that were in breach of two norms. The first norm centres on the idea that EDD staff await approaches from other departments for opportunities to work with their students (G28EY). The second norm, and the more widely entrenched of the two, is that students independently adjust to learning problems met in higher education. A corollary follows: that they be left to stand or fall in the system by the success or failure of those personal adjustments (G28EY). The first breach in norm falls to the question of so-called elites in the system and their requirements to maintain and defend their positions of dominance, which carries pressures to defend the legitimacy of that dominance. The second breach in norm falls to the question of expanding markets: the movement towards mass participation in higher education, and carries pressures to attack the legitimacy of the implied subjugation among new groups of disadvantaged students entering the system.

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<sup>5</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 283-4.

<sup>6</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 280-1.

The interview transcript presents a conflict picture that raises direct questions about the nature of the grounds of decision.<sup>7</sup> Latent interests are now becoming clearly articulated and rendered manifest. One polar opposite "Y" construct: *remain content to enclave the innovation* (G28EY) remains anathema for EDD ideology: innovation enclave is directly opposite from the cherished prize sought in all endeavour. The much pursued conflict resolution idea, so cherished by many marketeers of populist programs for organisational improvement, comes in for some rough treatment in this setting. It is important to note how Informant G tells about aftermath circumstances that continue to "ferment" the conflict (G31X; G32X; G33X). Counterpart polar opposite "Y" constructs bring out the sedate picture that is simply no longer there, if it was ever: clarity of decisional purpose has disappeared: "... they are sort of stuck" (G39Y); quietude does not imply the disappearance of the conflict: "When students approach me now for help, I do offer assistance to them individually, but I insist that they agree to attend the lectures and tutorials in the Physics Department" (G37Y); and the big one, the general status of EDD in the wider campus setting, remains the deepest issue: put to one side, but not forgotten: "Yes, unfortunately, and we haven't got a great deal of power. When it comes to political, . . . we've got the lowest niche" (G40Y). This "Y" construct remains the central point for the whole interview. This one small polar opposite construct, among a constellation of fifty plus constructs, reaches deeply into the collective consciousness of the whole group, while reaching out to touch every unit across the campus and beyond. In such ways Informant G tells the story of frustration and a complete block to progress. Where, now, lay the grounds of decision? Who has decided what, under what circumstances, for whom, and to what purpose? It would appear that inquiry into such sorts of questions must remain a research issue seemingly impossible to resolve, even with further time and abundant resources.

### Thematic Analysis

The study now turns back to reconsider matters on a higher level of abstraction. From a review of constructs derived from Informant G's interview transcript, the focus now moves

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<sup>7</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 280-1.

FIGURE TWELVE: INFORMANT G:  
KEY EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT  
(See below, **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 275-86)

THEMATIC IDEA	KEY CONSTRUCT	POLAR OPPOSITE CONSTRUCT
EXAMPLE A. <b>The continuing climate of conflict theme:</b>	"... it is not something you can leap into [talking to people about ways of lecturing in chemistry]; and always you get a very great difference in reaction to it" (G26X)	<i>lecturers universally welcome input on their teaching methods and modes of delivery</i> (G26Y)
EXAMPLE B. <b>The gradualist imperative theme:</b>	"... yes, I guess the strategy is slow and steady" (G27X)	"we have heard of other situations [where direct input on other lecturers' work has been given] and, of course, I don't think that is the way to go at all" (G27Y)
EXAMPLE C. <b>The strategic recruitment theme:</b>	"... it probably needs, fairly soon, another half step forward: I have got a couple of people in mind who I am going to contact and work forward with them" (G28X)	<i>maintain a non-problematic approach to these other units</i> (G28Y)
EXAMPLE D. <b>The radically incrementalist strategic change theme:</b>	"... a large number of students in the Department of Nursing failed the physics unit... this presented as a deep crisis in the wider campus setting" (G34E); action taken to expand EDD activity: "... run a set of revision tutorials" (G34E) [causal direction remains problematic between these items]	<i>accepted as a norm for such a group of students ... if students don't attend lectures, then they don't deserve to pass ... the students are being lazy, they are not making the effort</i> (G34Y)
EXAMPLE E. <b>The escalation of conflict theme:</b>	"... make further arrangements, a continuation of tutorial services, that look like a compromise, but which effectively establish grounds for further conflict" (G35EX) [displacement of persons in authority relations happening at that point]	<i>conflict resolution as the disappearance of the conflict</i> (G35EY) [quite possibly, this never typically happens in higher education organisations]



FIGURE TWELVE: INFORMANT G:  
KEY EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT  
(See below, **Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 275-86)

THEMATIC IDEA	KEY CONSTRUCT	POLAR OPPOSITE CONSTRUCT
EXAMPLE F. <b>The grounds of continuing climate of conflict theme:</b>	" This is a big stumbling block: a big brick wall in the Department of Physics which at this stage is almost insurmountable" (G29X) " Everyone's hands are now well and truly tied: Nursing and Physics remain at loggerheads over the issue as physics studies are required by the accreditation document" (G.35EX)	<i>the conflict resolved to the point where it has disappeared</i> (G29Y; G.35EY)
EXAMPLE G. <b>The conflict remains unresolved in the collective setting theme:</b>	"I am very frustrated. I don't know how to get a round that, I can't" (G52X)	<i>work goes forward according to plans and recurrent assumptions about expending EDD work with other departments</i> (G52Y)

on to consider broad thematic ideas found at key points in the interview. These are set out in Figure Twelve (above). New and useful categories will be drawn together, in search of how inquiry into the grounds of decision making may now identify and explain more socially dynamic modes of operation. The special picture for Informant G is built around four thematic categories. There are three examples that reflect aspects of the cultural scene (Examples A, F, G). Three further examples reflect action recurrently undertaken within that cultural scene (Examples B, C, D). One example reflects deep crisis and dialectical interface between the cultural scene and the action frame of reference (Example D, again). Finally, one example reflects structural change: the virtual displacement of persons in authority relations caused by all the above (Example E). The report now turns to consider the detailed development of this picture

Continuing climate of conflict theme. Three separate aspects of the continuing climate of conflict theme are clearly presented in items set down for consideration on the chart. First,

there is the role set embedded in the outlook given by Informant G. Example A raises this. We may note how Informant G holds a diffident attitude towards approaches to other members of staff about innovations in teaching certain discipline studies. Secondly, there is deeper sedimented layering now taking place and hardening between the various arms of developing conflict groups. Example F raises this, pointing out how there is a developing reality outside embedded role sets given by Informant G and mutually held in place by various groups: "everyone's hands are now well and truly tied". Thirdly, there is the absence of any resolution of this conflict as conflict disappearance. Example G takes this up where Informant G points out how he remains frustrated. He does not drop the matter. Professional roles and functions demand that day by day, week by week, the informant must live on with the situation. It is important to note how much of this derives from enforced coalitions: group membership that was not initially chosen by the informant, which changes its nature over time, and from which he is not obliged to withdraw. Such sorts of dynamics seem now to be pictured in recurrent terms for members of staff in the EDD. Put sociologically, they make up aspects of order in the action and order interface.

Radically incrementalist strategic change theme. Three examples identified for the radically incrementalist strategic change theme show, through the action frame of reference, steady progression towards deep crisis. These depict what members of EDD staff do as strategic moves within the background of a culturally ordered setting, as outlined above. Example B reflects a *gradualist imperative*: "... yes, I guess the strategy is slow and steady". Example C reflects *strategic recruitment*: "I have got a couple of people in mind who I am going to contact and work forward with them". Example D presents a crisis: action taken to expand activity with one department was made against a background of this crisis. What remains causally problematic throughout analysis at this point, is sequence in the chain of events through tutorials, tests, outcomes, tutorials and tests? What prompted what? Had relations with the Physics department laid foundations for further moves towards taking responsibility for physics tutoring, or had the crisis in examination results prompted the further successful probes, and a compliant response? Such questions are crucial to a linear approach to understanding decision making. They fall away, however, under the present steady progression through the accumulation of a picture through dialectical conflict. The cycle, when assumed to be omnipresent, can be shown to escalate under certain conditions; but such

conditions are best seen as "ferments", instead of ordered lock-step sequences or sufficient causes.

Locus of legitimation. All examples reviewed in this section of the report are, in one important sense, examples of loci of legitimation. They lay firm grounds for action and for accepting aspects of the cultural scene as the recurrent background for action. Example D, just reviewed above, is a prime example of such a point of legitimation. It outlines an interface between action and order. Action taken to expand EDD activity against the background of the crisis in examination results crystallised, or rounded out details defining the legitimation setting. Each seemed to feed upon the other. A chain of events was in motion in which the crisis prompted the action, and, simultaneously, the action prompted the crisis. This latter may be seen more clearly when we consider how the crisis itself would be thrown into relief far more vividly against a background of EDD action, or intended action, or possibility of action. In this sense, action itself, in the minds of the actors, can function as an aspect of cultural background. There might be a two-way reaction -at work, governing the process.

Escalation of conflict theme. The process outlined above finds its thematic culmination, in this interview, in the way in which Example E reveals structural change. Persons and groups have become displaced in authority relations across lines of conflict. Moreover, the displacement begins to look sudden, intense and violent. Staff and their students in the Nursing department now look to EDD staff as a source of tutoring in physics, and, moreover, this new resource now lies beyond confinement by the Physics department. Staff and their students within the Physics department are probably also well aware of this displacement. EDD staff and their growing client groups of staff and students will be aware of such a change, since it represents such a deep confirmation of the efficacy of their growing position and expertise across the campus.

Questions now arise about the real grounds of decision making in the setting given in this interview. Where are they located? Where does the decision making process begin? What are the boundaries of their developing content? Where and how may the process be seen to reach finalisation and formalisation into a regularised and detailed format? Such sorts of questions become strangely misdirected. Yet what has been outlined above is quite familiar and quite typical of one small development in one small campus unit taken from the whole

higher education setting. Academics develop expertise and interests around developing disciplines. They make moves upon territories and sub territories traditionally belonging to others. There is action and reaction. There is nothing unusual or unfamiliar in the setting that has been given above in this analysis.

It is a testament to the ethnographic integrity of the evidence given by Informant G that his own theoretical logic may clearly be traced through the interview transcript. Two clear pillars of understanding support his picture. The first pillar is made up of his professional regard for the head of the department; the second is his own developing academic interests tied to issues about progress forward for the EDD. However, such a confident edifice in practice and purpose suddenly seems to fall into the background when he turns to consider staff and students whose work lies yet outside the department. Deep uncertainties are brought out in the language used: "it is something that we are *hoping* we will do . . ."; "it will *filter its way* back up . . ."; "it *probably needs*, fairly soon . . .". Certainty returns, again, to the foreground of his account, in the following confident assertions: "certainly, we are now making inroads into certain departments" and "I guess the strategy is slow and steady". Yet, tantalisingly, crucial empirical issues are located right there, well into the background of Informant G's experience. Just how does this process work or fail among staff and students outside his department? What is its nature? What types of interactions serve to make up the various conflict processes that, in turn, lay down the real grounds for decision?

A similar sort of research problem emerges elsewhere in the transcript. Through a timetabling anomaly, Informant G is doubly blocked in seeking to act for his department with this group of students. All these lines of causality are clear, all the way up to the expressions of frustration and the acknowledgment of the "big stumbling block" to progress. What falls into the background are details of just what is happening out there in the conflict setting. Empirical inquiry seems warranted at this point: but where would one begin? How may the cycle of conflict and counter conflict be broken open to make some causal sense of these types of social interactions?

Questions arising at this point in the study assemble around how empirical inquiry may probe where and how such processes may be opened for more detailed explanation in a causal sense. With these issues now firmly on the agenda, the study turns to consider the interview for Informant D, a notable contrast with the account considered above.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DECISION MAKING AND MECHANISMS OF CHANGE

### ANALYTICAL APPROACH

The study now turns to examine the interview transcript for Informant D.<sup>1</sup> This interview, again, clearly analysable in terms of the informant's developing theoretical logic about the setting, gives a contrast with the previous analysis, as there are clues to progress on the empirical research agenda: inquiry into typical settings that make up the social grounds of decision. Informant D gave the culture centred upon radical changes in the technical, political, and social conditions of organisation that she held necessary for progress in the work of the Learning Centre sub-unit of the EDD.

Such change was sudden in the sense of displacement of persons in authority relations. Strategic recruitment processes within the conflict group setting resulted in new forms of domination and subjugation. These, in turn, resulted in escalation of rewards and facilities for both conflict groups, the students and staff. It is to that central picture, so clearly given by Informant D, which we are now able to turn, for information on how processes got under way in the conflict escalation movement within that particular circle of academic work. Again, a careful analysis of polar opposite "Y" constructs charted from the interview transcript gives a clearer picture in terms of what members of staff in the EDD both follow and avoid.

### Radical Changes in Conditions of Organisation

In contrast with the picture of dysfunctional social process given by Informant G, the account given by Informant D tells a different kind of story. We may note steady differentiation into what may be interpreted as higher orders of conflict groupings and recurrent social

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, pp. 246-50.

interactions. In this setting, the term higher order is used to signify that the EDD ideology of substantive analysis is being realised in the change process. The new order is higher in two senses. First, it further differentiates, and acts upon, scales of values among groups: in particular, certain NESB linguistic and cultural preferences. Second, such differentiation is held up, ideologically, as more desirable than the opposite, which is to act as if such diversities in cultural preferences do not exist.

Certain identifiable groups of students entering EDD programs brought along their traditional assumptions about the nature of the new social settings. Notable among these, was the assumption that the English language would prevail as the sole medium of communication and study. Added to this, the tutor would legitimately dominate all proceedings as the expert in the setting. Students would follow proceedings in consistently polite subjugation. Along with Dahrendorf, we may note an important point: that such subjugation does not necessarily go hand in hand with deprivation of rewards and facilities, a fallacy often met in discussions about domination and subjugation in social settings (Dahrendorf, 1959, pp. 200-1). Such sorts of subjugation, for students newly arrived in Australia from Asian communities, clearly held the means towards escalation of rewards and facilities within their new communities. Furthermore, if returning overseas after graduation, such means would apply "back home" as well.

All of this amounts to commonplace analysis, and not very significant. What warrants close study here, and does hold special significance, lies just alongside these facts. Not the students, but the tutors, the dominant group, set out to reverse the order of authority. This reversal proceeded in the interests of escalation of rewards and facilities for themselves, also for their students. They achieved this by means of voluntarily subjugating themselves, in certain strategically chosen settings, to the scales of values met in their students. The following analysis traces this important story.

The developing picture centres upon how academics used a range of techniques and strategies to try to open the learning process for groups of students brought into the setting. The transcript presents a steady accumulation of data on latent interests becoming manifest for both students and staff. Following summer and winter school programs, students were asked ". . . if they would like to continue anything or take a new direction that might be current or to reinforce something that might be covered" (D13X). Small groups were set up to watch videotapes with the tutor, with related written material (D13X). Groups held

discussions about "... how things that were in the tapes related to their own situations" (D13X). Again, polar opposite "Y" constructs give the picture from another perspective: what members of staff try to avoid. Activities are not bounded by course unit schedules (*assume that short courses are over at the end of classes, and that nothing more needs covering in that area of work* (D13Y)); academics do not expect students to work away in isolation: to succeed or fail autonomously, as may be, within a putatively impartial system (*assign students to study the video out-of-class* (D13Y)); and they are not habitually sent away to the library to research special materials for themselves (*leave it to the students to work out, for themselves, in out-of-class viewings, how materials may relate to their own situations* (D13Y)). This culminates, for Informant D, in useful outcomes. In her own words, she asserts, as follows: "And that, I feel, was most valuable, because they were able to say within the group, well, ... you know for me it's quite different" (D13X). She also articulates the polar opposite construct, as follows: "... and just to send students to look at a video in isolation doesn't enable them to look at themselves and how they approach things and come to terms with the way the tapes were made may be legitimately different from what's going on somewhere else. But that sort of activity runs its course" (D13Y).

Alongside this accumulating data, further considerations arise. The data presents a growing displacement in the campus wide value system towards EDD staff and their support services. The significance of certain "familiar constricted" types of decision making, noted according to Bradford Studies theory, begins to fall away (D01X; D02X; D03X). Deciding to "try things out", "looking, listening, and asking", "keeping in touch" and "talking", while readily acknowledged as necessary in the process, no longer look sufficient for the process.

The accumulating picture then moves through ways in which Informant D has drawn upon literature and brought this to bear upon processes of legitimation. Ideas centre upon her readings about "... the cultural disorientation of people who had recently arrived in the country ... ." (D11X). This lead on to considering "broader life issues"; the appointment of a mentor; and related activities on student acculturation. The process culminates in a firmly coordinated conflict group. "we played a part there in establishing a network of students" (D11X). Again, polar opposite constructs reveal certain significant pathways not followed by EDD staff. For they do not assume too much in common among the characteristic behaviours of their students. They do not always use publicly articulated, goals oriented, skills based approaches; and they do not leave student networking to the students (D11Y).

Remarks by the informant on aspects of work with NESB groups give further empirical evidence on the process of change. Two lines of connection trace how students themselves have influenced the running by rejecting electronic technology in favour of more personal contacts with staff. The following items from the transcript give the line of developing theory for the informant:

We've found that the technical equipment, we do use [it] to put variety into the program in summer schools; but generally it isn't something that attracts a lot of interest during semester (D08X).

Student interest is falling off, the informant comments upon usage rates:

The interactive video fit in more to the self-access category . . . so the interactive video; language mastery and all those sorts of things come under the heading of computer aided language learning; and you can see that our student numbers aren't very high there (D09X).

Again:

Well I think in a way it's been forced on us because students would much rather have interaction with ourselves; and I think that was one of the decisions behind the strong mentor program that we've got now and that one of the goals of the mentor would be to provide conversation practice (D10X).

Again, such material links closely with the many ways in which EDD staff used the substantive analysis imperative to firm up certain NESB groups as viable conflict groups in their own right (D11X). These influences, with Informant D's readings, have brought about the ". . . strong mentor program that we've got now."

EDD staff do not avoid innovation in the computer based learning technology. When students, however, appear to reject it, the staff probe for suggestions that may replace the new technology. The reversion to more interpersonal work with staff, however, is not a reactionary move in the sense of a harking back to more traditional ways of instruction. It results in a more radical move, passing power across to the students themselves: incorporating the NESB students' home languages and cultural perspectives in the instructional process. In terms of polar opposite constructs, EDD staff do not move at a steady lock-step pace through instruc-



tional materials. Nor do they keep to a rigid scale of values in which only the English language is held as the sole medium of exchange. Through an "immersion" strategy, such is often held up as in the best interests of English language skills development: a highly problematic assumption in the NESB instructional setting (D08Y; D09Y; D10Y).

Radical change has taken place here. Conditions of organisation have been modified in observable ways. These are seen in the following forms:

- \* the social conditions centred upon communication;
- \* the technical conditions centred upon study materials development along specific cultural lines;
- \* the political conditions centred upon notions of who takes or gives the running on points of procedure (Dahrendorf).

This last point covers political realities both inside small EDD operative groups on campus and outside those groups, where information spreads along new lines of communication about new modes of interaction inside them.

Rewards and facilities accrue, but not only to the students in this setting. Tutors also receive distinct advantages. The profile of EDD is raised among the NESB community both within and outside the campus: a highly cherished value, well established in recent local history, and widely fostered in the Western Melbourne community setting located around the Footscray Campus. Staff become associated with such increasing profiles. This process, in turn, firms up conflict group orientations across the wider campus, with results among both cooperating and non-cooperating staff members, and among students both inside and outside the boundaries of EDD academic work. Structural change now seems implied. They who once held the ground across certain discipline areas on campus now no longer seem to retain matters as they have managed it in the past.

### Thematic Analysis

Again, the study now turns back to reconsider matters on a higher level of abstraction. Figure Thirteen sets out key themes identified in the interview transcript for Informant D (see

opposite). The special picture for Informant D is built around a much more fluently cyclical or dialectical process than that for Informant G. The interview begins and ends with strategic recruitment, but goes on to show how an instance of mutual strategic recruitment, carried out between tutors and students, reflects a close interface between action and order. No "deep frustrations" here, nor "brick walls" built against progress, as in the interview for Informant G discussed above.

Strategic recruitment theme. Two items identified for this category give life to the special picture brought forward. Example A, Figure Thirteen, presents the EDD unit as it is seen to be in full flight, in the sense that new networks of students are being brought together over time (D11X). Example E underlines the point: how such new networks become institutionalised into the framework of the unit (D10X). As semesters and years go by, recurrent patterns in the action and order interface fill out such developing social niches with new faces and further modifications to the technical, social and political conditions met there. Quasi groups, undifferentiated masses and sub-groups of students, with much smaller and fewer groups of staff members both inside and outside EDD, become "recruiting fields for interest groups of the class type" (Dahrendorf). Some are successfully recruited, and some are not. Those that are, firm up oppositions across lines of implied authority over received and unreceived ways of doing things, and ways of seeing why things should be done as they are, or are not. Newcomers enter, and are required to choose. Those who are not successfully recruited become fields for recruitment to opposing interests.

All authority is potentially illegitimate, so opposition across lines of authority remains endemic. Since, in higher education, all concerns are so firmly based upon deeply felt judgements about discipline areas, and established locations of legitimation in them, any structural change arising out of such opposition can become sudden, rapid and violent. The "new network of students" brings new lines of authority for their group on the campus. Moreover, they now include EDD staff members among their ranks.

A new displacement has occurred. Some may see this as undermining a traditional view of student academic work centred on autonomous student survival or failure within the supposedly impartial system. Such a view may become legitimated through open references to "favouritism" directed at specific groups: "they are here, they have to pass". Such an opposition in developing interests will not go away. It will be brought forward again in time. The

**FIGURE THIRTEEN: INFORMANT D:  
KEY EXAMPLES DRAWN FROM INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT  
(See below, Appendix Two, Interview Transcripts, pp. 246-50)**

THEMATIC IDEA	KEY CONSTRUCT	POLAR OPPOSITE CONSTRUCT
<p>EXAMPLE A: <b>The strategic recruitment theme:</b></p>	<p>"... So I think we played a part there in establishing a network of students" (D11X)</p>	<p><i>leave student networking to the students</i> (D11Y)</p>
<p>EXAMPLE B: <b>The strategic change theme: modify the political and social conditions of organisation:</b></p>	<p>"one NUSB student could explain the concept better to another student in their first language" (D07X) "then the group would look at expressing that idea in English" (D07X)</p>	<p><i>use only English language to explain ideas set out in study materials that use English</i> (D07Y)</p>
<p>EXAMPLE C: <b>The two-way recruitment to interest groups theme: Who recruited whom? Who was training whom? Casts doubt upon the whole notion of "training":</b></p>	<p>"... our realising that students would much rather have interaction with ourselves" (D10X)</p>	<p><i>students prefer to work individually or in small groups away from tutors</i> (D10Y)</p>
<p>EXAMPLE D: <b>The substantive analysis/ anti-deficit analysis theme:</b></p>	<p>"... my reading on the cultural disorientation of people who had recently arrived in the country" (D11X)</p>	<p><i>assume that all students in higher education are the same in terms of wants (further qualifications), and needs (materials, resources, teaching time)</i> (D11Y)</p>
<p>EXAMPLE E: <b>The radical change theme: modify political and social conditions of organisation: AND The strategic recruitment theme:</b></p>	<p>"... the strong mentor program that we've got now to provide conversation practice" (D10X)</p>	<p><i>scheduling academic staff to give conversation practice is a waste of an expensive resource</i> (D10Y)</p>

"strong mentor program" has displaced certain previous assumptions about formal appointment of tutors and the traditional expansion of traditional academic work functions. Such a move brings a direct modification to the political conditions of organisation: certain students, appointed as mentors, may now be seen to be crossing the line between student and staff roles; or filling out support roles once reserved for formally appointed academic staff.

Processes that support the strategic recruitment theme. Example B, Figure Thirteen, gives a clear picture of how new orientations within the technical, social and political conditions of the organisation were being caused through direct modification (D07X). Following such sorts of recurrent interactions, as with one student "explaining the concept better to another student in their own language", the social setting, for those actors, staff and students alike, becomes changed forever. From dependency to independency, from passivity to activity, from reactive to proactive response: all such axes of recurrent interaction suddenly become open to empirical inquiry in pursuit of clearer grounds of decision both inside and outside the social setting. "Then the group would look at expressing that in English" underlines the return to an older order, but the older order has now changed. It now includes non-English linguistic and cultural concerns.

What begins to emerge in this analysis is the notion of distinct social forces at work in the setting. This reality changes the logic of explanation. The forces are not static. They impinge, vary, intensify and decrease, behaving like the tides or the rain. They do not begin or end like railway lines or sheep paddocks, as in assumptions of linearity and boundary. Such remarks now point up ever-widening cracks in the focal theory set down for this study. If sampled decisions, defined by, and continually subject to, such flux, remain impossible to boundary in finite terms, how then, may they be processed and explained in recurrent research study?

Example D, Figure Thirteen, draws upon a wide circle of cultural knowledge to picture a clear locus of legitimation for action taken by Informant D (D11X). This pictures a different process from that given in Example B. Informant D reads on cultural disorientation. It is the changing nature of the wider community that provides the reading materials. These arise out of the experiences of newcomers entering the community, to be captured and rendered articulate by authors sufficiently concerned about cross cultural issues in a climate of turbulence and change. The "cultural disorientations", patterns of belief and ways of

misunderstanding, remain hidden and undifferentiated before articulation into manifest form. Informant D's readings and presentation of ideas, action taken to legitimate new ways to understand matters within the department, also become part of the new background, the new order emerging then. In such ways, certain processes support the strategic recruitment theme.

Two-way recruitment to interest groups theme. It is to Example C, Figure Thirteen that we must turn to note a significant point about the nature of decision making in this social setting (DIOX). This construct gives the lie to much that is assumed about decision making processes and the confidence with which researchers often approach the topic. In decision making terms, it is arguably the pinnacle construct among a group of supporting constructs that lead up to, and support it (Examples A, B, D, & E, Figure Thirteen). It also underlines the unique nature of higher education units and the modes of decision making they foster at "the bottom" of the system.

A commonplace idea puts the matter clearly. This idea is often overlooked in talk about education, but it has been exploited in the popular musical comedy industry through the lyrical idea that "... if you are a teacher, by your pupils you'll be taught!" Against a "top down" notion of training, parenting counsellors point out how the baby trains the parent around breast feeding and nappy changing patterns. The class of children train the teacher about what weekly routines get smoothly accepted and built into the classroom life: "can we have more of our serial story today?". In small business, this comes forward in the truism that "it is the customer who owns the business": applying pressure about what gets stocked and what gets priced in various directions. In higher education, a rowdy group of adult learners will force interactions in directions that better suit themselves: clearer, brighter, more simplified overhead projection sheets; readings set at lower readability levels; less time given to formal lecture based presentations; less Friday afternoon classes, more Tuesday classes. The list goes on, and varies according to local circumstances. Finally, it may be asserted that although trainers may design training programs, they must also take account of how trainees often train the trainers.

Turning again to Example C: "... our realising that students would much rather have interaction with ourselves", we may note how it gives both the turning point in action and the cultural background newly fixed in place and recurrently visible to influence the deciding. In this sense, it reflects a steep interface between the two central sociological impulses for action

and order. But the reality reflected in the remark is something more than one significant detail in Hickson's "organisational background". Also, it brings Allison's notion of a standard operating procedure into a new form of life, showing how such recurrent regularised sorts of decisional phenomena may be driven by deep ideological impulse.

This becomes clearer when we reconsider how there is a mutual recruitment under way, and not just a one way recruitment. EDD teaching staff direct students to use the computer based, video interactive language development programs. These are well developed, prestigiously innovative and "high tech.". Students try them, but reject them, and show preference for approaching EDD staff members themselves for personal direction and support. Structural displacement has occurred in terms of interests and groups. Advocates of high technology have lost in this process. Students have begun to firm up their own group, demanding more personal intervention from EDD staff. On their side, staff have not rejected the students' requests. They have worked away in familiar fashion: planning new programs and schedules, organising resources and people, dipping into support funds to get the necessary finance together to fit such requests. Conflicts met along the way do not get resolved in the sense of disappearing from the cultural scene; instead, such resolutions as do occur, lay grounds for further conflict. Advocates of high technology will not go away, they will move to the background to count the costs, and rework their media developments. Allocated finance will one day be consumed, and committees will need to contest for more. Staff members will find that certain student groups will escalate demands for personal time. Sectors and groups yet unserved will be noting developments, and considering their own approaches for support.

In such ways, conflict groups, not decisions, appear to develop and change; and make up the grounds of decision. In higher education work groups, it seems, a necessary and sufficient condition for decision making is a point of interface between recurrent action and order where deeply felt ideologies are legitimately located on both planes at once: driving the need for action and filling in the background that makes up the framework of order.

Analysis at this point is now able more clearly to understand the highly experienced, clearly successful, and confidently held, outlook of this executive staff member. Indeed, the analysis may be used as a model for people seeking guidance in such sorts of support settings. The account begins with escalation in the political, social and technical conditions of the organisation. Political liberalisation was being furthered through the ethos that various matters

were being "trialled", and, by that, were not to be seen as set in concrete at any stage. Communicative liberalisation was furthered through "staff meetings over lunch", and through a range of approaches to students for advice: "to continue anything or take a new direction or reinforce something". Technical developments were furthered through "discussions about how materials on tapes relate to their own situations"; which, in turn, led to "personal comment from students about their own situations".

Further developments in the interview transcript bring together the three key points, in the action and order interface, centred upon "...our realising that students would much rather have interaction with ourselves". The other two points are the strongly held ideological preferences of students centred upon their home language and related cultural imperatives; and the setting up of the "strong mentor program" to give support within the cultural framework then emerging through articulation of interests at the heart of the EDD academic group. It needs to be noted how such ideas hang together quite loosely. Tracing final causal direction among such ideas would be highly problematic. What may confidently be asserted at this point is that, based on the evidence presented here, *they seem to interact closely and strongly upon one another.*

Familiar constricted decision making (Hickson) interacts with articulation of latent interests through changes in the political, social and technical conditions of organisation outlined above (Dahrendorf). These result in recruitment to more firmly outlined interest groups, but the relation remains one of interaction instead of causally directional accumulation. Legitimation through the literature, holding its place at the centre of the process, adds further evidence, because such literature is not typically absorbed and acted upon in piecemeal steps forward. Instead, it is typically read, re-read, referred to repeatedly from time to time, interpreted, and used piecemeal in staff discussion, or formally written into submissions for further funding. This is the picture for higher education work groups at the "bottom" of the system. This is the "factory floor" that Burton Clark spoke about, but did not get around to elaborate in detail at the basic interface where the decision making life ultimately comes to find its grounds

## OUTCOMES OF CHAPTERS SIX AND SEVEN

Ideological depth can now be seen to define the nature of decision making revealed in analysis of the interview transcripts for these two informants. Drawing upon research behind this report, it may be found to be the case that, in higher education units operating at the bottom of the system, authority relations centred upon ideologies define a unique kind of decision making. A steep ideological interface between action and order occurs when groups coalesce around ideas held up for agreement, and contrast with background circumstances. Thrown up against deeply felt ideological order found in key aspects of the cultural scene, this steep interface generates deeply ideological action leading to structural authority displacement. This is the case with two key thematic examples discussed for each informant in this chapter: Example D for Informant G, and Example C for Informant D. This part of the report now turns to elaborate this outcome.

It has been argued above that Example C for Informant D stands out as a thematic pinnacle among supporting peaks in a chain of mounting decisional pulses. The two-way recruitment to interest groups theme sits well supported by its minor themes. Clear links may be drawn from this construct to strategic recruitment, strategic modification of organisational conditions, the substantive analysis imperative, and radical change through modification of organisational conditions. Example D for Informant G, the radically incrementalist strategic change theme, splits apart the ideological landscape of the university. On the one side lies EDD belief in support services for students lacking a background in physics studies. On the other side lie more widely held beliefs in leaving students to their own devices for survival within the so-called impartial system. Action taken to expand EDD activity at this point was anticipated and structurally supported by three themes: continuing climate of conflict, gradualist imperative, and strategic recruitment. It is important to note how Example D: the radically incrementalist strategic change theme, takes the pinnacle position above Example E: the escalation of conflict theme. This remains true, since, as reported at the centre of the interview transcript, all players in the conflict were taking simultaneous action about the escalating matter. Although this pictures the heightening of conflict, it does not highlight the pinnacle point of action. Action taken by Informant G, and other EDD staff, to expand EDD activity, steepened the interface between action and order. It follows from this, then, that the pinnacle theme, radically incremental strategic change, became antedated by three further



support themes: escalation of conflict, with grounds of continuing climate of conflict, and the conflict remaining unresolved in the collective setting. Example D, therefore, looks like the prime decisional point for this conflict setting. But it may not be usefully seen as the sole grounds of decision in this instance. It remains meaningless without its constellation of minor supporting peaks that hedge around it and fill out essential details for picturing the action and order interface.

For Informant G, it was failing students within the regularised higher education system that forced recruitment to new conflict groups and drove decisional action towards an escalation in crisis and conflict. For Informant D, it was staff going along with an impulse for mutual recruitment to a new conflict group formation that drove decisional action there. What do these two differing examples hold in common? Now that certain linearity doctrines have been set aside, new and possibly more explanatorily useful characteristics may be brought forward as defining characteristics of decisions and decision making in higher education institutions. The following remarks outline some of these defining characteristics. Both constructs, located as they are at the centre of decision making process, show deeply held ideological content. Moreover, this appears readily linked with reverse ideologies located in the background features of the cultural scene. Both link strongly to a chain of support constructs that show both distinguishing and overlapping thematic characteristics that set up a chain of family resemblances. This complex of constructs lends a more multi-dimensional picture that departs from the linearity notions of decision making isolated in discussions given above in this report. In this picture of decisional process, *there are no beginnings, no endings, and no clear boundaries around decisional content*. Yet both constructs are the pinnacle decisional points of departure for new action, and, in the classic sense of traditional analysis directed towards understanding decision making, they show clearly where the impulse for decisional action finds its grounds. How this picture may now be drawn together for final review of key questions and theoretical points selected for this study becomes the main focus of inquiry from this point. To that task the report now turns.

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## CHAPTER EIGHT: SUMMARIES AND CONCLUSIONS

Bounded linearity, an idea traditionally applied to talk about decisions and decision making, now begins to fall away. It saw decisions as compiled units of content, built up through time and phases of "committed" activity, defined by boundaries, set in place for filing, and portable from place to place. Inquiry based upon this view set out to categorise decisional items along a scale. Research on decisions and decision making in higher education may not, any longer, make sense while using this approach. For the researcher who sets out to sample decisions seeks an illusion. Such ideas need to be replaced by a different view of decisions as resurgent pinnacle points of meaning.

We may now note resurgence as an attribute of decisions, showing how they do not seem to remain static within social settings. Seen now as pinnacle points of meaning, instead of as bounded units of content, we capture certain ways in which actors use them. They become tools used to range widely within their familiar cultural scenes and social settings. Points of meaning seem to take on a life of their own, free of fixed form and content. They refer between other pinnacle points in the setting, as has been outlined above in this report (see above: commentary upon Figure Thirteen, Chapter Seven). Widely and deeply across fields of legitimation, actors in this higher education setting use them to both support and undermine; and, by that dual process, to displace: persons, ideas and programs held in authority locations.

### THE REVIEW PROGRAM

The report now turns to review how research interests, questions and theoretical points, have held up in the light of study outcomes. Theoretical realignment has taken place, enforced by ethnographic process, and enriched in by attendant analytical outcomes. What now

may be said about the nature of that realignment? Which particular schools of thought or traditions, in theory on strategic decision making, raised for consideration earlier in this report, have been touched by study outcomes? Which remain untouched?

The thesis has fulfilled research interests, as set out in Chapter One. It has confirmed how entry into organisations can be made by means of sampling decisions and observing decision making among actors at all levels. Bradford Studies materials showed the way for this introductory process. Early research approaches such as these, however, will likely break down under due ethnographic process, as informants introduce their own, culturally determined, categories. Resurgence in decisional dynamics seems constantly to undermine research moves towards analytical certitude. Such outcomes derive from proximity to informants' local terminologies and ways of seeing within their respective cultural scenes. Broader case study approaches intrude as later research interests develop on the basis of initial inquiries.

In respect of research questions listed in Chapter One, the thesis has answered some, and generated others. For group one questions (see above, p. 6), the search for types of decisions and decision making unique to higher education social settings must now persist. Category driven outlooks, such as those of Hickson and Allison, remain somewhere in the middle ground of the field, but begin to fall away. Higher education social settings would seem unique in the depth of ideology to be met at all levels of the system. This may well include members of campus staff in administration, a much neglected field of inquiry. For group two questions (see above, p. 9), the thesis presents insights into the nature of decisions and decision making among small groups of academics. Outcomes from the two item pile sorts and the two case studies now have something to say about the unique nature of such social phenomena. After dispensing with group three questions as too broad for the present study (see above, p. 10), the thesis has much to say about group four questions (see also above, p. 10). The present chapter draws together outcomes that address applicability of Bradford Studies ideas to small campus units in future studies of this kind.

Among the theoretical propositions listed at the end of Chapter Two (see above, pp. 49-50), three taken from Clark provide much fertile ground for development, as outlined in conclusions set out below in this chapter. Since Clark, alone among commentators upon higher education social process, names certain key elements in that process, close attention is given to try to extend his work. There is "much discretion" and "much that trickles up", he says, but he does not then proceed to fill in details about the substance of that discretion, nor

the influence that trickles. The contributions section of this thesis now draws together outcomes in respect of these research inquiries.

The following section addresses an agenda set down in Thesis Part One. It reconsiders views of Burton Clark against study outcomes. There follows discussion on views of Hickson *et al.*, to consider their revised application to the field. The thesis ends with discussion on prospects for further case study research based on study outcomes.

## VIEWS OF BURTON CLARK

Discussion now turns to views of Burton Clark. Do study outcomes modify those views? When people engage in commonplace talk about decisions and decision making in units, they often ascribe rigidity to the decisions and fluidity to the social structure. Informant D gives a typical example when she makes assertions about valued achievements set in a context of fluid social interchange (see above, Chapter Seven). Decisional statements appear rigidly set, as in concrete, shown in the following items: "our realising that students would much rather have interaction with ourselves"; "the strong mentor program that we've got now to provide conversation practice" and "we played a part there in establishing a network of students". Their social context, by contrast, is presented as fluid, suggesting that anything can happen any time, as in the following items: "during classes with NESB students issues would arise"; "one NESB student would explain the idea better to another student in their own language"; "then the group would look at expressing that idea in English" and "over lunch people could talk about how hard it is here". Operative among these sorts of items is use of the terms "would" and "should", suggesting intrinsic fluidity in the social setting.

As far as this categorised ascription of rigidity to decisions and fluidity to social structure is widespread in talk about decision making, it remains a category mistake. Understanding the nature of social reality centred upon decision making seems to require the obverse. We now need to understand how rigidity frequently belongs with social structure, and fluidity belongs with decisions and decision making.

This idea now drives the contributions discussion. In two distinct sorts of ways, it governs how background and focal theory are now seen differently as an outcome of this study. The first way points out how background theory, until now insufficiently developed as decision

making related to small groups in higher education, through notions of non-linearity, becomes confirmed and more usefully elaborated. The second way shows how focal theory, already well developed in detail along linearity lines, and already clearly related to group decision making interaction, needs to be broken down, modified and more usefully confined.

### Multidimensional Research

Study outcomes given here call for a more multidimensional point of view brought to bear upon understandings about decisions and decision making. "Multidimensional" is an idea that suggests a form of inquiry in social research that tries to take in a range of approaches, including some attempt at inquiry over time. It stands in contrast to the single snapshot approach typically sought in positivist studies. At the level of theory, the present thesis attacks the linearity doctrine. This has been defined in terms of notions about decisions as bounded entities. They are seen to begin, develop within defined boundaries of content, and proceed, in sequence, towards finalisation. This imagined process makes up too limited a view for explaining how decision making gets under way in higher education work groups at the "bottom" of this system and its units. By contrast, the argument put forward in this study takes in ideas of dialectical conflict as a way of seeing how legitimation works in decision making.

Dialectical conflict acts through "fermentation". This means that it needs to be seen as one causal factor among others. It sets up conflicting outlooks, which, in their turn, define the social grounds of decision (Dahrendorf, 1958). Decision makers in higher education spend much energy on defending or attacking the legitimacy of authority structures. Such activities typically focus upon developing loci of legitimation. These turn up in some quite surprising places, among an array of locations unique to higher education. Moreover, the conflicts can often become rapidly escalated, intensified, and violent. Such activity, embedded in daily talk, needs to be clearly interpreted as violent in the sense of consolidation and displacement of individuals in and around entrenched authority positions. In this organisational clamour, it is not useful, therefore, to go searching for clear boundaries around sampled decisions. Discussion needs now to reconsider these realities.

Theoretical realignment, in this study, hinges upon two pairs of ideas. These are rigidity or fixity and fluidity or resurgence. Study outcomes apply them to, or withhold them

from, certain categories of ideas in the field of inquiry. Such understandings need an abundance of detail about informants' talk and social settings. They derive from interpretation and analysis of field work data. These coalesce, ultimately, to form the new picture of decisions and decision making in this higher education unit.

As with much theory given elsewhere, the process uses analogy and metaphor to try to bring out details of interplay between theory and data. In such ways, following Craib (1984), the new point of view takes in both pairs of ideas. Rigidity/fixity attaches to social structure, and fluidity/resurgence, to decisions and decision making. Such ideas will now be applied to a range of aspects central to the field of inquiry. Since inquiry in this study often centres upon social relations in decision making, the new ideas will sometimes look like they are "not available to the agents themselves" (Craib, p. 27). In that sense, discussion in this chapter will, from time to time, appear alienated from reality. We may note, however, that this is an essential element of theoretical elaboration about relationships in social settings. Two dimensions make up this new understanding, and the following section discusses them in sequence. The first addresses decisions *per se*, the second, decisions and decision making in social context.

### Decisions *per se* and Decision Making

Beginning with decisions *per se*, we can say much about the old ways in which they were perceived. People spoke about them, and researched into them, as discrete items available for detailed listing. Researchers set out to map them, tracing their origins or birth in ideas located in time and space. In time, their domain became distinguished from that of implementation. For they became an effects of the research process in their own right: a dangerous outcome for adequate understanding in any field of inquiry. Artefacts of the research process are an outcome, held to be counter productive, when conclusions can be traced back as outcomes of the research method chosen, and not the data gathered for inquiry. In practical work settings, academics frequently assume ownership of decisions and decision making as central to the process. The term blueprint may arise in discussions and proposals. This assumes that itemised details in decision making may be fixed in place for transfer across parts of the organisation. Such assumptions, always seductively acceptable in

talk around a table, are dangerous for economy of organisational resources. It would be tedious to go on to build illustrative detail in support of these points. Documents circulating in committees and forums throughout the higher education system may be found to contain many examples of such characteristics attached to decisions and decision making.

Present study outcomes, by contrast, point to decisions *per se* as very different from this. They more resemble intermittently perceivable points upon waves on a sea of change. Here, research talk departs from commonplace talk about the subject of study. The artefact has suddenly disappeared, for it is being replaced by an idea more fitted to the new understandings. At this point we need to remember how even the commonplace term "sunset" can be questioned, if perceived as an artefact. Poets and lovers may well talk about the beauties of sunsets, but they need also to be understood as "horizon risings". The new term, awkward and confronting as it may sound, may be used, at least to give to a child, some clear idea about the earth's rotation and their own location in the process. Scientific understanding requires a new language, born of more useful ideas.

With such provisos made clear, we may now go on to say much more about decisions *per se*. Like pinnacle points upon waves on a sea of change, they may remain regnant for a moment, they may threaten for a moment, even appear awesome for a moment. However vividly they may appear in the mind's eye, we need always to understand how they transmit their influence as overriding meanings in widely elaborated meaning systems. They may enforce concern, then go on to enforce their application, but they will inevitably then be lost from view in the ebb and flow that follows. This loss may often occur before their effective application. Universal futility is avoided, for this idea, if it is kept in mind that the decisional points upon these waves transmit their likenesses in further pinnacles that take over beyond their own influence. It needs also be kept in mind that the influential distance seems limited. To carry the image further, decisional points may rise to a crescendo, subside down again upon an easy swell, or drift away out of sight and seem to become lost in immeasurable calm.

Turning now to decisions and decision making in social context, we now may also say much about the old ways in which these were perceived. Decisions and decision making were held to be fixed in place by contract and set in concrete by consent. From this imposing position, it was typically held that they were not open to change through later arguments. Decisions firmed up in such ways were meant to maintain a fixed form and content against changing social relations. To assume so, is to see fluidity in social relations, a fallacy exposed

by outcomes from this study. Inevitably, in research, this view was bound to face difficulties centred upon certain social facts. People, and the groups they comprise, operate in enforced coalitions. This means that they live through the bulk of their daily working lives in and among groups that are not of their own choosing. This difficulty becomes further compounded by the fact that these coalitions and conditions are constantly subject to changes that are often beyond the control of any one individual or group. An administrator newly appointed finds the social reality different further along in time. The administrator herself undergoes change in outlook and ideology. New reality no longer resembles the old reality.

Maintaining fixity, or rigidity, in so-called authorised decisions, becomes harder, especially when those decisions have been brought forward to try to govern circumstances held sacrosanct. A case in point is given by the imposition, in higher education, to reduce funding by 3 percent per year, to try to get academics to work towards bringing in more consultancy money. Will this decision stand up over the next three years? Will someone's job finally disappear because of non-compliance? Might the decision lapse, and, if so, what was its status in the system when it was supposedly finalised? Was it a false decision, a non-decision, a mirage decision, or just a waste of time? Again, examples in support of these points may be found throughout the higher education system. Reviews of documents in higher education give evidence of this idea that decision making is held to begin, make progress, and reach finalisation, in fixed stages and points in time. Such documents arise from committees covering strategic planning, quality auditing and review, and course accreditation, to name a few. They typically give evidence of this notion that decision making is held to begin, progress, and reach finalisation, in fixed stages and scheduled points.

Present study outcomes, again, by contrast, now question these assumptions, in trying to bring clearer understandings of the process. Rigidity and fixity are terms better employed to characterise attributes of the social structure, not decisions and decision making. Rigidities in social structure enforce fluidity and resurgence in decisions and decision making.

How is this process typically carried out? Within the EDD unit, as confirmed above in interpretation and analysis of data, academics making decisions ran their programs around ideologies that were either articulated in detail or assumed in the background. These were made available to be brought into the light through research inquiry. Polar opposite constructs, employed in interview transcript analysis, etched in useful detail. The method of research became indispensable for the outcome of the research. Such ideologies as were



brought into the light, were seen to firm up conflict positions around issues perceived at certain points in time and circumstance. Thematic analysis of key constructs allowed this to be observed and logically interpreted. There, regnant pinnacle points of meaning were seen to assemble around points of conflict. Nascency, fluidity, resurgence, and mutually supportive substance were identified as defining characteristics of these items. Conflict, under these circumstances, drove the process towards seemingly inevitable outcomes that were dual by nature: authority in social settings was either taken, or given; there were no compromises. Program direction, decisional sway, and recruitment to new coalitions, are more clearly understood considering this duality in outcomes: the question of whose ideas or programs took, maintained, or gave the running at any given point in time and circumstance. New theoretical outcomes from this study centre upon decisions and decision making by academics in this small unit. We may now use such ideas to "specify in more detail the causal processes at work and the situations in which causal mechanisms come into operation" (Craib, p. 26).

### Clark's Propositions

It is time now to turn to re-examine certain key views of Burton Clark. How may these be given a useful reinterpretation, considering the currently developing point of view? Again, following Craib (1984), discussion needs to keep to a clear sense of purpose in theory. As Craib states, "It is not just a matter of specifying underlying structures, . . . since the theory must offer an explanation - in other words, it must have some conception of cause" (p. 24). So this section needs to go well beyond the suggestion that something causes something else. Discussion must also stipulate how that causal process is working out in practice (p. 24). The central task of this section, then, is to try to show how study outcomes renew certain key ideas raised in background theory. This entails detailed discussion, not of the whole corpus of Clark's work, but of certain key ideas selected because they closely relate to research problems and study outcomes.

Clark's point that "structure grants and withholds voice" is now better explained. The idea, as given in the source, does not sufficiently elaborate how this may be seen to go beyond "top-down" understandings (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962, pp. 947-952, in Clark, 1983a, pp. 107-108; and see above, pp. 49-50, listed theoretical propositions). The remark might be taken, by

many readers, for the suggestion that top levels of structure typically take the running: a dangerous idea for understanding what goes on in higher education. For it may be recalled how Clark saw the "fundamental task" as setting out to "discern broad patterns of legitimate power, authority rooted in the dominant locations of certain groups" (Clark 1983a, p. 107). Such broad patterns demand inquiry into more than just how leaders at the top retain their respective positions. Patterns of dominance among groups and sub-groups become the object of inquiry. Academics exercise dominance in a bewildering range of directions. Following the present study, we can now see how the statement remains true in such broadly defined terms. We may now consider how all people, in all tiers, give voice to their concerns, but only from within social structures that are not of their own choosing.

Also we can now go beyond this to be able to see how such voices may build their power within their own small circles of influence. Furthermore, we can also see how that ossified influence may often then turn its face towards other structures, in any one of many directions: up, down, sideways, also towards foreground and background matters. Perhaps structuring should not be taken as two-dimensional layering from bottom to top or from top to bottom. Perhaps we need to see structure in more multi-dimensional terms, with units of structure arrayed on separate levels, but also with movement between foreground and background dimensions of the imagined structural complex. Upper levels may seek to influence lower levels at the front, and *vice-versa*, but each may miss out by not directing influence towards background dimensions operating at each level. Within background dimensions of structure, influence might go on between the tiers, but out of sight, privately.

The new picture given by study outcomes, to see decisions as regnant points of meaning, intermittently at work within rigidly held social settings, enabled us to see more clearly how Clark's "structure" both "grants and withholds voice". We have already seen how this process works in broad terms, even in the most socially confined situations. The process is often far removed from committee tables, where, it is typically asserted, deep strategy is most likely to be worked out. Against this latter view, it has been shown how strategic process takes place even within individual staff and student interchanges;<sup>1</sup> within cultural sub-groups

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<sup>1</sup>Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts, p. 282, "[G37] When students approach me now for help ..."

identified among students;<sup>2</sup> and within politically active groups competing for ownership of tutoring programs<sup>3</sup>. Strangely, not the students, but the tutors, the putatively dominant group, in one scenario, set out to reverse the order of authority. They did this, it seems, in the interests of escalation of rewards and facilities both for themselves, and for their students (see above, Chapter Seven).

Clark's point that ". . . professional and scholarly expertise confers a crucial and distinctive kind of authority . . .", is further explained in detail by study outcomes given in this report. More particularly, Clark, in this important remark, uses the word "some" to qualify the nature of dominance typically felt where expertise runs its course (Clark, 1983a, p. 108, citing Moodie, 1976). Following the present study, it is now necessary to consider using the term "absolute" to qualify the nature of dominance arising from expertise. Also, it is necessary to go on to consider voluntary subjugation in absolutist terms as well. This latter point raises a further broad question.

Previous discussion of power and dominance in organisations neglected to consider how incumbents will voluntarily submit to the dominance of others. They frequently do this in the interests of perceived organisational, and/or personal, progress. Much discussion in the literature seems to have centred upon openly and vigorously contested power and authority, with little attention given to how and why people will frequently step aside to allow others to take the running. Study outcomes provide instances from data analysis that now support this need to try to take in a more complex view. There are many ways in which professional expertise may be seen to confer distinctive forms of dominance in and between groups and sub-groups in higher education systems and units. Taking account of such ways now enables us to both extend, and further elaborate, certain strong theoretical points in Clark's work.

Dominance and its Distinctive Kinds of Authority. Beyond pointing to the process as outlined in the interpretation and analysis passages cited above, little now needs to be said, just to list its features. First, the process is long. For it incorporates ideologies that may run deeply back into the past of actors. As three illustrations among many, we may note the

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<sup>2</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 248 "[D11] . . . so I think we played a part there in establishing a network of students."

<sup>3</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 280-2, [G31-G36E], the perceived conflict between Nursing, Physics, and the EDD.

apparent logical distance between construct items discussed at A64X (Informant A), G23X (Informant G), D10X (Informant D), and other items, linked to these, within their respective social settings; such logical distance masking the underlying interconnections revealed only through closer study. Secondly, and significantly for this study, the process is deeply decisional by nature: for it underpins and directs energies released in the interests of action choice. Thirdly, the process is grounded in mutually generativeregnancy among construct items revealed, above, in presentation, interpretation, and analysis of data. The interconnecting causal and referential logic between items is often located deep in the social setting, and hidden from view, without deep interpretation and analysis. Finally, the process seems held in place within rigidly formed dimensions of social structure. These are observable only through the paraphernalia of construct analysis employed in this study. So the process is evident. It extends and elaborates Clark's point of view about the distinctive nature of authority in higher education, and how it is exercised.

Discretion and its Attributes. Study outcomes also further elaborate Clark's point that "there is much discretion at the bottom of systems and units". Unlike the conferral of authority by professional expertise, best considered as a process, discretion needs to be considered as an idea. What, we now need to ask, are key attributes of examples supporting this idea, and where may they be observed? They may now be seen as attributes of decisional patterns showing distinctively fluid forms that proceed within structured social interchange. One central idea in socialisation theory holds that outcomes as settlement into patterns of social structure, though rigidly held, bring, paradoxically, freedom for individuals and groups. This point may well confuse lay observers, who, approaching a higher education system, look for, and expect to find, varieties of rampant and widespread academic freedom. "Ungovernable" is a term frequently used to characterise the academic world. They may well miss the mark in this respect: for freedom is not licence.

Chapter Seven, above, has discussed ways in which interview transcript construct items, and their polar opposite constructs, may be seen to be cross-referring between each other: how the drive to stop students making unreasonable demands upon time and resources, also drives the need to have students themselves clarify their own roles and recurrent study practices. Discretion at this point, whether practised by academic staff or cooperating student, appears

resurgently fluid due to this peculiarly long ranging cross-referral between construct items brought forward in the setting.

Fixity, rigidity, and bounded content, attached as attributes to decisions and decision making, seem to distort Clark's idea of discretion at the bottom of systems and units. If boundaries are thick around both social structural and decisional units, where and how, then, may discretion be exercised? Once decisions are authorised, and set in place, application only should then take over. Such predictable order is not the picture arising from this study. By contrast, fluidity, resurgence, and strategic interchangeability, attached as attributes to decisions and decision making, further elaborate Clark's idea of discretion at the bottom. Again, discretion, in this context, does not mean freedom or licence. It draws more meaning from deep running ideologies. These draw out long tenuous trails of interconnected meanings in the decisional process, many of them hidden from view, even to the actors themselves. Clark was, no doubt, aware of this process. What this study has achieved is to show one way of mapping out, in detail, how such processes operate. Where may actors turn their faces to support their ideologies? In what directions, and with what sorts of expressions, do they typically drive their programs? Such questions now become points of inquiry that need to be taken up in future studies of this kind.

Parallels Between Loose Coupling and Balkanised Authorities. Study outcomes also elaborate Clark's point that "the loose coupling noted in the division of work also has its parallel in balkanised authorities within systems and units" (see above, Figure Fourteen, p. 137, and see also Clark, 1983a, p. 132). They now go on to explain how, and by what extended processes, such authorities finally become entrenched. We can also now see how this point given by Clark strangely approaches logical inconsistency, unless it is further qualified. For the idea opposes the next point that "there is much that trickles upwards through systems and units and happens by slow accretion". This latter remark suggests that substances move across boundaries between the balkanised authorities. Such substances must not be just assumed, they need to be identified and explained. Furthermore, these two points also interact with a third. "Professionalisation of bureaucrats" relates to "layers of coordination above the institutional level". From this he concludes how "such staffs are notoriously removed from faculty and especially from students" (Clark, 1983a, p. 149). Such remarks seem to mitigate against "trickle up" ideas. In what ways do study outcomes rectify this apparent theoretical problem?

Clark's ideas drew our attention to the peculiarly entrenched nature of the higher education system. His work successfully warned us against taking too much for granted about the governability of such a professionally autonomous network. Study outcomes now give an important idea in qualification of his balkanised terrain. This is the idea that decisions are regnant points of meaning that are only intermittently at work within rigidly held social settings. By contrast, this suggests that they may not be readily assumed as permanently at work, following their finalisation, nor rigidly held in place within fluid or resurgent social settings. For such an idea, though widespread in daily talk and decisional documentation, now becomes a fallacy that masks the reality.

## DUAL RATIONALITY THEORY

Whereas Allison (1969; 1971), Braybrooke and Lindblom (1963), and Lindblom (1959), saw the lone decision maker as central; and Levine (1980) saw matters as more organisationally oriented; Hickson et al (1986a) tried to combine elements from a range of perspectives. In trying to build a process approach to understandings, their model of decision making separates two levels of operation: organisational and decisional (p. 166). Present study outcomes note problems from this point on in their exposition. Top Decisions puts forward a chronological bias at the heart of the decision making process. Linearity in decisions *per se*, and in decision making, drives this point of view. Decisions and decision making show certain problematic features. They contain clearly bounded content, display points of initialisation and finalisation, and have their substantive existence stored and filed in drafts, memos, position statements, and development plans. Arrows employed in their diagrammatic model show that standard operating procedures make up a background against which the real thing gets under way: decision making.

Perhaps this arrangement of diagrammatic units is unfortunate. A circular orientation in the diagram might improve it. This would show that all three influences can operate independently. They can impose upon both decisions *per se* or the decision making process, in oscillation, or in variable scales of influence, at any point in the process (Hickson et al, p. 166). As further exposition of their argument shows, however, such an attempt to improve matters by restoring independence among variables undermines their general theory.

In this model, decision makers oscillate between poles of concentration. A dual rationality theory sees decisional activity switching between problem-directed and interest-directed centres of influence. This point of view assumes that organisational interests, Allison's standard operating procedures, do not direct the decision making. Instead, organisational interests are seen as *laying down the ground rules against which the decisions are considered*. This point remains highly problematic for the present study context. Further, the model assumes that the decisional problem is coextensive with rational complexity, and that this latter point works to the exclusion of political complexity. Against this view, present study outcomes assert that political complexity may well form a "decisional problem" in its own right, and that discussion needs to address this aspect of decision making activity (pp. 167, 8).

Discussion needs to underline problematic assumptions behind certain wordings employed in the text. The following illustrates the chronologically prior position given to the rational, as opposed to the political, in arguments made:

Thus, as managers deal with the greater or lesser politicality of the decision-set *implicated in a topic*, influencing its interests and being influenced by them, they build up a decision making process for reasons different to *the solving of problems*, yet just as much inherent in the decision making (p. 168 [emphases added]).

Rational complexity is now seen as a kind of ur-complexity. It resides in the intellectual background afforded by any suggested decision. As such, it connotes a pure form of being at the heart of decision making, laid down at the beginning. This intellectual phenomenon, comprising the rationally conceived decisional complex, "the solving of problems", takes prime position in the process. For Hickson et al., interests are only "implicated in a topic", they are not the decisional topic, they tag along afterwards:

Sources are approached not only for information but to ensure that a decision is compatible with their interests (p. 168).

We may accept that this practice frequently occurs. Such approaches do not, however, cover all of the possible territory. They do not cover it like Allison's initial assumptions about how the political form of logic may well stand on its own.

## Political Dimensions

Inadequately, the picture that Hickson et al present here excludes occasions when actors see decisional problems as political problems. The point reaches well beyond seeing political problems implicated in, or growing out of, decisional complexities held as rational complexities, "the solving of problems". Theory needs to cover settings where alliance and accord make up the nature of the decisional problem(s) in hand. Decision makers often see organisational progress as based upon movement from one political situation (pa) to another (pb) through a piece of political logic (px, py, pz). This process arguably excludes what may pass for the purely rationally initialised complexity as it is being set out in the Hickson et al picture (from ra to rb through rx, ry, rz).

Bringing the argument along now to the "committed" settings endemic in higher education:

Committees meet not only to pool what the members know but also to allow their interests to be voiced (p. 168).

Certain questions need to be raised against this implication now traced for higher education settings. Where are circumstances covered in which committees meet only for solving problems of interest? How may such theory fit this sort of activity?

Study outcomes compiled from the present context affirm how, in higher education, much political decision making is carried on in purely political terms. Analysis in this report has constantly needed to address accounts by informants that incorporate construct items of ideology. They often hold such points of ideology very strongly. Informants in this study have based them upon what pinnacle points of meaning they have brought forward in complex arrays of construct items. They have also based their points of ideology upon ideas that go unremarked by them. This they do, either for gaining a sharper profile in an articulated position, or for emphasis upon what they wish to avoid in decisional action. The following remark draws attention to the logic of organisational ambiguity. This needs now to be set aside, because it fails to account for the many ways in which actors can advance organisations in a range of directions:



Reports are prepared not only to inform and recommend but also to advance an interested viewpoint. This is because the objectives of interests are answers already there awaiting a question to arise which they will then conveniently fit (p. 168).

Such logic is insufficiently penetrative of the absolute "cutthroat" realities that often prevail in higher education settings. These frequently entail displacement of persons, groups, ideas, and programs in the progress of the organisation. Such progress, it needs to be understood, can result in organisational advancement or decline.

As we shall see, further along in this discussion, Hickson et al dilute the power of dialectical conflict theory. They do this, when, citing Cyert and March (1963), they argue how only "quasi-resolution of conflicts" prevail. They see that this causes only "superficial" or "temporary reconciliation" between interests assumed to be engaged in complexities inherent in problem resolution. The present thesis rejects this notion of "quasi-resolution" of conflict. In contrast, it favours ideas of "deep conflict". They are more typically preserved and held over indefinitely. This study has tried to put to use the strictures of dialectical conflict theory in the service of a more dynamic social and cultural critique. For the idea of conflict resolution is anathema to properly formulated dialectical conflict theory. Conflicts, once openly, deeply and honestly engaged, are never resolved. Once engaged, their outcomes typically lay new grounds for further conflict. Discussion needs to see how remorseless this logic becomes. When theory accepts such assumptions, they must not be watered down again in theory. Their testing out requires adequately conducted research process before final judgements made about them.

### The Standard Operating Procedure

Organisation, for Hickson et al, is based upon "rules of the game" (pp. 189-94):

For decision-making, an organisation *is* the rules of the game. It is the ruling framework governing both process and outcome (p. 191) [emphasis in original].

Such a statement appears doubtful, for it is too inclusive. What about standard operating procedures, as when a group or individual may make use of one for personal or political

purposes? In this sense, actors may break some very fundamental rules of the game, and cause unexpected change. In higher education, such a course of action remains likely. Perhaps this contrast underlines a corporative bias in the Bradford Studies materials. Research has neglected inquiry into examples of standard operating procedures to underline the arguments put forward.

Ideas about "rules of the game" raise more than mere questions of "interest units" (p. 191). This is because any decision making issues, centred upon standard operating procedures, raise more than just the nature of relations between units. They raise tangible routines: where one goes to fill in a form, how one gets reactions to assignment work, commands required to run programs on a computer, whose turn it is to man an enrolment desk. These are typical among the standard operating procedures used in higher education.

To A one can say: "We can't spend it on that. I will need the dean's signature" (implying, by tone of voice, that the dean will not give it, as a standard operating procedure). To B one can say: "We can spend it on that. I will just get the dean's signature on it" (implying that the dean will give it, as a standard operating procedure). Both remarks appeal to a standard operating procedure (the item requires the dean's signature). Either can mask a setting that bristles with political import. Each may show how a standard operating procedure can become elevated or lowered in importance in the interests of a political cause. What have the Hickson *et al* ideas about an underlying interest relation to say about the research issue in this kind of case? Where may we go to find the substantive grounds for the "rules of the game" based upon standard organisational process? If such grounds may be shifted in political manoeuvring, then there is no basis for such a stable "rules of the game" background to decision making.

Dual rationality theory is insufficient for the settings reviewed in this study. As discussion has outlined above, Hickson *et al* saw problem complexity (rational explanation) and politicality (political bargaining) as two key ideas found universally interactive in decision making (see above, p. 47). They reintroduced Allison's organisational process as part of the background, and not the foreground, context of decision making. This move raises, however, a further problem. Their theory has not made it clear whether such influence takes place before, during, or after decision makers raise the "matter for decision". For this question must be addressed. If the influence is before the raising of the matter for decision, then it may well drive the process, and not just function as a background or ground rules for the process.

## Research Site Differentials

Perhaps this problem arises from the kind of research that the Bradford Studies team was trying to accomplish. They case studied decisions taken by teams at the top. Perhaps a sense of organisational process as "rules of the game" pervaded the formalised senior executive contexts in which they researched. Their executive decision makers, they found, exercised a "malleable constrained domination" (p. 94). By contrast, in the present study, a lone researcher was exploring a very different cultural context. Higher education units are unique in the sense that conflict seems much more ideologically turbulent and individualised in its directions and purpose.

Perhaps this research site differential now demands that some directed research be conducted among the Bradford Studies research team itself. This needs to be done before members become too disbanded, to try to find out more about the socio-cultural context in which they carried out their work. One possible corollary not considered is the degree to which Hickson's "rules of the game" (organisational process) may influence the developing decision both before and after its finalisation. If so, this might change the logical status of such an influence. Instead of acting as a backdrop against which decisional action takes place, organisational "rules of the game" might get reinstated as a foreground theoretical element in its own right. Present study outcomes improve upon this potential confusion in discussion.

Seeing decisions as resurgent pinnacle points of meaning, only intermittently at work within rigidly held units of social structure, helps to restore theory to tripartite status. A more balanced point of view requires this triple rationality. Hickson's "rules of the game", "complexity", and "politicality", may all remain usefully employed within the body of new theoretical directions emerging from the present study. They need to be recognised as operating within their three independent domains of analysis, not partially conflated, as in Top Decisions. Moreover, they need to be seen as independently influential: simultaneously so, not piecemeal.

## FURTHER CASE STUDY RESEARCH

Study outcomes compiled in this report stress two sides to the question about further work upon single complex decision processes in higher education settings. First, there is the

question about seeking new openings for reworking the present study outcomes. They have stressed the need for turning away from settled practice. New ideas have been developed and applied to the field work setting. Fixity and rigidity were attached to social structure and withheld from decisions and decision making. These ideas have brought out new ways for understanding. Commentary has also developed the obverse pattern. Fluidity and resurgence were attached to decisions and decision making and withheld from social structure.

Approaches to research on decision making have been far too confident about the substantive realities under study. Researchers have assumed the following doubtful proposition: if decisions infuse the daily terminologies recorded among actors, then they must exist substantively in the organisational setting. Typically, this has meant the documents on file and the surface assumptions and talk related to them. Yet such presuppositions have been seriously called into question by the present study. Perhaps the study goes too far in this direction. Further study might require a different direction. Perhaps the same study needs to be undertaken in a new and similar setting so that outcomes may be tested and possible adjustments worked into place. In other words, this points towards an identical follow-up study. This is the case for "yes" along one side of the future research work problem. Proceed with further similar research work through inquiries based upon established presuppositions about the realities projected upon decisions and decision making. The viewpoint here develops from a search for moderating interpretations to put upon the present study outcomes. As such, this program will seek to test out limits for the new generalisations that have already served to test out the generalisations that were originally selected for study.

Second, there is the question about taking the present study outcomes as substantive warnings against further similar work. The present report has compiled abundant data related to old assumptions. Sampled decisions and interview transcripts have taken up much time and textual space. The question about an extended pile sort has been raised concerning sampled decisions on note cards. This material now begins to look outmoded. It displays residues from research mistakes that served well in exposing prior research work weaknesses. These now belong in the past. This is the case for "no". In future work, a new imperative rules: to depart well away from inquiries based upon established ideas about research on decision making in the field. If present study outcomes have successfully confirmed utilities grounded in searching out discrete decisions, with their related decision making, then stop trying to do

that at this point. This viewpoint marks the beginning for a new direction in research on decisions and decision making in higher education units.

There is, however, a third viewpoint that faces this emerging problem. The researcher may case study selected complex decision processes from across a range of higher education settings. Comparative outcomes from these studies could then be used to bring detailed commentary to bear upon present study outcomes. This may prove useful, since the research work would break new ground in trying to understand decisions and decision making. Such further work may keep to ideas about fixity and rigidity attached to social settings through dialectical conflict theory. This can continue to form the background for understanding fluidity and resurgence in decisional meanings. Significant progress upon the current study outcomes may be achieved through such an extended study, bringing more comparative depth to the discussion.

Complex decision processes selected for such comparative case studies might be found in a range of higher education settings. These might take in academic and non-academic settings, upper and lower levels in decision making systems, strategic and non-strategic matters taken up for decision, long-term and short term decision making scenarios. How might actors' perceptions, about similar decisional matters studied in other settings, relate to outcomes from the current setting? How might they depart from, and contrast with, current study outcomes? Outcomes from such a later study might then be usefully applied to assess validity in the current outcomes.

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