

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION: DECISIONS AND DECISION MAKING IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

This research looks into the daily decision making work of academics located in one small unit. What kinds of decisions are typically made in such social settings? Do they show distinctive characteristics? How are they put together and finalised? Who is included in the process? Do decisions made by academics differ in kind from strategic decisions in non-academic fields of work? What is meant when a decision maker talks about "firming up" a particular decision? What may be seen as "firm" or "soft" in decisions and decision making? In talking and thinking about decisions and decision making, how best may we understand differences between "firm" as determined, steadfast and "soft" as wavering, unsteady? Such sorts of questions drove the study.

From the start, social research principles imposed boundaries upon the project plan. Since no individual academic operates in a social vacuum, any study needed to include social, cultural, and political dimensions of decisions and decision making (Baldrige, 1971). Getting close to the action to be studied required finding a small academic community given over to innovation in their field. In higher education, as elsewhere, innovation goes hand in hand with articulated decision, and connects directly with ideas about strategic decision. Moreover, any unit studied needed to be one where members allowed ethnographic intrusion into what would otherwise be judged a closed community (Clark, 1978; 1983a; 1983b; 1987).

Research interest in this project arose out of a number of issues. Discussion about decisions and decision making needed to get behind and beyond "garbage can" ideas that have often been applied to academic units (March & Olsen, 1976). Prior studies and conversations pointed the way towards broad literature by Allison (1969; 1971); Clark (1956; 1960; 1970; 1972; 1978; 1983a; 1983b; 1987) Hickson et al (1981; 1986a; 1986b; 1987); and Meek

(1981; 1982; 1983; 1984; 1987a; 1987b). But even this small selection of literature, in turn, pointed the way well beyond its own boundaries toward yet broader fields of complex understandings. Problems and obstacles multiplied with study upon how best to try to understand decision making processes among academics, including key attributes of the decisions that typically arise. The time came when the study needed to focus upon particulars in a local setting of some kind. It also needed to move away from the researcher's own campus, to try to avoid distorting effects that can be caused by local political entanglements.

The research project brings together data from interviews and observations taken at the field work site over a period of five years. A development education unit, the Educational Development Department (EDD), comprising fifteen staff members, gave opportunities to gather field work data. The unit was establishing itself, throughout that period, on a large amalgamating campus in the western region of Melbourne City.

Development education is a newly recognised field in higher education. It takes up the academic development work with students where formal discipline based tuition breaks off. Academics in the field explore how students may develop clearer understandings about their study practices. These include the many ways in which their own personal backgrounds and special abilities can be used to enhance their developing skills.

Staff in the unit set out to research, plan, and set up, broad, original, and creatively run support programs. They even set out to change the very nature of the tertiary teaching content in several fields. How may female nursing students be helped to shed some of their gender determined anxieties about mastery in mathematics and physics and form basic concepts in new, more realistic ways? What are some effective ways to help business/ law students who are newly arrived from Asian settings and show only limited grasp of Australian-English language, idiom and culture? How may lecturing staff from across the campus be helped to see that worthwhile photographic work they request comes best from clear communication, rather than confusion, about the idea and the image? Such questions drove the work of the unit.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>**Appendix One: Fifty-One Sampled Decisions**, p. 201 and following pages. Sampled decisions numbered 33, 38 and 50, pp. 210, 211, 214, give a feel for the innovative energy found in the unit. See also **Appendix Two: Transcripts of Interviews**, pp. 269-70: "INFORMANT: Back to last year again . . . and Arabic background people" for one detailed account of the struggle to get results.

At the centre of the department there developed a detailed philosophy of commitment to shaping tertiary support programs suited to a diverse client group. This philosophy was embodied in the figure of the head of the department, who clarified a set of goals for the unit during the period 1986-87. A senior academic figure, for many years widely known and highly regarded on the campus, this powerful person had begun and led the development and growth of the work unit.

Clearly, the social situation gave good prospects for studying organisational change, structured innovation, and social conflict, along with related decisions, decision making, and outcomes. Vigorous innovative work by the head of the department was rapidly establishing the EDD throughout that period, using seeding funding. Many theoretical patterns seemed to match particulars being compiled for the study. For example, questions about how innovations in higher education may get "diffused", "enclaved", "resocialised" or "terminated", sounded clearly throughout the data gathering phases (Levine, 1980). Such ideas lent fascinating background interests to the focal inquiry into the nature of decisions and decision making.

The study sets out to review patterns in data collected at all levels of the academic staff in the unit. It tests out ideas from the literature against outcomes from selected modes of ethnographic inquiry (Spradley, 1979; 1980; Van Maanen, 1988); and assembles, for detailed study, a sample of decisions from academics at work in the unit. Observations and depth interviews were taken with all members of staff. These focussed upon those decisions they perceived themselves to be considering during that period. Later sections in this report review how and why these modes of inquiry were selected and linked to research questions.

Parts Two and Three of this report set out the data for systematic review. It is then analysed and interpreted against the focal ideas taken from readings. As Meek (1982) affirms, empirical outcomes of field studies must await the analysis and interpretation of empirical data (p. 9). Theoretical lines of development in field work research seem to proceed by systematic examination of established theoretical detail held fast against the light of currently perceived realities. For, as he goes on to explain:

... I hope to show where theory may require modification or perhaps rejection. My aim is to test past theories, not to specifically generate new conceptualisations - though suggestions for new ways of viewing the structure and process of the university organization may emerge from the study. In the very process of questioning the validity of established propositions we lay the foundation for the development of new or more refined theories (p. 10)

Such guidelines for theory development are important for field research practice.

At the start of a new field of inquiry, it is important to be reminded to only set out to lay foundations for theoretical development. It is unwise to build or outline new theoretical forms. If we try too soon to make gains with too elaborated a form of new theory, we will likely come to grief: bogged down in logical entanglements.

In line with the remarks given above by Meek (1982), the present study will only set out to make clear the propositions being questioned, as well as the nature of the new foundations being set down for further development. The report will set out to demonstrate how these foundations may possibly lead to different sorts of theoretical structures in the future. Hopefully, this may be done by proposing similar lines of inquiry in related settings, and at differing levels of similar systems. Such is the program for the present report, to try to lay new foundations by mapping them clearly for future projects.

The general thesis presented here further confirms the now widely held belief that higher education units are unique. Unlike many other types of organisations, such as those reviewed in the Bradford Studies materials (Hickson *et al.*, 1986a) all levels of the operation may show marked strategic and executive decision making forms (Clark, 1983a; 1983b; 1987; Meek; 1982; 1983; 1984; 1987). Concluding sections of the report suggest how this may be seen to be the case, in unique ways, based upon this single case study.

The report develops in four parts, as set out in the table of contents. The first part introduces research questions, approach, and the field work site. It then proceeds to review relevant background and focal literature. Theoretical lines of inquiry are clarified at that point, where certain ideas are taken up and seriously criticised. Among these, the literature assumes two broad ideas that now become problematic. The first idea is that the decisions that actors bring forward are "bounded" or "bordered", containing a relatively fixed parcel of content. The second is that any decision making represents a process. This implies that it is typically "linear" or "sequential", showing clear points of commencement, development and finalisation. Getting close to academics' decision making action, as will be seen from this report, tends to undermine such assumptions.

The second part analyses and discusses outcomes of pile sort activities applied to decisions sampled from the academic group. Researchers may ask informants to sort piles of items into categories to stimulate comment and to clarify local culture. The researcher walks a slippery slope here, because culture is not being "discovered" or "revealed". Instead, both

the informant and the researcher collaborate to clarify patterns of meanings that seem to be taken for granted in the setting. This part of the study meets the need to get close to particulars and try to understand social phenomena based upon turns of phrase given by informants themselves. One key social research principle used here recruits the informant as teacher to the ethnographer. As well as this, the researcher operates, in part, as respondent to his own research effort. An exchange emerges at that point: central to research outcomes for this particular study, blending research method with theoretical outcome.

The third part takes up two contrasting cases generated from the interview and observation materials. These cases centre upon concerns given by two key informants. Their respective theoretical world views are constructed from the interview transcripts. That data is then analysed and interpreted for new insights about the nature of decisions and decision making in the field. Such detailed treatment of two key cases is necessary because problems found are complex and intricate. They are bound up with ways in which decisional phraseology and political manoeuvre combine in interview responses. There are likely to be many other factors at work as well: personal, career-oriented, arising from informants' academic backgrounds.

The fourth part sets out summaries and conclusions for the study and makes recommendations for continuing similar lines of inquiry. Common talk about decisions and decision making seems to bias thinking about two contrasting ideas: fluidity and structure. Typically, decisions are spoken about as structured, in the sense of partially or completely "firmed up" or "finalised". Social relations are typically held to be fluid, in the sense of constantly emerging and negotiable. Such talk seems to engage in a confusing language game. Following this piece of research, the report will tentatively suggest that the reverse may give a clearer picture for academics at work in their settings. It is social relations that are "firmed up" and "finalised". Within this somewhat rigid social structure, decisions and decision making remain open, negotiable, resurgent, and fluid. How these terms may now be used, and why this may be seen to be the case, must await the central sections of the report, where data from practising academics is sifted and analysed.

This opening chapter has so far briefly outlined research interests and how they got the project started. It now turns to outline research questions selected for the study. There the reader will see how certain questions begin to look toward special modes of inquiry, to the

exclusion of others. In turn, it will also begin to become clear how the selected academic community came to accommodate both the research questions and the researcher's intrusions.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This chapter section assembles research questions under two headings. First, there are those questions that arose from prior discussions and readings. Next, there are those from focal readings on decisions and decision making in complex organisations. Each question is listed, categorised, and allocated a status for the remainder of the report. It will be seen how progress in the written report matches progress in the study. To some extent, this process is inevitable in thesis report writing. In earlier sections, attention is given to prior concerns, to explain and demonstrate how these led on into deeper research activities and outcomes arising.

Questions that arose early from prior discussions and readings. Four questions make up a group that cover the broadest scope and level of discussion. They are listed as follows, and given identifying numerical labels.

- 1a Are there types of decision and decision making unique to higher education organisations?
- 1b To what extent may decisions and decision making be seen to resemble the "mystery ridden" decisional settings found in literature about other sorts of organisations and their decision making activities (Allison, 1969, 1971)?
- 1c In higher education settings, is it useful to distinguish between *rational*, *political*, and *organisational process* approaches?
- 1d Also, in higher education settings, how far, and by what means, do politics and personal or group interests enter into the process?
- 1e In small campus units, how well do Bradford Studies models of decision making fit in and function as explanatory theory (Hickson et al. 1986a)?

Going back to the time before the first contact made with the EDD, the story begins with ideas met in Allison (1969, 1971). Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis grapples with the idea that even the most important, highly strategic, and far-reaching decision making can often come down to remain a mysterious process. Ultimately, one may never be able to trace the origins or causes of certain decisions in complex organisations. These ideas connect with the fact that, over time, many actors in the form of individuals and groups may give input to a decision. Motives, both collective and personal, may become highly charged. These factors often magnify certain special interests in the minds of actors. Such sorts of ideas account for questions numbered 1a., 1b., 1c., and 1d. listed above.

Allison (1969, 1971) draws clear splits between three approaches to analysis. These he labels Model I: *Rational Actor*, Model II: *Organisational Process*, and Model III: *Governmental Politics*. Rational actor approaches look for goals and the rationally logical means/ends arrangements made for their attainment. Organisational process approaches look for standard operating procedures. It is these, not actors, that often predetermine goals judged acceptable for varied occasions. Not only that, but impersonal standard operating procedures may also fix the means for reaching the goals and even the standards by which attainment will be assessed. Governmental politics approaches look for individuals and groups and where they sit on current issues. Values, points of view, and recurrent stakes and stands adopted by actors are explained in these terms. These three approaches, Allison affirms, may produce three quite different views of the same sequence of events in complex organisations (Allison, 1969, pp. 715-718).

This now leads to another important point. The rational actor approach is the leading common sense model, and is held in ignorance of more recent lively discussion in the literature on organisations (Brunsson, 1982). It is the way we habitually regard the right way forward. From politicians to teachers to bank managers we hear the language of what is and should be "rational". This often means the standard by which all processes are judged. It is as if the term "rational" means "good", as in the commonplace expression: "That is not the rational way to go". Being or appearing rational seems to be the norm for most people, reflected in ways we typically think and talk. It also appears the easiest framework in which to carry out research. Simply find the statement of goals, identify the organisation's means for reaching those goals, and assess effectiveness (usually speed?) of attainment.

Against this apparent norm, the organisational process and governmental politics approaches bring radically differing points of view. When pointed out to them, these ideas shock many people. Organisations, it would seem to most untutored people, just should not be seen or accepted to behave in such apparently devious or deviant ways.

On the face of it, standard operating procedures should not be irrationally inflexible. They seem to be drawn up rationally and duly authorised, after discussion and review; and then set out clearly in manuals of procedure. But stupidly inflexible they frequently seem to be. They may both set recurrent goals and fix the standard of performance for meeting them. Individuals may sometimes be caught in this web, become shocked, and rail against the very idea of bureaucracy.

It is the same with the power of political stakes and stands. Why should these carry the day in the pulling and hauling of conflict? A great deal of taxpayers' and shareholders' wealth is at stake in the health of many organisations. It may appear to the untutored lay person that such modes of operation are grossly irresponsible, even unthinkable. The unthinkable is underlined, of course, when it takes a nuclear missile crisis to wake us up about it. Such was one of Allison's scholarly achievements.

A further achievement, however, was Allison's new agenda for research. We must now turn to change our own scholarly ways. The old ways of seeking rational patterns no longer give useful insights. The continuing differentiation and dedifferentiation of institutions is better explained by some form of combination of the three approaches identified.

Beyond this, the very nature of scientific inquiry itself is thrown into problematic focus. Science is not lockstep. Even scientists, and the organisations in which they work, develop standard operating procedures. Also self- and group-interested stakes and stands get expressed by scientists in a lively political life. The popular and seductive idea of science as a model "rational" enterprise is called into question.

Ideas like these force the hand of any researcher, and so it happened in the study reported here. No longer might synoptic realities govern the research agenda in the study of the EDD. Bland indeed would be any success in gaining access to what actors themselves considered to be the rational goals and purposes of the unit.

Far more interesting would be to list standard operating procedures found to be in place. More than that, how supremely interesting it would be to find that actors were only partially aware of them, or even ignorant of them. Also more interesting would be



information on who sat where among the range of political realities in the group. This meant that no one person's point of view about the internal life of the EDD may be allowed to prevail. A wide range of perceptions from as many actors as possible became a prime research goal arising from questions categorised as 1a, 1b, 1c, and 1d.

Following such trains of thought, three questions, listed below, took their place alongside the first group. These questions enforce closer engagement with dynamics available for observation within the social setting. They are much more particularised than the former set of questions.

- 2a. How are decisions made in small campus units?
- 2b. In decision making, who gets included and excluded?
- 2c. How, in what ways, and under what circumstances, are these kinds of processes involved?

The researcher now expected to find, and in practice found, new complexities.

In some special instances there were people in the unit ready to say that sometimes they did not quite know what was going on. This became a hopeful sign for the research project, since informants were not resorting to legitimating script to back up their stated practice. By contrast, they seemed to be confronting those aspects of organisational life that confused, pleased, angered or blocked them. The depth interview work at this point often needed to move ahead through broad open-ended questions. During interviews, the researcher felt the need for adroit interpersonal skills to accommodate incomplete answers. On some occasions, when walking a blind alley became apparent, skills were applied to try to avoid an atmosphere of mutual embarrassment in the interview setting. But the way forward became clear on these questions and the project compiled useful depth interview data for later analysis and review.

By contrast with this sharpening focus, two further questions offered promising pathways which got left behind in the later developments. They are included here to indicate developing boundaries in the study.

- 3a. Would it be useful to make case studies of large single strategic decisions in order to draw comparisons between them across settings and topics (Hickson et al. 1986a)?
- 3b. Would it be useful, following Allison (1969: 1971), to observe and document a cluster of decisions and proceed to interpret them using a range of models or perspectives?

Such questions raise issues that go to the very heart of the scientific method, and it became clear that they belonged to a much more extensive study. The project reported here hardly even approaches such territory. It became necessary, in the ever changing realities confronting the researcher, to narrow the boundaries of the study. The main purpose now was to gather initial empirical data relevant to the questions compiled as 2a, b, and c, listed above. Those developments make up the next stage of the story, to which the report now turns.

Questions that arose from focal readings on decisions and decision making in complex organisations. A change in direction came about with increasing public discussion on the recently published Bradford Studies research program (Hickson et al. 1981: 1986a: 1986b: 1987). In that extensive project, decisions and decision making were systematically researched through a wide range of organisations. Top Decisions (1986) reports methods and findings for the project. Building upon research question 1e about Bradford Studies models of decision making, four questions make up a group that focus upon components of decisions and decision making reviewed in those sources.

- 4a What are the identifiable components of decision making treated in the literature?
- 4b How applicable to campus units is the *expanding linear triangle* idea used in Hickson et al. (1986a)?
- 4c Might there be useful modifications to this idea of the *expanding linear triangle* that will help to clarify the nature of academics' decision making?
- 4d Does the triangle ever begin to contract prior to the implementation phase?

Wilson (1980), in a PhD thesis arising from the Bradford Studies, uses the *expanding linear triangle* to outline how decisions were seen as developing through time. A point on the left

indicates the identifiable beginning of a decision making event. People have recalled how ideas were first raised at that point. The triangle then expands to the right, with flattening out plateaux that indicate significant stages in the process. These may be significant committee meetings or points of conflict that have been recalled and related to the researcher. It ends, in right angle triangle form, with a vertical line to indicate finalisation, and the beginning of full scale implementation. The idea is powerful, but the thesis being developed here will go on to suggest that it is based upon flawed assumptions. Two basic ideas, linearity in decision making, and boundary around decision content, are exposed as highly problematic when considering academics' decisions and decision making.

In passing, it may be noted how research question 2a, *how decisions are made in small campus units*, was well served by the Bradford Studies readings. They systematically opened up, and detailed, as never before, the social dynamics of decisions and decision making in complex organisations. Chapter Two of this report takes up detailed review of key ideas from those sources. In later chapters, following the empirical work, this report then turns to modify certain key ideas for application to further research on small campus units.

In this literature was found a systematic attempt to clarify the field within a social science context. Moreover, as the literature showed, there remained room for further work on higher education institutions emerging from the resulting conceptual scheme. Prominent among interesting issues was the question of "top" and "bottom" in relation to decision making. This was especially so for the ideologically "bottom heavy" higher education context (Burton Clark, 1983a, 1983b).

A broad conceptual tension now grew at the back of the current project. How may the newer Hickson *et al* typological framework of decisions be matched with the threefold approaches to analysis by Allison? It seemed at that point that the universe of ideas could not be broader or more problematic. What seemed immediately imperative was to simply keep going forward with depth interviews and observations. Collecting the sample and interviewing all actors got results where it seemed to matter. Their perceptions about work roles and related culture seemed usefully to be unfolding the unique decisional life of the unit.

## RESEARCH APPROACH

This chapter section outlines key aspects of the lone researcher's case study approach. A major issue for field research is the question of scientific rigour. Free and open disclosure about all aspects of the work in progress seems to be the widely accepted way to confirm a scientific balance. The section begins with broad ideas from the field and proceeds through increasing detail. Sooner or later, however, the report itself needs to break off the process of outline and take over the concrete demonstration of developing methods by means of progress through empirical compilation and analysis.

### Case Study in Research on Higher Education

In the literature on lone case study research in higher education a good place to begin is V. Lyn Meek (1981; 1982; 1983; 1984 & 1987). For a detailed treatment by Meek of case study strategy, its defence and theoretical support, together with field work demonstration of data gathering techniques, see The University of Papua New Guinea: A Case Study in the Sociology of Higher Education (1982, Chap. 1, pp. 7-12) and Brown Coal or Plato? A study of the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education (1984). It is also noteworthy how, in his article "The Wheel re-discovered: a critique of the 'new paradigm' of organisational evaluation in education", Meek (1983) outlines a position on evaluation research in general. This article, published between the two major works noted above, consolidates guidelines for method in this kind of work. For a later recapitulation of, and reflection upon, the central issues of case study research, see "The Coalface Revisited" where an infinite regress of ethnographic subjectivity is suggested in the closing remark "I am the least qualified to comment on what I really do" (Meek, 1987, p. 214).

As suggested above, case study strategy is used in this project to test established theory, not to generate new theory. The grounds for generation of new theory, however, may well be laid down by the kind of work being reported here (Lijphart, 1971; Meek, 1982; 1983; 1984). In the development of case study reports such background matters become important. A free and open disclosure of the researcher's developing thoughts, concerns and biases bring their own form of intellectual rigour.

FIGURE ONE: SIX TYPES OF CASE STUDIES (Lijphart, 1971, p. 691)

- (1) Atheoretical case studies;
- (2) Interpretative case studies;
- (3) Hypothesis-generating case studies;
- (4) Theory-confirming case studies;
- (5) Theory-infirming case studies;
- (6) Deviant case studies.

Scholars have questioned the status of case study social research as a legitimate scientific approach (Lijphart, 1971; Miles, 1979; Atkins, 1984). Lijphart (1971) records six types of case studies and lists their merits and demerits, while noting that "any particular study of a single case may fit more than one of the . . . categories" (p. 691) (see Figure One above). The paper tries to clarify the field for studies in comparative politics. Views put forward in the paper parallel those of Meek (1982) and others about the ubiquitous influence of theory upon observation. Such ideas are accepted for the present study.

In respect of atheoretical case studies, Lijphart is quick to bring into line ideas about interrelations of theory and data. These form a major line of defence in long lasting controversies about the status of case studies made by lone researchers. It is worth noting the line of argument in detail:

An actual instance of an atheoretical case study probably does not exist, because almost any analysis of a single case is guided by at least some vague theoretical notions and some anecdotal knowledge of other cases, and usually results in some vague hypotheses or conclusions that have a wider applicability. Such actual case studies fit the first type to a large extent [see Figure Two], but they also fit one or more of the other types (particularly the third, fourth, and fifth types) at least to some extent (p. 691).

Since the nature of the project reported here is testing out research directed at extending the range of the Bradford Studies ideas, the work comes in under categories 4 and 5 of Lijphart's typology. Both theory-confirming and theory-infirming outcomes are traced throughout subsequent sections of this report.

In respect of theory-confirming and theory-infirming case studies, Lijphart notes how interests may centre upon certain variables from a body of theory which are found to be extreme within the case study (p. 692). An example from the EDD on the Footscray Campus would be the extreme "politicality" of certain decisions, as with the earlier decision to relocate audio-visual staff outside the developing unit to other locations on campus. The same would apply to the later decision to disband and relocate certain of the recently developed sub-units and functions of the Learning Centre Section of the EDD to other parts of the campus. Feelings ran very high among actors about those decisions. Overall, this study set out to test whether the Bradford Studies notions of "top" decisions: their tripartite classification and executive/strategic dynamic, held for higher education units well down through the levels of hierarchy. Along with Lijphart, "if the cases are, or turn out to be, extreme on one of the variables" then the study may be labelled a "crucial experiment, or crucial test of . . . propositions" (p. 692).

#### Field Work Methods Developed in the Study

Field work methods developed and used are closely related to developing ideas about decisions and decision making among academics. Central to the development of this report lies the need to note carefully the nature of the research site. Development education undertaken at tertiary level made up the broad focus for professional endeavour. This field held the central focus for the radically innovative programs which increasingly came to be identifying characteristics of the EDD on the Footscray Campus. Entailed in these two points is the highly developed sense of professional identity held among informants.

Range of data collected for the study. For specific ethnographic data gathering techniques and methods the researcher drew from Spradley (1979, 1980). These works give fine detail about where to start, what to do, and they demystify many aspects of field work for the lone researcher. Van Maanen (1980) reviews Spradley's work but either glosses over or blatantly ignores many of his accumulated points of technique. Van Maanen sees Spradley as adopting "the currently fashionable cognitive view of culture" and that he is "no fan of Geertz's (1973) 'thick description'" (p. 528). Yet Spradley himself asserts that the

ethnoscience he uses is only a step towards "the larger goals of ethnography" and he cites Geertz (1973) in support of the task to seek "'thick descriptions' that will communicate to outsiders the full context and meaning of a culture in all its human dimensions" (Spradley, 1979, p. 232).

Such comments show that Van Maanen has not carefully read Spradley; nor yet has Spradley carefully read Geertz. For the view advanced by Geertz was that Spradley's "full context and meaning of a culture" would remain much further down below any levels of analysis available to the practising anthropologist. For, as Geertz (1973) asserts:

... interpretive anthropology is a science whose progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate. What gets better is the precision with which we vex each other (p. 29).

Spradley's work opens up the complexities of seeing social settings as distinct from cultural scenes. In this way, the important distinction between social structure and cultural value is introduced into field work (Geertz, 1973 pp. 30, 164; Meek, 1982; Turner, 1986, pp. 210-12).

Ethnographic record keeping. Spradley distinguishes three important principles for the lone field work researcher: the language identification principle; the verbatim principle; and the concrete principle (p. 65). Each may be illustrated from the field work journal used by the researcher in the current study. In order to be able to identify later what level of language was being used in the field note record, the researcher developed a system of recording that distinguished three sorts of entries. The researcher clearly labelled those entries that used the ordinary language of the observer; those that used social science concepts in comments made by the researcher about observations recorded; and those that recorded what participants might be actually saying, word for word, in the setting. This is the language identification principle and may be extended and adapted to incorporate any range of forms of language found to be used by sub-groups and quasi-groups in any social setting. As Spradley says (1980, p. 66), this process avoids the development of an amalgamated language and aids subsequent analysis. Parts Two and Three of this report draw upon these research principles. Informants' actual phrases and terminologies are held up for analysis and discussion in the advancement of the thesis.

FIGURE TWO: QUALITIES OF STRONG INFORMANTS  
(adapted from Back (1956), in Scott, (1965))

A. WELL SITUATED

- They have access to information due to lengthy tenure in the setting.
- They have generalised rather than specialised interests.
- They have good perceptual abilities.

B. ARTICULATE

- They can readily communicate information due to relatively high education.

C. HOMOPHILOUS

- They are motivated by objectives similar to those of the researcher.
- They are not motivated by other aims such as receiving money or special favours.

Informant selection for the study. Early discussion of the selection of informants is found in Scott (1965), drawing upon a study by Back (1956) who "attempted to discover what qualities are conducive to making a good informant" (Scott, 1965, p. 292). Three broad principles are offered for guidance in the selection process and are set out in Figure Two (above). Scott notes the absence of further such studies so researchers remain in the dark about the worth of the principles as guidelines for selection. He cites Whyte (1960) as an exception in the sense that he "described in detail his use of informants" (Scott, 1965, p. 292).

The principles in Figure Two were followed closely for the present study. All members of staff in the EDD were closely involved in making decisions of one sort or another and lived close to central political concerns and conflicts. They fulfilled well the requirements for A. in Figure Two (above). Many were easily drawn into discussions about questions of goals, conflicts, and short and long term prospects for the department's work.<sup>2</sup> Long passages from the interview transcripts appended to this report also testify to informants having "good

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<sup>2</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts.** see especially pp. 290-1, "INFORMANT: Yes, and I guess what I find systematic too is that . . . But yes, the nature of the job has changed and I am much happier about the change" and *passim*. Informant H seemed to hold a firm grasp upon issues of where work had begun and where it was going in the short and long term.



perceptual abilities" (Scott, 1965).<sup>3</sup> Many informants freely revealed, in lively responses and discussions, their many talents and benefits derived from a "relatively high education".<sup>4</sup> Since they so willingly responded to the researcher's approaches it became clear that they were motivated by similar concerns as those expressed by the researcher. These concerns centred upon further understanding about the complex processes in which we all found ourselves to be embroiled.

Spradley notes how informants who are too knowledgeable in certain respects may "get in the way". They may seek to interpret the culture for the researcher (Spradley, 1979, pp. 52-4). The researcher needs a good informant to just give the culture and not go on to interpret or analyse it. Those informants educated in social sciences, in particular, may be difficult about this. This may be logically misleading in the light of Meek's remarks about mistakenly assuming culture as something there to be discovered by the researcher (Meek, 1987a). Spradley clarifies the picture for the lone field work researcher by showing how nine separate categories of data may be collected and processed in the interpretive task.

Descriptive observations. Spradley (1980) identifies nine "major dimensions of every social situation" for the purpose of making observations. These are spaces, actors, activities, objects, acts, events, times (periods), goals, and feelings (p. 78). These nine are then ranged across one illustrative example of a "descriptive question matrix" (pp. 82-3) to show how the researcher may make conscious choices about the developing directions of the study and its relations to the field work site. A commonplace view among academics in the field of education is that research in higher education is somewhat hampered in certain respects because there is not much to be observed going on around the place. This is in contrast with, say, research in school classrooms, where a steady tradition of positivist and post-positivist interaction analysis has been building in the literature. Such views are rendered fallacious

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<sup>3</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts.** Informant G, pp. 275-86. The total interview transcript shows a high degree of political awareness in the academic work of Informant G.

<sup>4</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts,** p. 257. "There is always a problem in this job, it seems to me; . . . that they be aware of the expectations of a person reading what they write" and passim. The interview transcript for Informant E shows a high level of conceptual analysis applied to the complexities of tertiary educational development work with individuals.

when put alongside the kinds of options Spradley's work opens up for the field work researcher in higher education.

An academic institution need be no exception to any other form of organisation in respect of social dimensions. There are a multitude of ways in which, say, acts and activities of actors at different levels and in different situations vary over time, and that certain time periods govern arrangements and sequences of significant events throughout the academic year. Moreover Spradley's sample matrix underlines the problematic two-way relations that may be traced. Each sample question has its mirror twin for the researcher to consider, as in the paired questions: "Where are goals sought and achieved?" and "What are all the ways space is related to goals?" The first question qualifies well as a starting point for observations that may lead up to useful answers to the second question. One key document appended to this report: the "General Program Strategic Plan" addresses one of Spradley's key questions from his matrix: "How are goals related to time periods?".<sup>5</sup>

## THE FIELD WORK SITE

This chapter section outlines distinctive aspects of the field work site. As is now widely recognised in the field of higher education studies, Burton Clark has written extensively about the distinctive nature of campus units and the kinds of discretion exercised "at the bottom of systems and units". Questions probing the attributes of such discretion became prominent as the data gathering phases of the study unfolded. The thesis outlined in this report will set out how researchers may explain and understand in detail how academic discretion works out for decision makers at the bottom. It will be seen how the ordinary language employed by actors in the setting may be used to build a picture of the distinctive nature of such discretion. But prior to that process getting under way, the reader now needs to glance at key features in the field work setting.

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<sup>5</sup>Appendix Three, *The Educational Development Department: General Program Strategic Plan*, p. 325.

## Location and Development of the Unit

As stated above, the social setting for the study was the Educational Development Department (EDD). It was situated, at that time, on the Footscray Campus of the Victoria University of Technology (VUT). Initially, the unit grew from an academic service department, delivering the usual audio-visual and materials development technical services to other departments on campus. During the period 1986 to 1990 a number of appointments tied to seeding funded positions gathered the departmental work group together in a new and strikingly different orientation.<sup>6</sup> Steady growth seemed to centre around the vision and energies of one person, the head of the department, who clarified a set of goals for the unit during the period 1986-87. Effective in academic political circles, both locally and federally, this person seemed to have been well positioned, at that time, for a round of applications for special funding to get under way to establish special programs and facilities for disadvantaged students. At that time their presence and numbers on the campus were being seen to be significant for future developments. Appointees under the head of the department brought a wide range of talents for work within the development education field.<sup>7</sup>

The Victoria University of Technology (VUT) is a recently amalgamated institution now comprising five faculties: Arts, Business, Engineering, Human Development, and Science. In historical terms, the primary unit in its development was the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT). This large and diverse institution grew steadily, by accretion, from the old Footscray Technical School, on Ballarat Road, which opened in 1916. Certain dates stand out as significant in the institution's growth towards the point where the turbulent politics of securing university status as a "university of technology for the West" took hold. This movement focussed around an attempted amalgamation with the city-based Royal Melbourne

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<sup>6</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 220: "We have received . . . put into the learning centre." And see also **Appendix Four: Taxonomy of Parts of the Educational Development Department**, p. 328: notice how many of the technical and service functions have been given over to Reception, a point of policy. The head of the department often stated that academic functions were to be expanded and the service functions diminished: "This is an academic department, not a service department".

<sup>7</sup>**Appendix One: Fifty One Sampled Decisions**, p. 201 and following pages. Sampled decisions numbered 11, 18, 19, 26 and 30 give evidence of the range of skills and interests among staff. See also **Appendix Three: Learning Centre Staff Portfolios**, p. 326 for variation in the spread of skills and interests of individuals in the learning centre section.

Institute of Technology (RMIT) in 1989. The amalgamation subsequently lapsed. To go back further in the history, in 1958 it was designated a Technical College, the senior technical institution in the western region of Melbourne; in 1968 it became the Footscray Institute of Technology under the revised Victoria Institute of Colleges Act of Parliament; in 1972 the first degree courses in Civil and Electrical Engineering were established; in 1975 a School of General Studies was established with departments of Business Studies, Humanities and Physical Education and Recreation; in 1979 the School of General Studies split into Schools of Business and General Studies; in 1981 the first degrees were awarded in the name of the Council of the Footscray Institute of Technology, rather than the Victoria Institute of Colleges; in 1984 the Footscray Institute of Technology became entitled to accredit its own courses to degree level (Rasmussen, 1989, pp. xii-xiv). The VUT is now a thriving institution spread widely across six campuses from the city to the western and south western regions of Melbourne, located at Footscray, St. Albans, Werribee, Melton, Sunbury, and City.

As outlined in Meek (1984), the historical picture given by this development is now familiar. In the growth of the Colleges of Advanced Education sector of higher education, social pressures, brought to bear to provide general education in the form of humane and liberal studies, were imposed upon a technical and engineering institution from outside. Conflicts over basic goals and purposes brought permanent tensions to bear upon the changing social settings. Whether resulting dysfunctional or crippling impasse could be avoided, often seemed to depend upon massive energy or brilliant political acumen in individuals and small groups running the organisation. The theme of the significant individual now seems permanently to colour the organisational saga (Clark, 1970; 1972; Rasmussen, 1989). At Footscray the names of C. H. Beanland, D. R. Mills, and I. Herrman are firmly written into the folklore of development through management of conflict.

### Development Education in the Department

For the reader to understand better the work of the EDD, this study needs to define development education in broad and inclusive terms. At the time of the research the coordinator of the learning centre section of the department presented a paper on the unit's program development at the Higher Education Research and Development Society of

Australia Annual Conference (Webb, 1991). The paper set out details of ideas guiding activities in the learning centre section, and now provides a source of information about what was in the minds of actors at that time.<sup>8</sup>

In her paper the author stressed the need for developing clear guidelines for operation where there were few to be seen in the literature (pp. 1-2). The paper claimed that "substantive analysis" and model development replaced the older "deficit analysis" in planning work with students. This claim is central to all discussion of academic work in the EDD. It means that staff in the unit worked with students in positive ways. They sought out, stressed, and built upon, their students' strengths, rather than pointed out their weaknesses. Moreover staff worked to locate the unit at the centre of university life and so avoid its becoming a mere adjunct to the mainstream. The following passage captures, in the author's own words, the spirit and self-image then being developed in the unit:

We wish to avoid the image of a remedial unit which marginalises individuals and groups and places in question the appropriateness of their participation in studies at a tertiary level. Our student-centred pedagogy means that we reject the application of the principles of a deficit model to our interaction with students from non-traditional backgrounds; instead, we work with all students in ways which acknowledge that their existing skills and understandings can be used as the basis for extending their insights and enhancing their performance.

In addition, we believe it is appropriate for our programs to become part of the culture of mainstream courses rather than functioning as adjuncts. Being part of the usual operations of academic departments not only enhances our credibility but helps to address the issue of marginalisation mentioned above (p. 5) [emphases in original].

The paper went on to outline details of programs developed to meet needs arising from the learning centre's diverse clientele. Figure Three lists activities planned and carried out by members of staff on a yearly basis (see below, overleaf).<sup>9</sup> Clearly, in the minds of incumbents in this small unit, theirs was a deeply innovative and challenging task. The logic of their views on work with students went straight to the heart of student power issues and institutional liberation. It was clear to the researcher at the time of the paper's publication that the EDD

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<sup>8</sup>Appendix Four: Taxonomy of Parts of the Educational Development Department, p. 328, gives details of the structure of roles and functions and the place held by the learning centre section.

<sup>9</sup>See also Appendix Three: Student Support Program, p. 324, for further details.

FIGURE THREE: STUDENT SUPPORT PROGRAM:  
LEARNING CENTRE SECTION

- \* pre-and post-semester workshops: summer and winter schools
- \* in-semester workshops
- \* parallel tutorials: pre-semester, in-semester, post-semester
- \* study groups: in-semester
- \* in-class cooperative projects: in-semester
- \* English language classes: pre-semester, in-semester, post-semester
- \* individual consultations: pre-semester, in-semester, post-semester
- \* self-access facilities: pre-semester, in-semester, post-semester (Webb, 1991).

had indeed been developed as a small unit given over to radical innovation and change within the wider campus environment. In sociological terms, the two stated central goals: to bring change in attitudes towards more substantive analysis of student needs and to enter the mainstream culture of the institution, would be bound to meet with deep tensions and conflicts.

This chapter has set out introductory matters in terms of the lone researcher's developing interests and project ideas. The following chapter will review literature on two levels. Background readings will be broadly reviewed for ideas about the nature of social structural factors in lone case study research on higher education. Focal readings will then be reviewed in close detail in attempting to outline a clear analytical logic for analysis of ideas on the nature of decisions and decision making in small innovative campus units.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The report now turns to review literature, accumulating points of theory for the developing thesis on two levels: background and focal. In the first chapter section, background sociological theory is selected and outlined to give theoretical life to the social structural background typically found in small academic work groups such as the EDD.

Literature on the structure of sociological theory is very broad. A competent review of the field is given by Turner (1986), and the present study follows his assessment of the field. Within conflict theory alone, the dialectical conflict theory of Ralf Dahrendorf, the conflict functionalism of Lewis Coser, and the critical theorising of Jurgen Habermas have been recognised and set in place for use in field research (Dahrendorf, 1958; 1959; 1968a; 1968b; Coser, 1956; 1967; Habermas, 1970). Beyond this circle, within functionalism, the systems functionalism of Niklas Luhmann appears well suited to sociological analysis of higher education units at the systems level (Luhmann, 1982). There is, however, much more than these particular sociological outlooks to be considered. Interactionist theory takes in symbolic interactionism, structural role theory, process role theory, and ethnomethodology (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959; Turner, 1978; Garfinkel, 1967). Structural theory covers the macrostructuralism of Peter Blau, the microstructuralism of Randall Collins, and the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (Blau, 1977; Collins, 1975; Giddens, 1979; 1982; 1984). This thesis does not set out to make an assessment of the various merits and demerits of these broad theoretical outlooks.

Instead, the present research case studies a single unit to probe group dynamics at the coalface of the higher education system. Enforced coalitions set up in small academic groups form the focus of interest for the present study. These comprise social settings where actors are required to interact within groups that they have not chosen for themselves. Perceptions about authority relations are central, not peripheral, to research interests and questions as set out above in Chapter One. For these reasons, the study selects the dialectical conflict theory

of Ralf Dahrendorf as the sociological outlook most suited to an introductory analysis of the field. Later, more systematic studies of decisions and decision making, may take in a broader literary analysis to prepare the way for comprehensive assessment of sociological theory.

Building upon this platform, views of Burton Clark are reviewed in detail for key ideas on academics' professional socialisation. Clark's early publication: "Academic Coordination" (1978), the Yale Higher Education Research Group working paper, as discussed below in this chapter, gives key organising ideas for understanding the dynamics of academic work in small social settings. He calls these settings the "factory floor" of higher education. Clark's work, alone, provides clear ideas for research inquiry at the most basic level of analysis. Terms such as "competence", "authorities", "discretion" and "structure" demand research attention, as outlined below in this chapter. Clark's material bridges background and focal levels, touching both the broadest and most minute details of the academic decision making life. Certain propositions outlined from Clark's work will be set down for systematic inquiry in the following two data analysis parts of the thesis.

Finally, in the third chapter section, focal discussion turns to review aspects of the detailed analytical logic now developing around formal ideas about decisions and decision making in complex organisations. Once again, arising from this review, propositions relevant to research questions raised will be clarified, preparing the way for the ethnographic sifting process carried out in the following data analysis parts of the thesis.

Research interests, questions, approach and field work site, as outlined in Chapter One above, now require that specific pathways be set down for progress through theory. Social, cultural, and political dimensions of decisions and decision making need to be considered, to pull the study away from the rational bureaucratic model of explanation (Baldrige, 1971). Distinctive features of academic units need also to be included in discussion, to draw clear comparisons with studies, so far completed, in both academic and non-academic organisational research (Clark, 1978; 1983a; 1983b; 1987; Hickson *et al*, 1981; 1986a; 1986b; 1987; Meek, 1982; 1983; 1984).

In addition to these requirements, a much clearer analytical logic governing discussions about the nature of decisions and decision making in complex organisations needs also to be clarified. Attention has been drawn, above, to a confusing language game in which common talk links formal structure with decisions and decision making; while fluidity, together with open ended adjustment, are linked with social structure. In trying to correct this bias.



arguments developed throughout this thesis will suggest a different picture to support further research. But detailed outline of new insights needs to await empirical sifting of data gathered at the field work site.

To prepare the way for descriptions and explanations on these matters, this section of the report will now turn to outline and discuss dialectical conflict theory, a powerful mode of social analysis, important in its own right. Applied to such a close-knit social setting, researchers may go on to see decisions and decision making among academics in a distinctive light. Through that theoretical framework, it may be seen, in later parts of the thesis, how academics within the EDD voiced concerns that were often held firmly in place by clear lines of social structure. But also, within that structure, analysis will show how they worked their decisions and decision making events in some surprisingly open ended ways. It will be shown how such theory fits in with, and prepares the way for, detailed analytical study of both decisions and decision making in small campus units generally.

## DIALECTICAL CONFLICT THEORY

This study applies aspects of the dialectical conflict theory of Ralf Dahrendorf to understanding decisions and decision making in higher education work group settings (Dahrendorf, 1958; 1959; 1968a; 1968b; Turner, 1973; 1975; 1986). Conflict and coercion in the life of groups require the kind of close attention that tries to build a credible model to help in the explanatory task. Dahrendorf's conflict theory departs from, and tries to build upon, the work of Marx and Parsons, by showing how they each concentrated too much upon topics related to one class. Through general discussion of the views of Marx, much attention has been given the working class as the non-propertied, the exploited, alienated or disaffected. This has been at the expense of neglecting middle and ruling class social dynamics. Through discussion of the views of Parsons, the focus has been the middle class, the so called well-socialised, ordered, inwardly controlled and controlling; at the expense of trying to understand the dynamics of alienation among those being controlled or exploited (Turner, 1986, p. 130; Dahrendorf, 1958).

Consistent with current study goals to inquire into small campus units, Dahrendorf tries to explain how people everywhere deal with power and authority in groups that are not of

their own choosing. These groups he calls "imperatively coordinated associations" and they are ubiquitous. They are found in families, workplaces, friendship circles, business centres: in any organisations, whether large or small, where legitimated authority, together with possible challenges to its position, may be found. Because roles and role sets are linked with people's positions in these groups, social process may be seen to take place often against the will or intention of otherwise powerful individuals. As van den Berghe (1963) states, Dahrendorf set himself the task of "developing one circumscribed aspect of conflict theory, namely class conflict as a special case of group conflict, which, in turn, is a special case of an all-encompassing conflict model" (p. 700).

Ideas such as these may now be used to open up decisional dynamics found in academics' work group settings. Because authority relations, together with related latent and manifest role development issues, hold such a central place in Dahrendorf's sociological theory, politics and history intersect in the line of argument. If applied carefully, such theory may well result in a useful fusion of ideas from sociology, anthropology, politics, and history, all brought to bear upon the problems of explaining decisions and decision making in the EDD. For any researcher seeking to apply this theory, main questions need still to revolve around where and by what means conflict arises between any two classes or conflict groups in the setting under study.

Outcomes of such an inquiry will bear directly upon problems in understanding the nature of the grounds of decision and decision making in the EDD. In particular, the "types of authority" and their "variable states", together with entailed variations in "type of domination and subjugation", together with "variable types of opposed interests" leading to variations in "types of conflict groups" seem to warrant close empirical study (Turner, 1986, p. 160).

Such questions, touching upon issues underpinning the background social structural environment, relate to those raised above about decisions and decision making in Chapter One. Decisions and decision making, their nature and dynamics, cannot be understood without some clear connections with an acceptable sociological theory about group conflict. Also, Clark's views, cited above, and reviewed below in this chapter, have already shown the conflict ridden nature of the field: how emergent forces seem constantly to push processes of differentiation and dedifferentiation. How best to understand the growth and expansion of vigorous units such as the EDD, together with their decline into disuse and apparent fossilisation, remain central issues in the higher education field of study.

### Description of the Theory:

Development of ideas in this section begins with Dahrendorf's "apparently meaningless assertion that there can be interests which are, so to say, impressed on the individual from outside without his [or her] participation" (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 174). In the EDD, staff worked all the time with other people who were "not of their own choosing". This is an important point to be noted in all associations. A commonsense idea separates "achieved status" from "ascribed status" in social settings. Dahrendorf himself admits that "the distinction between these ascribed and achieved positions is not always clear" (1986a, p. 36). The present study probes this idea further by applying it to small campus work groups.

Upon reflection, it may be seen how all authority positions, once "achieved", sooner or later become "ascribed". All administrators, following their appointments to positions of authority, find themselves dealing with different people further down the track. For, as Dahrendorf states, "a conflict of interests is associated with authority positions in any association" (ibid, p. 177). Values alter, alliances shift, agenda for management and development change. The perceptive administrator soon sees how quasi-groups in the various settings have "become the recruiting fields of organized interest groups of the class type" (1959, pp. 238-9). The term "perceptive" becomes operative, since the process may take place outside of the consciousness of the administrator, her associates, and any other parties to any conflict.

As Dahrendorf further notes, "the incumbents of positions equipped with 'objective' interests will [not] necessarily become conscious of those interests and act accordingly" (ibid, p. 177). This remains true, since roles and role sets generate implied but powerful courses of action and points of order. It is pertinent to note how the decision sampling process used in the present study found that actors needed to have sample decisions "midwived" out of them on some occasions.<sup>1</sup> There seem to be, as yet unexplained, strange forces at work that drive forward the process of change from quasi-group to conflict group. Legitimation seems to hold a central place somewhere in the process. Theory needs somehow to be fitted in with such

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<sup>1</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 317-22. Informant K gives clear evidence of the way in which certain decisions and actions have been taken according to a strategic logic, without those decisions, actions or strategic logic being readily to hand at the forefront of the recorded talk.

realities. Studies of the kind developed in this report, trying to explain details of decisions, decision making and change in one small campus unit, now need to consider how this theory may be seen to work out in practice.

It is important for critics of Dahrendorf's views to note how he turns away from the idea of "objective" interests in favour of "role interests, . . . expected orientations of behavior associated with authority roles in imperatively coordinated associations" (ibid. p. 178). Incumbents behave in an "adapted" or "adjusted" manner insofar as they "contribute to the conflict of contradictory interests rather than to the integration of a social system" (ibid. p. 178). This comment departs from common usage about adaptation and adjustment. Such terms are usually confined to ideas about conformity and consensus within social groups. This may commonly be seen to be so until we are reminded of Spradley's ideas about "adaptive strategies of urban nomads": tramps deliberately pleading guilty to drunk charges in droves, to get remanded to the Alcoholism Treatment Centre, and, in such ways, to avoid an indictment (Spradley, 1979; 1980). We may also note the "adapted" and "adjusted" manner in which one academic, Informant G in the EDD, gave the account of conflicts with the Physics Department over who ran support programs for nurses in introductory science programs.<sup>2</sup>

The nature of transition from quasi-group to conflict group remains the empirically interesting problem in the EDD. In this context it becomes important not to confuse an analytical with a chronological sequence (ibid. p. 183 and note). Critics must always bear in mind that quasi-groups are theoretical phenomena. At this point it is useful to note the details of Dahrendorf's total model of interest group formation, elaborated in such a way as to exclude any intervening variables which may be derived from empirical study:

The categories of latent and manifest interest, quasi-group and interest group, constitute the elements of a model of conflict group formation. Under ideal conditions, i.e., if no variables not contained in this model intervene, the analytical process of conflict group formation can be represented as follows. In every imperatively coordinated association, two quasi-groups united by common latent interests can be distinguished. Their orientations of interest are determined by possession of or exclusion from

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<sup>2</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 275-86. Informant G gave evidence of being politically aware and carefully strategic in outlook. Latent interests had become manifest in this informant's talk. It is also important to note how the conflict was not resolved or ended. On the contrary, it was being held in place, even cemented in place, by the informant's comments in confidential talk (Dahrendorf, 1959, p. 224).

authority. From these quasi groups, interest groups are recruited, the articulate programs of which defend or attack the legitimacy of existing authority structures. In any given association, two such groupings are in conflict. This model of conflict group formation is as such complete and suffices for all purposes of theoretical analysis (ibid., pp. 183-4).

This now clears the field for advancing empirical study of the setting. How may this advancement take place through empirical observation?

To give one illustration, the EDD was a small social unit held together in cramped spaces to undertake innovatory work in which there was constant social pressure to expand its operational boundaries. In this sense, Dahrendorf's technical, political, and social conditions of organisation were met for the formation of a conflict group. The following observations make this point clear. On the Footscray Campus, a leadership cadre formed around key figures in the newly developing department. A clear charter was firming up for the future and developing in documents. Permission had been given by certain dominant groups within the campus directorate, and other departments, for the EDD to continue to organise its interests. Within the EDD, close lines of communication among the members was guaranteed by cramped working conditions. Recruitment to ranks was permitted by structured arrangements, through further funding, which allowed autonomous recruitment decisions. For, as Dahrendorf remarks, if a group "is so scattered topologically or ecologically that a regular connection among the members of the aggregate does not exist and can be established only with great difficulty, then the formation of an organized interest group is empirically most unlikely" (ibid. p. 187).<sup>3</sup>

Speaking yet more generally, the point raises questions along the way for the political status of all units in higher education. In many areas, academics work in apparent isolation. How do controlling forces make use of this feature of academic life? Are academics politically vulnerable, even dispossessed, through this isolating condition of work? Or is it the other way around? Are they able, through such conditions, to keep a firm hold on ownership and control of the means and methods of production in the classical Marxist sense (Clegg, 1957;

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<sup>3</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, p. 267-8. "ETHNOGRAPHER How did Jan get your name? . . . and you're looking for ways to get more closely with the department." This point in the transcript gives evidence that Informant F came to the department through a shared pedagogic background and formerly established network contact.

1979a; 1979b)? A related question is the degree to which academics transcend their various isolating conditions to maintain a close bond for political purposes. Such questions will be raised again below in relation to Burton Clark's developing work. For the moment, and for the purposes of this study, Dahrendorf's views seem to give a clearer theory pertinent to background social structural factors at work in the EDD.

### Key Criticisms of Dahrendorf's Views

Dahrendorf's views have drawn criticisms that range widely across alternative perspectives. This study does not set out to deal with all of the points put forward. The interconnecting literature is now vast. Certain key points of criticism are selected for comment at this point, since answers given advance the case study. There is evidence from the literature, however, that the dialectical conflict theory as set out by Dahrendorf has met sufficient critical support for it to be considered useful for this case study research on decisions and decision making within the EDD. Turner (1986) sums up Dahrendorf's point of view as a "fruitful strategy for developing sociological theory" in which "methodological problems could be minimised with just a little additional work" (p. 162). Van den Berghe (1963) notes how many of Dahrendorf's set of testable propositions "withstand the test of [his own] South African evidence and prove quite useful, while others call for refinement and modification" (p. 701).

There are, however, a number of points which could be put by way of critical adjustment to what some scholars have said, and to how Dahrendorf himself may have generated some confusion about his own views. Perhaps there were one or two useful ideas implied in his work that he himself overlooked or distorted in some way.

Van den Berghe (1963) puts the case for a synthesis in functionalist and conflict theories. His reading of the "binary model of class conflict" in Dahrendorf's work links with central ideas about a power view of organisation (p. 700). On this view it is through perceptions of power differentials that people view and interpret reality. The point is put in zero-sum terms in Perrow's broad study of organisations:

Power, as used here, is zero-sum, relational (over someone), exercised both inside and outside the organization, and concerns an output of organized activity that is valued and an output that is produced only at some cost (Perrow, 1986, p. 259).

These ideas may well apply more to higher education settings than to any other form of organisation, since, as has been argued in many studies so far, power to operate as one sees fit is central to the basic idea of academic work (Clark, 1956; 1960; 1970; 1972; 1978; 1983a; 1983b; 1987; Meek, 1981; 1982; 1983; 1984; 1987a; 1987b).

In further comment, van den Beughe (1963) says that Dahrendorf, in reverse of Marx, does not demonstrate "why authority is prior to the means of production" (p. 701). Against this view, even within the classical Marxist sense, it may well be argued that in higher education work group settings the struggle for ownership and control of the means and methods of production goes on all the time (Clegg, 1975; 1976; 1977; 1979a; 1979b; Clegg and Dunkerley, 1977; 1980). Deskilling the lecturing labour force, for example, arises as a recurring critical issue in public conflicts. This is pushed forward by means of apparent bids to reduce academics' powers of autonomous decision making. The matter is often put in terms of an exchange for higher pay (or reduction of funding cut threats) in order to run corporatist programs, geared to higher turnover of students, in the interests of corporate "efficiency" and "productivity" in higher education. The conflict process often centres around who holds authority, prestige and/or power in the setting. In the later empirical data sifting process undertaken in this study, inquiries will try to locate how Dahrendorf's quasi-groups form into conflict groups through processes of legitimation and how these processes are built into the social setting. It will be shown, in the final sections of this report, how conflict in such a setting may often turn out to be inevitable, intense, and violent. "Violent", in this social context, needs to be understood in terms of "displacement" of persons, groups, ideas and agenda, and how these outcomes are often central to progress in academic circles.

Within this context of fine interpretation of ideas derived from Dahrendorf, it needs to be pointed out that one cannot see "classes" as different from "other conflict groups". To do so misses the point. A certain "class", for Dahrendorf, is one of two only dynamic social phenomena to be found in social settings. The point must be taken back to basic ideas in the theory. A "class" is either a ruling or a subjugated group. Each of the two opposing groups may be seen along different dimensions: as groups of people; as opposing roles; as ideas held in their minds; as ideologies; or as value systems which are often present as normally expected

for the group of people being considered. Such ideas are always open to empirical inquiry and are present in social settings as matters to be empirically sifted through and clarified.

Where critics seem to go wrong about this theory is that they focus too much upon the ruled or subjugated class, looking there for the dynamics of rebellion, submission, reform and change. This remains a mistake. Dahrendorf's theory gives an opportunity to turn to consider both classes. The dynamics of suppression, subjugation, and authority led change, within small groups such as the EDD, may now be studied. The stereotype that top level power players resist change and largely work toward a status quo may now be avoided. Also, the possibility that authority led change may fall into a dysfunctional mess for the organisation is held up as a viable empirical possibility. Groups of so-called "top" decision makers, firming up as quasi-groups making up "the recruiting fields for organized interest groups of the class type", now become one of two equally important loci of change dynamics. A new picture now begins to emerge. In higher education, top level decision makers occupy "class" positions that are no longer tied to economic stratification, an idea that was of little use in close social analysis, any way. By contrast with this, they are now seen to be tied to roles and role sets, which, in turn, are tied to the dynamics of change which can go in any direction: forwards or backwards; progressive or regressive; innovatory or status quo. They are just as tied to these processes as members of teaching staff at the so-called "bottom" of the system. Moreover, there are classes within and alongside classes at the top. The conflict struggle is constant, open, multi-faceted, inconclusive, and turbulent.

Moving along further in critical theory, Van den Berghe's idea of seeing authority as among a line up of "goods" to be fought for is a fine critical point (van den Berghe, 1963, p. 701). But it does not stay within Dahrendorf's original point of view. Power and authority are the only "goods", for all else derives from them. The questions now worth asking are the "how" questions. How does the process of legitimation, for example, get under way in quasi-groups? How does it continue to develop or diminish? How does the quasi-group become a conflict group through "objectification of interests"? It is these broad theoretical ideas that need to be deconstructed and rendered problematic. This is the program for dialectical conflict theory applied to decision making in small higher education work group settings. This is the theory to be tested.

Van den Berghe (1963) argues that Dahrendorf's dualistic model imposes itself too rigorously upon a diffuse reality (p. 701). It is not clear, following van den Berghe's references,



where he has read Dahrendorf's notions of the middle class. Dahrendorf was making the point that "from the point of view of a theory of conflict there can be no such entity as a middle class" (1959, p. 52). He went on to argue that in so far as a person occupied the clerical worker category, that person would be in a ruling or subjugated role depending on the setting and what the issues may be at any one time. As to the issue of ambiguity of position in bureaucracies, it needs to be said that this is what the problem is all about in higher education. This is one reason why higher education remains such an interesting field for study. The so-called "diffuse" authority structure of modern enterprises needs to be deconstructed and rendered problematic. This now becomes the program of study, the burden of the closing chapters of this thesis: how decision processes in the EDD may be better understood in the light of coercion, conflict and change. How displacement, as a type of conflict outcome, operates upon persons, groups, ideas and agenda.

## ACADEMIC WORK AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIALISATION

This chapter section examines views of Burton Clark, chosen for their depth and power in giving the sharp features of academic life throughout both America and other wide areas of the world. The report draws attention at this point to ways in which Clark's views extend and develop those of Baldrige (1971). Following Meek (1982), this study needs to look at those social forces that arise from both the endogenous and exogenous environment. As well as intra-bureaucratic processes, increasingly fine details of the extra-bureaucratic professional, political, and market processes of control are opened up for the higher education researcher in Clark's work. In comparison with Clark (1978), Baldrige (1971) gives a somewhat static view of the pre- and extra-bureaucratic political context. It is to Clark, however, that we need to turn to get a much more dynamic picture. He gives us the persistent mix of the many varieties of pre-bureaucratic and extra-bureaucratic forces at work in higher education.

It will be found in this chapter section that sociological aspects of the field become clearer where a branching point is found between functionalist and conflict points of view

(Parsons and Platt, 1973; Turner, 1986).<sup>4</sup> Put briefly, in the jargon of sociological dispute, Burton Clark's writings seem Parsonian. However, this comes about in appearance only. Many ideas he uses are open to study through empirical research, taking them beyond theory, and so moving them into accepted fields of further scientific inquiry. The report will now try to show how this is the case with regard to certain ideas important for this study of the EDD and its decision making work. Effective studies require clear boundaries marked to spot those matters that require empirical study and, as such, are not matters that can be assumed through theory.

### Academic Life As a Unique Form of Life

For a clear picture of academic work and its social structure and value systems as a unique form life, a good place to begin is The Academic Life: Small Worlds, Different Worlds (Clark, 1987). This book, based on wide survey work, gives a well rounded account of the American academic in the social, political, cultural and historical context. To those familiar with the work of Clark, the title alone speaks as an end point for strong ideas about the unique features of academic life now developed and increasingly accepted over three decades of his work. When we turn to the academic scene on the Footscray Campus of the Victoria University of Technology, Clark (1987) gives rich ideas for seeing into the nature of the life among members of staff in the EDD. In brief remarks such as the following, he comments upon how the guild concept applies widely and powerfully to the academic life. He explains as follows:

The academic guild came late to American higher education, but come it did, and on the back of fragmenting bundles of knowledge that allowed "teachers" to become "professors" by acquiring the authority of arcane knowledge (p. 16).

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<sup>4</sup>The literature on the sociology of Talcott Parsons is vast. This discussion draws upon Turner's interpretations of the disputed field. The final chapter in Parsons and Platt **The American University**, "Continuity and Change", gives key ideas from the canon for comparison with the logic of Clark's views and how they apply in this study of the EDD.

For, as has been noted previously in this report, members of staff in the EDD constantly seemed to be building upon new areas of expertise. Moreover these new areas were both familiar to, and exotic from, the surrounding units they sought to serve. The more talk recorded about their work, the more a sense of "arcane knowledge" linked to particular forms of "splintering expertise" became clear.<sup>5</sup> With such views, Clark reacts strongly against analytic practice that looks only at "the formal plan and the formal hierarchy" of systems in higher education (Clark, 1978, p. 46).

It is important to note, therefore, the rich lead-up literature produced by Clark stretching back to the doctoral dissertation work (Clark, 1956; 1960; 1970; 1972; 1978; 1983a; 1983b). "Academic Coordination" (Clark, 1978), the Yale Higher Education Research Group working paper, remains a seminal work for researchers in higher education. The paper outlines in detail certain logical and sociological ideas that underpin their later broader exposition in The Higher Education System: Academic Organization in Cross-National Perspective (Clark, 1983a) and in "Governing the Higher Education System" (Clark, 1983b).

Taken as a whole, the Yale working paper sets down clear ideas useful for the present study and the following discussion will draw extensively upon its ideas. It gives details about the federative and multi-layered nature of coordination and control which developed in Australian higher education prior to the movement into the unified national system. Clark (1978) shows how this unique setting both paralleled and contrasted with developments overseas throughout this century. Formal governmental control in differing intensities and at differing levels, formal and informal professional control at all levels of the system and its agencies, and the wild cards of market forces all get due notice in Clark's broad survey. Moreover, public or overt activities are noted in contrast with hidden or covert forces; and these hold special interest for the present study of decisions and decision making among academics in the EDD.

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<sup>5</sup>**Appendix Two: Interview Transcripts**, pp. 240-1, "INFORMANT: I work primarily with two lecturers . . . and very concerned about addressing those needs, just a different approach". Informant C's account of growing work with client lecturers relates closely to these ideas.

## Covert Processes Become Overt: the EDD Developing Background

The focus for this study of the EDD setting at Footscray centres upon certain ideas given in the Clark (1978) analysis. A close study and analysis of any higher education setting needs to begin with Clark's model of dynamic forces constantly at work in varying degrees. These are "fourteen processes of coordination grouped under the four headings of bureaucracy, politics, profession, and market" (p. 30). Taking these into account, the study will be less likely to overlook endemic complexity and its multiplying detail. For it is to the historically recent extension and intensity of the power of these fourteen processes that Clark turns. The higher education system he found was locked into turbulence and change. The Yale research working paper captured this point of change and gave to its various elements a more adequate pattern of ideas.

Clark sees the fourteen processes as forces which sometimes complement and sometimes conflict with one another. Put broadly, as at 1978, bureaucratic complexity and control, together with intrusive government at all levels, had already become prominent. By means of eight of the fourteen processes, they had made their public presence felt around the world to all people at work in the higher education field (Clark, 1978, pp. 31-39). Against the more publicly recognised eight at that time, the more covertly operational six, grouped under professional and market processes, gave promise of increasing intensity and growing power as "countervailing forces". Among these processes, those that interest this study in detail are intensified subject expertise, swollen consumer sovereignty and, most intriguingly, what Clark sees as power market growth, "units struggling against each other at all levels of the system" (p. 45).

The power of Clark's point of view can be seen in the way that these three ideas give shape to much that was found operational in the EDD setting. As has been reported so far in this study, there is evidence of very active expansion of subject expertise among EDD academics and their associates. Both students and staff valued special programs and began to build a sense of profit about them. Within both upper and lower levels of the system, units were in conflict about resources, funding, content and goals, as power markets developed around clusters of units, individuals, and ideas. It now remains for this report to try to outline the limits and boundaries of such ideas. How far do they apply usefully to the setting and ideas under study?

## The Functionalist Tone in Clark's Writings

A close reading of Clark's writings reveals a tone which some may criticise for leading in a sociological direction that is overly functionalist. Put briefly, the term functionalist denotes a point of view that sees social systems in constant equilibrium due to elements of the system balancing out and resettling the impulses for change. Social systems pass through phases of disequilibrium, but soon restore the original balance and sense of order. On this view, deviance, dissent and conflict afford only passing disruptions. A wide range of interpretations, however, have generated lively debates on and around the functionalism topic (Abrahamson, 1978). In general terms, concerning the "predispositions of beliefs", Clark (1983a) argues that there is a two-way pull between forces of disintegration and convergence. Multiplying units formed around the continually developing areas of knowledge and programs break up the unities that people value for order and control. At the same time powerful actors try to integrate systems in the interests of uniformity of purpose and outcomes. Systems reveal the divergent results of these processes in all kinds of shapes and styles (pp. 197-99).

There is a sense of irony and almost acute satire about this whole process. There is also a sense of sociological functionalism until one gets close enough to see the details and their open ended, empirically accessible nature. In the following passage a concluding remark on the value of "competence" in higher education sounds disarmingly balanced in this functionalist sense:

Whenever there are centres of excellence, a few are chosen and the many are left out. The exclusion stimulates the counterargument that there should be a democratization of knowledge: if knowledge is power and it is concentrated, more effort should be made to scatter it. Then, too, the pursuit of self-interest on the part of specialist groups may or may not serve the general welfare. "Elite functions" are necessary, but they will always be in tension with mass participation and certain democratic ideals (1983a, p. 247).

This comment certainly reflects much of the work of the head of the department in the EDD. During the data gathering phase of this study, the researcher constantly noted how he made an art of working through the reappropriation of science education for those who have always found it a mystery. Democratizing his field was a constant theme in his own talk, and in that of his associates.

But research is not about counting heads or attitudes or outcomes. The question here is how far both Clark's analytic language and the realities at Footscray warrant a functionalist sociological interpretation. The answer, in both cases, is "only very marginally". For ideas about conflict, which amounts to continuing and real disintegration of concerted action and order, are never very far away and need to be brought to bear upon both centres of interest raised at this point in the analysis. Both the ideas in theory and the events in reality need to be brought under a workable analysis, including ideas of real conflict, and actual change.

To the commonsense observer, the Victoria University of Technology at Footscray seems to perpetuate its various social and political elements in constantly recurring patterns. But this broad fact does not warrant interpretation only through functionalist certitudes. Conflict, mismanagement, and turmoil over future directions can bring down the work of individuals and groups so that the place is permanently different from what it once was. The spectrum of threat seems to run all the way along from "my programs altered and changed beyond all recognition" to "the old place [seeming to be] just no longer what it used to be".

With regard to conflict and its possible dysfunctional outcomes, Van den Berghe's point about people not wanting to "kill the goose that lays the golden egg", for instance, warrants careful criticism (van den Berghe, 1973, p. 262). The idea may have applied well to an African setting where incumbents at the university depended heavily upon its survival in various ways. As that report noted, there was a lot at stake in that setting in terms of employment, income, and social status. In contemporary Australian settings, however, options may differ. The system has moved on from the tiered structure to the turbulence of the unified national system. There may well be people in the national system now who would wittingly or unwittingly "slay the local golden egg laying goose" in order to further their own ends in a career which may well take them on to other places and higher levels within the system. Moreover, if Clark's body of theory about the multifaceted nature of the system holds, then that goose may falter from self interested actions of individuals and groups, and decline or die in a thousand different ways. Following on from such background considerations, research may now address how conflict may result in either destructive or constructive change.

## Formal and Informal Authorities

As noted previously, Clark's discussion of higher education institutions and their functions turns away from formal structure as outlined in official documents and as found in assumptions surveyed. His work seeks out the more commonplace and day-to-day realities in the various settings. We need to know more about the forces that push the process from one stage to the next. The following remark captures the spirit of this analytic turn:

It is time to take "authorities" seriously, both those designated as such and those who exercise influence without benefit of administrative title (p. 107).

The head of the department in the EDD, for example, is not only embodied in the position and roles of Associate Professor, he is also the person called by his first name: known to many for certain sorts of predispositions. What are these predispositions? A reflective outlook, calling a spade a spade, habits of networking among the power players, a single minded sense of commitment, all these get mentioned by people who work with him. How do these traits impinge upon decisions and decision making in the department? How do other actors model their work on this cluster of attitudes? What does it look like when units in the department grow in autonomy and point in different directions?

But authorities are located in contexts. Clark (1983a) states: "The fundamental task is to discern broad patterns of legitimate power, authority rooted in the dominant locations of certain groups" (p. 107). He further draws upon Schattschneider (1960) to argue how "system structure is . . . a mobilization of bias", . . . steadily presenting certain points of view, furthering the cause of certain groups and subordinating others" (p. 71, in Clark, 1983a, p. 107). Moreover there are hidden agenda also at work in all settings. Clark (1983a) follows Bachrach and Baratz (1962) in noting how pervasive is the influence of structure:

structure grants and withholds voice, not only in determining who sets agendas and tells others what to do - decision making - but also in restricting the scope of what will be decided - non-decision making (pp. 947-952, in Clark 1983a, pp. 107-108).

The point links with remarks in Hickson et al (1986) about replacing the question of "who decides" with the better one of "who influences the deciding" (p. 93). It also links with

remarks in Allison (1969, 1971) about organisational process and the way that standard operating procedures may powerfully determine directions against both rational and political forces. The context of decision making activities, notes Clark, is crucial for understanding the direction that social forces will take. For example, when X states Y, both X and Y are in a context Z, the details of which need to be noted. When one informant in the EDD records a decision to attempt research studies, her milieu informs the timing, placement, direction and, therefore, the outcome of the decision making process. A question for the researcher in this study is how these sorts of matters may be taken into account in giving explanations that relate closely to realities met in the setting.

### Centres of Expertise as Pivotal Developments

Clark has much to say on the question of professional or scholarly expertise as pivotal sources of power in higher education settings. The ideas are crucial for understanding how, on the Footscray Campus of the newly amalgamating Victoria University of Technology, the EDD grew over the years, and how this growth accelerated during the period of the data gathering phase of this study. Clark (1983a) cites Moodie (1976) in asserting that:

Professional or scholarly expertise confers a crucial and distinctive kind of authority, entitling certain persons to act in certain ways that entail some dominance over others (p. 108).

The point opens up the distinctive nature of academic endeavour. The critical cast of mind will avoid definite answers to definite questions. Over-determined belief systems will be anathema. Attitudes arising from open-ended inquiry will run deep and bring little tolerance for interference from professional managers and others seen as intruders.

On the question of levels and forms of academic authority Clark notes a range of levels which vary in importance from country to country, but which influence decision making in ways which may be clearly noted. He sees problems as entering in at levels and being moved around until they find appropriate decision makers. There are two terms: "problem access structure" and "decision structure" in this regard (pp. 109-110). Under "discipline rooted authority", Clark sees "personal rulership", "collegial rulership (professorial)", "guild



authority", and "professional authority" as separable (pp. 110-116). At the heart of discipline rooted authority is the assumption of freedom to research and to teach without formal rules and regulations (pp. 110-112). This has already been noted, and will be further discussed later, in certain EDD activities where personal rulership flourishes. The head of the department will quietly enter the room and make careful suggestions about the point being discussed. He publicly admits to proceeding cautiously and slowly. Informant G talks about moving "two steps forward and one step back" in relations with the Physics Department. The coordinator of the Learning Centre seeks a meeting, sharing diaries all around.

Collegial rulership ranges across a spectrum from apparently functional to apparently dysfunctional: it seems to hold significance for all in academic work (Clark, 1983a, pp. 112-13). In the EDD the head of the department and the coordinators speak strongly of a need to consult at all times and on all issues with subordinates. This, so much so, that the subordinates no longer appear subordinate.

Guild authority is an essential notion for understanding fully the nature of the background to decisions and decision making in higher education (Clark, 1983a, pp. 113-15). Clark synthesises from history and theory on the matter. The professions have been formed with guild like personal control over areas held in common with colleagues: "... collective rule dampens the tendency [for full personal control] by locating decision making in a body of the whole that attempts to monopolise control over a larger domain of work" (p. 114). This process, occurring at the lower levels, sets the tone for domain building of a distinctive kind. Ethnographic descriptions of the areas of work and work activities in the EDD illustrate the point: even the range of ways the students enter the area also fits the picture.

Clark's views allow an escape from an idealistic picture of professional life. How to render the stark power realities of higher education is a major problem for the present study. There is a dark underside to the professional way of life. It becomes important to give due weight to this aspect. Clark (1983a) notes how professional authority has been considered in unduly idealistic terms (pp. 115-16). Professionals "exercise authority in a host of ways", rendering the description of professional authority "problematic" (p. 115).

## Professionalism in its Contexts

Clark (1983a) has found his "appropriate middle ground" in the notion that "overall, academic professionalism is ambiguous, diverse, and complex"; and that "it tilts toward specific forms of authority according to the pressures of context" (pp. 116, 125). This middle ground lies between the overly formalist ideas of the past and the vague banalities of "organized anarchy" (March and Olsen, 1976). The analysis has been set up in order to move on to describe systems across national boundaries. Three summary points now give background clarity for any analysis of higher education units and they are listed in Figure Four (see opposite).

Finally, and importantly, for this study, Clark (1983a) considers the question of decision making in the light of fragmented centres of influence at all levels. Small accretions of action are furthered in memos, drafts, suggestions and tentative discussions (pp. 132-33). An important point to note is the way in which autonomy at the lower levels can still be subject to sudden incursions from above: from state or national authorities; or from institutional bureaucracies. During the data gathering phase of this study, the question of the future location of the EDD in the constantly evolving amalgamated structure of the Victoria University of Technology remained problematic. Moreover the question went to the very heart of cherished value systems held by members of staff. Relocating the EDD within the faculty of education, or within the humanities area, or leaving it to function as an autonomous unit, elevated to full "academic department status", were all options being considered by higher decision makers. Each carried its own far-reaching consequences for program design, philosophies, and career development.

Clark (1983a, Chap. 5) asserts that simple descriptions and answers to the question of how the system is ordered should be avoided. Processes of integration are not going to be easily understood as "tasks proliferate, beliefs multiply, and the many forms of authority pull in different directions" (p. 136). This goes all the way up to the highest levels of government, for:

Time and again the modern state stumbles over the academic system. A concluding review of some twentieth-century efforts to fashion compelling chains of command suggests their self-defeating nature (p. 137).

FIGURE FOUR: PROFESSIONALISM IN ACADEMIC UNITS  
(Clark, 1983a, p. 132)

- \* there is much discretion at the bottom of systems and units;
- \* the loose coupling noted in the division of work also has its parallel in balkanized authorities within systems and units;
- \* there is much that trickles upwards through systems and units and happens by slow accretion.

Points made by Clark in his analysis bear directly upon certain processes that established the EDD in the early years. The head of the department was then going to CTEC for seeding money to establish certain functions around the learning centre concept. Drawing upon local Australian analyses of the system, Clark explains how:

The buffer form of oligarchical influence is likely to develop most extensively in those systems historically rooted in federative, coalitional, or market environments of institutional development (p. 142).

This remark draws attention to how the head of the department took part in an expanding market process. He was periodically going to Canberra to obtain funding from the CTEC buffer organisation. While capitalising well upon this funding with imaginative ideas for new programs, he was, in return, also adding to the expansion and development of that buffer system. New staff were appointed to EDD. The campus community was pleased with new funds for special programs targeted to disadvantaged students and this also meant further local merit. CTEC, in turn, was fostering its particular forms of influence as it saw its funding well spent on worthwhile programs.

This particular scenario, however, was not to last forever in its initial form. Once again, Clark (1983a) gives the prophetic line to new developments always, it would jargonistically seem, like Marxian seeds of self destruction, ready to germinate different directions of growth. Clark cites Lunsford (1970) to support how the "professionalization of

administration has been uniquely strong in the United States": and goes on to cite Moodie (1976) to support how in Britain:

. . . observers . . . have also noted there a "greater emphasis on the roles of vice-chancellors, bureaucrats, and council" in university government, with a concomitant decline in the relative power of faculty and with the possibility looming that "practising academics" will be replaced in key decision-making areas by "full-time professional bureaucrats" (Moodie, 1976, pp. 133-34). Such professionalization will occur strongly in the layers of coordination above the institutional level, since the higher staffs need skills applicable across larger and more complex systems and a related mentality appropriate to a view from the top. Such staffs are notoriously removed from faculty and especially from students (p. 149).

Towards the end of the data gathering phase of this study, from the top layers of the university administration, there came moves to close down the learning centre functions of the EDD. Certain resources were to be disbursed to other sections of the newly amalgamating university. Financial viability was a prime issue, widely stated as: "There is just not money around for student support any more". The image of merit and reputation for local support for disadvantage, so effectively and painstakingly built up over recent years, was being seriously challenged by an incursion "from above". In those higher circles were to be heard remarks such as: "People simply do not like change, but change is sometimes necessary".

It needs to be said in conclusion that ideas derived from the work of Burton Clark in this section of the report remain open for empirical study. Like Parsons and Platt (1973), Clark (1983a; 1983b) seeks to build new systems of concepts that will comprehensively render the social realities of the field. In this move is to be felt the functionalist tone in the writings, as mentioned earlier. Unlike Parsons, however, there is no closed system of ideas as is found to form the background to *The American University* (Parsons and Platt, 1973, Introduction, and Chap. 4). There is a more open-ended study of current research and personally experienced ideas in Clark's work. Such ideas as the "proliferation of academic tasks", the "multiplication of beliefs", and the "multivariate forms of authority pulling in different directions" are open to observation and "amenable to direct empirical assessments" (Abrahamson, 1978, pp. 31-3, 66-73).

Research matters such as these have already been outlined in Chapter One of this report. The two major appendices setting out sampled decisions and depth interviews show

evidence for the three propositions listed above in Figure Four. Such ideas will be further discussed in detail in the summary sections of the current report where they form direct background to central questions: how far detailed analysis of decisions and decision making within the EDD links with theory from Hickson et al (1986) and Allison (1969; 1971). To those two detailed sources the report now turns for theory at its most focal.

## ANALYTICAL LOGIC FOR UNDERSTANDING DECISIONS AND DECISION MAKING IN COMPLEX ORGANISATIONS

Rational approaches to decisions and decision making have taken the front running from both everyday and academic points of view. As remarked above in Chapter One, whether or not a proposal is thought "rational" sets the scene for whether or not it is labelled "sensible". The term rational carries deep overtones of desirability, since the obvious antonym is irrational. Yet executive decision makers would object to the idea that taking account of the political climate for running a proposal was thought irrational. Organisational politics carries its own form of rationality, as does attendance to standard operating procedures, which carry the rationality of authorised organisational process. Along with the three so far mentioned: rational, political and organisational process approaches, two further forms of decisional analysis are raised for mention in this section: incrementalism and synoptics.

Incrementalist approaches bring a fresh view through taking an activist cast of mind to the busy program of public policy analysis. An opposition between the synoptic and the cybernetic outlook brings a useful dimension to the studies. All theoretical outlooks have gradually come around to agree on one important point. The synoptic assumption of an adequately assembled overview of the conditions leading up to the point of decision is a mirage. Synoptics, the idea that all aspects and implications of decision require identification and simultaneous consideration for the matching of objectives with means for attaining them, is identified by Hickson as the departure point for new theory in the field (Hickson et al, 1986a, p. 18).

Allison's Rational Actor Model. Allison's landmark works on decision making theory (1969, 1971), have been referred to by many but not then comprehensively extended by them

(Hickson, 1987). There is a basic ambiguity in the work, for the term rational actor, for Allison, denotes organisations, and not individuals, as may be often mistakenly assumed. In higher education, applying Allison's ideas means referring to such phenomena as: the council's views; the institute's attitudes; and the decision (making) of the board of studies. The council, the institute, and the board exemplify Allison's "rational/organisational/political" actors in one important sense of the term. Developing a clear notion of the social actor as individual is a task quite distinct from such phenomena.

Values-maximisation lies at the heart of Allison's views of the rational actor. Groups review options for bringing forward actions which will see certain values given the greatest scope for further development. This is a plausible idea in real world practice, but quickly bogs down when people give time to clarify the values. This process is often lengthy, complicated, and, it may be argued, never ends in a succinct values formulation. Typically, the process is detoured, and, in rational actor terms, groups just get on with rationally hunting a commonly assumed, but broadly stated cluster of values. This field is well reviewed by Steinbruner (1974), giving a cybernetic paradigm nested within cognitive processes identified in recent research. Focus in Steinbruner's work is upon the individual human brain as the centre of decision-making activity. In this sense the work reaches outside a working sociological perspective.

Hickson's Rational Actor Model. Hickson *et al* (1986a, 1986b, 1987a and 1987b) and Wilson *et al* (1980 and 1986) cite Allison, but the extensive literature they present does not substantively develop his triple rationality thesis. Hickson's dual rationality theory argues that:

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

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

Curiously, a careful reading of Hickson *et al* rediscovers it in the diagrammatic model of decision making given (*ibid.*, p. 166). The diagram distinguishes an organisational level from a decisional level and locates the organisational "rules of the game" at a point prior to

the raising of the "matter for decision". Dual rationality of complexity and politicality then take over dominance of the process. The source of the idea is not emphasised in discussion, leaving it to the reader to infer that Hickson *et al*'s organisational rules of the game corresponds with Allison's ideas about standard operating procedures. This is unfortunate, because Allison gave ideas about how standard operating procedures were able to carry their own rationality and decisional outcomes from start to finish. Where there is loss of complexity in explanation, theoretical conflation is often suspected.

Discussion may proceed with Hickson (1987) to note the upsurge in interest given to political processes: "It is well recognised that the way each matter is handled is shaped by the interests it implicates as well as by the problems it raises" (p. 172). Allison (1969) is mentioned in terms of his "bureaucratic politics" model, but there is no mention of the "organisational process" model. Some of the language used, however, approaches the idea: "Most of the time . . . the elite keep a grip on what is going on . . . Behind this grip lie the rules of the game as these are expressed in the constitution and structure of the organisation itself" (p. 174) (emphases added).

Tantalisingly though, the commentary remains a long way from Allison's notions of standard operating procedures (SOPs) with their major effects upon long-term outcomes and the parochial urgencies and rulings which keep them in place despite influence from above. An important addendum is the idea that goals are seen as "tethers defining acceptable performance" (in a particular standard operating procedure).

Hickson contends that a better question than 'who decides?' is 'who influences the deciding?': "Because of politicality, there is not so much 'the decision' but 'the deciding'" (Hickson, 1986a, p. 93). There is a "hubbub of pressure and contention" surrounding decision makers, but describing it as "organised anarchy" (Cohen, et al, 1972) is argued as going too far. A chief executive, as seen by Hickson *et al*:

may exert more influence than any other source of influence but he does not have more influence than everyone else combined, nor more than sub-alliances of interests, especially external interests. He has a hold that is open to challenge. There is not a single hegemony over the managerial pluralism of internal and external interests, but a malleable constrained domination (Hickson, 1986a, p. 94) (emphasis in original).

The idea is complex and attractive in its implications: it matches Wilson's notions of persona, the idea that decision makers wear different masks to put forward certain interest patterns on certain sorts of occasions (Wilson, 1980).

Allison's Governmental Politics Model. The dominant inference pattern is as follows:

If a nation performed an action, that action was the resultant of bargaining among individuals and groups within the government. Model III's explanatory power is achieved by displaying the game, the action channel, the positions, the players, their preferences, and the pulling and hauling - that yielded, as a resultant, the action in question. Where the action was for the most part the triumph of an individual (e.g., the President) or group (e.g., the President's men or a cabal) this model attempts to specify the details of the game that made the victory possible. But with these . . . Model III tries not to neglect the sharp differences, misunderstandings, and foul-ups that contributed to what was actually done (Allison, 1969; 1971).

To feel the weight of complexity in Allison's early arguments in this context, it is important to note the way in which institutions as well as groups and individuals are perceived to be political actors. Furthermore, the ideas of misunderstandings and foul-ups are important as they entail forces beyond reasonable control; standard operating procedures (SOPs) are significant in this respect.

Allison's Organisational Process Model. There is usually a very strong context in which what is the case is perceived to be what ought to be the case:

The characteristics of a government's action in any instance follows from . . . routines, and from the choice made by government leaders - on the basis of information and estimates provided by existing routines - among established programs. The best explanation of an organisation's behavior at  $t$  is  $t-1$ ; the best prediction of what will happen at  $t+1$  is  $t$ . Model II's explanatory power is achieved by uncovering the organisational routines and repertoires that produced the outputs that comprise the puzzling occurrence (Allison, 1971, p. 88).

There are strong links here with the incrementalism of Braybrooke and Lindblom. It remains a critical issue for this study to explore the extent to which the work of Hickson et al based on the Bradford studies gives due credit to Allison's ideas.



Re-examining Hickson: the Organisational Process Model. Outcomes reported in the Bradford Studies indicate that universities are the most 'committed' of organizations and this would appear to be an acknowledgment of the status of Allison's Model II orientation to explanation. But if this is so, it is not developed. The essentially dual rationality of explanation is underlined in the following:

The tumult in committees, and in common rooms and corridors and on telephones between committee meetings, is not only about decision problems [rational actor model] but about which and whose interests [governmental politics model] should or should not be represented - academics, students, or whoever (Hickson, 1986a, p. 227).

It is asserted that academics seem to value sorting out who should be represented in a decision making process rather than what resources need to be made available for it. This is the idea that committees are the oil in the academic system, a truth that needs to be put, but it is clearly not the whole truth. We need to test the extent to which reported outcomes neglect the possibilities of seeing or inquiring into the power of the standard operating procedures. These would be instantiated in the very "fluid or constricted" committee processes reported in those very same studies.

Theoretical Propositions Governing Focal Interests. In concluding this theoretical framework part of the thesis, certain propositions arise which now govern focal interests. In describing and explaining the nature of decisions and decision making among academics in the EDD, it will be important to try to point out whether and how such propositions are confirmed or disconfirmed in the data analysis process. They are listed below, ranging from social structural factors, through professional socialisation issues, to items that outline recent developments in an analytical logic adequate for the descriptive and explanatory task.

- # Deep conflict is endemic within academic work groups, frequently violent, and takes the form of displacement of persons, groups, ideas and agenda within identifiable binary conflict groups (Dahrendorf).
  
- # Within academic work groups, adjustments forced in relation to conflict, put into place new role sets, that form the basis for further developments, that, in turn, lead to further conflict (Dahrendorf).

- # Understanding the legitimation process is central to showing how technical, political, and social conditions for the modification of quasi groups leads to objectification of key interests, which lead, in turn, to formation of conflict groups (Dahrendorf).
  
- # In respect of small units such as the EDD, there is much discretion practised by academics working within them, notwithstanding that they operate at the bottom of systems and units (Clark).
  
- # The loose coupling noted in the division of work also has its parallel in balkanised authorities within systems and units (Clark).
  
- # There is much that trickles upwards through systems and units and happens by slow accretion (Clark)
  
- # Tripartite classification of decision types into vortex sporadic, familiar constricted and tractable fluid opens the field for further analysis of decisions and decision making to test the scope of the categories (Hickson et al).
  
- # The expanding linear triangle idea is used in tripartite classification of decision types to depict progress in decision making from initialisation to finalisation (Hickson et al). The point rests also upon the assumption of clear boundaries developing around decisional content as decisions move towards finalisation.
  
- # Triple rationality theory (Allison), becomes dual rationality theory (Hickson et al), with the result that the idea of the standard operating procedure as a logically independent idea remains a wild card that warrants further examination in empirical inquiry.

This now concludes the formal consideration of theory for the thesis. The report now turns to systematically set down data gathered from the field work site and to show outcomes of the required ethnographic sifting.