UNITY OF VISION: CONSTRUCTING WORKPLACE HEGEMONY

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On Employee Communication

The article presents findings from an analysis of a video (***Total Quality Culture*** 1991) that was used in support of a Total Quality Culture initiative in British Aerospace (Commercial Aircraft) Ltd, Airlines Division Prestwick[1]. It was one of a series of communication activities[2] undertaken to improve communication between the Division's managers and employees, and between its departments which were perceived by the Prestwick Management Committee to be working independently of one another. The video employs what might seem contradictory discourses. One, a "tell-and-command" rhetoric, (taken to be consistent with rigid, steeply hierarchical, "modernist" or "Fordist" organisation), the other, a rhetoric of facilitation, that has been associated with "open" (Smythe Dorward Lambert 1991), flatter "post-modernist" or "post-Fordist" organisational designs (Hassard and Parker 1993; Hall and Jacques 1990). The co-existence of these discourse in the video raises questions about neatly separating organisational types. This video simultaneously encourages individual initiative **and** establishes limits to it; affirms **and** denies greater participation in executive decisions; and clarifies **and** obscures relations of production. In light of the changing circumstances which have conditioned its production, the video can be understood as a moment in a complex process of redefining the **relative** autonomy granted employees to demonstrate functional initiative.

Communicating to, if not with, employees has been greatly emphasised of late[3], and ways of doing so have been developed extensively, partly because of continuing organisational re-structuring, and partly also because of employment legislation that followed a turbulent period of industrial strife during the 1970s[4]. Employee com-

munication - **purposeful communication through official (controlled) channels, that is designed for employees and, in conjunction with other means, aims to inform them about, involve them in, and commit them to, approved representations of an imaginary organisation** - is closely bound up with the perceived need to motivate and involve employees. While acknowledging the importance of the other social arrangements that might involve (envelop or entangle) employees in the circumstances of their companies, this analysis explores what has been happening to communications targeted on them.

The video selected represents model, responsibly autonomous employees as members of an imaginary community which is possessed of a unity of vision. It does so by recruiting for corporate purposes, a culture which it attributes to employees. What it reveals of this culture, places great store by the voluntary and dedicated pursuit of skilled interests. The culture's representatives appear, willingly, to undertake demanding tasks in their private lives, and to obtain considerable satisfaction from doing them well. They are promised similar satisfaction from doing their work tasks as well.

The main discursive actions of this video might be seen as microcosmic illustration of the "corporate development of the obedient, normalised mind and body" (Deetz 1992, 26). From another perspective, they might be seen as evidence of a greater regard for, and enlightened treatment of, labour (Kern and Schumann 1987). Labour is not simply a "human resource" to be deployed efficiently, it is also one of the "stakeholders" from whom corporate organisations must seek a licence to operate (RSA 1994). So, is it best to understand the video as disciplining employees, or as a request to them to be allowed to operate in a particular fashion? Might it, indeed, be something of both?

Types of Organisational Communication

Formal communication in the workplace is either **operationally** or **hegemonically** oriented. Often, specific episodes will be a combination of both, and it must be stressed that the boundary between the two is, in practice, a fuzzy one. Timely information that is perceived to be operationally relevant can have added hegemonic value simply by being timely and relevant.

Operationally oriented communication episodes are **everyday** occurrences, and functional in that they demonstrate procedures. They may usefully be classified as a site of disciplinary power (Foucault 1979) in as much as they define particularly what is (can, and ought to, be) **and** what it is not (cannot, and ought not to, be) done. Different types of knowledge predominate depending on the specific objective(s) of a communication episode. When episodes are oriented to operational matters, received **dictionary** and **directory** knowledge (Sackmann 1991) will predominate. They will indicate **what**, for instance, a process is, and also **how** it is to be enacted. In organisations with BS5750 or ISO9001 accreditation, such knowledge will be institutionalised in written, "generic procedures" and "work instructions," compliance to which — "conformance" between representation and practice — will be periodically tested by external auditors. Operationally oriented communication may also involve what Sackmann calls **recipe** knowledge, prescriptive or regulatory knowledge, the expression of which is occasioned by breakdowns of various kinds. While for Sackmann it is largely repair knowledge, it can also be exemplary knowledge, "best practice" knowledge, which is likely to surface in the course of initial training or induction, or when processes are being "re-engineered."

Hegemonically oriented communication **unifies**, or **co-ordinates**, participants' and a company's goals, expectations and attitudes. While this can be an everyday occurrence, it can also be a feature of "special" occasions which stand somewhat apart from the normal, recursive processes that produce and reproduce everyday realities, for instance, the organisational rituals as employee socialisation. If it does address specific operational topics, it is likely to develop their significance at a more general level. It will be visionary or missionary, will assert fundamental and universal (corporate) principles, commitments and directions. An important feature of hegemonically oriented communication is that it occurs with pragmatically motivated rites and rituals, which in the hands of "savvy" managers, "become powerful levers that top management can pull to maintain its control and exert its influence" (Deal and Kennedy, 1988, 75 - 76). While Deal and Kennedy presumed too much about the capacity of managers to control and steer cultures, they have reminded us that occupational cultures are bound up with control and influence — a connection that cannot be manifestly evident to the participants if desired outcomes are to be realised. Participants must be absorbed by the ritual itself, if particular expectations are to be experienced as common and shared, and this requires identifying and recruiting **appropriate** rituals. Communication episodes will represent as common, that vision and those values which the most senior levels of management consider to be **the** vision and **the** values of the organisation. Yet truly hegemonic communication must be populist (Laclau 1977) in that specific episodes recruit, or are couched in, subordinate discourses (or approved features of them). It is inevitably thus with the large modern company which is a **mélange** of subcultures. It is communication which represents managerial initiatives as responses to others' demands or, more likely nowadays, needs or initiatives.

Employees are likely to experience such communication intensively during initial socialisation. Laurie Graham has reported that in the manufacturing company she observed, of the 127.5 hours of initial orientation and training, approximately 56 were spent in practical training, while 71.5 were concentrated on attitude and behaviour (1993, 158). This involved "lessons on the company's history and philosophy (...) instructions in the concept of kaizening (a philosophy of continuous improvement) and lectures designed to demonstrate SIA's egalitarian nature. The third area of instruction involved an attempt to socialise workers as to their expected behaviour (...) This took place through formal, video-driven behaviour training sessions and also through facilitating informal interactions with other classmates" (1993, 158).

Many companies now also make a regular slot available to screen video magazines, the viewing of which occurs in circumstances which create a sense of occasion, of importance, and of community. Often people are brought together **in normal work time** to view a video, of which Thralls (1992, 387) has observed that they provide "an occasion (...) for members to gather for a common unifying experience." Given what we know about the decoding processes of domestic viewing of broadcast television, and about the subcultural diversity of contemporary organisations, any notion that group viewing **inevitably** results in a "common unifying experience" has to be considered problematic. Nevertheless, Thralls usefully indicates other measures used to create a sense of community.

The video analysed here is oriented more to the hegemonic rather than the operational. It is particularly interesting because of its recruitment of subcultures to promote among employees a "total quality culture" approach to work. The analysis explains how this is done.

Methods

Methodologically, the study was situated within critical linguistics (Fowler et al. 1979; Kress and Hodge 1979; Fairclough 1989; 1992; Wodak 1989). The methodology is, in fact, a hybrid one. It combines lexico-grammatical, register analysis (Halliday 1973; 1978; Fowler 1977; 1991), and clause relational and textual analysis (Hoey 1983; Hoey and Winter 1986; Hoey 1994; Winter 1994), together with insights from semiotically oriented cultural studies (e.g. Barthes 1973; Fiske 1982; Uspensky 1973). It enables the identification of the linguistic devices and configurations by which texts have converted meaning potential (Halliday 1978) into specific, readable meanings. It is a methodology which enables us to explore [a] the ideational dimensions of the texts — the understandings they construct, for example — and [b], their interpersonal functions, by which we mean to refer to such matters as authorial evaluations and the inferences readers are encouraged to make through the use of such devices as modality and clause relations.

Relationship of the Verbal to Other Discourses

The techniques just described operate on linguistic data. This study's object is a video and, therefore, attention had to be given to the explicit and implicit relations between what is said **and** seen.

For most of the video, a narrator's voice-over accompanied the visuals. As is normally the case with "realist" video productions, there were few, **explicit** or specific references within the voice-over narration to what can be seen. The relationship between the verbal and the visual is akin to that frequently assumed between clauses; they can be seen to be connected, but the nature of the connection remains implicit or unmarked. A connection of some kind is at all times assumed by viewers, even if it turns out to be different from that intended by producers. Much of the first half of this video shows us people undertaking hobbies, sports, and other leisure pursuits, then the same people at work in the Prestwick plant. In both circumstances, they are looking intently at what they are doing, not at the camera. For the first of these "at play - at work" sequences, the accompanying voice — over is:

> *It isn't just about our people. It's about the way we do things, the way we manage our processes.*
>
> *We have to find a different approach to our work, a way that reduces errors and cuts down waste. At the same time ...*

Just as the word "time" is being uttered, the visual discourse cuts to a close-up of a man preparing a fly for fishing.

> *... it can be a way of working that makes the job less frustrating and more satisfying.*

As this is being said, the shot is lengthening. The angle of vision is increased to allow more of the setting, a lamp-lit living room, to be seen. The "private" has been publicly represented, as it so often is, with detail conventionally associated with the "domestic." What is seen in these few seconds will be taken as an illustration of a "less frustrating and more satisfying way of working." The final cut of the sequence is to the man looking admiringly or contentedly at the results, just as the voice-over says:

> *For many of us, searching for excellence comes naturally in our private lives. For*

Prestwick to succeed, the same commitment to quality needs to be transferred into the workplace.

Clearly, the producers are deliberately[5] making connections. During post-production, these words have been spoken, at precisely the moment certain shots are seen. But the carefully timed connection, the constructedness, is not made explicit. Viewers are not bluntly told that what they are seeing is "someone naturally searching for excellence in their private life." While the orchestration of the visual and verbal discourse may well condition such an interpretation, it is left to the viewers to take the final steps to it, by themselves. A more directive approach occurs, when visual and verbal together realise a pun, but this is **exceptional** in this context[6]. The voice-over acts to anchor the visual discourse, to reveal its truth, but only because it has been carefully edited to follow and punctuate the unfolding visual discourse. It conditions, but does not overtly direct viewing possibilities.

The other, largely background discourses lend support to the voice-over's anchoring work - but not always unconditionally. At one point we see the only woman to be featured, first as a tenor horn player and then in the office, at keyboard and screen. The brass band of which she is a member, just happens to be playing the hymn "Dear Lord and Father of Mankind":

Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways
Reclothe us in our rightful mind
In purer lives thy service find
In deeper reverence praise

It is as if the hymn had been recruited to the cause of quality, and of course, if the connection is made, the cause of quality would be sanctified. Only if the hymn is recognised and its lyric recalled, the significance of the invocation to be "re-clothed" will be transferred to the verbally constructed prescriptions about the importance of "**a quality first approach, a customer first approach**." But **is** the connection made? Who would recognise the fragment of incidental music, let alone recall the quoted verse[7]?

Licensing TQC

The video, ***Total Quality Culture***, was used as part of an internal campaign to promote an awareness of the importance of "total quality," and was for internal consumption. No captions are used when characters are seen for the first time, as they would have been had this been a documentary on total quality initiatives produced by a broadcaster for transmission to anonymous viewers[8].

After an initial sequence which establishes what the video will be about, it assumes a pattern with three main elements. There are shots of people engaged in leisure pursuits, followed by shots of them at work. After a run of three of these sequences, the video cuts to a meeting, picking up a speaker in mid flow. None is identified by caption. We know from interviews that the one who is seen and speaks most is the Director and General Manager, and that the situation is a breakfast meeting with representatives of a range of the company's departments[9]. After the extracts from the meeting, the video returns to people at play, then at work, and eventually to another sequence from the meeting, of which there are three in all.

Thematically, each repeat elaborates what is established at the outset for different

categories of employee. There is early reference to a "Total Quality Culture development programme," but no exploration of whether the programme should or should not be adopted, nor any manifest advocacy of its implementation. Instead, the video begins by celebrating pride in a job well done and **only then** asserts the necessity of the TQC programme and the benefits that might follow from fully implementing it. In seeking to legitimate the TQC programme in the eyes of viewer-employees, the video proposes that TQC is [a] merely an extension of their craftsmanship, their naturally occurring pride in their work, and their dedication to healthy leisure pursuits[10]; and [b], a consequence of customer demand. It relates the new (TQC) to that which is presented as familiar and held in high regard.

Setting the Scene

Following opening visual sequences of a small, "executive" aircraft being readied for take-off, being boarded by a young be-suited man holding a brief case, and taking off, the visualisation shifts to scenes of empty and still factory interiors and then to groups of backlit employees arriving, or possibly, departing. Over this, occurs the following verbal discourse:

> (1) *Twin Pioneer. Bulldog. Jetstream.* Quality *aircraft and aero-structures.*
>
> (2) Meticulous workmanship. Innovative *Design.* Attention to detail. Excellence. *These are the strengths that Prestwick's customers have rightly come to expect.*
>
> (3) *In our time we have won the Lockheed* Quality Award. *Hardly anyone outside the United States has succeeded in doing that. So we can, and have,* achieved high levels of quality.
>
> (4) *But, what exactly are our strengths, and how can we build on them? And, critically, how can we improve our ability to satisfy our customers and keep ahead of the competition?*
>
> *MUSIC UP; TAKE-OFF SEQUENCE; CUT TO PREPARING FLY FOR FISHING*

The non-italicised words form a lexical set that maps what quality culture is. The "quality register" (upon which this voice-over draws heavily throughout) begins to propose to viewer-employees what their experiences of working at Prestwick are, and are about to become. How is the representation of their experiences executed?

> *(1) Twin Pioneer. Bulldog. Jetstream. Quality aircraft and aero-structures.*

No formal, grammatical connection is made between the three named entities in the first part of utterance (1), nor between it and the second part. The collocation of the **three** named entities, and of the first with the second part, presents the named entities as of a kind, as quality aircraft and aero-structures. Assuming as implicit an anaphoric "these are," the second utterance would be heard to refer to the first list, and to **classify** it. It is a truncated attributive clause. Until it occurs, the entities could **have been** anything, at least to those not involved in their production. Because this is said to an audience who have been involved in their production, however, and who therefore know already they **are** aircraft the heard emphasis in the second utterance is likely to be on "quality." Not just any old aircraft, then, but **quality** aircraft.

The second (2 above) operates in similar fashion. The three noun phrases are clas-

sified as features of excellence. The first clause of the second sentence represents them as "strengths," which in turn are classified by the next clause as attributes (now) expected by "Prestwick's customers." Applying a **commutation test** (Fiske 1982, 111-112) to this utterance, the final clause could have been "*... that Prestwick's customers expect*." It would have made roughly the same sense, and arguably, would have been punchier. Therefore, some explanation of the use of "*have rightly come*" is necessary. The phrase moderates the customers' expectations. It justifies them. They have a right to expect them, and by implication, therefore, somebody is obligated to acknowledge their right. The force of the "*have (...) come*" suggests that the expectations have developed over time. These are not one off, but repeat customers in a long term relationship with the company. They are satisfied customers too, because their "rightful" expectations have not been disappointed, but on the contrary, have been met to such an extent that prizes have been won, as the initial utterance of the next part of the voice-over establishes.

Another noteworthy feature of the second utterance (2) is the use of "*Prestwick*." Neither the company's nor division's name is ever mentioned throughout the entire video. The consistent use of Prestwick instead creates an imaginary community of interest between company and town. Company and town become one and the same. As it happens, Prestwick is largely a one company town, and this characteristic substitution (it occurs quite spontaneously in conversations with company representatives) draws on and reinforces a connotative fusion of the town's and the company's fortunes. In the context of the video fusion also invites employees to shoulder the responsibility of the whole town's economic viability. The substitution proposes that considerably more is at stake than the profitability of the Commercial Aircraft division. A higher purpose for the pursuit of a quality culture has been invoked.

A higher purpose is also implied in the use of the phrase "*In our time*" (3), which has a folkloric ring to it and suggests the company has a life span which exceeds that of its current employees. As stewardship of the company (Prestwick also, perhaps) has passed into their hands, they have done well by it, as can be seen from winning a quality award — the "*Lockheed Quality Award*." The use of "*Hardly anyone...*" suggests its prestige. For all we know, however, inside the US, winning the award could be an everyday occurrence! The use of "*Hardly anyone...*" will probably be heard as enhancing the rarity of winning the award, and thus as further celebration of the capacity for achieving "*high levels of quality*" by the present day stewards of the company.

Mode of Address

By mode of address, I mean to refer to such matters of textual design as the voices of the texts, the manner in which they deliver the texts, and their orientations to, for instance, the actions of other textual participants. Two types can be distinguished in the opening voice-over. One is anonymous and impersonal, while the other is akin to the "confessional" narrators of fiction who appear to tell their own stories.

The first occurs less frequently. It is there in the first two utterances, later when the voice-over points out the way forward: "*For Prestwick to succeed, the same commitment to: quality needs to be transferred into the workplace*," and then periodically through the remainder of the voice-over. This voice delivers definitive knowledge or mandates action. It belongs to that class of omniscient voice also found in journalism and classic realist fiction, which delivers the metalanguage surrounding the discourses in inverted commas and which illumines their truth (MacCabe 1981). In place of "reported speech," there is here the visual discourse and a certain amount of received organisational knowledge.

The impersonally delivered discourse consists mainly of simple declarative and imperative utterances and when clauses are formed they are attributive. This voice makes no use of speculative verbs such as "seem," nor of adverbs such as "perhaps," "certainly" or "as if" which would shift its discourse from the register of the factual to that of interpretation. These are interpretative utterances, of course, but their grammatical form — combinations of declarative sentences — renders the interpretation invisible. They appear instead to disclose simple, self-evident truths.

With utterance three (*"In our time..."*) a different voice is assumed, one sustained through the remainder of the opening segment. No longer anonymous or disembodied, it has become one of those included in the "we" and the "our," and can, therefore, be heard to deliver "insider," popular knowledge. The "we" is inclusive (Wilson 1990) and the speaker is not creating distance from the topic. It is delivered as it were by one of us, reminding us of our achievements, asking us to consider what our strengths are and later indicating how they might be improved. It appears to be a pretty knowledgeable, and somewhat stern, member of the community the "we" encompasses, sufficiently qualified to remark on the rightness of customers' expectations and to interpret the winning of the Lockheed Award as evidence of high levels of quality already achieved. Moreover, it does not shrink from advancing **recipe** knowledge, stating the things that **have** or **need** to be done to change and improve the situation. Indeed, the voice-over becomes progressively more prescriptive, as in the following:

> *We all have roles, but what really matters is that we're all members of a team and it's a team effort which will let us make changes that on our own we'd find impossible. So, everyone is involved. No-one is exempt.*

The use of "*really*" is definitive. The assumption of such discursive power, if it is not to appear excessively assertive, perhaps requires the adoption of the "we" form. This, then, could be a mildly democratic subaltern voice, of the employees but informed by corporate, and not only functionally specific, knowledge. This voice assumes membership of the "community" (team / Prestwick) and uses this to license the dispensation of recipe knowledge.

The opening segment closes with (the utterance 4), which functions textually as a **boundary utterance**. It brings to a conclusion the first major segment of the video, by briefly reiterating and then pointing forward to what will be done next. It does so in a way typical of factual television discourses. It poses questions related to what has been seen and heard, and thus creates an expectation that what is yet to be seen and heard will provide answers (Hall, Connell and Curti 1981). Of course, a significant difference between this and broadcast television discourses is in the use of the "we" which collapses a distinction scrupulously maintained in the latter between those who report and comment on the actions of named others and those named others.

Three macro themes have been established. First of all, the products and working practices at "Prestwick" have demonstrated high levels of quality, hence the winning of the Lockheed prize. Secondly, customers have come to expect excellence. Thirdly, though excellence is evident, there is room for improvement. The best can be bettered. Clearly the last statement (4) of this opening sequence suggests that BAe too is a practitioner of the alchemy of excellence or **kaizening**. On relations, a community of interest (*Prestwick's future success*) has been established, the bearers of which are the teams in the plant. The video now proposes how to better to best.

The main thrust of the following stages is to link the new, the quality approach at work, to the already familiar, what people do when they are not at work for example. In so doing, the quality approach is made to seem merely an extension of what "*comes naturally in our private lives*." That done, it becomes more insistent about that which **must be** done "*to develop a quality first approach*." Here, first of all, is how the connection between the private and the public is made.

> (5) *It isn't just about our people. It's about the way we do things, the way we manage our processes.*
>
> (6) *We have to find a different approach to our work, a way that reduces errors and cuts down waste. At the same time, it can be a way of working that makes the job less frustrating and more satisfying.*
>
> (7) *For many of us, searching for excellence comes naturally in our private lives. For Prestwick to succeed, the same commitment to quality needs to be transferred into the work place.*
>
> (8) *We know that our customers are demanding even greater quality. It's up to us to provide products and services which meet their requirements, every time, on time, and at the right price.*
>
> (9) *So, we've got to harness all of our skills and energies to develop a quality first approach — a customer first approach.*

This segment restates the problem and concludes with a solution. Few of these brook questioning or quibbling, mainly as a consequence of the increased use of modal auxiliary verbs such as "have to," "needs to be" and "got to." Sentences are definitive, as with (5) and (9), in representing what is and is not the case, and what must be done to achieve the solution — "*a quality first approach - a customer first approach*."

This sequence addresses delicate matters. A fundamental implication of what is said is that people do **not** invest as much energy, dedication and enthusiasm in their work as they need to. Why else would the video be necessary? In saying that "*For many of us, searching for excellence comes naturally in our private lives*," "*many of us*" implies that not all of us do. Perhaps it is *only* "those of us" with "constructive," leisure pastimes (the only kind we are shown) who spontaneously work as diligently as the cause of excellence demands. This is not, and cannot be, stated **openly** without running the risk of opposition from those who may work productively, but instrumentally, or who enjoy evenings in pubs. So it is transformed. The video only depicts cases where people, successful in their "constructive" leisure pursuits, **do** appear to transfer their commitment to them to workplace activities. They may not "actually" do so, but the video's discursive organisation makes it seem that they do indeed make the transfer.

To meet the requirements and discipline of a customer first approach the voice-over in (5) through (9) is not asking for, but demanding a complete colonisation of the viewer-employees' lives. Nothing less than "*all of our skills and energies*" must be harnessed. Will the viewer-employees have any energies left for their recuperative, leisure pursuits? The succession of modalised clauses — "*the same commitment to quality needs to be transferred*;" "*we've got to harness all of our skills...*" — **obligates** viewer-employees, leaves them with no alternative. The demand can be made only because it has already been established that "we" are all in this together — "**we are all involved**."

Satisfying Customers

The harnessing of all the employee — viewer skills and energies is represented as necessary and inescapable — for everyone, "*right the way through to the top*." This obligation, while it includes "the top," **did not** originate there. The voice-over **never** positions management or senior management as an agent (i.e., a participant who is endowed with the power of purposeful action, who makes things happen according to his/her design or intent). The agent is mostly "we" or if not, then "everyone" or "our customers." Indeed, senior management — "*the top*" — is as much an affected participant as every other employee. The agent of the demand and the source of the obligation is "*our customers*," as in "*our customers are demanding even greater quality*."

Like other gods, customers too are presented as beyond the control of those whose lives they rule. Their expectations and desires must simply be met and satisfied. Utterances (8) and (9) realise a condition — consequence couplet that has two consequential elements, marked by the use of *It's up to us* and *So*:

> [a] *It's up to us to provide products and services which meet their requirements, every time, on time, and at the right price.*
>
> [b] *So, we've got to harness all of our skills and energies to develop a quality first approach — a customer first approach.*

This compounds an earlier condition-consequence sequence where the condition is "Prestwick's success," and the consequence is, that the commitment to quality evinced in employees' private lives is "*transferred into the work place*." If someone were to ask "why do we need a quality first approach?" they would know from such sequences that it is because customers demand it. In case they should be in doubt, however, the first of the video's three meeting sequences has an employee ask just this question: "*Why do we need TQC and TQM?*"

Personalised Vision

While everyone must be disciplined by customer expectations and demands, those at **the top** have some say on how customer expectations are to be fulfilled. The first of the three meeting sequences introduces the Director and General Manager (DGM) in full-flight, saying

> *...The company is engaged in what I would call "a strategic revitalisation process." Total Quality is just a dimension of that.*
>
> Employee 1: *Why do we need TQC and TQM?*
>
> DGM: *What we tried to do first of all was change the culture of Prestwick, change the culture from what I would describe as a very static, inhibiting culture to...We tried to develop an enabling culture, that helped us achieve our mission and visions. And culture is all obviously about people, so we tried to empower people to feel that they could make the change, challenge the way we go about doing things.*
>
> *What I say is there's a business objective, and that is quite simply to make a return on investment. Not to build aeroplanes, not to build aero-structures. The business objective — the reason for being here — quite simply is return on investment.*

My concern about where we are today is that we do not have quality effective processes. I've no concern about strategy — I know where we're going with strategy. We should all know where we're going. I've got no real concern about the people we have. I think we have tremendous people here. What I do have concern about is the processes we adopt in getting the job done.

The DGM's monologue can be heard as (superficially) reassuring. Total quality is defined as no big deal, since it is "*just*" a part of a grander sounding "*strategic revitalisation process*." While noone, apart from the speaker, may know what a "strategic revitalisation process" actually is or who is involved, since the nominalisation of revitalise effaces agency, it can be heard as positive given: [a] the inclusion of the words "strategic" and "revitalisation," suggestive of something planned, controlled, renewed and hence beneficial; and [b] that it is a classification. What the company is involved in has been named (classified) and thus has been brought under control. It may also be assumed that the speaker knows what he is talking about, and this too could be reassuring.

Does the DGM's response to Employee 1's question **impose** his definitions upon his audience? Such an interpretation would take insufficient account of Employee 1's **invitation** to the DGM to be explanatory. Employee 1 is positioned (as by implication are other employees) as one who looks to the DGM for the understanding he lacks, and his question positions the DGM as a source of explanations. His performance does not disappoint yet in important respects he does **not** answer the question he was asked. DGM speaks as if he had been asked a "what" or a "how," not a "why," question and his response is, therefore, **inappropriate**. The question he seems to answer is "How did you set about changing the culture at Prestwick?" It is an account of **what** was attempted, **not** an explanation of **why** it was attempted. The mismatch between question and answer raises the possibility that they were not temporally sequential, that they were instead recorded at different times, and articulated during post-production. If so, Employee 1 would not have had the option to press DGM for a more fittingly relevant answer. Failure to attend to such sequential detail could undermine DGM as an authoritative source. In the eyes of viewer-employees, it could render his performance equivocal or evasive.

The DGM's talk has certain attributes associated with authoritative modes of discourse. A feature of his speech is the use of the first person, singular pronoun "I," in phrases such as "*what I would call*", "*what I would describe,*" "*I've no concern*". No definition, thought or concern is mentioned without being branded his. This too is a feature of the discourse of senior political figures when they are discussing "their" successful policies.

His use of mental process verbs, *"what I would call..."* and later, when speaking of the company's culture, of "*what I would describe...*" and again, when addressing the company's business objectives, of "*What I say is...*" not only makes them **his**, they also make him a classifier. There are of course alternatives such as "The company is engaged in a strategic revitalisation process," or, equally allowable, "The company is engaged in what might be called a strategic revitalisation process." The latter would have introduced a note of uncertainty and both would have absented DGM. The phrases he uses **personalise** the knowledge and thus potentially strengthen his standing as a source of explanation. These are the speech habits of a rationalist manager who gains control of the uncertain world of business by demonstrating an ability to

name, know, classify, and thus, control it. They are evidence of his "natural" fitness for the part of an authority. They elevate his status, for here is someone who has assumed, **and who has been granted** (in the context of the video at least), the right to dispense his own views of the company and its culture.

In the midst of the monologue the DGM moves to an axiomatic level and briefly avoids personalisation. This is when he addresses the company's business objective —"*the reason for being here*." He has two goes at defining the objective. With the first he offers his definition, "*What I say is* ," with the second the definition has been depersonalised to become "*quite simply (...) return on investment*." Between the two goes, the business objective is transformed into a fundamental tenet, which even the DGM cannot escape, for it is beyond his individual discursive powers. It is the ultimate obligation.

The DGM's contributions are combined with several, at least a dozen, visual cuts between him and the employees. **Visually**, we see a speaker facing several others, making eye contact with those seated round the table, and those others looking steadily in the direction of the speaker, nodding, and occasionally smiling. **Visually**, this speaker is the focal point. **Verbally**, the traffic is pretty much one way as the DGM announces his views. Together these discourses represent the employees as a largely silent **and** willing audience. If the DGM is there to construct history, offer explanations and express his concerns, the employees are in attendance merely to prompt him and to **receive** what he has to say. Nothing suggests they are uncomfortable with this role.

Ratifying Employee Contributions

Very little changes in the second extract from the "breakfast meeting," though on casual viewing, it might seem as if the attendant employees play a more active role. It begins as before with the DGM already speaking definitively:

> DGM: *This is a team organisation. We did have, and you're quite right, a win—lose mentality. I win and the guy in the next function loses. I win and the guy in the next desk loses. The competition isn't here at Prestwick. The competition is outside, in the real world. We have to develop what I call a win—win mentality.*
>
> Employee 2: *I feel you should be driven by your personal pride in your work and not by the aggressive, competitive nature.*
>
> DGM: *People come to work to do a good job. They don't come to work to foul up. Now, if they foul up, if they've a negative attitude, it's because they're not being encouraged, not being given the freedom to make a contribution. I don't actually believe fundamentally that people are negative.*

There is a marked difference between Employee 2's and the DGM's contributions. Whereas Employee 2 presents his contribution as tentative — something he "feels" — the DGM uses "generic sentences"[11] such as "*This is a team organisation*" and "*People come to work to do a good job*." DGM is not indeterminate. Where "feel" could be used by him, he uses "believe" or "would say" instead. Otherwise he delivers (unmodalised) statements, or else heavily reinforced belief statements.

The sequential movement is stilted. The DGM's first contribution sounds as though it is an answer to another that has not been included. It is certainly a **comment** ("*you're quite right*") on what has been said. Employee 2's contribution appears to have been included only so that the DGM might be seen to endorse and elaborate it. Such action forms a major part of the segment.

Employee 3: *When problems do occur, Allan, we all too much at the moment look superficially rather than going back and tracing the fault through and sorting it. At the moment it just keeps re-occurring.*

DGM: *It took the Japanese 30 years to develop their total quality culture. We hope to learn from that. But, I believe it's a 5, 7, possibly 10 year programme to change culture.*

And so, we're engaged in the process of trying to give as many people on site an understanding that what we must do is continuously search for excellence, and really that's what our Total Quality Culture development programme is all about.

Again the first part of his response can be taken as a comment on what has just been said by Employee 3, who, we should note, is able to address DGM initimately. DGM counsels patience. The second, concluding (*And so ...*) part sees the DGM define the very process in which he and the Employees are engaged. What he offers is **not** an understanding of why a ceaseless quest for an always elusive excellence is necessary, but rather merely an understanding that it **is** necessary. His discourse is revealed as mythic, for it achieves "a clarity which is not that of an explanation but that of a statement of fact" (Barthes 1973, 143). Why is TQC and TQM necessary? It just is!

Obligations

The final meeting sequence has the DGM replying at some length to a focused question put to him by one of the employees. Employee 4's focusing of his question connects with DGM's earlier observations about empowering people:

Employee 4: *One of the barriers in implementing TQC is making people comfortable about being able to report problems without being blamed or pinpointed in that respect. How d' you propose to manage change in order that people don't feel like that.*

The question is quite specific in nominating someone to deal with the problem that has been raised. His use of **you** singles out the DGM himself, whose response is:

DGM: *You've got to create a situation where the people feel empowered from the highest level to ask questions and make positive change and through a number of devices, the management of the company should be able to take the temperature in terms of whether that's being allowed to happen.*

For example, you've got to understand when someone believes quite rigidly about a point of view, telling him he's wrong is not the answer. You've got to understand why he has that perception. Get in there and try to understand the perception, then try to develop in his mind a different perception if you believe he's wrong, not telling him he's wrong all that does is create barriers.

But, ultimately, once it's fixed, then the quality of life, people's participation at work, should be enriched, the quality of life improved. Because we're not really here to drive people into despair, drive them hard. We're here to facilitate them doing the job more efficiently and that's what TQ is about.

Since the question nominates him, and since his presence is felt in his other responses, it is surprising that he does not once use the "I" pronoun here. The expected response could have been something like "What I would do," but it is not. Where before he has acknowledged his "authorship," he here effaces himself with the pronoun "you."

The first three sentences each employ "*you've got to*". This is a relatively fixed syntagm, and the "got to" element does not normally stand on its own. It can do, for instance, as a brief reply, but it is unlikely to be used at the opening of an extended one. Nonetheless, the speaker has the option of using "have to" by itself. The effect of using "*you've got to*" instead is to obligate doubly the "you" to act as the DGM commands: "*Get in there and try to understand (...) then try to develop in his mind (...) (do) not telling him he's wrong*." If reporting problems is perceived as "informing," the DGM's answer might offer little comfort since informants would be licensed from **the highest level**.

It is only after the difficult work is done, "*once it's fixed*," that the DGM allows himself to appear again, but in the "we," not the "I" form: "*we're not really here to drive people (...) We're here to facilitate them.*" It is not just the DGM, then, must facilitate others. Here he dismisses a hypothetical reason for being here, ("*to drive people into despair*") with the altogether more positive, real reason ("*to facilitate them doing the job more efficiently*"). Once again, he concludes definitively — "*that's what TQ's about*."

More General Considerations

The video analysed here is conditioned by, and represents, changes to the organisational design and management of work processes which are not peculiar to this company. Indeed, they have been seen as elements of a pattern of change fundamental enough to signal the "end of organised capitalism" (Urry 1990; Hall and Jacques 1990). Nevertheless, the video represents localised versions of the changes and ways of experiencing them. In the imagined version it prefers, the changes are "explained" with reference both to more general themes — an inevitable effect of customer expectations — and to more particular ones — local strengths and traditions. The remedial action required to improve Prestwick's lot draws on these local strengths which are shown to be sustained and nurtured in the private sphere.

"Ordinary employees" play a major role in the video. Those featured "at play and at work" embody the "personal pride" and responsible autonomy that is called for by the expectations and demands of BAe's customers, and ultimately by the need for a return on investment. They are depicted as the source of the virtues upon which a successful future of "Prestwick" can be built. Moreover, they are seen to acknowledge the DGM as an authoritative source. Their depiction here is a far cry from the demonisation of striking workers that researchers claimed was an intrinsic feature of journalistic and managerial representations in the 1970s (GUMG 1976).

With respect to its audience, the video's **positioning potential** is considerable, not because it imposes views from above, but because it engages, and heroically transforms particular subcultural resources with which its employee-audience probably makes sense of their private and their working lives. To render them model employees, the video draws on a deep rooted sense of dignity which may have become all the more precious as the skilled, manufacturing occupations which have supported it disappear. TQC is represented as an opportunity to continue to achieve the kinds of satisfactions that have been possible through the exercise of craft skills which employees at the Prestwick plant are still routinely expected to use. Prestwick's employees have not experienced "down-skilling" to anything like the same degree as employees in other sectors of manufacturing, and still have opportunities to be meticulous about, and take a pride in, the work done.

The leisure-work sequences form an incorporating movement, one that goes from particular, employee cultures and their mythologies to a corporate culture presented

as more general. The video reveals a truth employee-viewers may have already felt, namely that they are the very resources that will enable all to "*grow from strength to strength*," and "*Prestwick to succeed*." Virtually the final words of the voice-over make just this ennobling connection:

> *The quality we strive for in our leisure time has to be reflected in what we do here at work. This is called Total Quality Culture.*

The hegemonic movement is complete when the quality employees strive for is one and the same as TQC.

The video is an example not of the dissipation of managerial control but instead of its continuation by means other than rules and regulations. On this matter, there are various interpretations of the significance of changes that have conditioned this video. The internationalisation of economies, that involves major relocation of centres of production and massive changes in spatial divisions of labour, has increased rather than decreased the centralisation and standardisation of production (Pollert 1991). For others, however, the changes apparently mark the disappearance of rigidly hierarchical structures and have occasioned decentralisation without a single point of leadership (Frank and Brownell 1989) or cellular structures that are self regulating, rather than governed by rules and commands from above (Mulgan 1990). Where there appears to be a measure of flexible specialisation in work processes, some have proposed that labour's position has been enhanced because the skilled utilisation of general purpose machinery demands both greater autonomy and adaptability from the worker and greater trust between workers and management (Hirst and Zeitlin 1989; Hirst 1990). The concern for achieving ever greater productivity may have occasioned the loss of vast numbers of manufacturing and middle management jobs, but it has also entailed a recognition that productivity cannot any longer be attained without a more considerate regard for labour (Kern and Schumann 1987). The production of videos such as that analysed here might be cited as evidence of this regard.

However, if the video sets out to license TQC in the eyes of employees, it presents no evidence for the decentralisation, still less the deconstruction of corporate power. If large companies have formally devolved certain types of decision making, this should not be allowed to obscure the reality of tighter control through financial mechanisms and the technical control of production processes (Pollert 1991). The video does not present a company in which management structures have become "functionally decentralised, eclectic, and participative" (Clegg 1990, 17). From the discourse between the DGM and employees, we might suppose that layers of management have indeed been removed, but there appears to have been **no** structural changes to management practices. The DGM's definitional framework is the one that prevails. The video's representation seems consistent with Thompson's (1993) view that there has been a dual development industrial relations. On the one hand, organisations have devolved labour process and production decisions through such mechanisms as quality circles and team meetings, groupings of "responsibly autonomous" employees, while on the other, power and control over spatially dispersed units has been increasingly centralised, often with the assistance of information technology. So, Thompson proposes, "local and lower management may have increased operational autonomy and delegated responsibilities, but mostly within a more tightly controlled framework" (Thompson 1993, 190). Laurie Graham's observational study (1993) provides observational evidence in support of this case.

On the nature of control, Mulgan has asserted that whereas so-called "Fordist" organisations were held together by discipline and contract, "post-Fordist" ones are held together by very different kinds of bond — "ethos, self-esteem and peer pressure".

> *Corporate ideology takes on a new significance, demanding loyalty and devotion from the workers, so that discipline is internalised within the worker's own conscience (...) Soft control has become as important as hard control* (Mulgan 1990, 351).

It may be that in many organisations ideology has taken on a new significance, but Mulgan's argument is rather too extreme in proposing that soft control is a feature of only "post-Fordist" organisation. While Graham (1993) focused attention on (soft) social controls (the team, self-discipline and peer pressure), technical controls (the use of computing to monitor the production process), and commands from team, leaders were still much in evidence. Organisations **combine** forms hard and soft controls. This seems to be Huczynski's point when he said of developments in UK industrial relations during the 1980s that overall the situation was a quite complex one involving "a contradictory mixture of job cuts, robots, union opposition and an attempt to engage the enthusiasm and willing involvement of the workforce" (Huczynski 1993, 167).

This video makes demands of its employee-audience, but only after it has celebrated their skills and excellence. It defines reality for its employee-audience, and states what has to be done, though it would be difficult to conclude that it imposes its representation of reality. One could not imagine that refusal to implement TQC procedures would be tolerated. Still, something important appears to have changed in working relations when a video that seeks to woe and engage its audience's acceptance of TQC was felt to be a worthwhile investment.

Notes:

1 In January 1993, the Division became Jetstream Aircraft Ltd.

2 An internal communications unit was set up in 1990. It commissioned the installation of an internal television network to distribute news and information across the Prestwick site.

3 It was a major theme of the joint Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Confederation of British Industry (CBI) report *Competitiveness - How the best Companies are Winning*. The report's observations on the matter were incorporated into the chapters on management in the White Paper, *Competitiveness: Forging Ahead* which was presented to Parliament in May 1995.

4 The Employment Acts of 1980, 1982, and 1984. A useful discussion of their significance is given by Coates (1989). More recently, European policy on promoting workplace democracy has also begun to have an impact.

5 This should not be taken to imply they are also conscious of the semantic consequences of their purposeful actions. The visual realisation of the private by the domestic relies on much that is unconscious or taken for granted.

6 Specific voice-over reference to what can be seen is more often a feature of the training videos we have analysed.

7 Certainly not the author on first viewing the video. I must thank Julia Fowler for knowing the hymn and drawing my attention to it.

8 Many other employee communication videos do employ captions. A study we have just completed of twelve other corporate videos noted that all but those produced for use in the Post Office employed captions for managers only. When employees were seen in respondent roles (which was not frequently) they appeared without them.

9 The interviews have been conducted by Julia Fowler as part of her doctoral research on company

uses of video and television. These meetings had recently been introduced, again as part of the effort to improve internal communication.

10 We only ever see hobbies (gardening, playing musical instruments) and sports (golf, rugby athletics) - healthy and improving activities. We see no drinking, dancing or clubbing.

11 According to Fowler, such statements usually have the form of simple declarative sentences that claim total and definitive knowledge of some topic (1991, 211)

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