WORKPLACE LEARNING, CONTEXTUALITY AND CULTURAL TEXTS:

A case study of Taylorism in Incoming Customer Service Call Centres

by

Margaret Crouch

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CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP/ORIGINALITY

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student

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Abstract

The relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning is part of an ongoing academic, educational discourse. While enlightening in general terms, this thesis represents original research focusing more specifically on workplace learning in incoming customer service call centres.

Investigating references to "revitalised Taylorism" in general terms, and "an engineering model" in specific call centre terms, the research confirms that at the core of call centre contextuality lies the adaptation of F.W. Taylor's late 19th century Scientific Management philosophy and the call centre model for efficiency performance management. Over the passage of time this Taylorist adaptation in contemporary call centres practices grounds an argument to view incoming customer service centres as a unique ethnographical and cultural business community shaped by past practices and artifacts, folk knowledge and enduring behavioural patterns. These in turn shape workplace learning frames of reference "embodied in the signs, symbols, and language or the semiotics of culture" (Merriam & Associates 2002, p.236).

The main body of the research then focuses on workplace pedagogy. It proposes that workplace artifacts become embodied in cultural texts (such as written curricula, oral/aural storytelling, semiotic language and semiotic displays) which act as teaching and learning conduits. Specific artifacts and cultural texts are examined from the perspective of Korczynski's claim (in Deery & Kinnie 2002) that call centre performance management and measurement are infused with two logics, that of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation.

The originality of the research lies in two key areas of contribution. The first is the rigour applied to situating workplace contextuality as a framework within which understandings of workplace learning can be interpreted. The second, as a consequence, is a fresh approach to

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workplace learning, and one which legitimises the workplace as an ethnographic, cultural community which teaches and learns through cultural texts. Examining workplace learning from this perspective raises the profile of workplace artifacts, socialisation and semiotics (including semiotic language) as significant workplace learning conduits. The thesis challenges existing understandings which act to constrain a broader interpretation of learning agencies such as literacy, culture, semiotics and texts in assigning relevant workplace meaning and knowledge constructs in their frames of reference.

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Chapter One – Introduction

1.1 Incoming Customer Service Call Centres

There are two major classifications of call centres – incoming and outgoing – determined by the contact initiator. In incoming call centres the customer initiates the call to the call centre whereas in outgoing the contact is initiated by the call centre to the customer, which is generally known as telemarketing. This research is specific to incoming call centres. As reported in Crouch (2004), call centres numbered over 2,000 in Australia in 2004, employing more than 160,000 people (Taylor 2004). In the 1990s there was an annual growth in call centres of 24% in Australia (40% globally) with businesses conducting 66% of commercial transactions through call centres, which percentage was expected to rise to 75% by early 2000s (Deloitte & Touche Consulting 1998 in conjunction with ACA Research). With a shift away from traditional shop fronts, many organisations have opted to channel their customer service contact through incoming customer service call centres. As sites of customer service production, incoming customer service call centres are a phenomenon which has become progressively prominent and operationally sophisticated in efficiency performance management and its measurement over the past 30 years, functioning now on a platform of advanced and complex efficiency-orientated telecommunications and performance management technologies.

In simple terms, incoming call centres operate on an efficiency model of optimisation. This is mathematically calculated using a formula based on the service level required (such as 80 per cent of calls to be answered in 20 seconds), the forecasted work load by event type (anticipated incoming call volumes and work-related activities such as faxes and emails) generally per half hour and an average call handling/work process time in seconds per call/per process. These factors then enable a prediction of the number

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of customer service representatives (CSRs) required on a half hourly basis. It is usual for a transaction time deficit to be factored into the calculation, meaning that a customer enquiry should be waiting to be handled based on a pre-determined customer wait time tolerance in seconds. Incoming call centres are increasingly reviewing and/or implementing selective and customised technologies, such as interactive voice response (IVR), computer-telephony integration (CTI) and natural language speech recognition (NLSR), to assist in a wide range of quantifiable efficiency gains.

Incoming call centres, as a channel of customer service production, have not only been progressively embraced by Australian companies since the 1970s but also have come to play an integral role in achieving business efficiencies. While business efficiency is not unique to call centres, the structured and controlled management of people and process resulting in the detailed, monitored measurement of customer service representatives' performance (hereafter referred to as CSR) does set call centres apart from other work environments. Therefore central to the research is the claim that call centres' "culture of efficiency" is grounded in F.W. Taylor's 19th century Scientific Management model. However, while some advocates expounded the virtues of the model in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, others progressively over the 20th century questioned the lack of social consciousness of the model. One well-known critique of Taylor's legacy is that of Braverman's (1974) *Labor and Monopoly Capital, The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century.*

The research findings in toto indicate that incoming customer service call centres can be positioned as Taylorist and the impact of Braverman's critique on Taylorist methods of management are minimally addressed in the call centre context. While these conclusions will not receive any substantial elaboration in this thesis, they are nonetheless significant as the foundation on which this thesis is argued. In the adaptation of Taylor's model to the call centre environment however, the customer has been included in the production cycle. This prompts a claim by Korczynski in

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Deery & Kinnie (2002) that "call centre work is infused with two logics, a need to be cost-efficient and a desire to be customer-orientated" (p.4). These two logics provide a research framework within which constructions of meaning which prioritise the logics can be examined to determine the competing or complementary dynamics. For the purpose of this research the logic of cost-efficiency is examined as quantitatively defined performance management and the logic of customer-orientation as qualitatively defined performance managment.

The research question is:

In what ways can workplace contextuality be shown to influence pedagogical practices in relation to efficiency performance management in incoming customer service call centres?

1.2 Thesis Outline

The thesis is presented in six chapters:

Chapter 1 – Introduction

This introductory chapter provides a synopsis of key elements of the thesis.

Chapter 2 – Background and Framework

This second chapter elaborates on call centres, their evolution and operational philosophy, as well as providing an insight into a semiotic-based language which underpins efficiency performance management. This is then juxtaposed to the construct of ethno-cultural contextuality. From this platform the construct of pedagogy is then briefly discussed, touching on learning theories and practices such as formal, informal, contextualised, social and constructivist.

Chapter 3 – Literature Review

This chapter positions the constructs of contextuality and pedagogy within frameworks of selected literature, discourses and theorisations. The review encompasses relevant references to call centres and their practices, support for contextually-based research claims, as well as reference to

specific learning theories and practices relative to the pedagogical positioning of call centres.

Chapter 4 – Methodology

This chapter outlines an interpretive, ethnographic case study approach as the appropriate methodology for this research. It focuses on interpreting the research participants' constructions of meaning. It also details the researcher's position in terms of –emic (community member/insider) and -etic (researcher/outsider) within the methodology choice.

Chapter 5 – Data, Analysis and Interpretation

This chapter presents the research findings, provides analysis and an interpretation of the data. The contextuality construct supports an argument for the recognition of call centres as an ethno-cultural community. In the pedagogical construct, cultural texts and cultural text influencers are foregrounded. These, it is argued, support the notion of culturally-based workplace teaching and learning practices and associated constructions of meaning.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion

The research invigorates some underdeveloped ideas in the relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning. From this premise, notions of the workplace as an ethno-cultural community, with teaching and learning practices facilitated through cultural texts, socialisation and semiotic literacy, could potentially have applicability to a broader range of workplaces and practitioners.

1.3 Thesis Constructs

1.3.1 Contextuality Construct

The use of "contextuality" requires a holistic interpretion encompassing dimensions such as historic, behavioural, social, economic, political, geographic and/or linguistic contextuality, as well as the contextuality of knowledge and meaning. Three paired dimensions influence workplace

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contextuality in this case. The first, "Historic-Scientific", recognises a 19th century science-based affiliation, and the second, "Social-Political", acknowledges claims of a lack of social conscience in Taylor's management model. These provide the platform for the third and the focus of this thesis, "Ethno-Cultural", which argues for the recognition of a call centre community as both ethnographically and culturally evolved, with beliefs, rituals, traditions, relationship structures and a semiotic language underpinned by its historic, scientific, social and political roots. D'Andrade in Merriam and Associates (2000) epitomises the notion presented in this thesis of an ethnographic cultural community when stating that culture is behavioral and cognitive sharing by an identifiable group of people and that it has "the potential of being passed on to new group members, to exist with some permanency through time and across space" (p.9).

Diagram 1.1 – Call Centre Contextuality

Ethno-Cultural Dimension

Social-Political Dimension
(Braverman's critique)

Historic-Scientific Dimension
(F.W. Taylor's
Scientific Management)
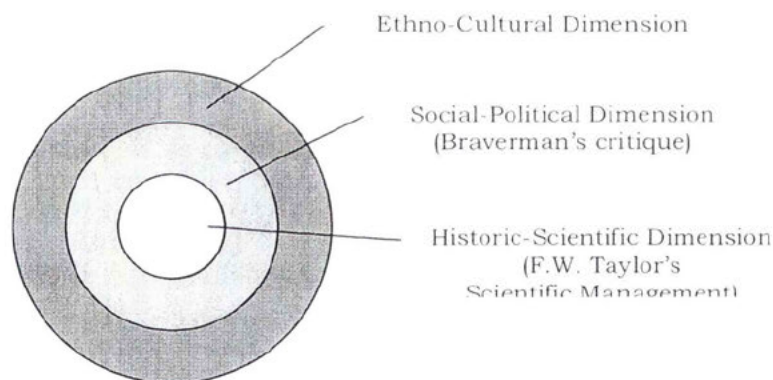
1.3.2 Pedagogy Construct

The frame for the second construct, pedagogy, representing workplace teaching and learning, is shaped by the assumption that the key contextuality influence in call centres is ethno-culturally grounded. This in turn exerts direct influence on call centre pedagogical practices. Introducing the term "ethno-pedagogy", call centre teaching and learning

is examined through **cultural artifacts** which create contextually based **cultural texts** which facilitate **encoding** and **decoding** meaning in relation to the logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation. This examination is done at key **cultural junctures** from the perspective of key **cultural text influencers**, which will be explained in greater detail in the following section. It looks at

- **who** (who are the authors, the speakers and the audience),
- **when** (what are the key junctures for encoding and decoding texts),
- **how** (what form do the cultural texts take, such as artifacts of curricula [written], storytelling [oral/aural], language and displays [semiotics]),
- **what** (what is encoded and decoded, and what influences the texts),
- **where** (where are the texts positioned and delivered in the workplace teaching and learning environment),and
- **why** (why does it happen this way),

and positions these either within educational theories and discourses or suggests a new perspective.

1.4 Research Terminologies

The following relevant terminologies and their descriptions broadly explain the intent underpinning their selection.

- **Contextuality** refers to the key elements which provide a frame of reference to situate a workplace within a structure of theory and practice and which influence constructions of meaning, in this case, in relation to call centre efficiency performance management and the two logics.

- A **cultural ethnographic community** is commonly underpinned by rich historic, social, political and economic traditions, amongst others, which guide culturally related relationship structures, beliefs, values, customs, rituals and the structure of language. The education of these cultural understandings shape the community's teaching and learning practices and, as part of a cyclical narrative, they embody and reinforce the culture

of the group to future generations through written and unwritten cultural texts.

- **Pedagogy** is used generically here to identify significant practices in the workplace which encompass teaching and learning processes. While acknowledging Knowles' (1980) preference for andragogy as a more relevant term in relation to adult teaching and learning, the term "pedagogy" has been selected for its traditional connotation in relation to the general notion of teaching and learning.

- **Ethno-pedagogy** refers to the notion of workplace learning as a process of acculturation through cultural texts which act as workplace teaching and learning conduits.

- **Encoding** relates to those cultural texts and artifacts which encode the rhetoric of practice in relation to the explicit prioritisation of customer-oriented logic as explicit intent, whereas **decoding** relates to those cultural texts and artifacts which decode the reality of practice in relation to the implicit prioritisation of cost-efficient logic. In general terms, encoding and decoding could be considered as what is "taught" and "learnt" respectively, which, in this research, creates a tension between the logics.

- **Cultural texts** are both explicit and implicit, in written and unwritten format, with literacy encompassing a semiotic language and semiotic systems. The term acknowledges a range of methods of communicating meaning and encompasses a range of cultural artifacts, such as curricula, workplace displays and conversations, which contribute to the layering and relayering of cultural knowledge related to practice either through passive individual or active pair/group engagement and socialisation in and with the call centre workplace artifacts, environment and community. An argument for the recognition of cultural texts as pedagogical tools in call centre teaching and learning supports a general theory and epistemological assumption that learning occurs in unstructured ways, used reservedly here in an attempt to avoid the limitations of labels such as formal and informal. For example, "unstructured" allows

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acknowledgement of the notion that "informal" learning is not necessarily confined to "informal" settings. It may occur in "formal" teaching settings through processes of encoding and decoding with internalised evaluations being made against existing knowledge constructs and resulting in refreshed meanings.

- The five key **cultural junctures** are:

(1) The first juncture, **Recruitment,** involves the process and criteria used in the selection of Customer Service Representatives (CSRs).

(2) The second juncture, **Induction Training**, encompasses the call centre's structured and management controlled training programs, which provide a newly employed CSR with assessed competency in a set of skills for, generally, one to two skill set silos. A skill set silo usually isolates a customer service function within a customer group, such as a specific product enquiry from a non- or low revenue customer.

(3) The third juncture, **On-the-job Training**, refers to the mentoring process in the operationalisation of the simulated skills gained during induction training. This includes a variety of mentoring strategies, such as one-on-one or "buddy" training, accessing an internal helpline, or as a small group "on the floor" overseen by an experienced CSR.

(4) The fourth juncture, **Performance Review**, includes the processes whereby a CSR's performance is formally reviewed qualitatively, through remote call monitoring, and quantitatively, through statistical data.

(5) The fifth juncture, **Self-regulation**, refers to the point at which a CSR is considered independently operational and experienced in a number of skill set silos with an ability to self-regulate their performance to one which is aligned to the management controlled cultural text of defined performance expectations expressed through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

- The three key **cultural text influencers** are:

(1) **Structure and management control of texts** which refers to the degree of management control over the text, its explicit content and delivery.

(2) **Workplace socialisation** which relates to a CSR's freedom to interact in and with the call centre environment and community in terms of artifacts and people, where interactive knowledge acquisition, such as observation, listening, engaging in conversations, leads to an active (conscious) or passive (unconscious) relayering of existing cultural knowledge.

(3) **Semiotic literacy** encompasses the decoding of cultural artifacts, such as language and the location of displays, which communicate cultural signals. For example, there is a unique semiotic language used by community members resulting in meaningful exchanges. Additionally, the physical positioning of people, equipment and displays are proposed as semiotic signs requiring contextualised cultural literacy to decode the underlying text. For example, access to supervisors, team leaders or specialised product experts is only available through an internal helpline and any form of mobility around the call centre is discouraged, as the data will reveal. Also to be described in a later chapter, electronic data boards, individual computer tickers or screen banners may form part of a cultural ritual to generate individual and/or general statistical information such as calls waiting and how the day's progressive performance measurements compare to Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets.

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1.5 Research Framework

Diagram 1.2 – Research Framework
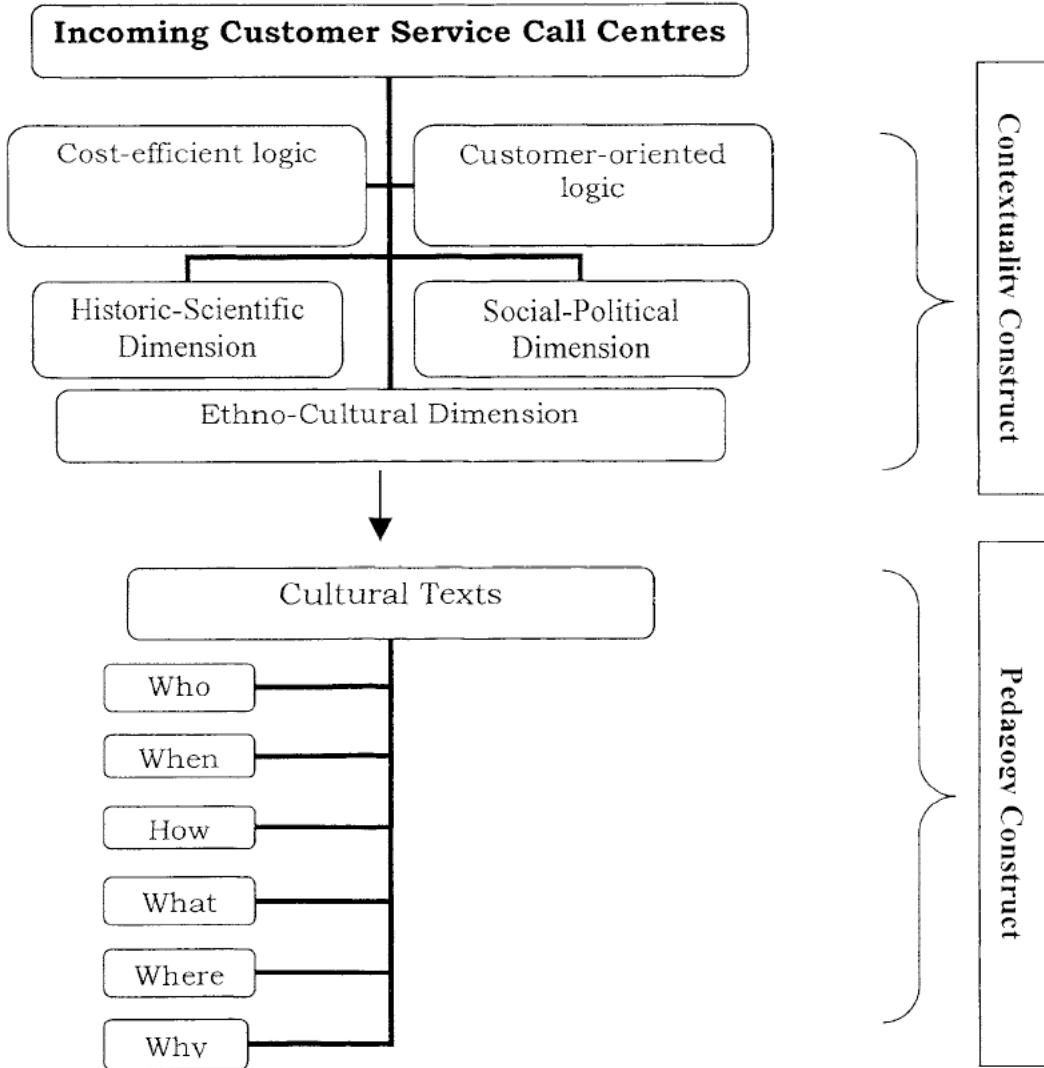
Chapter Two – Background

2.1 Chapter Introduction

The journey from an initial reflection upon a problematic within the workplace to the clarity of a well-articulated, researchable question, which is considered as a scholarly contribution, is an evolving process. This chapter outlines this evolution. The aim of the chapter is to provide additional background information on call centres, and to illustrate the development of research thought on the constructs of contextuality and pedagogy in order to enable a greater understanding of the research questions and ultimately the findings and their interpretation. It is also intended to lay the foundation for a richer engagement with selected authors and quotes in the next chapter, Chapter 3 - Literature Review.

2.2 Evolution of the Research

On the theoretical side, early research readings introduced Korczynski's notion of two logics in call centres (Deery & Kinnie 2002), that of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation, which instigated particular interest in the pedagogical practices relative to the logics. Consequently, the early constructs of workplace contextuality and pedagogy were shaped by such problematics and evolving research questions as "what is the significance of the two logics in call centres as competing or complementary dynamics?" and "how does this impact on call centre teaching and learning?". This later developed into considerations of how and when the logics are communicated, how CSRs come to understand the prioritisation of the logics, and what practices influence CSRs' meaning-making in relation to the logics. These latter questions signified the holistic research concept of the relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning.

Early readings and references to Henry Ford and F.W. Taylor and their respective models of management and production indicated Taylor's model as more pertinent to call centre efficiency management. According to Person (ed. 1929), Ford's mass production identifies with large markets, huge volume of orders, standardised products, economical fabrication by means of a steady flow of materials through single-purpose machines and highly routinised workers, whereas Taylor's Scientific Management has its origin in small and medium-sized plants which make variable items, or standard items variable as to detailed characteristics on multiple-purpose machines which require human regulation and attention as work varies (p.14). Acknowledging its 19th century origins (historic) and the scientific nature of Taylorism (scientific), this first and central **historic-scientific** dimension of the **contextuality construct** took shape.

It was a natural transition then to include readings which are critical of Taylor's model in order to gauge the impact such criticisms have had to effect change on the adaptation of Taylor's model in call centre efficiency performance management practices. Braverman's (1974) well known critique of Taylor's legacy was instrumental in providing this platform, with Garrick (1998), drawing on Boje and Winsor, suggesting that the response in fact represents revitalised Taylorism masquerading under the guise of discourse implying progress and change as part of a balanced debate (p.40). This dimension has been titled, **social-political**, to recognise the claims of a lack of social conscience in Taylor's model and its capitalist driven philosophy. However, as mentioned earlier, the comprehensive nature of the findings of these two dimensions inhibit their inclusion in this thesis. Notwithstanding, excerpts relative to situating them as influential in call centre contextuality are included in this thesis.

The third and final contextuality dimension, the **ethno-cultural** dimension, evolved progressively through the inductive analysis and interpretation of collected data. With the researcher's positioning as both a subjective –emic insider/community member and objective –etic

outsider/researcher, an ability to gain acceptance and establish credibility through "talking the language" developed into analysing a semiotic language, culture and a work-specific occupational ethnography. This shaped and framed the proposal of call centres as an ethnographic cultural community.

With regard to the **pedagogy construct**, there were many influential discourses and learning theories in the development of the research, such as industrial and post-industrial, constructivist and social learning. However, as an extension of the ethno-cultural community, it became apparent that in considering cultural texts as learning conduits, questions relating to who, when, how, what, where and why needed to be addressed.

In considering these aspects, a need to be more exacting with the usage of words such as "formal" and "informal" became apparent and problematic. The aim here was to differentiate clearly between, for example, "informal learning" and "informal learning settings" in order to acknowledge that informal learning can occur in formal teaching/learning settings which may be set up on the call centre site but not classified as "in the workplace". The use of "workplace" in this research context then also required some qualification. It appears generally accepted that "workplace" learning refers to the place at work where "hands on" practice occurs whereas "work-based" learning refers predominantly to the decontextualised knowledge acquired away from the workplace. So "formal learning" took on the notion of "work-based" teaching as intentional, structured, explicit, decontextualised or disassociated, whereas "informal learning" took on the notion of "workplace learning" as largely unintentional, unstructured, implicit, contextualised or associated. It also acknowledged that while formal teaching and informal learning are usually associated with formal and informal learning settings respectively, extending this assumption became germane to the research.

The dilemma, to be discussed shortly in greater detail, became to acknowledge that the texts act simultaneously as encoding agents (that is,

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teaching what is intended to be meaningful in practice – the rhetoric of practice)) and as decoding agents (that is, learning what is actually meaningful in practice – the reality of practice). Teaching and learning therefore occurs on a textual and sub-textual level with a possibility that the encoding and decoding would create a conflict or a tension in meaning making.

The following sections elaborate on these ideas and contextualise the competing or complementary nature of the two logics through the research constructs of contextuality and pedagogy.

2.3 Call Centres

"While data on call centres is difficult to procure, estimates are that they employ about 3 per cent of the workforce in the US, 2 per cent in the UK, and 2.3 per cent in the rest of Europe", according to Datamonitor (1998, 1999), claim Batt & Moynihan (2002). They also draw on Anton (1999) to offer that U.S. call centres were growing at an estimated annual rate of 15-20 per cent in the 1990s. In Australia, a 1998 survey by Deloitte and Touche Consulting in conjunction with ACA Research indicated that "call centres are one of the fastest growing industries in the world, increasing by 40 per cent globally and 24 per cent in Australia" with businesses conducting 66 per cent of commercial transactions over the phone, and this was expected to rise to 75 per cent by early into the 21st century. In 1998 Australian call centres were a $2 billion industry comprising of 1,400 call centres and employing in the region of 50,000 people (Deloitte Touche & ACA Research 1998). More recently Taylor (2004) reported that there are over 2,000 call centres in Australia which employ more than 160,000 people.

2.3.1 Incoming Customer Service Call Centres

The concept of call centres in Australia, as an efficiency and cost saving strategy for many organisations, appears to have gathered momentum

from the early 1970s onwards, a century after F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management model was introduced in the United States of America. The early call centre days of manually intensive efficiency measurement processes have been progressively replaced with sophisticated technological efficiency measurement counterparts today. However it is really only over the last decade of the 20th century that the term "call centre", in terms of occupation and work environment, has become increasingly identifiable in Australia to a broader community audience.

By the time this broader recognition has occurred in Australia, call centres in the United States and Europe are already favouring a change to "contact centre" or "customer care centre". This move has been influenced by the need to reflect the growth of alternative mediums of customer contact possibilities, such the internet, online web sales, help desks and email communications. The newer labels are considered to be reflective of the holistic nature and diverse business activities now being handled within a call centre. At the time of writing, this label change has not yet been widely adopted in Australia, with the possible exception of global call centre companies operating in Australia. However, the My Career section in The Sydney Morning Herald weekend edition now specifies an employment section for "contact centres" and a cursory review from late 2005 to early 2006 indicates position titles such as "customer care representative" are gaining some popularity.

One factor in the rapid growth of call centres is that they act as a primary channel of customer contact, customer service production and in many cases as channels of sales and distribution. On one hand it could be argued that the growth of call centres is influenced by corporate manipulation to redirect higher cost shop fronts to lower cost call centres, while on the other hand it could be claimed that call centre growth is influenced by customer demand for the convenience of customer service related transactions without geographic and time limitations.

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The truth is probably that both factors contribute to the continuing growth of incoming customer service call centres. However apportioning the evolution of call centres in Australia to corporate manipulation or customer demand or otherwise is not the subject of this research. It is rather more pragmatic, accepting that call centres, far from being a transient phenomenon, are fixed in today's business world occupying a substantial niche in Australian business operations with chameleonic adaptability to accommodate progressive changes in the mode of customer contact from telephone to fax to email to online self-directed methods of transacting customer service related activities.

Incoming customer service call centres can vary in size from just a few "reps" (CSRs) to larger call centres which employ numbers in the hundreds or thousands. They are generally referred to by their "seat" capacity rather than their CSR capacity. Using the widespread call centre practice of "hot desking", this means that each "seat" may be occupied by several CSRs across the course of 24 hour period. Typically a call centre will employ substantially more CSRs than "seats". While the full "seat" capacity may be required and utilised at peak times of the day, if a call centre's business is contained within Australia, realistically, the distribution of incoming calls and work events (such as faxes, emails) is unlikely to be required to be sustained at a constant level over a 24 hour period. However, in call centres which are dealing with multiple time zones on a global basis "seat" capacity and rostering to cover "peaks" requires due consideration.

As far as the call centre layout is concerned, generally in Australia call centres are undergoing a layout change from older cubicle style work stations, with dividers or partitions above eye contact level to promote voice insulation and to discourage social interaction. Newer or refurbished call centres are now generally architecturally and ergonomically state-of-the art where unpartitioned open plan fish-bone pattern seating or paired/small group open desk space is becoming the preferred style. This is accompanied by various employee-friendly facilities such as well

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equipped relaxation or "breakout" areas with microwaves, coffee makers, free-to-air TV, cable TV, videos, DVDs (with both professional and entertainment titles) massage minutes, gym facilities, piped music, recreational activities including pinball, snooker/billiard tables, amongst other offerings.

The geographic positioning of a call centre is also important with particular consideration required to the technological limitations and ongoing support of the location for the anticipated seat size as well as the suitability and sustainability of the population to meet the initial and ongoing recruitment needs. The advantages and disadvantages in establishing call centres in metropolitan or regional areas of Australia, or even outsourcing incoming call centre business "off shore", are the topic of business strategies and appropriate considerations. However, some caution appears to be emerging in regard to offshore choice as the initial attraction of labour efficiencies needs to be more carefully considered against such factors as technology infrastructure capability and reliability, and also customer reaction.

2.3.2 Call Centre Semiotic Language and Literacy

The evolution and usage of a language is generally acknowledged as one of many cultural markers of an ethnographic community. For its members, there is an understanding in its usage in terms of the meaning it generates. Aligned to this, and argued in the contextuality construct of the research, is a research claim that call centres should be considered as an ethnographic community with its own contextually meaningful language, in which everyday words adopt a semiotic significance. To highlight the spoken language the following narrative format identifies a selection of call centre terminologies (*emphasis provided*) with an explanation which situates each within a context of a more holistic call centre semiotic language. This presentation method is favoured over an independent alphabetised glossary of individual references which act to constrain and disenfranchise the words and explanations from their contextual meaning.

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Where quotes are used, the reference in this section is Cleveland and Mayben (1997)

The first consideration in measuring efficiency performance management is establishing a call centre's *service level (SL)* which generally also assumes the status of a *key performance indicator (KPI)* criterion. For example, the most usual call centre *service level* is *80/20* which means the call centre is aiming to answer 80 per cent of incoming calls within 20 seconds. Call centres generally have *multiple service level targets* based on such considerations as, for example, call type (sales or service), event type (incoming call or email) and customer base (frequent customer or new customer), which relates back to "customer value" to the company. Depending on these factors different *service levels* are generally established, such as *90/15, 70/30*, etc. In close relationship with these service levels is the *average speed of answer (ASA),* which is the average delay of incoming calls. For work events or transactions which do not need to be handled the moment of arrival, that is in real time, a *response time,* which is similar to a service level, is established and is "the critical link between the resources you need and the results you want to achieve" (Cleveland & Mayben 1997, p.41). For example there may be classifications of a *response time* for an email work event of within one hour at the higher end of a customer service commitment, or within 24 hours at the lower end.

The *anticipated volume of calls* to be received for every half hourly period of the call centre's operational hours is based on *historicals* or historical reports and data relative to call centre's past activities which are collected through a variety of systems. These provide insights into future call trends such as type of call, category of customer, time of day, day of week, month, etc. From this, the accurate *forecasting of workload* is critical. The *forecast* is "the basis for determining staffing needs and requirements for resources, such as how many workstations are required and how many (telephone) lines are necessary" (p.53). From this, an analysis of the workload occurs

to *predict* what work event types will occur and when. Another important component within the *historicals*, in addition to the number of actual transactions received and the times at which they arrived, is the duration of time required to handle those transactions. In relation to this, four key elements are significant. The first is *talk time (TT)*, which is everything from an opening hello to a closing goodbye; the second is *after-call work (ACW) or wrap (up) time* which is time required to finalise the transaction after closing the call and before accepting another, such as leaving an audit trail of information given (for example, "advised service charge applies"), particularly when callers will generally be handled by different CSRs on each contact occasion; thirdly, *average (call) handling time (AHT)*, which is the combination of *average talk time* plus *average after-call work*; and lastly, *call load* which is "the product of (*average talk time* + *average after-call work*) x *call volume*, for a given period" (p.264, emphasis added).

Therefore, a further element in this planning is having the correct number of staff in place for each half hour period supported by the right system resources. The calculation of *base staff* or *seated agents*, which is the "minimum number of agents required to achieve *service level* and *response time* objectives for a given period of time" (p.262, emphasis added) needs to consider *shrinkage*, which factors in "extra people to accommodate breaks, absenteeism and other factors which keep agents from the phones" (p.262). The *Erlang C formula* is widely used in call centre staffing. It is named after A.K. Erlang, a Danish engineer with the Copenhagen Telephone Company "to determine resources in just about any situation where people might wait in queue for service" (p.83). *Erlang C* calculates *predicted wait times (delays)* based on three things; the number of customer services representatives (or agents or operators), the number of customers (or callers) waiting in the telephone queue to be answered, and the average amount of time it takes to service each (p.85).

Accordingly, it is also necessary to ensure that a call centre has sufficient telecommunication *trunks* to handle the *trunk load* of waiting

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callers as well as callers currently being attended to. *Staff rostering* also needs to consider such elements as *skills-based routing* which "matches a caller's specific needs with an agent who has the skills to handle that call, on a real-time basis" (pp. 95-95) via the programming of the Automatic Call Distributor (ACD), and the monitoring of *call arrival patterns* as *smooth, random or peaked. Call centre occupancy* refers to "the percentage of time during a half-hour that those reps, who are on the phones, are *in talk time* and *after-call work*" (pp. 129-130, emphasis added).

Information regarding *wait times* or *delays on trunks* in each of the skills groups programmed on the *Automatic Call Distributor (ACD)* and information on the arriving call will generally be available to a CSR on the telephone console, advising, for example, the encoded skill group, which generally indicates an encoded selected option from the *Interactive Voice Response (IVR)*, and the origin of the call by state; for example *Skill 05 NSW Country* where Skill Group 05 may signify new customer, sales inquiry, and based on the customer selection the call will be *routed* to the first available CSR, that is with the appropriate skill set irrespective of the location of the customer or the CSR.

More recent technologies and strategies such as *Computer Telephony Integration (CTI)*, which represents "the software, hardware and programming necessary to integrate computers and telephones so they can work together seamlessly and intelligently" (p.265), are now capable of identifying a caller and automatically displaying the customer profile on the CSR's screen at the same time as the call arrives. Advances are also being made in partially completing a call interaction through *voice recognition technologies,* such as the one which has been introduced into Telstra's Directory Assistance whereby the spoken word is "translated" using *artificial intelligence (AI) technologies.* Within the call centre, general performance data are also available via various mediums, such as electronic reader boards, individual computer screens tickers, etc., and

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these will be discussed in greater detail in the findings and their interpretation.

There are a number of ways that a *call arrival* can be *announced* to a CSR. This may be programmed marginally pre-, or simultaneous with the call *dropping in*. It may appear as encoded information on the CSR's telephone console, be a beep in their ear or even a spoken recorded message. The degree of *CSR control* over the *call arrival* is usually determined by call centre management. Some call centres prefer to have the *call arrival* as an *automatic drop in* on completion of the previous call, whereas other call centres recognise that *after-call work* may be required and therefore permit CSR manipulation of selecting *ready* or *busy*. In either case, the process of being in an available state or *available*, or in an unavailable state or *unavailable* is a manual process and, from a CSR perspective it represents "accountable" time which will be tracked by management. *Available time* or *idle* however is "the total time an agent or agent group waited for calls to arrive" (p.262), which time is accountable by management, not the CSR.

The accuracy of the *prediction* and *forecast* when overlaid with *staff rostering* is also measured in terms of *adherence* and *compliance* which provides statistics on how well CSRs are adhering to their *allocated break duration*, such as 30 minutes meal break or 10 minutes morning/afternoon tea break, and how well staff are complying to their allocated break time. For example if a staff member took a morning tea break at 10.40 am instead of 10.30am this would show as a *variance* and *non-compliance*. The impact of this is significant in the call centre terms as being over-resourced from 10.30 a.m. to 10.40 a.m. does not offset being under-resourced for that 10 minutes from 10.40 a.m. to 10.50 a.m. There is now, potentially, a number of CSRs logged off in excess of the number of consultants *rostered* to be *logged off* and therefore, as they are *unavailable*, the call centre is potentially unable to meet the *predicted call volumes* which will impact on *service level* and other relevant measures of

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performance such as *occupancy,* which is "the percentage of time agents handle calls versus wait for calls to arrive" (p.270).

The accuracy and the interaction of the key elements mentioned above are measured statistically usually on a second-by-second real time basis, but generally reported half-hourly. Accurate *forecasting* and *prediction* means that call centres skill groups will be in time deficit if they are operating at *optimal efficiency.* In other words there would be some *calls waiting* to be answered but not exceeding what has been established, generally through *historicals,* as the anticipated maximum customer *wait time tolerance* before customers hang up or *abandon* the call.

So, even with minimal mathematical or scientific background it is easy to understand that one or multiple deviations from the established formula have an immediate, significant and compounding impact on the *optimal efficiency performance* potential of a call centre. With one operator less than *rostered,* or a few more calls per half hour than *forecast,* or the duration of *call handling time* increasing by as much as 1 second on average (which is meaningful in call centre terms), any one of these factors in isolation would immediately effect *service level* and therefore *efficiency performance.* If, however, multiple factors were involved, the effects would be compounded with management held accountable to explain variances in relation to efficiency performance targets.

In essence, according to Cleveland and Mayben (1997) there are six laws incoming call centres "laws"; *for a given call load, when service level goes up, occupancy goes down; keep improving service level and you will reach a point of diminishing returns; for a given service level, larger agent groups are more efficient than smaller groups; all thing being equal, pooled groups are more efficient than specialized groups; for a given call load, add staff and average speed of answer (ASA) will go down; and, for a given call load, add staff and trunk load will go down* (p.130, emphasis added).

The expertise of those individuals in the centralised management team responsible for accurate *resource (workforce) planning, call forecasting* and

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establishing a realistic *average call handling time* means however that if they are fulfilling the performance criteria of their role, such unscheduled opportunities for training and coaching are infrequent. Any scheduled training, particularly where needed to be conducted in a formal setting, requires substantial justification detailing course duration and benefit as this may require a *reforecasting*, which does not automatically imply more staff are required. This results in additional layers of complexity.

Efficiency performance management in call centres involves both qualitative and quantitative values and measures. *Quantitative measures* are computer generated statistics or *stats* which indicate performance on three levels generally; by call centre as a whole business unit, by team and by CSR. Individual *CSR stats* may include the number of calls received, the number of calls answered per hour/day/week (depending on the call centre), the average handling time (AHT) including average talk time, average after-call work (ACW) time, the average time spent waiting for call to arrive, time spent by CSRs in an available state as an "available" operator, any outgoing call made and its duration, any calls transferred in to or out from that CSR, the length of time the CSR has placed a customer "on hold", whether the CSR or the customer terminated the call, and the duration of any CSR initiated unavailability or "going unavailable".

More generally, the statistics and their reporting will also include other data such as the generic reason a customer is calling, based on the customer selection from the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) "touchfone" from the menu, the skills groups data, the number of calls on hold for any given half-hour period of the day, the longest and shortest wait time until that call in answered, and at what duration point the customer has opted to wait no longer if the call is abandoned. Other statistical quantitative reports can be run to provide a more in depth review of specific performance criteria either collectively or individually.

The collection of *qualitative data* predominantly involves *evaluations of call. Call evaluations* assesses a selection or a consecutive series of calls

handled by a CSR in relation to nominated criteria, such as call answer technique (greeting used, tone of voice, etc), questioning technique to establish customer's needs etc, technical expertise (least number of keystrokes used to access information, etc.). The data are collected by nominated qualified staff via remote call monitoring, that is through listening in real time or via tape recordings in a place away from and without forewarning to the CSR as to the specific day/time of the review. The performance is generally rated as a quantitative value which is based on a numeric scale, such as 1-10, with the rating of one being low and 10 denoting high evaluation of performance respectively.

While the two sets of data are collected independently, quantitative data is collected and delivered to the individual as a part of their performance review more regularly, generally, than their qualitative performance data, yet their combined interpretation is intended to provide a more holistic review of total performance. Although it may vary by call centre, quantitative data is generally conveyed to CSRs on an ongoing, hourly, daily or weekly basis, while qualitative feedback is generally conducted once every four to eight weeks.

The highly controlled and measured work performance environments of incoming customer service call centres are acknowledged by Houlihan (2002), Batt and Moynihan (2002) and Holman (2002) to mention a few. Call centre technologies or operating systems are monitored on a minute by minute basis with immediate decisions being made on such issues as, for example, *routing* incoming calls to the first available CSR as the *longest available agent* or *next available agent*, that is "the agent who has been sitting *idle* the longest" (p.268, emphasis added) based on their specifically manipulated single or multiple skill sets and the customer's organisational value, that is their quantifiable economic value to the organisation.

In other words, purposefully *segmented skills sets* can be trained to CSRs at nominated times with a view to the advantageous balance of efficiency of resource against the customer's value and needs, generally

determined through touch key *interactive voice response (IVR)*. For example, if an IVR option offers a different "touchfone" choice for new sales and enquires, then a sales related call would generally be programmed to receive a higher *transfer priority* to an available CSR than an enquiry related call which was not anticipated to generate new quantifiable revenue for the organisation. Similarly there may be a choice for existing customers to key in their customer number, thereby allowing their customer "value" to the company to determine their *transfer/call answer prioritisation.*

The *skill sets* of each CSR can be tailored to each of many possible combinations both in terms of management controlling when and what skills are trained, and how and when they are used. For example, when joining a call centre, a CSR may be trained in one type of enquiry for customers designated as low value. From here the CSR may progress in management controlled training stages to add other skill sets, such as sales and/or more complex enquiries, plus increase the parameters of access to higher customer "value" bases. The research shows that this manipulation is common practice and seen as sound efficiency strategy by call centre managers.

2.4 Background to the Thesis Constructs

The construct of **contextuality** draws on firstly references to F.W. Taylor and Scientific Management, secondly to Braverman's (1974) critique of Taylorism, and thirdly, ethnography and culture. The construct of workplace **pedagogy** draws on such learning theories as constructivist, formal and informal, social learning and also underdeveloped pedagogical discourses with a view to highlight the role which culture and semiotics play in workplace learning.

2.5 Contextuality Construct

2.5.1 F.W. Taylor, Scientific Management and the Historic-Scientific Dimension

Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915), an American engineer, conducted experiments between 1878-1890 in an effort to maximise workers' productivity by rigorously examining where and how efficiency gains could be achieved. Taylor, noted as a revolutionary and a reformer (Thompson 1917a, 1917b, Nelson 1980) for his role in the transformation of American industry, expanded the experiments into a detailed organisation of work production, adaptable to many work environments. Early 20th century authors such as Thompson (1917a, 1917b), Person (ed. 1929) and Hunt (ed. 1924) claim that Taylor's vision, management model and production processes marked a significant historical milestone in production efficiency in terms of workplace practices and their management. The term " 'scientific management'...has come to signify a complex of forces – mechanical, economic, social and human – which have developed out of efforts to introduce scientific determinism into work" (Cooke in Hunt, ed. 1924, p.vii). Terms such as systematic, organisation, processes, procedures, functional, purposive, standards, inspection and measurement became synonymous with Scientific Management.

When appointed to management ranks Taylor started to investigate how a proper or fair day's work could be defined in measurable terms through scientific methods, "or in words the amount of output which it is possible for a capable workman to produce in a given time with given equipment and materials" (Thompson 1917a, p.52). The measurement which Taylor was seeking was the maximum sustainable production level of an employee. His belief and commitment focused on realising efficiencies through the detailed analysis of the entire production process and its associated functions, encompassing how equipment was used, the equipment itself, the layout of the workplace, the assignment of tasks to workers as well as the selection and training of workers. Taylor reasoned

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from his own first hand labouring experience that, firstly, there was a more cost-, labour- and effort-efficient way for a workplace to operate and that, secondly, labourers had adopted certain deliberate unhurried work practices known as "soldiering", which deflected their maximum potential.

Based on literature reviews, nineteen components have been determined as comprising Scientific Management:

- Planning
- Time and motion studies
- Recruitment and selection
- Training
- Atomisation and specialisation
- Wages
- Incentives
- Tools
- Layout and design
- Routing
- Standard times
- Standards
- Inspection
- Functional foremen
- Soldiering
- Cost analysis
- Stock
- Accounting
- Distribution

2.5.2 Braverman and the Social-Political Dimension

Kanigel (1997) observed that in 1977, when three groups of historians and managers were asked to rank, in order of significance, contributors to 20th century American business and management thought, Taylor was ranked as number one. Similarly Drucker (in Brown 1999a) called Taylor's work "the great American contribution to Western thought since the early nineteenth century" (p.13). These late 20th century acknowledgements are difficult to reconcile with Thompson's (1917a) early 20th century account that there were only 201 known industrial plants practising some form of Scientific Management, of which 169 were in the United States of America and 32 in other countries globally (p.38). Statistics presented by

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Thompson (1917b) state that of the 113 plants practising scientific management, 59 were complete successes, 10 partial successes, and 34 failures (p.13). In spite of the statistics, the impact of Taylorism however is noted by Braverman (1974) as "a woeful misreading of the actual dynamics of the development of management" (p.87), simultaneously acknowledging that "if Taylorism does not exist as a separate school today, that is because...its fundamental teachings have become the bedrock of all work design" (Braverman 1974, p.87). Challenging Friedmann's terminology of the "science of work", Braverman (1974) points out that it should be considered as a "science of the management of others' work" (p.90). This is supported by his views that Scientific Management's control over the labour process assumed unprecedented dimensions by controlling the precise manner in which work was to be performed, which were complemented by the collaboration of Taylor's time studies with Gilbreth's expertise in motion studies (Braverman 1974, p.173) to instigate even greater efficiencies.

The social-political debate, however, does not appear to have impacted on the growth of call centres in Australia or globally. In 1998 Australian call centres were a $2 billion industry comprising of 1,400 call centres and employing in the region of 50,000 people. The average cost per call centre seat in Australia is $US48,750 a year which is lower than both Singapore and Hong Kong (Lowe 1997) with "State and Federal governments...starting to appreciate the importance of investment in the call centre industry because call centres are relatively large employers" (p.1). The 1997 Asia Pacific Call Centre Industry Report claimed that "Asia Pacific is the world's fastest growing region, with 80 per cent of top multinational corporations that do not already have a call centre in the region stating that they planned to set one up" (Lowe 1997, p.1). The research therefore questions to what degree social-political critiques, such as Braverman's (1974), have influenced the adaptation of Taylorist management practices in call centres.

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Based on Braverman's critique, the key elements extracted for examination relevant to this dimension of contextuality have been:

- Capitalist-based ethos
- Workplace environment
- Unionisation
- Rule-based or autonomy-based work philosophy
- Deskilling

2.5.3 The Ethno-Cultural Dimension

> Today it is only modest overstatement to say that we are all Taylorized, that from assembly-line tasks to a fraction of a second, to lawyers recording their time by fractions of an hour, to standardized McDonald's hamburgers, to information operators constrained to grant only so many seconds per call, modern life itself has become Taylorized (Kanigel 1997, p.14).

Regardless of whether authors acknowledge Taylor's legacy impartially, as supporters or as critics, this quote highlights the evolutionary adaptability of Taylor's management philosophy into a diversity of occupational communities and also conceptualises a subtextual, generational continuity and longevity which requires recognition. This is done principally through the notion of a cyclical Taylorist-based cultural narrative in which the dominant culture of efficiency establishes a philosophy and belief system (contextuality) that acts to influence and contain culturally-based teaching and learning practices (pedadogy), which reinforce the contextuality, and so on.

The choice and usage of "culture" was carefully considered, ensuring, as Solomon (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) cautions, that its clichéd usage neither implies that "practices and activities associated with (it) require little analysis or discussion" (p.119) nor "unreflexive usage...is superficial, counter-productive and inconsistent with (its) intention" (p.119). Solomon draws on Cultural Understandings as the Eighth Key Competency 1994 to provide a definition.

> Culture is socially created forms of human interaction and cohesion. It arises through socialisation and learning; it is neither natural nor fixed.

> Culture entails multiple personal and social meanings, relationships, practices and values (p.120).

The concept of socialisation within the notion of culture also took on significance and "refers to the process by which individuals internalize the values, beliefs and norms of behaviour of the society into which they are born" (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin 2003, p.44), where society here is argued as the society of the workplace community.

> From a sociological perspective, individuals are socialized into cultural values, attitudes and beliefs. They come to share these with the rest of society, which makes possible the consensus which all societies are said to depend on for their survival (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin 2003, p.44).

In closing this research construct it is argued that an exacting and transparent account of workplace contextuality would potentially facilitate an insightful review of workplace teaching and learning practices and mediums of learning. Casey in Boud & Garrick (eds. 1999) observes that "educators, managers, training and development practitioners, and workers generally may be better able to design, provide or seek workplace curricula most suitable to employees and to their organisation and industry" (p.15) if there is "a greater appreciation of ...contextual events and changes (which) enables a more informed, adept and practical understanding of the contexts and processes of learning at work" (p.15).

2.6 Pedagogy Construct

The use of pedagogy in this research evolved to represent both teaching and learning in formal and informal settings within the workplace environment, and specifically to the teaching and learning practices relative to the two logics. In relation to teaching, a definition which was found useful was "the transmission of information from one individual to another through directed instruction" (Frieman 2002, p.283, citing Caro and Hauser) with "the most common form of teaching in humans (being) verbal instruction: telling someone what to do or how to do it" (p.284).

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Brown and Duguid (in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000) also offer a complementary and extended view by stating that "training is thought of as the transmission of explicit, abstract knowledge from the head of someone who knows to the head of someone who does not in surroundings that specifically exclude the complexities of practice and the communities of practitioners" (p.108). This has bearing on Tosey's observation in Jarvis, Holdford and Griffin (2003) of "decontextualised knowledge".

In basic terms, when considering "directed instruction", "explicit, abstract knowledge" and "decontextualised knowledge" the notions of conscious, articulated "teaching" are assumed to fall within formal learning theory. The opposite could therefore be considered as undirected instruction, implicit workplace in situ relevant knowledge and contextualised knowledge which potentially falls within informal learning theory. However, the notions of external/internal people and processes and decontextualised/contextualised knowledge adopted a spatial construct. The pairing of external control and decontextualised knowledge, becomes synonymous with being spatially secluded or remote from the place of actual practice, whereas the pairing of internal and contextualised becomes synonymous with being spatially inclusive at the place of actual in situ practice. These references to learning spatiality became attached, respectively, to formal and informal learning settings in this research. Formal, decontextualised and "teaching" therefore became associated with the structure and control of curricula, which later became represented as a cultural text in encoding the rhetoric of call centre practice and the customer-oriented logic.

On the other side of this rationale was "learning" as contextualised knowledge in an informal setting. A definition which was found useful and which juxtaposed the notions of internal and contextualised, situated learning "in the trajectories of participation in which it takes on meaning" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.121). With Garrick's (1998) view acknowledging the importance of "occupational influences on the processes involved"

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(p.142); Hager (drawing on Foley in Boud & Garrick., eds. 1999, p.67) notes that "contextual and situational understanding...is largely a product of workplace experience and learning", and Frieman (2002) complements these by describing contextualised learning as knowledge gained through experience requiring "the necessary and sufficient conditions" (p.xiv).

Holistically these views explore constructivist learning, as a cumulative learning process in which new experiences are interpreted in relation to existing knowledge constructs; that is which "emphasize the ways in which learners construct knowledge for themselves into an integrated and holistic understanding" (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin 2003, p.43). Collectively, the common theme highlighted the importance of the inclusion rather the isolation of knowledge from practice, and ultimately advocates a view of "what is learned is profoundly connected to the conditions in which it is learned" (Brown & Duguid in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000, p.109, citing Lave and Wenger).

Other terms which attracted research attention were to be found in references to primary and secondary experience in experiential learning (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin 2003), with "primary" being "an experience by any, or all, of the senses of aspects of the social context within which the experience occurs" (p.55). Continuing, "secondary" is explained as "a mediated experience having little or nothing to do with the social context within which the experience occurs" (p.55) wherein the authors draw on Miller & Boud's definition of experience as "the totality of ways in which humans sense the world and make of what they perceive" (p.56). Therefore teaching and learning, in addition to a spatial construct, also adopted sensory and social constructs.

Research based interpretations reviewing the relationship between the spatial, sensory and social constructs ultimately incorporated these perspectives in structure and management control of workplace texts, semiotics and workplace socialisation as significant conduits in workplace learning. This was reinforced by Darrah (1996) who draws on Lave and

Wenger when observing that "learning on the production floor involves more than the internalization by learners of the knowledge presented by instructors" (p.46). Therefore processes which produced either complementary or conflicting constructions of meaning as outcomes of teaching and learning in formal and informal settings became of research interest. This matured into examining the pedagogical practices and processes involved in transitioning constructions of meaning from teaching as decontextualised knowledge to learning as contextualised knowledge, while also considering the sub-text which plays a role in the transition, such as informal learning in formal learning settings.

Consequently, the reseach claim is that "teaching" in the pedagogy construct has a holistic interpretation which included the notions of decontextualised knowledge in a formal setting external (or in this case semi-external) to workplace practice with sensory and social limitations. Correspondingly "learning" has a holistic interpretation which included the notions of contextualised knowledge in an informal setting internal to workplace practice without sensory or social limitations. Further, the findings inductively imposed customer-oriented logic as encoded rhetoric (or the theory) of practice while cost-efficient logics became decoded reality of practice.

These interpretations however are not definitive. Although the juxtaposition of formal teaching-formal setting and informal learning-informal setting appears a logical association, a research interest developed to extend the assumption to review the sub-text or informal learning in a formal teaching setting. As will be highlighted in more detail later in the research "formal" and "decontextualised" generally refers to that knowledge which is both institutionalised and abstract; that is to say it is generally conducted at a recognised educational institution with, for the most part, formal qualifications being obtained generally prior to obtaining a job and/or experience in that particular field of study.

Many organisations however with their own training department or learning and development centre, such as the call centres in the research, generate a consideration for a semi-contextualised or semi-decontextualised position. Their "formal teaching/learning" is generally conducted in a "formal learning setting" such as a training room with assessment based on specific and internalised competencies for that call centre and its products. The training room, while set apart from the call centre "floor", still remains in relative close proximity to and sharing of call centre activities, such as the "tea room", meeting colleagues, etc. For the purpose of this research however the term "decontextualised" is used to refer to the "formal training" component in call centres acknowledging its abstract and theoretically based nature which simultaneously acknowledges their relevant spatial, sensory and social constructs.

Having framed formal/informal learning as "setting", informal "learning" presented new considerations in terms of informal, incidental or accidental. Marsick and Watkins (1990) refers to workplace learning outside of the formal training process as requiring a recognition of difference between informal and incidental, suggesting that "informal learning is intentional, incidental learning is not" (p.218). "Informal learning is mainly experiential and takes place in non-institutional settings, but it is often planned" (p.141) such as coaching, mentoring, performance planning, whereas "incidental learning is unintentional, the by-product of another activity" (p.141), such as assumptions, beliefs, learning from mistakes, or the 'hidden curriculum'. An alternative term of "sub-textual", rather than "hidden", in relation to contextualised learning and knowledge in a practice-based informal environment became a conscious research choice as "hidden", in the researcher's opinion, appears to carry the notion of pre-meditated, subversive intent.. On the other hand the use of "sub-textual" defers to Billett's (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) explanation of "hidden curriculum" as "unintended learning resulting from engagement" (p.155)

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and "not observable...therefore...more difficult to learn" (p.158), which was considered to be more relevant.

Garrick (1998), drawing on Marsick and Watkins, observes that informal (and incidental) learning occurs "outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored classroom-based activities, taking place under non-routine conditions or in routine conditions where reflection and critical reflection are used to clarify the situation" (p.10). This reference to reflection and critical reflection however pre-supposes that it is done at a conscious level, which also became a juncture of some reflection in the research. Garrick (1998) inadvertently offered a resolution by suggesting that "accidental" is "a spontaneous, contingent form of learning where something fruitful or transformative happens without deliberation" (p.219).

Drawing on Bagnall, Garrick (1998) also highlights the unconsciousness of learning just through living in a particular "environment" or "context" (p.219). Extending this thinking Garrick's (1998) quote from Marsick and Watkins that "informal learning can be deliberately encouraged by an organisation" while "incidental learning on the other hand, almost always takes place in everyday experience although people are not always conscious of it" (p.18) held relevance in the research development as sub-textual learning "encouragements".

Although references to conscious and unconscious knowledge acquisition do feature on an elementary level in this thesis, delineations between informal, incidental or accidental learning ultimately fell outside the scope of this research, and became collectively absorbed and represented through the use of "informal learning".

2.6.1   Ethno-pedagogy

Generalised theorisations on knowledge acquisition in formal and informal settings then needed to accommodate come specificity in relation to call centre teaching and learning. Supporting the relationship of workplace contextuality and pedagogy, call centre teaching and learning became grounded in ethno-cultural contextuality and the cultural cyclical

narrative. The term of ethno-pedagogy was then applied to represent cultural learning, to indicate this interdependence and to support the claim for recognition of call centres as an ethno-cultural work community.

Highlighting the contextual and cultural nature of the teaching and learning, according to Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin (2003), "social, historical and cultural contexts...determine the content, style and methods of learning...the meaning and significance of knowledge and learning for individuals according to their location in society" (p.43) where "knowledge is contingent upon circumstances, and learning is a process which directly reflects this" (p.43).

The use of social, historical and cultural descriptors were particularly resonant in light of the call centre ethno-cultural contextuality construct, with "society" deemed here to be "the workplace" society. Phrases which became significant in this direction included social learning, observational learning (Mazur, 1998), and cultural or social transmission of knowledge, in an attempt to interpret how learning takes place in an environment where culture comes to be understood and culturally based meanings reconstructed without any seemingly conscious or reflexive process.

Lave & Wenger (1991) also had an impact on connecting learning with historical, social and cultural concepts by noting that "in a theory of practice, cognition and communication in, and with, the social world are situated in the historical development of ongoing activity" (pp.50-51), thus "understanding the technology of practice is more than learning to use tools; it is a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in its cultural life" (p.101). This was complemented by Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin's (2003) reference to the importance of the social context of learning noting that "learning takes place in an interaction between ourselves and others in the context of culture" (p.51).

Other significant observations were also instrumental in developing the cultural and social nature of learning, such as "cultural evolution is the

process by which we humans adapt to our environment by transmitting acquired knowledge from generation to generation through teaching and imitation" (Frieman 2002, p.23, drawing on Boyd & Richerson). Frieman (2002) continues by later noting that "social learning leads to the cultural transmission of knowledge: knowledge and skills passed from one generation to another through learning" (p.272) with the transmission occurring "in one of two general ways: (1) intentionally through some form of instruction, or (2) inadvertently through observation of another individual" (p.272).

Significantly Gonczi (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) suggests that as workplace participation shifts "from being peripheral to becoming more central", workers "are increasingly capable of meshing this cultural understanding with their technical knowledge and their skills and attitudes" which "enables them to make increasingly informed individual judgements about how they should act" (pp.183-184). The shift from "peripheral" to "central" in terms of acculturisation became represented as cultural junctures at which meaningful cultural understandings relating to performance expectations and workplace behaviours are assigned and reflective of the reality of practice.

Reinforcing the cultural and social avenue of exploration, Matthew and Candy (quoting Kolb in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999), refer to "social knowledge as the culturally transmitted network of words, symbols and images based solely on comprehension" (p.52). This "network" and "comprehension" is suggested as residing "in social activity in ways that are relatively hidden from, or invisible to, the social actors involved" (p.54), which, as a consequence, "often makes it difficult for individuals to talk about and to share consciously what they know" (Matthew & Candy in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, p.54, citing Spender).

McDermott (in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000) also broadly encapsulates the idea of ethno-pedagogy when commenting that "we learn by participating in these communities and come to embody the ideas,

perspective, prejudices, language, and practices of that community" (p.26). This view was separately reinforced by later observations that "*knowledge flows through professional communities, from one generation to the next*" (p.26, original emphasis) and the process of acquiring knowledge acquisition occurs by "participating in a community – using the tools, ideas, techniques, and unwritten artifacts of that community" (p.28).

These "tools, techniques and unwritten artifacts" then became a relevant research interest and developed under the theme of workplace cultural artifacts as pedagogical conduits. According to Matthew and Candy (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, drawing on Sternberg), "knowledge we need in order to adapt to an environment (such as the unspoken rules which govern any workplace) is not explicitly taught and indeed is often not even verbalized" (p.52), with clarification that this knowledge "is not disembodied facts, or even information, rather it is the 'veil through which we see and interpret the world, and interact with the world' " (p.52). The research interpretation became the lens of "the veil".

Explorations relating to the combination of words such as community, practice and learning frequently included the seminal work of Lave and Wenger's (1991) on "communities of practice". Its relevance to this research went through stages of association and disassociation with the concept of ethno-cultural community, with the wavering between the two based predominantly in the seemingly conflicting nature of the relevance of consciousness and critical reflexivity in the model. As a consequence, call centre ethno-cultural community is not claimed as a "community of practice" in the Lave and Wenger sense for the following reasons. Interpretation of the term appears dependent on a community wherein critical reflexivity of practice is predicated on an assumption that learning is conscious knowledge to be shared. This understanding was at odds with an attempt in this research to highlight some of the subtleties of learning which came to be understood not through conscious group sharing but rather without any seeming conscious and reflexive process,

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communicated through a wide range of artifacts which were not knowingly identified as attributable to learning or knowledge sharing.

However, some other specific writings in relation to "community of practice" serve to cloud the earlier clarity and were found to be relevant and useful. One such example, Stamps (citing Lave & Wenger) in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher (eds. 2000) is a substantially more comprehensive interpretation of a community of practice where "practice" denotes "social practice", both explicit and tacit.

> It includes what is said and what is left unsaid; what is represented and what is assumed. It includes the language, the tools, the documents, the images, the symbols, the well-defined roles, the specified criteria, the codified procedures, the regulations, and the contracts that various practices make explicit for a variety of purposes. But it also includes all the implicit relations, the tacit conventions, the subtle cues, the untold rules of thumb, the recognizable intuitions, the specific perceptions, the well-tuned sensitivities, the embodied understandings, the underlying assumptions, the shared worldviews, which may never be articulated, though they are unmistakable signs of membership in communities of practice and are crucial to the success of their enterprises" (p.58).

Despite this comprehensive and relevant explanation, particularly of the inherent notions of consciousness, reflexivity, verbalising and community sharing of "learning", it was not found to represent the findings of the ethno-cultural community of call centres or the notion of ethno-pedagogy as relevant in workplace learning. Rather than secondary learning (community reflecting on practice) this research focuses on primary learning (practice which reflects the community).

In closing this section, having loosely assigned a place in the research for sensory and social themes, an interest also developed in regard to work artifacts and workplace language to further explore the notions of semiotics and semiotic language and, as a natural progression, semiotic and cultural literacy. This area of interest emerged gradually, and existing literature on its position in workplace learning appeared to be underdeveloped. Therefore it presented an aspect claimable as original and an approach which permitted the extrapolation of existing references to

advance new theorisations. This avenue of exploration can be predominantly traced back to Searle's (1991) writings on workplace literacy, challenging the conventions and limitations of current literacy definitions as too contained. Similarly, Lave and Wenger (1991) differentiated between the talk about practice from the outside and talk within it, noting that "the didactic use of language, not itself the discourse of practice, creates a new linguistic practice, which has an existence of its own" (p.108).

The idea of language being significant as both instructional in an informal sense and shaping the ethno-cultural was accompanied by Garrick's (1998) view that in informal meaning making, semiotics are texts or signs. In claiming "there is no innocent, pure or pristine experience of a real external world...(w)e 'encode' our experience of the world in order that we may experience it – there is no neutral text" (p.180), Garrick (1998) continues by noting that "from a semiotic viewpoint, any social behaviour or practice signifies and may be read as a text, as a language" which "systematically communicates something meaningful to us" (p.180). The idea of "texts" as learning conduits developed into a focal feature of the research.

2.7 Research Questions

2.7.1 Research Question Assumptions

In order to avoid the repetition of phrases "according to the understandings of call centre managers" at the beginning of every research question, and "in relation to the privileging of cost-efficient logic and customer-oriented logic in efficiency performance management" at the end of each research question, their inclusion should be assumed. For example, "According to the understandings of call centres managers, **how does F.W. Taylor, Scientific Management and his efficiency model influence call centre contextuality** in relation to the privileging of cost-efficient logic

and customer-oriented logic in efficiency performance management?" The abridged question appears in bold text above and this format will be used in the following presentation.

Although the three key influential dimensions in positioning call centre contextuality feature in the table of research questions following, the detailed analysis and interpretation of the data of historic-scientific and social-political dimensions will be published, due to their substantial volume, separately. However, a synopsis of their content will be included as relevant to the presentation and holistic understanding of this thesis.

2.7.2 Table of Research Questions

Table 2.1 – Table of Research Questions

Contextuality Construct		
Level		**Question**
Macro	1	What key factors play a role in defining incoming customer service call centre contextuality?
Meso	1.1	(Historic-Scientific) How does F.W. Taylor, Scientific Management and his efficiency model influence call centre contextuality?
Micro	1.1.1	How does the atomisation of Taylor's model correlate to contemporary call centre practices?
Meso	1.2	(Social-Political) What key aspects of Braverman's critique of Taylorism have a bearing on call centre contextuality?
Micro	1.2.1	To what extent do these key aspects effect change in the contextuality of Taylor's model in call centres?
Meso	1.3	(Ethno-Cultural) What factors shape the evolution of an ethno-cultural community as contextually relevant in call centre practices?
Micro	1.3.1	To what extent do these factors shape a cultural representation of call centre efficiency performance management?
Pedagogy Construct		
Macro	2	How do the contextuality dimensions influence call centre pedagogical practices?
Meso	2.1	(Tension/Logics) How does a tension in the logics shape pedagogical practices?
Micro	2.1.1	How is the tension of logics manifested?
Meso	2.2	(Cultural Texts) What role do cultural texts play as pedagogical conduits in workplace teaching and learning of the logics?
Micro	2.2.1	What artifacts contribute to generating cultural texts?
Meso	2.3	(Cultural Junctures) What cultural junctures are significant in workplace teaching and learning of the logics?'"
Micro	2.3.1	What (re)constructions of meaning are manifested at each juncture in relation to the cultural texts?
Meso	2.4	(Cultural Influencers) What cultural influencers act to shape workplace teaching and learning of the logics?
Micro	2.4.1	How do these cultural influencers affect learning outcomes in relation to the logics?

Chapter Three – Literature Review

3.1 Chapter Introduction

The following literature review incorporates a broad range of authors and subject material. In arguing the Contextuality Construct, the selection relating to F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management mainly draws on those authors of that day who openly acknowledge Taylor's model in positive terms. In turn, this becomes fertile ground for critics of Taylor and Scientific Management, such as Braverman (1974), to argue the negative social impact of the legacy. Extracts specific to call centres and more generalised management theory also provide the (re)contextualisation of revitalised Taylorism. These aspects are then proposed as providing a foundation wherein incoming customer service call centres could be considered an occupationally specific ethno-cultural community with literature encompassing ethnography and cultural studies included.

In relation to the Pedagogy Construct, work specific contextuality is argued as influential in teaching and learning practices. Drawing on the ethno-cultural dimension as representing call centre contextuality holistically, it is argued that philosophy, beliefs, rituals, traditions, relationship structures, cultural artifacts and language within the community become teaching and learning conduits from which community members decode cultural texts and progressively assign and reassign meaning.

3.2 Contextuality Construct

3.2.1 The Historic-Scientific Dimension

Key authors in the early 20th century were, for the most part, supporters of Taylor's innovative new method of efficiency management as the articulation of earlier disjointed theories. Kendall, in Hunt (ed.1924),

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claims that there were basically three types of management models at that time; Unsystematized Management, Systematized Management and Scientific Management. The first two were found to be lacking in the comprehensive attention to detail which Taylor's efficiency focused model offered. For example, there were no instruction cards or checking of "tools", and new technology was automatically accepted as the best solution without any assessment of its suitability for required worker use and outcome. In other words a non scientific selection was made.

Scientific Management, on the other hand, offered a holistic efficiency management system. It focused on production and all the associated aspects of production, and the control of those processes. The focus on the organised study of work, the analysis of work into its simplest elements and the systematic improvement of the worker's performance in each of these elements, had no difficulty in proving the contribution Scientific Management made as its results in the form of higher output were visible and readily measurable, as acknowledged by Braverman (1974) citing Drucker (p.88).

With the growing prominence of engineers at that time, an "engineers' forum", according to Person (ed. 1929), "enabled industry's growing consciousness of management problems to become articulate" (p.6). This evolved into the engineers becoming a part of the "new managerial elite" (Nelson 1980, p.4), seen as efficiency solution providers, with key accountabilities for solution implementation, and the management and measurement of efficiency. As Braverman (1974) observes, the key players, as the "management team", comprised principally of the engineers who designed the machinery, the planning department who planned the work load and distribution and the functional foreman who ensured maximum productivity and adherence to schedules and procedures. The key aim of Scientific Management is "the effect...on economy of production or conservation of energy, human or material" (Nelson 1980, p.5).

Summarising Taylor's efficiency model, Kendall in Hunt (ed. 1924) suggests the sequence as:

> A ticket made up in the **central planning department**, when combined with the **instruction cards**, serves to **plan the work in advance**; then it is used to **control the order of work** by being placed on a bulletin board; then it **gives the workman his particular piece of work to do with the instruction how to do it**. On this ticket is stamped **the time at which the work is begun and when it ends**. This same ticket then serves to check off **the progress of the work on the route sheet**. Then it goes to **the accounting department**, from which the man's pay is made up. It is then **redistributed and furnishes the labor cost** of the particular operation on the cost sheet of the job (p.22, emphasis added).

Kendall (in Hunt, ed. 1924) continues that the **storage of materials** is with the use of **mnemonic symbols** (p.24, emphasis added) and the execution of work is achieved via **routing** (p.25, emphasis added). Efficiency of the worker is achieved from **analysis and synthesis of elements of operation**, scientific **selection of the worker** and **training of the worker** (p.27, emphasis added) as well as **proper tools and incentive** (p.28, emphasis added). In the training of the worker, the employer has the duty and responsibility

> ...to train the worker to do the work in the way which the result of the analysis has shown to be the best way. This will be accomplished by a **functional foreman**, whose duty it is to train the workman and help them to get started right on each job. If they fail to perform the task in the time fixed, it is the duty of the functional foreman to find out why they have failed, and to help them do the work as it should be done" (pp.27-28, emphasis added).

Taylor's Scientific Management as a management efficiency model however has not always been similarly acknowledged as seminal in efficiency performance management by more contemporary authors. Whether the lack of acknowledgement of Taylor is by design or through lack of awareness, the essence of Taylorist thought is evident. One example is Williams (1967) who, although he does not acknowledge Taylor's philosophies as influential in industry and technology advancement in post World War II years of the 1950s-1960s, advocates a workplace environment which certainly bears a close resemblance.

> All **increases in output** not the result of mere increases in quantities of labour and capital....Technical progress, thus, includes the effects of **better organization, more effective labour** (whether caused by better training or by a greater intensity of efforts), **improved materials** (whether from discovery of new courses or from **closer control following scientific research**), besides the invention of new machines and processes to produce both old and new products (Williams 1967, p.67, emphasis added).

Williams (1967)continues to propose that the scope for growth could be realised through **improved "housekeeping" of organisational planning and control techniques to improve output** by ensuring the "**lowest cost completion of production targets**" by creating "the conditions of **low capital-output ratios**" (p.67, emphasis added).

While the emphasised text embraces the tenets of Taylorism recognising improved production and efficiency processes principally through scientific and technological innovation, the strategy is also presented with a sense of originality, of innovation and of "newness". Such distancing from Taylorist origins, conscious or unconscious, however was not always the case. Kipping (1999) notes that "during the 1920s and even more so during the 1930s, consultancies of U.S. origin started to play a more extensive role in the application of scientific management methods in European companies" (p.192). Such acknowledgements highlight the adaptability of Taylorist philosophies and add credence to Rhodes and Garrick's (2000a) reference to "rubbing out", drawing on Derrida's term of 'palimpsest'. This represents new language written over the old in an effort to obscure it while traces of the old are still recoverable (p.7).

In an attempt to reconcile these tensions and also specific or veiled references to call centres as Taylorist, a study was undertaken to examine the correlation between the elements of Taylor's model and contemporary call centres practices. The following nineteen elements were identified within Taylor's with their contemporary call centre equivalents in brackets.

1. Planning (Centralised Management)
2. Time and Motion studies

3. Recruitment and Selection

4. Training

5. Atomisation and Specialisation

6. Wages

7. Incentives

8. Tools (Technologies)

9. Layout and Design

10. Routing

11. Standard Times

12. Standards

13. Inspection (Quality Review)

14. Functional Foreman (Supervisor/Team Leader)

15. Soldiering (Productivity Manipulation)

16. Cost Analysis

17. Stock

18. Accounting

19. Distribution

Relevant independent quotes in relation to these elements will form part of the triangulation of data in the presentation of research findings, and contribute to establishing an argument for primary (tangible) and secondary (less tangible) cultural texts in call centre workplace learning.

3.2.2 The Social-Political Dimension

One of the most acknowledged critics of Taylor and his legacy has been Braverman (1974) and a review of key aspects of his critique forms the basis of the social-political dimension. In spite of Taylor's supporters (Thompson 1917a; 1917b, Hunt, ed. 1924, Person, ed. 1929), that his Scientific Management model represented a responsible social model, "for harmonious industrial relations, and workers' prosperity and good-will" (Person, ed. 1929, p.16), there is a marked contrast with subsequent writings critical of the social benefits of Taylor's model. through such descriptive imagery (visual and verbal) such "battery

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farming" (Crome, 1998), "assembly lines in the head" (Taylor & Bain, in Deery & Kinnie 2002, p.4) or "production line call centres" (Batt & Moynihan, 2002. p.15).

The five key aspects of Braverman's (1974) critique as points of focus in the research are:

1. Capitalist-based Ethos
2. Workplace Environment
3. Unionisation
4. Rule-based or Autonomy-based Work Orientations
5. Deskilling

In relation to **capitalist-based ethos,** Braverman's (1974) positioning of Taylorism as "capitalist" has been far from unique. Drawing on Jacques, Warhurst and Thompson (Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998) agree with Braverman's (1974) "capital driven" theory by observing that "it has long been management's job to make capital out of the originality of what labour knows and does" (p.7), which precedes management appropriation and subsequent control of knowledge, as well as the control of workers' performance in order to deliver the desired capital driven outcomes. Economic imperatives have become a prevalent part of a 'master discourse', which Garrick (1998, citing Marginson), proposes should raise concerns with regard to people being considered as human capital (p.7). Incumbent in this capitalist theory is the notion that the workplace environment has been socially compromised.

In terms of a **workplace environment,** call centres are generally targeted in negative terms for their degree of perceived control and regimentation. This perception is understandable when taking into consideration media articles such as West (2003) *"Staff made to pay for toilet breaks"*, in which it is claimed that management have directed call centre staff to log their toilet breaks as personal time. Other articles however, appear to support a stricter socially-based code of workplace behaviour. O'Hagan (2003) discusses the "office chat" in relation to

workplace behavior in which Spooner, "a senior lecturer in industrial relations with the School of Management at the University of Technology, Sydney" is quoted as saying "if people are spending too much time discussing issues that are not work-related, the employer has a right to restrict discussion...(and) probably the best way to work out the impact of such activity is to assess key performance indictors" (p.1).

Later in the article O'Hagan (2003), quoting Woodbury, a partner with the law firm of Blake Dawson Waldron, states that "it is quite common for employers to expressly prescribe appropriate office behaviour". However, the degree with which such "prescriptive behaviours" are detailed, monitored and managed in a call centre work environment may well contribute to their labeling as "the bete noire of organisational types" (Holman 2002), "electronic panopticons" (Fernie & Metcalf in Holman 2002), "dark satanic mills of the 21st century" (Garson in Holman 2002), "electronic sweatshop" (Garson in Jones 1999), and "human battery farms" (Incomes Data Services in Holman 2002) with a "distinctly Orwellian feel...(which) evokes a sense of Big Brother" (Brown 1999a).

When considering **unionisation** within social-political constructs, Thompson (1914a) acknowledges that Taylor's Scientific Management has no place for unions, or the philosophies underpinning industrial democracy (p.29), collective agreements (p.94) or individual bargaining (p.92). Thompson (1914a) continues by noting that in fact "in several instances efforts or organizers to unionize...have failed on account of the satisfaction of the employees with the conditions of their work" (p.96). Braverman (1974) agrees that collaborative management practices are only a myth until such time as management are prepared to accept that the reshaping of the organisation of labour is dependent on allowing the workers a return of the technical knowledge for a collective mode of production.

The role of industrial democracy and its implementation beyond rhetoric, in its aim to embrace what is argued as more socially responsible and

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accountable practice, is therefore questioned in this research. In adopting what may be claimed as "socially responsible" requires some scrutiny. Drawing on Braverman (1974) the workplace union may be inhibited in their ability to effect change if management is able to appeal to worker' key motivations particularly economically. For example, when Henry Ford was attempting to avert the "double threat of unionization and the flight of workers from his plants" (Braverman 1974 p.149) due to changes in work conditions, he boldly more than doubled the wage of the day to $5.00.

Even though this was acknowledged by Braverman as a conciliatory move to appease worker dissatisfaction over the newly implemented flat rate/no bonuses system of remuneration, it had the desired effect and made available a large pool of labour from which to draw. It also highlighted that workers' motivations, which were understandably financially related at that time in 1913, may also play a role in the union ineffectiveness when faced with management efficiency driven strategies. Citing Sward, Braverman (1974) notes that this strategy of increasing workers' pay, according to Ford, "was one of the finest cost-cutting moves we ever made" (p.150). Even acknowledging a difference between Taylorism and Fordism, the increased wage packet was also seen as a powerful Taylorist lure.

Work orientations, in terms of **rule-based or autonomy-based work orientations**, have also been extracted as a social-political theme. In spite of Braverman's critique and progressive developments in industrial democracy however, there is also literary evidence to suggest that these have had minimal impact on effecting social change from rule-based to autonomy-based work orientations in call centres. Batt (in Deery and Kinnie 2002) is noted as suggesting that "at the very time that many manufacturing organisations are moving away from scientific management and the production-line approach to workforce management, service organisations, and especially call centres, seem to be eagerly embracing this model" (p.5). Garrick (1998), citing Boje and Winsor, refers in general

terms to "revitalised Taylorism", with clarification that it is "masquerading under a costume of worker development, involvement and empowerment" (p.40). Despite recommendations for a more inclusive management style Deery & Kinnie (2002) observe that "the fragility of the approach is also revealed, as Houlihan identifies the persistent tendency of call centres to revert to a control approach in workforce management" (p.11). Significantly, Steijn's (2001) research on low/high autonomy in non-teamwork/teamwork environments initiates the claim "it becomes clear that the Tayloristic organisation is certainly not dead" (p.194).

This discussion on rule-based/autonomy-based workplaces should also include a brief reference to a range of post-industrial and industrial democracy workplace recommendations. A number of "innovative" management and business solutions tout various socially responsible aspects in an apparent effort to shift the rule oriented work environment associated with a Taylorist work ethic to one which advocates industrial democracy, increased autonomy and worker inclusiveness in decision making, amongst other claims. Braverman (1974) suggests that "the illusion of making decisions" may be a pretense of worker "participation" which reflects a variation in the "style of management rather than a genuine change in the position of the worker" (p.39). Therefore, a closer inspection may determine whether the reality in the implementation of the assurances which underpin such alternatives are in fact conducive with the superficial rhetoric which accompanies them or merely acting in the guise of discourses implying progress and change (Garrick 1998). Such views are also debated in contemporary articles with specific reference to call centres. Dobbin and Boychuk (1999) claim Taylor, and de-skilling (which received separate attention shortly), are responsible for low worker autonomy in an environment based on rule-orientation. The authors continue by acknowledging that "the social" is outweighed by "the scientific" in Taylor's model, which weighting has endured.

> We contend...that the legacy of Taylorism and job control unionism in the United States is not merely rule-governed work in settings subjected to Taylorism and job control, but a rule-oriented approach to organizing work that has become widely institutionalized. To say that this approach is institutionalized is to say that it is thought by Americans to be natural – to be self-evidently the optimal way of organizing work" (p.261).

Therefore, the authors continue, "in settings where worker discretion is bound by rules, supervisory discretion also tends to be bound by rules" (p.262).

Lund & Wright (2001), when speaking of new systems to improve efficiencies in grocery warehousing in Australia refer to a "new Taylorism" as "computerised Taylorism" involving engineered work standards and computerised performance monitoring. Parenti (2001) on the other hand prefers "digital Taylorism" when noting that phone and computer "log on" are mandatory at the beginning of a shift instigating a display the previous day's productivity scores from best to worst.. Brown (1999a) refers to Adler and Cole's contrast of "what they call a 'democractic Taylorism' with the traditional 'despotic Taylorism' so that even supporters don't see Taylorism as being superseded but rather becoming refined, or improved" (p.19). Similarly Warhurst and Thompson (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998) suggest that there is a need to review technologies objectively evaluating their ability to enhance control mechanisms once implemented in workplaces and which give rise to such labels as the "electronic ball and chain" (p.9, drawing on Lyon) which, as a consequence, embed a rule-oriented workplace over autonomy-based alternatives.

Through the use of technologies in "the inexorable march of science-based technological change" (Braverman 1974, p.6) companies are organising or "directing" their customers into organisationally and technologically mandated transaction selections such as through touch telephone or voice recognition technologies which in turn prescribes the customers' call routing to designated CSRs based on the customer value and/or their "reason for your call" classification.

One of the key arguments in Braverman's (1974) critique is the role which Taylorism has played in **deskilling**, which principally focuses on diminishing holistic worker knowledge, skill, responsibility and accountability in favour of the increased control of management over those processes. Braverman (1974), in arguing his deskilling theory, would undoubtedly challenge Thompson's (1917a) subtle interpretation of this shift as "transference of skill" rather than "appropriation". This advent, regardless of the term, involved the shifting of worker skills from the worker to the Planning Department in Taylor's model, with claims that the strategy resulted in the saving of labor and the increased output and reduction of cost. However its implications were considerably greater than this limited perspective. In social-political terms, the issue of deskilling as an outcome of Taylor's management model is vehemently criticised by Braverman (1974). He proposes deskilling as "the progressive elimination of thought from the work of the office worker thus (taking) the form, at first, of reducing mental labor to a repetitious performance of the same small set of functions" (p.319).

An editorial, cited in Braverman (1974), which appeared in the *International Molders Journal,* is quoted as claiming that Taylorism separates "craft knowledge" from "craft skill", and that "the worker is no longer a craftsman in any sense, but is an animated tool of the management" (p.136). As reference "craft skill" relates to manual skill and dexterity whereas "craft knowledge" carries a more holistic meaning which encompasses "something stored in the mind of the worker...partly the intimate knowledge of the character and uses of the tools, materials and processes of the craft which tradition and experience have given the worker...but beyond this and above this, it is the knowledge which enables him to understand and overcome the constantly arising difficulties that grow out of variations not only in the tools and materials, but in the conditions under which the work must be done" (p.136). Taylor's model, Braverman (1974) claims, was responsible for replacing many of the

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traditional craft- or trade-based work practices which were operating pre-Taylor, even though it could be argued that the shift from bespoke manufacturing to mass production preceded Taylorism. The outcome of this holistic separation, as "transference" or "appropriation" of craft knowledge to management shaped Braverman's comment that the dissembling of the production process resembled "production units (which) operate like a hand, watched, corrected, and controlled by a distant brain" (p.125).

Paraphrasing Rhodes & Garrick (2000), a metaphorical language has emerged through recent theorising of 'working' knowledge as generating a discourse that defines people as 'knowledge workers' in which knowledge becomes describable only in economic terms and people in 'cogito-economic' terms. On the other hand, Warhurst & Thompson (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998) suggest that much of knowledge based work, as an outcome of "conversion of ideas into processes", requires "little more than information transfer" (p.5), which, drawing on Leidner (1993), they confirm as the inputting of information on pre-programmed screens.

Additionally, this fuels the ongoing debate in relation to deskilling on one hand and upskilling on the other. For example, lower paid skills may be eliminated in favour of cost-efficient automated customer interactions, via the internet or telephone. This may create a skill and wage shift to technology-literate "help desk" call centres where few employees are required. While both the cost-efficient and the customer-oriented logics could be argued as represented, there is little doubt that the cost-efficient logic is prioritised in the decision making to "siphon off" skills. It also places some emphasis on determining the wider skill implications of pursuing this avenue, the "byproducts" of workplace technologies as it were. Pea & Brown in Lave & Wenger (1991) observe that,

> Technologies are dramatically transforming the basic patterns of communication and knowledge interchange in societies, and automating the component processes of thinking and problem solving (p.12).

3.2.3 The Ethno-Cultural Dimension

Braverman (1974) claims that Taylor dealt with the organisation of the labor process and control over it, whereas the later schools of Hugo Muensterberg and Elton Mayo dealt primarily with the adjustment of the worker to the ongoing production process (p.29). This adjustment receives some attention from Doray (1988) who focuses on "worker alienation" and claims that a Taylorist approach promotes the worker to "split" his individuality between social-self and work-self. Doray's (1988) choice of "alienation" is interpreted as implying a lack of "engagement" on the part of the worker, that the worker, in continuing to work at this place of employment, disassociates himself (used generically) from the work environment but not the work process. This would isolate the worker to be considered merely in terms of a provider of labour to management's specification. Such a viewpoint excludes the contextualised and cultural nature of the "specification" and the ability of the workplace environment, physically and socially, to be an inadvertent "teacher" and the worker an inadvertent "learner" of culturally desirable behaviours.

Consequently it is argued there that if the "disassociated" worker consistently performs to the requirements of the job and demonstrates through performance evaluation the acquisition of desired work behaviours, these understandings relating to work expectations are influenced within a contextualised social environment, not isolated from it. Therefore, rather than the worker being "alienated" or remaining extraneous to the environment, the worker does in fact become acculturised. The question therefore is perhaps one of acquiescence. In order words, the worker is now operating in a minimum of two culturally related environments, at work and outside of work, or in Doray's (1988) terms the social self at work and outside of work (p.119). As a consequence a term of "delineation" rather than alienation is suggested as more meaningful in this argument. This delineation appears to be acknowledged by Garrick (1998) as the "decentring of one's self" (p.72).

Notwithstanding, Garrick (1998) also cautions that a sense of "belonging" to a corporate family is a powerful lure which may extract a "personal" price such as accepting that information technologies monitor input and output on an individual basis (p.72). Rhodes and Garrick (2000) draw on Casey's theory of modern industrialism as shaping "the character of the modern self" and delimiting "the context of our thinking on self" (p.50) that produces 'acculturated employees' (p.78). The positioning of culture and an interpretation of the acculturation process is then justified in aligning the role of contextuality in workplace learning.

With acculturation defined as "the process or result of assimilating through continuous contact features such as beliefs, customs, etc of another culture" (The Chambers Dictionary 2003), it is this aspect which becomes the focus in this Ethno-Cultural dimension. In using the term "acculturation" in relation to workplace learning it simultaneously acknowledges the presence of a workplace culture. Therefore, at this juncture, it is important to recognise that, although the other two dimensions of the Contextuality Construct (Historic-Scientific and Social-Political) have been presented individually earlier in this chapter, they are not one dimensional. Rather they need to be considered in terms of their holistic relevance to creating a culturally-based multi-dimensional workplace contextuality.

For example, the notion of the cogito-economic knowledge worker (Rhodes & Garrick, 2000a) and socially based work changes have contextual implications beyond that of its positioning in social-political, work orientations and deskilling theories, as embodied by Rhodes and Garrick. (2000a).

> The cogito-economic self then exists in a discourse that works to define people in such terms...that resonate with organisational imperatives. In this way, a discourse becomes powerful...in terms of how they define themselves and are defined by others (p.8).

The defining "discourse" in this research become the cultural ethnographic work specific community which "resonates with organisational imperatives" wherein cultural literacy plays a significant role in the acculturation process, including a culturally holistic understanding of the work specific cultural community and one's role within it.

The introduction of the term culturally-based ethnographic community, or Ethno-Cultural community, evolved after consideration of existing terms and avenues of discussion were found lacking from the perspective of the absorption of culture by "living it" in the context of the workplace. Elaboration briefly on some of the concepts in Chapter Two – Background, and some of the "worker inclusiveness" strategy debates raised earlier, if considered through a different lens, can provide a platform from which the ethno-cultural nature of a specific work community can be argued. In relation to workplace group effectiveness and information processing based on knowledge sharing in groups as sources of performance gains (Hinsz et al, cited in Batt & Moynihan 2002), the principle lies in accessing the expertise of individual members for the benefit of the group, or, in other words, that shared knowledge becomes collective knowledge. The premise proposed is that self-managed or semi-autonomous work groups lead to better performance through collective problem solving. Batt & Moynihan's (2002) research suggests that the value of group based work is to motivate and to learn continually from each other in order to improve skills and ablities.

The research argument however suggests that the theories surrounding group knowledge and central constructs of group knowledge, knowledge sharing, information exchange and learning appear to be based on the notion of consciousness, that is, the knowledge must be consciously acknowledged in order to share it. This aspect of consciousness in knowledge sharing is perhaps assumed as it is rarely explicit. Whereas a generic description of a "community of practice" could in some instances also be ascribed to that of an ethno-cultural community proposed here

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culture and community are argued as shaping their contextuality, cultural learning could be considered as "non-reflective learning" (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin, 2003 p.62), or "social reproduction" (p.63) where prevailing "society and its structures remain unquestioned and unaltered" (p.63).

> When people learn in this way, they learn to fit into the larger organization or the wider society. They are, as it were, learning their place (Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin, 2003 p.63).

In the transition of workers from physical to knowledge environments, which is relevant to call centres, Rhodes and Garrick (2000b) note,

> For many contemporary workplaces nothing of an 'object' nature is produced and people's capability and willingness to engage in physical activity appears to be less important. This 'information economy' that has emerged through post-industrialisation is one where people spend their time at work using computers, reading, writing, talking and listening. The predominant way that work is mediated is textual, not physical. In this milieu there is a reduced need to control the bodies of workers and an increased need to manage the way that people produce and consume texts (p.273).

The specific point of interest in this reference is the "production and consumption of texts". The use of "texts" is interpreted here beyond its literal meaning to incorporate knowledge acquisition through cultural artifacts, both tangible and intangible, represented in this context by textual, social and semiotic, including technological artifacts. The manner in which the community members make meaning, it is argued, therefore occurs holistically, taking into consideration the meaning generated through such cultural texts and artifacts facilitating constructions and reconstructions of knowledge which ultimately reinforce the cultural and generational longevity of the community. It is also appropriately juxtaposed with earlier references which align cultural texts as "a discourse resonating with organisational imperatives" (Rhodes & Garrick, 2000a, p.8) and a way in "to write the culture of the group" (McIntyre 1999, p.79).

When considering Barker's (1998) statistic in Deery & Kinnie (2002) that two-thirds of all customer interactions with organisations now occur

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ultimately there are contradictions which negate its suitability in such positioning, principally due to this aspect of "consciousness" as a specific or implied concept, such as evidenced in the following.

> Communities of Practice are groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, p.4).

> Another milestone in maturity (of the community of practice) is reached when a community is ready to take active ownership of its practice and to start developing it self-consciously: negotiating standards, finding gaps in its knowledge, and creating a learning agenda...(which create)...a shared repository for capturing the aspects of their practice that lend themselves to documentation" (Wenger in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000, pp.10-11).

Additionally, in considering the viability of adopting Billett's (2000) "co-participation" and "workplace affordances", similar concerns emerged as to their suitability of usage in relation to this research.

Ultimately, the term Ethno-Cultural came to signify a fresh perspective on workplace contextuality, and a distinction from other approaches which has explicit significance in the pedagogy construct, in relation to the teaching and learning of the community's traditions, rituals, values and valued behaviours. The key to the term Ethno-Cultural lies in its focus and its differentiation that it does not primarily reside in conscious knowledge sharing as an organised activity within a limited dimensional view (such as changing practice) but rather unconscious knowledge sharing as an unorganised activity within an expansive multi-dimensional view (such as contextuality and pedagogy. In acknowledging however that the community sharing of knowledge occurs its processes occur principally through encoding and decoding of culturally related texts.

In essence, the Ethno-Cultural community represents rich contextualised meaning, rather the alternative contrived attempts which appear to represent knowledge awaiting some shallow contextualization. Further to these theorisations and specific to this research, and in keeping with call centres as a workplaces grounded in industrial discourses where

through call centres and that call centre customer service representatives (CSRs) represent the 'face' or 'personality' of the company, the significance and implications of behaviourally related cultural texts needs to be contextually comprehended. Some organisations are claimed as attempting "to instil values of good customer service...by way of cultural or normative control" by "transforming workers' characters and personalities" (Leidner cited in Deery & Kinnie, 2002, p.5), and/or by developing "an internalised commitment to quality service...through induction, training and performance appraisals".

This is extended by Callaghan and Thompson (2002) to include recruitment techniques focusing on personality traits and service-orientated attitudes despite Braverman's (1974) claim, referring to the work by Elton Mayo, that any pre-suitability, in terms of recruitment, psychological or position profile testing for a particular role, was largely a misplaced endeavour (p.145), suggesting that "workers' motivations could not be understood on a purely individual basis, and that the key to their behavior lay in the social groups of the factory" (p.145). As call centres are very much a group environment, with CSRs assigned into teams with individual and team responsibility and accountability for meeting designated performance measurements, the idea of social groups and their behaviours became included a subject of further interest.

Grossberg (1997) claims that cultural studies are about

> ...describing how people's everyday lives are articulated by and with culture, how they are empowered or disempowered by the particular structures and forces that organize their lives, always in contradictory ways, and how their everyday lives are themselves articulated to and by the trajectories of economic and political power (p.4).

This juxtaposition of everyday, culture, empowerment, disempowerment, structures, forces, contradictions, articulations, trajectories and power is viewed as adding weight to the argument claiming incoming customer service call centres as a legitimate "cultural study". Grossberg (1997) continues by noting that "part of what cultural studies has always been

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about is the self-production of culture: the practices by which people come, however imperfectly, to represent themselves and their worlds" (p.9).

Considered as acknowledging of the research's social-political dimension Braverman's critique and the cost-efficient logic, Grossberg later states,

> Cultural studies did not abandon an interest in capitalism. On the contrary, contemporary work in cultural studies is, I believe, returning to questions of economics in important and interesting ways (often but not only through questions of globalization and colonization and through links with economic geography and postfordist economies)...Cultural studies will have to take account of the changing relations between the different forms of capital ..., the changing nature of and competing forms of both the modes of production ...and the formations of capitalism (e.g., fordism, postfordism), the changing nature of labor and consumption, and the changing nature of the global relations of both political and economic power. (p13)

In the previous and the following quote, Grossberg (1997) highlights the important aspect of reframing perceptions which define the study of culture and its characteristics, suggesting that lateral interpretations would be beneficial.

> Cultural studies must confront the globalization of culture not merely in terms of the proliferation and mobility of texts and audiences, but also in terms of the movement of culture outside the spaces of any (specific) language...The new global economy of culture entails a deterritorialization of culture and its subsequent reterritorialization, which challenges culture's equation with location in a place as locale (p.17).

This invitation to delimit current definitions or interpretations in favour of broader, alternative proposals is one which is embraced in this research. Another author, Hartley (2003), similarly articulates the notion of everyday, power and its representations in cultural studies claiming it is the study of everyday life in modern societies and attempt "to make sense of everyday life within the terms of its own ongoing inquiry into meaning, power, ideology and subjectivity in contemporary societies" (p.121). The key to making sense is seen as understanding the contextuality or the frame of reference of the cultural group.

To highlight one aspect of this cultural contextuality, that of social relationships and technology, Leavitt and Whistler (1958) state that, while

technology itself is associated with notions of control, it is the human choice of which technology should be implemented which reflects the dominant social values of a group, an organisation or society. As Brown (1999a) points out this human choice has been "vested in a relatively small number of managerial positions", which through custom and practice is viewed as "managerial prerogative" (p.15). Therefore the choice and use of current and future technologies are revealing of not only the nature of social relationships and hierarchical structure in the community but also as representations of community values, such as control and measured performance.

Drawing on Batt's findings, Deery and Kinnie (2002) claim that "there is evidence to indicate that there is an association between the way employees are managed and the performance of the organisation" (p.9), with additional reference to Frenkel et al (1998) who report that more than half of employees surveys indicate satisfaction with the methods of control used in the workplace and three-quarters said the controls helped them to work better. This indicates a degree of acculturation where management control and performance measurement become accepted community practices and values, which are considered natural, as earlier referenced.

In those cultural communities therefore where the logic of cost-efficiency is a key community value, Garrick's (1998) observation, that economic rationality is centred around knowledge frameworks in which financial and numerical performance indicators become "valorised", becomes meaningful. This is supported by Doray's (1988) view that the individual worker could see the quantitative dimension of work only in terms of a personal relationship with a norm, and the reality of the workshop appeared to be an expression of that relationship (p.99). These understandings have representation in the findings as part of the acculturation and workplace learning with workplace contextuality.

Warhurst and Thompson (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998) suggest that enlisting today's managers requires not only instrumental compliance

but also the 'internalisation of values' (p.10). The authors continue by arguing that that employees are "exhorted, indeed trained, to manage and mobilize their feelings in pursuit of higher quality and increased productivity" (p.10). This philosophy is also endorsed based on Womack, Jones and Roos' claim in Brown (1999a) that the benefits for workers of extensive training, multi-skilling, challenging work, empowerment and harmonious labour-management relations requires management to engage workers' commitment to the company and its objectives. This view appears to encapsulate the process of cultural engineering, noted by Warhurst and Thompson (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998), as "elevated from an aspect of managerial activity into the driving force of workplace transformation, "when new managerial discourses simply *displace* old corporate realities as the focus of attention" (p.11, original emphasis).

These quotes highlight several significant points of reference. While the new discourses may be "teachable" or "engineered" underpinning them is the concept of palimpsest and "readability" or "learnability" of the original partially visible or detectable text. References such as "exhorted, indeed trained" again highlight the tangible elements of cultural engineering yet lack the recognition of how this also occurs as a more subtle, intangible process also. Therefore the nature and contextuality of the "texts" which write the culture of the group need to be examined not from any one dimensional point of view but rather as an integral part of a multi-dimensional cultural community, facilitating its cultural passage across generations.

One example for consideration, advocating workplace "engaging" in a culturally superficial manner, is a media article by Taylor (2003). It suggests that a sense of workplace culture and community can be generated through strategies and activities such as redecorating staff lounges, team based "park rumbles", tugs of war and sharing pizzas. This is generally aimed at "pleasing Generation X workers" who in their turn interpret that "work is a place where parties, casual dress and funky

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furniture" help staff gain "a sense of belonging" where training, support and a sense of inclusiveness are key features of the work culture.

In addition, an independent review of advertisements for call centre managerial positions over a limited duration (My Career, The Sydney Morning Herald, June-October 2003) revealed the majority contained a criterion explicitly recruiting on a platform which included abstract reference to workplace culture, such as "drive cultural change" or "develop a high performance team and culture". On a complementary level, Brown (1999a) suggests that terminologies suggestive of team sport, such as 'leaner and meaner', 'team players', 'no pain, no gain', and 'work smarter not harder' (p.20) are designed to convey a sense of fun in the workplace, disguising aspects viewed as "dehumanising" and one which Brown (1999a), drawing on Gee et al, suggests is a language based "in an optimistic set of words" (p.20) which act as a mask to disguise the inherent nature of the job. All of these add to the tension in the true representations and positioning of the logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation in the workplace.

The superficial rhetoric also highlights a tension in this research of the generic and broader usage of workplace "culture", which also extends to "organisational cultures". For example, Casey's quote in Boud and Garrick (eds. 1999) emphasizes " 'empowered' team-playing employees maximally performing in participatory organisational 'cultures' " (p.21). In this case the use of culture or cultures indicates a socially conscious, industrially progressive strategy. The broadness of its scope is then generally individually encased in multiple abstract organisational concepts, such as "culture of change", "culture of innovation", amongst a plethora of others.

Isolating one, the abstract notion of an organisational "culture of innovation" as an example, the onus is then placed on the individual business unit within the organisation (such as the organisation's call centre) to operationalise it in terms of implementation accountability and measurement. The research argument however aims to highlight that this

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fails to recognise that the individual business units, which could lay claim to their own deep rooted historical, social and ethno-graphically bound culture (such as argued here for call centres), may in fact operationalise the abstract concept in different ways.

The primary business (as opposed to organisational) consideration becomes the adaptability of its implementation within the existing established and operating work specific culture, such as, in the case of call centres, within its culture of efficiency. For example, an abstract organisational "culture of innovation" or "culture of technological excellence" could be interpreted by the call centre business as encompassing the implementation of innovative technologies thereby complying with the abstract directive and ensuring its accountability through further efficiency gains. This, in its turn, could serve to further embed established practices of performance management through monitoring and measurement in spite of existing socially-based criticisms. Therefore, the operationalisation of the abstract organisational concept becomes individualised on a work specific or business unit basis in a manner which addresses its own cultural core. In other words, the workplace is the adopter and the adaptor of organisational directives on its own terms.

This individual business community is also claimed as having a more clearly defined and well accepted cultural marker, that of language. While the words are for the most part commonplace, meaning and literacy go beyond the words themselves. The notion of cultural literacy therefore draws specific attention in this research. Literacy as a cultural concept is argued as requiring a cognitive processing beyond an understanding of the superficiality of the words, the numbers or the acronyms but it requires knowledge constructions within the contextualised environment which assign meaning to the words. Literacy in this sense, therefore, is argued as both semiotic and cultural in nature. Brown (1999a), quoting Garson in

The Electronic Sweatshop, provides a brief insight into the evolution of a call centre semiotic language in the following.

> There's AHU, that's After Hang Up time. It's supposed to be fourteen seconds. It just came down to thirteen. But my average is five seconds AHU, because I do most of the work while the customer's still on the phone. There's your talk time, your availability, your occupancy – that's the percent of time you're plugged in, which is supposed to be 98 percent (p.22).

In this case the cognitive process and cultural understandings are dependent on the decoding of the semiotics (AHU, 14 seconds, 13 seconds, 5 seconds, talk time, availability, occupancy, percentage of time, plugged in, 98 percent). These semiotics assign meaning based on understandings of individual performance and rationale, performance expectations and their management and individual positioning relative to these understandings. Individual words are then compiled into a narrative language which carries meaning and which highlights the symbiotic nature of their relationship to context. While knowledge constructions relative to efficiency performance management, measurement and expectation are evident, at the same time the quote generates a sense of topographic or colonised culture, and indeed acculturisation with some degree of pride and ownership (the individual's 5 seconds against the old average of 14, now 13). The unsolicited explanation of the terms also indicates that its highly contextualised nature, "literacy" demonstrating shared understandings, values and behaviours.

Worthy of particular note is Searle's (1991) research (an ethnography of checkout operators) which seemingly challenges the narrow view and definition of workplace literacy suggesting that "most workplace research to date has concentrated on 'literacy' as a process of reading and sometimes writing" (p.29). However, Searle (1991) continues that "very few studies have addressed the broader issue of communication which encompasses language in a spoken or written form, as well as numeracy and use of other sign systems" (p.29). The claim is that there are specific

workplaces and positions which require a degree of semiotic literacy in order to satisfactorily meet the job requirements.

This component of literacy is neither recognised nor acknowledged in either preparatory workplace courses or in the workplace, essentially leaving the individual ill equipped to handle the role. Significantly for this research, Searle (1991) highlights that "equally important to the culture of the workplace is the role of sign systems, whether these by spoken language, signs, or alpha-numeric symbols" (p.31).

As a consequence, these views recommend re-engerising the debate on workplace literacy to acknowledge the communication patterns of the whole social situation. It is the investigation of this whole social situation, as workplace contextuality, in this research which extrapolates the notion of semiotic literacy and cultural literacy through the examination of language, artifacts and socialisation in the workplace. In turn, these elements are integral to workplace pedagogy; that is, the teaching and learning of cultural values and traditions in relation to efficiency performance management and the logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation.

Solomon notes, in Boud and Garrick (eds. 1999), that

> This reflection of one's own cultural understanding can be complemented by an analysis of the culture of the workplace, that is, the structures, norms, beliefs and values that underpin certain expectations and behaviours in the organisation. This will involve interpreting the meanings that are displayed and constructed through various organisational 'texts' such as linguistic, behavioural and spatial ones, as well as visual images (p.129).

By replacing "the organisation" and "organisational texts" as more occupation or business unit related, there is relevance in the quote to the development of the research.

3.3 Pedagogy Construct

The pedagogical argument is based on the premise that workplace contextuality is a key influence in shaping workplace pedagogy and its associated pedagogical choices and practices, with pedagogy intended in this research as encompassing both teaching and learning. This clarification is important as the pedagogical construct is based on the proposal of teaching as a process of encoding "prescribed" communications and learning as a process of decoding "unprescribed" communications of relevance to workplace practice.

In claiming call centres as an ethno-cultural community, the mode of "communications" in teaching and learning become collectively argued as "cultural texts", acknowledging their variety of forms, such as written, unwritten, verbalised and unverbalised, and their variety of representations, such as "formal" curricula and "informal" semiotic artifacts. The development of this research thinking then required a degree of theoretical and academic positioning.

Hager in Boud and Garrick (eds. 1999) observes that finding a good theory of workplace learning is in itself a challenge due to "the sheer number of available theories that are arguably relevant to workplace learning" (p.63). They are embedded in "a variety of disciplines and fields" from sociology to cognitive and industrial psychology and others (p.63). This section draws on a range of authors and discourses, not only to support the research position but also, more relevantly, to challenge some of the theorisations or modes of thought.

In general terms, call centre pedagogy and its practices are presented in this research as residing within multiple discourses and theories. In line with the holistic research argument however, "contextualised learning" is the primary focus which is viewed as encompassing constructivist learning, situated learning and social learning amongst others. However in acknowledging decontextualised as loosely referring to knowledge gained

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"outside the workplace" and contextualised as knowledge acquired "inside the workplace", this idea of contextualised learning here needs to be understood as a holistic rather than superficial process taking into consideration the depth of workplace contextuality.

3.3.1 Formal and Informal as Learning Theory, Learning Settings and Decontextualised/Contextualised Knowledge Constructs

In attempting to negotiate the complexities of the words "formal and "informal" in the realms of education and workplace learning, Hager (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) quotes from Foley (drawing on Usher and Usher & Byrant) that "formal theory is 'organised (and) codified bodies of knowledge – embodied in disciplines and expressed in academic discourse', whereas informal theory is 'the understanding that emerges from and guides practice' " (p.66), with the latter including "contextual and situational understanding that is largely a product of workplace experience and learning" (p.67). Harris (1999), in highlighting the importance of learning in work contexts, points out that a balance is required between "just-in-case" and "just-in-time" learning. These are understood to signify learning as an outcome of "training for all eventualities should it arise" as opposed to "training for each eventuality as it arises".

There appears to be a general acceptance in the literature that formal learning is principally a product of teaching/learning conducted in a formal learning setting and that informal learning principally occurs in an informal learning setting, usually the site of workplace practice. However, representations of formal/informal are also expressed in alternative ways. Brown & Duguid (in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher 2000) select "canonical" and "noncanonical" as meaningful to the workplace learning debate. The authors designate "canonical" to describe "espoused practice" which privileges "the decontextualized over the situated" (p.106) and "noncanonical" as actual practice claiming that "the central issue in learning is about becoming a practitioner, not learning about practice" (p.99), wherein "practice is central to understanding work" (p.100).

Solomon (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) suggests that "espoused practice" emanates from a competency based framework that "has been developed through government, industry and education partnerships resulting in policies and industry competency standards that represent institutionally recognised and legitimate knowledge" (p.122). Therefore it seems reasonable to draw some parallel between "espoused practice" and "decontextualised practice".

In relation to the latter part of Solomon's quote above however, a tension become evident for two reasons. The first lies in the positioning of the call centres relative to these latter terms. Each of the call centres has developed comprehensive training programs with both "off the job" and "on the job" structured components. That is, induction training in conducted in training rooms and other components are on-the-job. However, even though CSRs in each of individual call centre may be assessed as "competent", their assessment is situated in an internally established framework and dialogue (call centre specific) which resides outside conventional concepts of "formal recognition" in terms of education provider, competency framework or paper-based qualification. The second, by default, implies that work-specific knowledge (incorporating the concepts of both work-based and work-place) acquired in this manner, that is outside the institutionalised conventions, should conversely be considered as "illegitimate". An apparent inflexibility or middle ground between "decontextualised" or "formal learning" and "contextualised" teaching, learning and knowledge acquisition became evident.

The research scope has a restrained approach in relation to competency standards, competency-based training and competencies. The area of interest lies in the individual workplaces assigning their descriptions of these concepts in the establishment of their individual training programs, rather than negotiating the minefield which "competency" now represents. That being said, there are some general applications relative to "competency" to draw on.

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Gonczi's view (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) is that "the competency of individuals derives from their possessing a set of attributes (such as knowledge, values, skills and attitudes) which they use in various combinations to undertake occupational tasks" (p.182) Continuing his observation Gonczi, drawing on Frederickson and Collins' term of "directness (or authenticity)" claims that competency "evaluates a cognitive skill through a performance which is as close as possible to the real work situation in which the skill will be used" (p.190). The latter definition lacks the holistic nature or the inclusivity of "a set of attributes" of the former and appears to restrains competency to work-based simulations. With competency determined in this manner it is understandable that the exclusion of other significant factors embodied in learning as a holistic concept, such as the culture of the workplace, the significance of relationship structures, and other elements, are cause for concern.

When applied to this research, it presents a view that there is a demarcation between being "work-based competent" as decontextualised competency and "workplace literate" (specific to this research) as contextualised competency. Definitions relative to the competency movement appear to have been adapted to address some of concerns raised, or at least its intent has received some reclarifications, with its more holistic nature now more commonly acknowledged.

> The nature of competency is complex, bringing together personal attributes and the contexts in which they are used, within one conceptual framework...(that) goes beyond traditional conceptualisations, which concentrate only on the tasks that need to be performed or the generic attributes of capacities that are said to underpin competency irrespective of the contexts in which these need to be applied (Gonczi in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, p.183).

Contrary to the contrived deduction from Solomon's earlier observation of "contextualised" knowledge as "illegitimate", in fact its legitimacy is acknowledged by its situating in culture, attitudes, behaviours and meaning making.

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> As practitioners engage in work they increase their understanding of the culture and content of their occupation and of their workplace. As their participation in work moves from being peripheral to becoming more central, they are increasingly capable of meshing this cultural understanding with their technical knowledge and their skills and attitudes. This combination of attributes enables them to make increasingly informed individual judgements about how they should act. (Gonczi in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, pp.183-184).

This, Gonczi continues, leads to "competent performance" over "competence *as* performance" (p.184, original emphasis) as a generalised notion, which complements the researcher's view above of "work-based competence" and "workplace (cultural and semiotic) literacy" which is specific to this research.

A key factor in transitioning decontextualised knowledge to contextualised knowledge is acknowledged in the previous quote as one of "engagement". However, this is stipulated by Gonczi as "engage in work" and, if this phrase is taken as a literal interpretation, it may be restraining. "Engaging" needs to be associated with "the workplace" as a holistic approach, rather than isolating "work" as a function, in order to become "workplace literate" and "workplace competent", an approach which will receive considerable attention in the research findings. In other words, objective (decontextualised work-based knowledge) becomes contextualised through subjective culturally based understandings as an outcome of "engaging" with a wide range of learning conduits. This view has a parallel with the perspective presented earlier on worker alienation and isolating "work" in that context also (p.92 of this thesis).

It became apparent in undertaking the research there was a need to clarify "formal" and "informal" in terms of learning theory, learning settings and their relationship to decontextualised/contextualised knowledge constructs. In this research call centre "formal training" programs, as generating explicit, prescribed, structured knowledge, comprised of components which were delivered in both formal teaching/learning settings (training rooms) and informal teaching/learning settings ("on the

floor"). This acknowledges the transition of the knowledge from "decontextualised" to contextualised" as environment and application related. By situating call centre "formal learning", it then became a logical consequence to situate "informal learning" in call centres, as generating implicit, unprescribed, unstructured knowledge. Informal learning, generally, appears to be predominantly associated with the contextualised knowledge and therefore informal learning settings, which association is supported in this research. However, the informal learning which occurs during "formal training" of decontextualised knowledge in formal learning settings does not appear to be widely acknowledged or included in learning theorisations. For this reason the use of terms explicit/implicit, prescribed/unprescribed and structured/unstructured are associated in this research to formal and informal learning, and where appropriate it differentiates between formal and informal in terms of learning and learning settings.

Although the terms decontextualised and contextualised appear definitive it is also proposed that there are "degrees" which need to be considered in their usage. For example "decontextualised" knowledge is widely associated with formal teaching/learning which occurs in educational institutions unrelated to a specific work site. In call centres however, where formal training programs are conducted "in house" and in formal learning settings, the term "decontextualised" knowledge is somewhat less than that applicable to "institutionalised" teaching/learning. Similarly "contextualised" knowledge has degrees also. On initial entry into a geographic location of in situ practice, acquired decontextualised knowledge is initially narrowly contextualised as a spatial construct until other constructs (social, cultural) outside the parameters of acquired knowledge yet critical to informal learning, add degrees of meaning in the contextualisation of existing knowledge.

For these reasons, this research developed a theoretical interest in reconciling these notions of formal/informal learning in formal/informal

learning settings and the degrees of decontextualised/contextualised knowledge as one of cultural depth in its progressive transition rather than being confined to a narrow spatial construct.

The following diagram is an attempt to represent the continuum of these relationships:

Table 3.1 – Table of relationship: formal/informal learning, formal/informal learning settings and decontextualised/contextualised knowledge constructs

• Formal setting • • Formal learning • Decontextualised knowledge	• Formal setting • • Formal learning • Semi-Decontextualised knowledge	• Informal setting • • Formal/informal learning • Semi-Contextualised knowledge	• Informal setting • Informal learning • Contextualised knowledge	• Informal setting • Informal learning • Contextualised knowledge
• Institution • Occupation specific • Industry non-specific • Workplace non-specific • Simulated/non-operational	• On site • Occupation specific • Industry specific • Workplace specific • Simulated/non-operational	• On the job training • Occupation • specific • Industry specific • Workplace specific • Early operational	• In the workplace • Occupation specific • Industry specific • Workplace specific • Semi-operational	• In the workplace • Occupation specific • Industry specific • Workplace specific • Fully operational

◄──────────────────────────────────────►
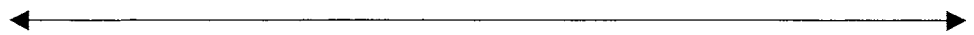
Theoretically, this research is specific to the last four boxes (indicated by the arrows and line) and supports a general theory and epistemological assumption that learning occurs in both structured (formal) and unstructured (informal) ways (or alternatively, prescribed/unprescribed ways). In the preparation of the table, the example call centre teaching and learning is used. In doing so, it recognised that call centre employment is

an occupation with "occupational qualifications" then tailorable to a broad range of industries and workplaces.

3.3.2 Contextuality, Culture and Learning

The views of Guile & Griffiths (2001), which advocate for recognition of "different conceptions of skill which reflect motivational traits and cultural dispositions" (p.117), draw also on Dewey's ideas of the 'intimate linkages' between students' cognition and its contextual location. Hager (2003) refers to Sfard's learning metaphors of acquisition and participation (p.7) to further the debate by including construction (reconstruction). This reference acknowledges Rogoff's three phases of "learning and development within a community" (p.8) as apprenticeship (community/institution), guided participation (interpersonal) and participatory appropriation (personal), which phases have a predisposed applicability aligning "formal" training with apprenticeship, on the job training and performance assessment as guided participation and the CSRs' understandings as participatory appropriation.

Although behaviours and attitudes are discussed within the discourse on competency, the approach of Rhodes & Scheeres (2003) also has theoretical validity in this research. The authors claim that designing core values in organisations "pre-empts a number of behaviours and attitudes" (p.9) with a "embedded belief that culture can be taught, learned and managed" (p.10) aligned to organisational strategies as well as changeable to produce "new sets of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors among corporate employees to enable increased productivity and profitability for the organisation" (citing Casey, p.10).

These views are significant for several reasons. Firstly, it accords "culture" a position as a tangible pedagogical concept, one which is teachable, learnable and manageable. While there is no disagreement with this proposal per se, when considering "culture" from the position of contextual depth as presented here, the concern lies in the relevant level of cultural consciousness required and a capability to articulate its nuances

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and its articulation irrespective of the form of the text (for example, written or unwritten). This concern has a parallel with earlier observations relating to the depth and usage of the word "culture" in organisational terminology and the argument that its operationalisation and measurability could potentially vary within an organisation to "fit in" with the individual business/occupational pre-existing culturally driven workplace practices. Therefore compliance, as a notion of corporate adoptability is not the issue. Rather it is one of its adaptability, as discussed in an earlier context in this thesis (p.102).

Having acknowledged earlier that "espoused practice" has been utilised to convey institutionalised competency-based qualifications, an alternative interpretation could be argued as "the rhetoric of practice", which term is used in this research. Its intent here is to make transparent the tension between how the call centre managers describe the prioritisation of the logics of customer-orientation and cost-efficiency in call centres in relation to the "reality of practice". These terms of "rhetoric" and "reality" of practice favour customer-oriented logic and cost-efficient logic respectively, with the former generally associated with qualitative performance measurement and the latter quantitative performance measurement.

Following on from this is the research concept of encoding the rhetoric and decoding the reality of practice, and a theoretical positioning which differentiated between formal/informal learning, its setting and the notion of semi-(de)contextualised knowledge. Encoding the rhetoric of practice, that is, those constructions of meaning which management is attempting to influence by deflecting or directing "gaze" (Darrah 1996, p.43), and decoding the reality of practice, that is, those (re)constructions of meaning which individuals have assigned as meaningful through contextualised interpretation foregrounds workplace learning as a relationship with workplace contextuality in which other dimensions of the workplace are viewed as critical contextual influences (Boud & Garrick in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, p.8).

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In claiming call centres as an ethno-cultural community, this contextualisation shapes workplace pedagogical practices and places cultural texts as the primary pedagogical focus. Therefore the rhetoric of practice become definable through examining those texts which engender cultural understandings favouring customer-oriented logic in the encoding; and the reality of practice becomes symbolised through examining texts from the perspective of cultural understandings which favour cost-efficiency logic in the decoding.

The research proposal and associated argument of cultural texts as pedagogical conduits then finds a resolution to earlier tensions in relation to formal (as structured, explicit, prescribed) and informal (as unstructured, implicit, unprescribed) by prefixing these terms to texts. In this way "formal texts" take on the concept of management structure and control as a process of encoding whereas "informal texts" adopt the concept of influences outside the structure and control of management. Importantly it finds a compromise sought in this research to acknowledge the idea underpinning informal learning in a (workplace) formal learning setting. This rationale reflects a preference in this research to adopt "structured" and "unstructured" in relation to management control over "formal and informal texts", and permits a review of the processes involved in the transition from encoding customer-oriented rhetoric to decoding cost-efficient reality. This also reflects the theoretical positioning of workplace contextuality in workplace knowledge (re)constructions and meaning (re)assignment, in which the author of the text, the content of the text, the context of the text, the control and structure of the text all become significant in culturally-based learning.

These cultural texts, as formal/informal and structured/unstructured, then adopt the capability, as Darrah (1996) relevantly observes, to "block gaze in some directions and direct it in others...(which) structuring of attention shapes learning in profound, often unrecognized ways." (p.43). This research seeks to review the "structuring of attention" and, through

raising the profile of texts and their visibility, seeks to redress to some degree the notion of "unrecognized".

With Darrah (1996) describing the workplace gaze as "essentially produced by people external to it, supervisors, engineers, and the support staff...a set of stage props designed elsewhere" (p.44), the issue of authorship and control of workplace texts takes on a high degree of significance. Once the text is no longer predominantly in the control of management, in other words in the transition from decontextualised to contextualised meaning making, then "knowledge, the relationship of knowledge to work, and the power to instruct are not merely pedagogical but are central to both work and workplace" (Darrah, 1996, p.45).

The transition from "seeing the workplace" in limited terms shifts to that of a worker who becomes "enculturated into a production-floor worldview that helps them interpret the behavior of others, as well as construct appropriate performances" (p.116). The significance of the physical environment as also comprising an important part of that worldview (p.133) is similarly acknowledged. In this regard Darrah (1996) observes that "the role of informal lessons and enculturation into organizational or occupational worldviews is typical of ethnographic studies (drawing on Gamst; Applebaum; Agar; Wellman, p.174), which observation additionally legitimises its pedagogical positioning here.

The encoding and decoding processes in the transition from decontextualised to contextualised setting and meaning making are characterised by various learning approaches, such as constructivist and social. Focusing on encoding and "formal or structured texts", when first employed, induction training in the three call centres is conducted in a traditional instructor led environment in company training rooms.

> Training is thought of as the *transmission* of explicit, abstract knowledge from the head of someone who knows to the head of someone who does not in surroundings that specifically exclude the complexities of practice and the communities of practitioners" (Brown & Duguid in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000, p.108, original emphasis).

Darrah (1996) refers to this as training knowledge "abstracted from the actual operations performed on the production floor" (p.40).

The use of "abstracted" is viewed as equating to decontextualised; that is, at this stage, it lacks a framework which contributes to assigning any significant degree of workplace relevant meaning. In regard to this framework Darrah (1996) offers some insight by noting that "the occupational structuring of knowledge" (p.38) and making meaning acknowledges that "work is completed within complex social networks" (p.42). Darrah (1996) further observes however that, in an attempt to build social networks, "workers...are often admonished to get back to work" (p.43), As a consequence they may be restricted in their ability to build social networks. What remains unacknowledged however, and will be argued in the research, is that such an attempt to confine community socialisation is itself a "cultural text", a semiotic influence for the construction of workplace culturally relevant knowledge.

As an extension of the occupational structuring of knowledge Brown & Duguid in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher (Eds. 2000) cite Lave and Wenger who, as learning theorists, reject "transfer models, which isolate knowledge from practice, and developed a view of learning as social construction" (p.109) in which "what is learned is profoundly connected to the conditions in which it is learned" (p.109). Therefore these authors refer to social construction of knowledge in their example of a researched workplace as "the reps constructed a shared understanding out of bountiful conflicting and confusing data" (p.108) with the constructed understanding reflecting "the reps' view of the world" (p.108) external to manuals or trainers. These are seen as representing the ideas of decoding and informal cultural texts relevant to this research.

Barnett (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) observes that learning to work and working to learn raises some important questions about the definition of "work" as function and/or environment observing that each profession has its own mix of factual knowledge, theoretical principles, action

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understanding, process knowledge, tacit knowledge and communicative competence. "Work in learning" proposes that "learning is work...in the sense that one has to yield to new experiences that come with learning" which experiences will be complex and challenging by presenting demands of understanding of a capacity to act or of self-reflection (p.36). The capacity to act is therefore interpreted as correlating to knowledge reconstruction and behaviour modification in which "though the new experience, one is challenged to understand the world in a new way..., or to act in the world in a new way..., or one comes to understand oneself in a new light" (pp.36-37).

Extending the working to learn and learning to work theory, Chappell (2003a) suggests that many contemporary environments, including workplaces, need to consider a wider definition of skill to embrace behavioural skills. In a subsequent paper Chappell (2003b) discusses worker-learner or work-conducive learning as contextual to the workplace and socially mediated through constructivist experiences. This is viewed as a progression from behavioural learning, that is behaviour which can be changed based on environmental stimuli, and cognitive learning, which involves mental processing as an outcome of the stimuli "connecting new information with existing knowledge in meaningful ways" (p.5). In turn, this signifies that "forms of knowledge other than disciplinary knowledge are now given more value in workplaces" (p.6), thus highlighting some of the limitations of learner-worker or learning-conducive work in terms of decontextualised competency standards which exclude socially mediated dynamics.

Additionally, Barnett (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) draws on Jarvis (1997) to note that experience is crucial in learning noting that "only through reordering of one's inward understandings can learning take place" (p.43). This has resonance with Billett's view (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999), and in the research, that "individuals are meaning makers (which) simply means that individuals' construction of knowledge is based

on their existing knowledge, including their beliefs and values" (p.154). By also drawing on his earlier work, Billett further significantly notes that "in different settings, knowledge is developed which has different propositional, procedural and dispositional characteristics" (p.155), and that knowledge gained in the work place

> ...goes beyond the immediate scope of vocational activities to include knowledge about power relationships and divisions of labour...That is, unintended learning results from such engagement. (p.155).

"Unintended" is interpreted as signifying the notion of "unstructured" in this research, which, on decoding and making meaning, becomes what Billett conveys as "hidden knowledge", that is, knowledge which is "not observable and therefore is more difficult to learn" (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999, p.158).

In support of the research theme of contextuality as a rigorously established term of substance and its relationship to influence workplace learning, Billett (2000) notes that "work practice is historically and culturally constituted, in terms of the vocational activities conducted, and situational factors manifest how those activities are conducted and valued" (p.3). Similarly Lave & Wenger (1991) also acknowledge history and culture as influences in the social processes.

> Thus understanding the technology of practice is more than learning to use tools; it is a way to connect with the history of the practice and to participate more directly in its cultural life (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.101)

Imel (2000), informed by Brown's (1998) constructivist learning theory, states "individuals learn by constructing meaning through interacting with and interpreting their environments" (p.1). Learning in this sense is presented as a cognitive, socially based interactive communication process of meaning construction. In constructivism, learning is cumulative, with new experiences being interpreted in relation to existing mental constructs.

Complementary to these views is that of social learning and situated learning. Lave and Wenger's (1991) claim that learning is situated "in the

trajectories of participation in which it takes on meaning" (p.121), which trajectories must be situated in the social world. This acknowledges that the theory of social practice emphasises the inherently socially negotiated character of meaning. Hanks in Lave & Wenger (1991) claims that situated learning "takes as its focus the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs" (p.14) which "situate learning in certain forms of social co-participation" (p.14) asking "what kinds of social engagements provide the proper context for learning to take place" (p.14).

In combining these theories and adopting a holistic approach to learning, Frieman (2002) offers some meaningful insights particularly in relation to processes of acculturation and cultural conditioning.

> Current research on conditioning and learning reflects three themes: a **methodological behavioral theme** that focuses on how certain experiences lead to changes in behavior, a **cognitive theme** that focuses on how experiences are represented in memory, and an **evolutionary/adaptive behavior theme** that focuses on the various kinds of learning as adaptive specializations that evolved through the mechanism of natural selection (p.xiii, original emphasis).

As Gertler and Wolfe (eds., 2002, citing Nicolini & Meznar, and Haas) observe in relation to adaptive behaviour there is a "general tendency is to treat incremental adjustment of behavior in response to change as 'adaptation' rather than learning". If, therefore, *"the study of learning focuses on how experiences change behavior"* (p.1 original emphasis), as Frieman (2002) claims, then the relationship between mean making in work related understandings and behaviours as one of relevance in the context of this research.

"Behavior reflects an integrated set of psychological processes and systems" (Frieman 2002, p.23), which include sensory (receiving information), perceptual (organizing information which is personally meaningful), learning (incorporation information into knowledge), memory (to store the knowledge), and cognitive (to perform mental operations on that knowledge). In the research argument of encoding/decoding, meaning making and (re)constructions of knowledge, the five aspects essentially

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encapsulate the relationship between the processes. Memory and the retrieval of knowledge-based understandings when combined with cognition will act to assign contextualised meaning and a possible adjustment in understandings and consequent behaviours.

Cognitive theorist Mezirow's theory of transformative learning is quoted as "the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience as a guide for future action" (in Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin, 2003, p.39) implying self-reflection and modified behaviour. However, rather than an isolated concept,

> *Obtaining knowledge about events and the relationships between events, and about how to perform actions efficiently through interactions with others* is called **social learning.** Social learning leads to the **cultural transmission of knowledge:** *knowledge and skills passed from one generation to another through learning...*The social transmission of knowledge can occur in one of two general ways: (1) *intentionally through some form of instruction,* or (2) *inadvertently through observation of another individual."* (Frieman 2002, p.272, original emphasis).

Frieman (2002) refers to social learning or observational learning as based on observing the behaviours of others, instructed learning as direct instruction from a teacher and text based learning as reading books. All three of these learning modes are also relevant in this research. The first, it is argued here, occurs through decoding contextually relevant observed behaviours which in turn shape individual (re)constructions of meaning through cultural and semiotic literacy in a socially based environment. As Frieman (2002) notes, it relates to*"obtaining knowledge about events and the relationships between events, and how to perform actions efficiently, through interactions with others"* (p.17, original emphasis). From the viewpoint of this research the second is argued as the process of encoding the rhetoric, the "just in case" or the decontextualised competency-based knowledge of "formal" training, while the third, text-based, holds particular relevance from a figurative cultural and semiotic literacy perspective as well as literal written text.

Cultural or social transmission of knowledge is claimed by Frieman (2002) as a process involving behaviour modification as individuals confront new situations with "adaptive specialization" indicating *"a process of adjustment to the circumstances in which an individual lives"* (p.22 original emphasis). Although Frieman's writing relates predominantly to scientific analytical research, its relevance to socially based interpretive research is also claimed here. References such as "operant conditioning" also become meaningful when viewed from an acculturation perspective. In this process "the individual's task is to discover what one has to do to obtain what one wants or to escape from or avoid dangerous things" (Frieman, 2002, p.xiv) noting that this is juxtaposed to "contingency-mediated behaviors" (Frieman, 2002, p.xiii). The proximity of Frieman's view with that proposed here of contextually, socially and culturally mediated reconstructions of meaning is an extrapolation of scientific analytical research to social situations.

3.3.3 Ethno-pedagogy and the ethno-cultural community

Ethno-pedagogical theorising benefits from the collaboration of constructivist and social learning theory as well as the extrapolation of conditioning to reflect processes advocating acculturation through assimilation wherein *"we attribute changes in behavior to learning when these changes are long-term and appear to reflect the acquisition of knowledge about the experience and how to deal with that experience"* (Frieman, 2002, p.8, original emphasis). A connection is made between this and what Frieman (2002) refers to as **"learned knowledge** (knowledge obtained through experience)" (p.xiii, original emphasis).

Supporting a research argument of a culturally and ethnographically bound work specific community, McDermott in Lesser, Fontaine and Slusher (eds. 2000) suggests that knowledge is informed by contextualised experience and reflection, with knowledge passing "through professional communities, from one generation to the next" (p.26). The claim that community members "learn by participating in these communities and

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come to embody the ideas, perspective, prejudices, language, and practices of that community" (p.26) embodies the intent of ethno-pedagogy. In claiming that "knowledge is the residue of thinking" (p.25) McDermott differentiates between acquiring information and acquiring knowledge with the latter an outcome of "participating in a community – using the tools, ideas, techniques, and unwritten artifacts of that community" (p.28), all of which are claimed in this research as pedagogical conduits in workplace learning, that is, in the construction of meaningful contextualised work relevant cultural knowledge.

Although call centres in this research are claimed as an ethno-cultural community, rejecting a label of "community of practice" based on earlier reasoning, of some relevance however is the acknowledgement by Lave and Wenger that "practice" has a social connotation. Jarvis, Holdford, & Griffin (2003) reiterate this view by observing that "there is a sense in which learning, like knowledge itself, is socially constructed (which) implies that the social, historical and cultural contexts, together with the individual's setting in all of these, determine the content, style and methods of learning" (p.43). The authors extend the observation to note further that "knowledge is contingent upon circumstances, and learning is a process which directly reflects this" (p.43). Therefore it is difficult to isolate the social influence of learning from constructivist theories of learning which "emphasize the ways in which learners construct knowledge for themselves into an integrated and holistic understanding" (p.43).

> The concept of socialization refers to the process by which individuals internalize the values, beliefs and norms of behaviour of the society into which they are born (Jarvis, Holdford, & Griffin 2003 p.44).

In attempting however to introduce a broader interpretation and context "the society into which they are born" may benefit from a reconceptualisation in order to recognise, additionally, "the workplace into which they are acculturated". The concept then adopts a meaningful significance for workplace learning. This extrapolation equally applies to

the authors' continuing argument that "from a sociological perspective, individuals are socialized into cultural values, attitudes and beliefs" which "they come to share with the rest of society, (and) which makes possible the consensus which all societies are said to depend on for their survival" (p.44). Survival, in a metaphoric employment sense, could also be argued as having applicability in the workplace context.

Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin (2003) similarly present a social theory of learning based on a more traditional positioning of culture and society, stating

> The idea of a social self means that all our learning takes place in an interaction between ourselves and others, and in the context of prevailing beliefs and attitudes – what we call the culture of society. This is not a one-way transaction, but it does make socialization a primary function of learning...From this sociological perspective, therefore, the structure and culture of society determines how any individual learning can take place...We are both products and creators of culture. Learning is seen not as social adaptation but as social action and interaction (p.46-47).

Here again the research argument is that the interpretation of its "location" should be more laterally considered in terms of socialisation within the culture of society which is a work specific community. This broadened "reading" can be interpreted in the writing of Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin (2003) who draw on Albert Bandura's notion that "social learning theory approaches the explanation of human behavior in terms of a continuous reciprocal interaction between cognitive, behavioral and environmental determinants" in which "both people and their environments are reciprocal determinants of each other" (p.49), and in which "individual and environmental influences are interdependent" (p.50).

The role of socialisation in social learning and experiential learning is not only an interesting aspect of this research, but also fundamental to the research argument. The subjective nature of experiential learning is noted as "influenced...by the social and cultural conditions in which they occur" (p.54). Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin (2003) draw on Miller & Boud's definition of experience as "the totality of ways in which humans sense the world and

make of what they perceive" (p.56). They summarise the tenets of experiential learning as: experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning; learners actively construct their own experience; learning is holistic; and learning is socially and culturally constructed.

Despite the holistic nature of such learning as described above, Jarvis, Holdford & Griffin (2003) also comment on primary experience as being "an experience by any, or all, of the senses of aspects of the social context within which the experience occurs" (p.55) and secondary experience as being "a mediated experience having little or nothing to do with the social context within which the experience occurs" (p.55). This view on the role of experience in learning brings the literature review back to decontextualised and contextualised learning and knowledge acquisition, formal and informal texts with some final notes of potential relevance.

Workplace learning terms such as informal, incidental, accidental take on a collective concept in this research of knowledge construction as an outcome of "unstructured informal cultural texts". The collective concept is well represented by Garrick's (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) definition of "a spontaneous, contingent form of learning where something fruitful or transformative happens without deliberation" (p.219), rather than confining this to "accidental" as Garrick intends. Drawing on Bagnall, Garrick quotes this suggests that learning at work can be obtained 'unconsciously, existentially; through the mere experience of living in a particular "environment" or "context" ' (p.219). Such references acknowledging "unconscious" draws attention to the aspect of unstructured learning and informal texts in observation acts as the knowledge repository awaiting its potential transition from decontextualised to contextualised knowledge in which is takes on meaningful cultural positioning.

Quoting from Kolb, Matthew and Candy (in Boud & Garrick, eds. 1999) initially describe "social knowledge as the culturally transmitted network of words, symbols and images based solely on comprehension" (p.52),

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which, while complementary to the research from a semiotic perspective, does not make explicit the consciousness or unconsciousness of the knowledge acquisition. The authors later, however, acknowledge this notion of unconsciousness by quoting Spender's view that "collective knowledge is embedded in social activity in ways that are relatively hidden from, or invisible to, the social actors involved" (p.54) which "often makes it difficult for individuals to talk about and to share consciously what they know" (p.54).

As Solomon, in Boud and Garrick (eds. 1999) claims, "workplace learning can be understood as a cultural practice constructed by contemporary discursive practices of work" (p.122). One discursive practice in unstructured or informal learning could be interpreted as that of storytelling, including observing, listening, passing on anecdotes, discussing, exchanging and interacting. These informal cultural texts while essentially social are generally ad hoc and unplanned as a workplace learning medium. Similarly, Brown & Duguid note (in Lesser, Fontaine & Slusher, eds. 2000) that storytelling directs incoherence to coherence through "narration, collaboration and social construction" (p.105) based on the fact that stories and their telling act as "repositories of accumulated wisdom" (p.106).

There are however other forms of "discourse" in the workplace which act as conduits for workplace learning. Workplace artifacts, despite their contextualisation here within a community of practice, are similarly claimed as influential mediums for decoding and reconstructions of cultural meaning in the ethno-cultural community.

> The significance of artifacts in the full complexity of their relations with practice can be more or less *transparent* to learners....Knowledge within a community of practice and ways of perceiving and manipulating objects characteristic of community practices are encoded in artifacts in ways that can be more or less revealing. Moreover, the activity system and the social world in which an artifact is part are reflected in multiple ways in its design and use and can become further "fields of transparency", just as they can remain opaque. Obviously, the transparency of any technology always exists with respect to some purpose and is intricately

tied to the cultural practice and social organization within which the technology is meant to function" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p.102).

Agencies of cultural transmission (Jarvis 1995) are "varied and operate in different ways...through language but not exclusively" (p.55). Jarvis (1995) continues to note, significantly for this research in the notion of encoding-decoding, that "learners are recipients of cultural transmission" (p.55) as a process of two-way interaction, "a negotiation of their differing understandings of the aspect of culture which impinge upon their meeting" (pp.55-56).

In concluding this chapter, the selection of literature and related arguments have provided the frames of reference in which workplace contextuality influences and shapes workplace pedagogy. With pedagogy encompassing teaching and learning perspectives, teaching is viewed as a process of encoding the rhetoric of practice whereas learning is viewed as a process of decoding its relevance in the reality of practice. In acknowledging learning approaches such as contextualised, constructivist, formal, informal, experiential and social, the focus on ethno-pedagogy as a workplace learning proposal relies on the recognition of the workplace as an ethno-cultural community. This recognition shapes learning through cultural texts which are significantly influenced by their structured and management controlled nature on one hand, counterbalanced by workplace socialisation on the other and the interpretation of semiotics on the other. Through a variety of workplace texts, artifacts, conduits and mediums, learning as a process of acculturation provides key understandings in relation to the workplace, its environment, its relationship structures, its performance expectations, either written or unwritten, spoken or unspoken, which collectively combine to create meaningful workplace knowledge.

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Chapter Four – Research Methodology

4.1 Chapter Introduction

Based on some literature relating to the conducting of research, some authors use research terminologies of methodology and method interchangeably, with others acknowledging a differentiation. This latter approach is adopted here. The selection of a theoretically-based research methodology guides the practice-based methods, that is, how it is conducted and the rigours with which the processes are attended to and conclusions drawn.

The method is essentially the tools and techniques of data gathering in the naturalistic environment of the research study, which is complementary to the theoretical underpinnings and attuned to the research aims and purpose. The aim here is to investigate and to interpret the symbiotic nature of call centre contextuality and pedagogical practices in relation to the logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation represented as quantitative measurement and qualitative measurement in efficiency performance management.

An interpretive ethnographically-based methodology is considered appropriate, with triangulated data collection process of interview, workplace observation and document review, from which inductive analysis, interpretation representing the voices of the participants and reported as a descriptive-based narrative.

4.2 Methodology

4.2.1 Interpretive Perspective and Qualitative Methodology

Theoretical writings on the interpretive perspective in qualitative methodology reveal a wide scope of definitions with commonalities encompassing the concepts of the individual's contextual constructions of

meaning and the usage of key words such as holistic, explorative, descriptive, inductive, naturalistic, fluid, multi-layered, complex and humanistic. Bogdan and Taylor (1975) describe it as an approach which examines "settings and individuals within those settings holistically", with Mertens (1998) similarly ascribing a definition of "an in-depth description of a specific program, practice or setting" (p.159).

Potter (1996) acknowledges that interpretive constructivist researchers favour creative social construction, and rather than the isolation of components for independent review this research approach considers the outcomes holistically. Therefore, key associations highlight research which is conducted in naturalistic environment with a degree of subjectivity and research data which is analysed inductively. Research relevant terms such as authenticity, credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability maintain their own integrity against natural science's trademarks of generalisability, validity and reliability.

The notion of multiplicity of interpretations or realities is now widely acknowledged as a characteristic of post-positivist interpretive qualitative research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000; Merriam & Associates 2002; Potter 1996). Similarly, the view offered by Walford (2001) extends that different constructs of the same phenomenon under review may present equally articulate and intelligible views as interpretations are human constructs and in social sciences and education there are situations "where it is not possible to 'hold constant' the various extraneous variables" (p.149). Christians and Carey (in Potter 1996) state that "qualitative studies start from the assumption that in studying humans we are examining a creative process ...(and) this creative activity is grounded in the ability to build cultural forms from symbols ...(which) assert meaning" (pp.282-283), with cultural forms, symbols and asserting meaning holding particular relevance in this research.

Within the qualitative approach there are characteristics which integrate descriptions of a cultural setting with meanings which show the "culture

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at work", according to McIntyre (1999). McIntyre (1999), continuing, claims that interpretive research is centred on the exploration of perspectives where the researcher is not engaging the researched to assess their situation, but rather observing the results. This view is reiterated by Potter (1996) when commenting that "human experience is strongly influenced by contexts and the product of that investigation must be description and interpretation, not explanation" (p.29).

Interpretive assumptions are based on the belief that the researcher attempts to foreground the point of view of those being researched while acknowledging that it may be difficult to background their own interpretation of the situation (Denzin & Lincoln and Morris in Potter 1996). In other words, it questions the researcher's ability to accurately represent the participants' contextualised stories, as the interpretation assigned by the researcher is bounded by his (used generically) own social contextuality and frames of reference, which, it is argued, potentially influences the interpretation. This could be viewed as presenting a challenge for the researcher to balance the multi-vocality not only from the viewpoint of the participants' and researcher's social contextuality but also the researcher's relationship with the area of research study. This area of potential conflict will be addressed shortly in the section entitled Researcher Positioning.

Similarly the nature of hermeneutics shares a common philosophy that an individual's knowledge and reality is socially constructed and the role of the researcher is to interpret the experience. In doing so it recognises that humans view the world as an interaction of parts and wholes and the part is only understandable in the context of the whole. Achieving a meaningful interpretation requires description through inductive analysis of "the parts" which construct "the whole" (Potter 1996, p.44), with this process sometimes taking on many iterations and reconstructions in thinking. This is similar to Eichelberger's (in Mertens 1998) description of interpretive, constructivist, hermeneutical research as wanting to understand what

meaning the participants attribute to activities and that in doing so that they are constructing the reality on the basis of the interpretations of data. Usher (1996) complements these views by noting that hermeneutic-interpretive epistemology addresses contextualisation, interpretation, meaning and illumination in social research.

However, beyond this point, the boundaries of perspectives and methodological choices are not easily defined or capable of being definitively "boxed" despite a wide number of authors attributing different labels, classifications and terminologies. The reading of such texts highlight the choice and suitability embrace some aspects as holding relevance yet others, within the same classification, negate its attributes as appropriate, denying its earlier sense of "belonging". By selecting Potter as one example, each of the following resonated with the research aims in some way, and therefore initially "suggested" themselves as worthy of consideration.

Paraphrasing Potter's (1996) **interpretive methodologies**, which focus on the study of phenomena through hermeneutic inquiry in a natural setting, some hold relevance for this research. **Ethnography**, for example, focuses on exploring how communities are created and held together with human interactions. The principal avenue of exploration is living with the people to learn how they construct meaning about their communities and their place in the community. **Ethnomethodology** on the other hand focuses on how people make sense of everyday life, by identifying and understanding the methods used to construct their own practical explanations. In this approach, the explanations are viewed from the perspective of everyday discourse analysis as data in terms of the context of the conversation..

Cultural studies examine how people interpret their culture and how they interact with it through the creation and use of symbols. It focuses on social practices holistically and emphasises the importance of the intervention of culture as an influence on how people live their lives.

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Textual analysis focuses on texts and genres and seeks to understand them from a literary point of view and how they define or influence culture. While Potter (1996) may have intended textual analysis in a literal sense and as external to a naturalistic setting, if considered holistically with a figurative definition it adopts a relevant presence in the research.

Despite the different philosophical anthropological, sociological or psychology based underpinnings of these approaches, all have commonalities and hold relevance in this research through the study of phenomena which involves people, culture and communities and how learning occurs through texts, symbols, language, behaviours and constructions of meaning through social interaction. Ultimately two of those mentioned above however, **ethnography and ethnomethodology**, have been extracted for a closer independent review as significantly influential in shaping the research methodology classification and design. This does not mean that the others do not have relevance but rather than the selection of these two were capable of incorporating valid components of the others.

4.2.2 Ethnography

The main aspects of ethnography focus "on exploring how communities are created and held together with human interactions" (Potter 1996, p.51) with Van Maanen (in Potter 1996) adding that ethnography refers to the knowledge which members of a group share, and which informs and shapes the activities of the group. Mertens (1998) draws on Tesch who defines ethnography as "a research method designed to describe and analyze practices and beliefs of cultures and communities" (pp.164-165) with culture encompassing the behaviours, ideas, beliefs, and knowledge of a particular group of people. It follows logically therefore that ethnography based educational research typically includes a study of educational practices in relation to such elements as the community's history, geography, kinship patterns, political influences, social relationships, rituals and symbols.

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McIntyre (1999) states this tradition is based in hermeneutic interpretation, that is how the social world and community culture is to be understood in order to facilitate the researcher to "write the culture" of the group with a focus on understanding how participants make sense of their contextually "constructed" world (p.79). This method of research, summarised by Schultz (1953), relies on intersubjective understandings, reciprocity of perspectives and the social distribution of knowledge where social interaction is founded upon the constructs and how individuals relate to the understanding of others' constructs, all of which hold significance and relevance in this research. Complementing this view McIntrye (1999) notes that the need to see research in relation to practice highlights the underlying theme that research takes place in context with a need to make the context "visible".

In citing an ethnographic study by Latour and Woolgar, Walford (2001) notes that that the perceived reality is "the result of an extended process of social construction" (p.2). Some of the ways in which this construction takes places are understanding the behaviours, values and meanings within a cultural context and appreciating the complexity of data which need to be considered to "develop the story as it is experienced by participants" (Woods in Walford 2001, p.311), including the researcher's role in the research instrumentation. The intention is to achieve some kind of understanding of a specific case, whether it be a culture, people or setting with the ethnographer/researcher intending to "construct a coherent story that takes the reader into a deeper and richer appreciation of the people who have been studied" (p.91). Potter (1996) further differentiates between macroethnography and microethnography, with the latter focusing on particular behaviors and certain symbols or semiotics as grounding for ethnographic communication. The interpretive process according to Peacock in Ely et al (1997) is one in which "ethnographic interpretations provide not only substantive information but perspectives

on that information" (p.223) in order to enrich the understanding of others.

Yet, while relevant characteristics of ethnography are self-evident and readily identifiable with the research, there are also key characteristics of the methodology which cannot be claimed. These relate predominantly to research method in terms of the researcher's physical situation, time frame and sample size. Hammersley & Atkinson (1995) explained that the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, collecting data in order to throw light on issues of researcher concern, or what Potter (1996) refers to as "long term observation of cultural forms". While the findings reflect documented evidence, much of the "long term", although documented, serves to inform the interpretation.

With regard to sample size Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) in Potter (1996) describes an ethnography sample as "intensive on a small number", whereas Mertens (1998) claims it can be driven by the researcher making "a decision as to the adequacy of the observations on the basis of having identified the salient issues and finding the themes" (p.271), recommending a sample size of 30-50 interviews (p.271). The former approach, that is small, intensive and adequate to draw conclusions, is considered appropriate.

The choice of **case study** approach, according to Lagenback, Vaughn, & Aagaard, and Tesch (in Mertens 1998), is generally associated with ethnographic interpretive research as it involves "the intensive and detailed study of...a group as an entity" (p.166). Stake (in Mertens 1998) recommends data collection which shows the nature of the case, its historical background, other contexts, other cases through which the "case" and the participants are recognisable. The aim of the case study is: to portray, analyse and interpret the uniqueness of real individuals and situations through accessible account; to catch the complexity and situatedness of behaviour; and to present and represent reality – to give a

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sense of "being there"' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.79) through the holistic examination of phenomena. The case study therefore provides an insight into a particular issue with the intent to advance understandings. In a collectively-based study, such as the presentation here of three call centre sites as representing one case study, this approach additionally highlights the commonalities or diversities which collectively come to represent the "case".

4.2.3 Ethnomethodology

In hermeneutics, the ethnomethodologist "concentrates on the relationships between the contexts and the particulars". In doing so, events are examined from the perspective of being "embedded in their contexts" (Potter 1996, pp.53-54). These are also socially derived and distributed, with their grounding based in everyday language and holding many possible interpretations. Potter (1996) draws on two views to highlight the purpose of this methodology. The first view is that of Jankowski and Wester which seeks to identify the rules people apply in making sense of their world, and the second view is that of Bogdan and Taylor which agues that it is "the ways people apply abstract rules and commonsense understanding in situations in order to make actions appear routine, explicable, and unambiguous" (p.16).

However, in ethnomethodology there is an emphasis on contextualised discursive elements, which in this research encompasses both a literal and a figurative interpretation of "texts" with a focus on the context rather than the words per se. This aspect is substantiated by Holstein & Gubrium in Denzin & Lincoln (eds. 1998, p.143) when stating "whereas much ethnomethodological research has been ethnographic...it pays close attention to the interactional, particularly discursive aspects of the settings studied". The attention is therefore directed to what the "words represent or tell about culturally circumscribed realities (Atkinson, 1990; Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Clough, 1992; Geertz, 1988; Gubrium &

Silverman, 1989" (p.143), and "the talk is considered as the very action through which local realities are accomplished" (p.143).

Ethnomethodological research has a discourse-in-context orientation being "attuned to naturally occurring discourse and interaction as constitutive elements of the settings studied (see Atkinson & Drew, 1979; Maynard, 1984, 1989; Mehan & Wood, 1975; Sacks, 1972)" (p.143). This focus on the context of the exchange is of particular relevance in this research and aligns to Potter's (1996) highlighting of semiotics/semiology wherein the researcher focuses on the analysis of signs, their functions and how meaning is generated through the rules that govern their use. The three characterisations of signs which Potter (1996) notes and which relate to the research are "symbolic" (through words), "iconic" (through pictures), and "indexical" (through inference). They remain abstract or meaningless however until their contextualisation assigns meaning.

Attuned to the interpretive research approach of inductive analysis and the consciousness of research positioning (which is discussed shortly), ethnomethodologists suspend assumptions by setting aside their own every day orientation to the world being studied "in order to focus on the ways in which members themselves interpretively produce the recognizable, intelligible forms they treat as real". This is done through interpreter/researcher "bracketing", according to Gubrium and Holstein (1997, p.40) which allows the researcher to objectify social practices, making them into research objects. This process allows the researcher to question social reality and to focus on how everyday activities become routinised (Garfinkel in Gubrium & Holstein 1997).

The research also takes on an analytic focus on "what speakers are doing with their talk" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.51), in which the research participants construct contextualised meaning concerning relationships and understandings in their social worlds. In this regard the research participants then became authors of their social reality. In this case the authors are the call centre managers and their social reality

becomes represented in their rhetoric of a customer-oriented practice as opposed to their acting out the reality of cost-efficient practice.

A foregrounding of the constitutive how, in analyzing the substantive what, is advocated by noting that "traditionally... qualitative researchers have treated members' talk as expressing an underlying, shared, cognitive order, but have not explicated the ways in which talk itself is an essential feature of the settings that it describes" (Gubrium & Holstein 1997, p.53). This results in a lack of adequate focus on the constitutive rather than the descriptive. To address this, the authors suggest that discursive analysis can provide a mutually informing influence on meaning and context in the continual reappropriation of meaning. In this regard, a review of call centres' semiotic language is thought to be enlightening.

In coupling ethnography and ethnomethodology it highlights the link between the former which "inventories a setting's distinctive, substantive features" whereas the latter "searches for the practices through which those substantive features are made observable" (Zimmerman & Poller in Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.41).

A designation of "interpretive, ethnographic case study" ultimately represents the choice of methodology. With the focus on culture and meaning making in cultural communities, Gubrium & Holstein (1997) observe that "as the corpus of local knowledge and practices coalesces,...local culture emerges as an interpretive resource" in assigning meanings which consist of "recognizable categories, familiar vocabularies, organizational mandates, personal and professional orientations, group perspectives, and other similarly delimited frameworks for organizing meaning" (p.172). Significantly for this research, the term 'local' is designed to mean "an experiential designation rather a purely geographic label" (p.172).

4.3 Method

Research "method' outlines the practicalities involved in the "empirical operationalization of the (interpretive) concept" (Pauly in Potter 1996, pp. 258-259). With the selection of interpretive ethnography-based case study methodology, the characteristics in its reporting narrative are inherently descriptive, subjective and inductive interpretations based on an analysis of data in a naturalistic setting. It has been suggested therefore that qualitative researchers have equal accountability to demonstrate the rigours of their research processes as they do not subscribe to the pre-defined assumptions associated with the positivist, scientific-analytical model, such as knowability, measurability, etc. Consequently, in this section, the rigours and processes will be made transparent in order to add to the credibility of the findings rather than argue that the post-positivist approach requires validating.

In the operationalisation of research methodology, in this case as an interpretive qualitative researcher, a wide range of interconnected methods, such as personal experience, introspection, interviews, observation, and visual texts amongst others, form the basis of data collection and/or play a role in the data analysis and its interpretation. This highlights the value-laden nature of the research inquiry approach. The focus of the interpretive research is to ask questions which "stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, eds. 1998, p.8). Mertens (1998) enhances this view by adding that "key words associated with qualitative methods include complexity, contextual, exploration, discovery and inductive logic" which allows the researcher to assign meaning to a situation "without imposing preexisting expectations on the phenomena under study" (p.160).

For this reason Patton (in Mertens 1998) suggests the selection of qualitative research in education is practically based on humanistic values where the focus is how humans construct meaning through descriptive

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data, such as people's written and/or spoken words and observable behaviour (Bogdan & Taylor in Potter 1996). The inclusion of language in the construction of meaning is significant in this research and acknowledged by Jensen's quote (in Potter 1996) that "language is the primary medium for exchange between humans and reality (in processes of perception, cognition, and action), and that, accordingly, verbal texts may become vehicles of knowledge and truth...through language, reality becomes social...(and) reality become intersubjective and accessible for analysis" (p.67). A detailed description of the research method can be found in Appendix A.

4.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The method of data analysis and interpretation was qualitatively correlative and inductive, using triangulation as "a means to distinguish between the idiosyncratic (focusing on the differences) and the representative (focusing on the convergences)", according to Fortner and Christians as cited in Potter (1996). The data was initially analysed for broad macro classifications or categorisations, starting with the Contextuality Construct. F.W. Taylor and Scientific Management, and Braverman's critique of Taylor's legacy, provided categories which subsequently developed into themes of historic-scientific and social-political. Within each, meso and micro sub-themes were tentatively identified, such as the atomised elements of Scientific Management and the key elements of criticism of Taylor's model as identified by Braverman (1974). These were additionally identified as correlative and impact related respectively, and therefore more closely aligned to deductive reasoning.

On the other hand, the ethno-cultural dimension as a component of "contextuality" and subsequently ethno-pedagogy as a component of "pedagogy" inductively evolved through the analysis of data. Although the categorisations of historic-scientific and social-political remained relatively

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static there was ongoing adjustments to these classification based on concurrent data collection, inductive analysis and tentative interpretations which warranted further consideration. This process looked at themes of similarities, anomalies, divergences or dissonance across all the call centre sites and ultimately their connectedness.

The tentative themes on a macro, meso and micro level were placed on an Excel spreadsheet as a starting point of reference to validate their scope, their appropriateness of label and/or their need for adjustment and realignment, particularly in relation to their interaction with other themes. In this process additional macro classifications, meso and micro themes, repetitions, cross-referential meanings of significance and relevance were all methodologically analysed with a preparedness on the researcher's part to pursue a "what if" and "let's see" change of tack, requiring, in many instances, additional readings and theoretical recontextualisations. For example, language emerged as a meso theme under a macro classification of culture. Language was then in turn inductively analysed revealing micro themes such as associated phrases with "associations" categorised in terms of dehumanizing, call centre unique, behaviourally based, performance based. There were also other phrases which fell into a classification of "potentially interesting but currently disassociated".

An ongoing process of pursuing further readings helped shape the themes, categorisations and classifications. For example, readings on literacy and semiotic orientations inductively shaped the meso theme of language into micro elements such as a call centre specific language, textual and subtextual communication. This process was very influential in establishing the final direction and focus of the research, particularly in relation to workplace culture, socialisation and semiotic orientation in workplace learning, with semiotic orientation requiring acknowledgement.

4.4.1 Semiotic Orientation

In analysing data Potter (1996) suggests that semiotic orientation plays a role in the method of analysis. In this research such orientation lies,

firstly, in a broad and non-technical view (from a linguistic perspective) of semiotics and semiology (as an analysis of signs and their functions). The analysis is concerned primarily with how meaning is generated and the way in which the "signs" communicate as well as the rules which govern the use of the signs (Potter 1996).

Semiological analysis focuses on "how the sign creates reality" (Potter 1996, p.136). Therefore reviewing semiotics in a broad sense for this research the interest lies in what role the signs play in facilitating (re)constructions of meaning as the reality. The signs as abstract entities (such as performance charts) are meaningless until such time as the interpreter or decoder attaches a contextualised meaning. With regard to symbols Potter (1996) refers to synchronic which is the study of an object, especially language, without reference to past or future influences, whereas diachronic, which is the study of an object, especially language, within the context of its history.

References to semiotics in this research has also incorporated other aspects of analysis which Potter (1996) discusses independently. For example, the notion of semiotics incorporates Potter's observation that discourse analysis "extends the idea of language beyond words to include nonverbal communication and production techniques" (Potter 1996, p.137). Additionally narrative analysis is "an analytical technique that seeks to fit messages into...storytelling" (Potter 1996, p.139) while genre analysis constructs categories of "basic structural similarities (such as dialogue, settings, themes...) (and) the evolutions of genres in terms of historical, technological,..." (Potter 1996, p.141).

4.5 Conclusions and Reporting

Drawing conclusions is regarded by many, according to Potter (1997), as theory construction which essentially analyses and advances claims about a phenomenon. Anderson (quoted by Potter 1996) offers that this

"contribution to theory comes in the form of a dialectic between the researcher's understanding of the social action as presented in the ethnographic text and the theoretical framework which is used to interpret the text for others" (p.155).

Walford (2001) suggests that a case is significant only in the context of a particular theory and where an extrapolation of interpretation could be made between a particular case and other cases if there is a strong theoretical and logical connection between them. Therefore theorising and theory generation is a vital part in the grounding of data analysis and the conclusions drawn. While this research is not claiming to be "grounded theory" there are certain characteristics of grounded theory which recommend themselves. According to Mertens (1998), citing Strauss and Corbin, it has relevance in developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analysed. Mertens (1998) continues that "a defining characteristic of grounded theory is that the theoretical propositions are not stated at the outset of the study" but rather that "generalizations (theory) emerge out of the data themselves and not prior to data collection", which concept has resonance with the development of ethno-cultural and ethno-pedagogy aspects of the research and theorisations surrounding the propositions. Similar relevance was drawn from the suggestion that as "the initial or emerging theory is always tested against data ….researchers accept the responsibility to interpret the data and use it as a basis for theory generation" (Mertens 1998, pp.170-171).

This view is also expressed by Merriam and Simpson (1989) as the building of theory that emerges from, or is 'grounded' in, the data. The evolving nature of propositions or theorisations in this research appears to fit with the idea of being grounded in data which become "sets of meanings which yield insight and understanding of people's behaviour" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.23) and mean making processes.

The reporting of the research adopts a narrative style which "overarches the individual episodes by attempting to provide a coherent descriptive

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framework that ties together the individual episodes" (Potter 1996, p.155). The narrative style of reporting in interpretive research also benefits from a rich or "thick description", advocated by Mertens (1998, citing Guba & Lincoln) so that "readers can understand the contextual variables operating in that setting" (p.255).

The descriptive narrative in this research reporting phase is intended to reflect the essence of the participants' stories, with the researcher facilitating a contextual understanding of their account through "an explicit interpretation of meanings of language and human actions" (Atkinson & Hammersley in Potter 1996, p.51). This details descriptively a logical and sequential process of socially acquired knowledge and meaning making in a culturally rich environment. The narrative includes key illustrative quotes from the participants' own revelations with a minimal number of tables and charts, which are qualitatively interpreted rather than enumeratively focused.

4.5.1 Transferability, Comparability and Translatablity

In adopting a post-positivist approach there is no attempt to claim the findings as representative or generalisable to a wider "population". That being said, there are other post-positivist arguments which attempt to situate the notion of positivist "generalisability" into broader research perspectives. Mertens (1998), for example, draws on Guba and Lincoln's notion of "transferability" while Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000), drawing on LeCompte and Preissle, and Schofield, suggest that "comparability" and "translatability" may have relevance. By providing "a clear, detailed and in-depth description...others can decide the extent to which findings are generalizable to another situation, i.e. to address the twin issues of *comparability* and *translatability*" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.109, original emphasis). The authors further note that "qualitative research can be generalizable...by studying the typical (for its applicability to other situations – the issue of *transferability* (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993:324) and by performing multi-site studies (e.g. Miles and

Huberman, 1984)" (p.109. Similarly, drawing on Lincoln and Guba and others Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest that "it is possible to assess the typicality of a situation – the participants and the settings, to indicate how data might translate into different settings and cultures" (p.109).

As a final note in closing this chapter, the choice of an "ethnographic" approach aligns the research locus of culture and community with narrative style of research reporting, which is seen "to create as vivid a reconstruction as possible of the culture or groups being studied" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.138].

Chapter Five – Data, Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Chapter Introduction

As a preliminary overview, in relation to the Contextuality Construct, the research data, analysis and interpretation seek to legitimise the three key dimensions within the construct. Firstly, to establish a correlation of incoming customer service call centres efficiency management practices with the historically and scientifically based model of F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management. Secondly, to evaluate the impact of Braverman's social-political critique of Taylor's legacy in effecting change in the contemporary Taylorist adaptation in call centres. Thirdly, to argue for the recognition of incoming customer service call centres as an ethno-cultural community based on such cultural aspects as traditions, customs and rituals, now into their third century, which define the community and its practices.

In relation to the Pedagogy Construct, the research data, analysis and interpretation seek to reflect the nature of workplace teaching and learning as relevant to the logics and as a process of acculturisation. Based on the premise that workplace contextuality is the primary framework within which teaching and learning occurs, learning theorisations, including constructivist, formal, informal, experiential and social, are drawn on to assist in the positioning of the findings. In this case, as workplace contextuality is claimed as culturally related, the role of "cultural texts" is reviewed as a key learning conduit.

PART A – Contextuality Construct (5.2 and 5.3)

PART B – Pedagogy Construct (5.4 and 5.5)

PART C – Primary Cultural Texts (5.6)

PART D – Secondary Cultural Texts (5.7)

PART E – Cultural Literacy (5.8)

PART A – CONTEXTUALITY CONSTRUCT

5.2 Contextuality Construct

In arguing that workplace contextuality influences workplace teaching and learning, three key dimensions are presented as framing call centre contextuality. The first dimension, Historic-Scientific, recognises F.W. Taylor, Scientific Management and his efficiency model as providing the foundation for efficiency performance management, measurement and practices in incoming customer service call centres today. The second dimension, Social-Political, acknowledges that a critique highlighting the social and political legacy of Taylor's model, presented by Braverman (1974) in *Labor and Monopoly Capital, The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century,* appears to have had minimal impact to effect change.

The findings indicate that these two dimensions provide the foundations underpinning contemporary practices in call centre efficiency performance management. It also provides a platform and a perspective from which to consider and argue the evolution of a specific workplace community environment wherein its members have become acculturated in historically and socially embedded cultural values, rituals, beliefs and relationships.

5.2.1 The Historic-Scientific Dimension

While some references to call centres suggest Taylorist underpinnings and/or an engineering model, no specific argument, theory or research could be located to situate call centres substantively within the Taylorist model; that is, no evidence could be located which, firstly, dismantled the holistic philosophy of Taylor's Scientific Management into its component parts and then, secondly, mapped these elements as correlational and influential in call centre efficiency performance management. The following analysis and interpretation addresses this gap.

The nineteen elements of Taylor's Scientific Management were atomised and analysed for correlations to contemporary counterparts in call centres.

The findings indicate that a correlation exists to call centre equivalent practices in the context of efficiency performance management. This correlation holds true in spite of the fact that some of Taylor's elements have now adopted a more contemporary label.

Table 5.1 – A correlative analysis of F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management to contemporary call centre practices

	Scientific-Management	**Call Centre**	**Call Centre A**	**Call Centre B**	**Call Centre C**
1	Planning Department	Centralised Management	✓	✓	✓
2	Time & motion studies	Time & motion studies	✓	✓	✓
3	Recruitment & selection	Recruitment & selection	✓	✓	✓
4	Training	Training	✓	✓	✓
5	Atomisation and specialisation	Atomisation and specialisation	✓	✓	✓
6	Wages	Wages	✓	✓	✓
7	Incentives	Incentives	✓	✓	✓
8	Tools	Technologies	✓	✓	✓
9	Layout/Design	Layout/Design	✓	✓	✓
10	Routing	Routing	✓	✓	✓
11	Standard times	Standard times	✓	✓	✓
12	Standards	Standards	✓	✓	✓
13	Inspection	Quality Review	✓	✓	✓
14	Functional Foremen	Supervisors/Team Leaders	✓	✓	✓
15	Soldiering	Productivity manipulation	✓	✓	✓
16	Cost analysis	Cost analysis	✓	✓	✓
17	Stock	Stock	✓	✓	✓
18	Accounting	Accounting	✓	✓	✓
19	Distribution	Distribution	✓	✓	✓

Based on these findings, there is a clear correlation between Taylor's efficiency model and contemporary practices adopted by incoming customer service call centres in the management of performance efficiency. Therefore, incoming customer service call centres could be claimed

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legitimately as adapted from F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management efficiency model, and call centres could therefore be referred to as Taylorist.

5.2.2 The Social-Political Dimension

With the establishment of Taylor's Scientific Management as the basis of call centre management practices, Taylor's model has attracted critics who challenge the social responsibility and accountability associated with its implementation. Therefore, the Social-Political dimension, spearheaded by Braverman's (1974) critique in *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century,* reviewed five key research-relevant social considerations raised in his work. This dimension aimed at evaluating the influence which this critique has had in effecting change in Taylorist management practices in call centres, based on the following:

1.   Political Affiliation

2.   Workplace Environment

3.   Unionisation

4.   Rule-based / Autonomy-based orientations

5.   Deskilling

The findings indicated that call centres were not viewed by the managers as representing any political affiliation in terms of labeling the business practices and philosophy as "capitalist". However, with a focused attention on efficiency gains, organisational imperatives, delivering a return to shareholders and the profitability of their centre and the company, a profit-driven ethos was evident. From a workplace environment perspective, neither did the managers consider that their call centre sites compromised the safety, comfort or well being of the employees. Any similarity to call centres as production or assembly lines, or sweatshops, were emphatically rejected as misinformed perceptions. In relation to unionisation, there was a union presence in each of the call centres, however the respective union representatives were only considered to be moderately active on average without any ability to exert significant influence over business decisions. A rule-orientated work environment was

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more dominant than an autonomy-oriented one and the notion of up-, cross-, multi-skilling rather than deskilling the workforce was the predominant view in relation to work-based skills.

Therefore, the managers' views reflected that Braverman's critique has had minimal impact, if any, on the fundamental practice of Taylor's efficiency performance management model. However, due to the substantial scope of the findings in relation to these two dimensions alone, the foregoing precis serves to underpin the main thesis focus, namely the Ethno-Cultural dimension of workplace contextuality and its pedagogy.

5.3   The Ethno-Cultural Dimension

With Historic-Scientific and Social-Political dimensions grounding call centre workplace contextuality, the focus and aim of this Ethno-Cultural dimension is to argue for call centres to be considered as a cultural and ethnographic community. Mertens' (1998) view of ethnographic research reporting is to describe and to analyse practices and beliefs of a cultural community, looking at their history, kinship patterns, social structures, rituals, symbols, politics and economic factors, or, as observed by McIntyre (1999), making the context visible. In making the context visible, an interpretation of the managers' descriptions revealed "efficiencies" as call centres' raison d'etre, reflective of Taylor's model from the late 1800s.

The notion of culture and ethnographic community is acknowledged therefore as one which evolves over a period of time as one of depth rather than of superficiality. Culture and ethnographic community emerge from historical and social influences, amongst others, which shape their regeneration and are bound by such aspects as shared beliefs, relationship structures and traditions which include rituals, processes and procedures as meaningful cultural artifacts. Central to the evolution of cultural community in this research is that the community's philosophy and beliefs are grounded in attention to efficiencies, all efficiencies, whether it is

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people, process, effort, cost or customer service, focusing on where efficiencies can be achieved and demonstrated through measurable, quantifiable dollar values.

The data, when inductively analysed, revealed a number of ethnographic and cultural community aspects which are proposed as influential in claiming call centres as an ethnographically- and culturally-based work specific community. The six elements which became apparent were:

1.   Evolutionary Understandings

2.   Relationships Structure

3.   Philosophy and Beliefs

4.   Traditions and Cultural Artifacts

5.   Language, Semiotic and Cultural Literacy

6.   Culturally Desirable Behaviours

5.3.1 Evolutionary Understandings

The managers were asked to share their evolutionary understandings of call centres and any connection with known efficiency management models and principles, past or contemporary. They varied in their understandings of the emergence of call centres both in terms of time-frame and originating locations. All acknowledged that call centres have been a phenomenon of the late 20th century, with the range specifically encompassing "early to late 1970s", "early to late 1980s" or even to the "early 1990s" and "relatively new, in the last decade or so". One manager commented that "from the early (19)80s (call centres) just became the flavour of the month to deal with your customers" even though they existed "at least ten years prior to that in some way, shape or form". The understandings of those managers who suggested the 1970s clarified their views as relating to "function rather than name", "evolving from basic telephone lines" and "various drivers transformed the humble manual, non-automated beginnings" of call centres into their sophisticated counterparts today.

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Their origins in terms of geographic location were attributed to the United States of America in the majority of managers' beliefs with the remainder suggesting that the United Kingdom was the call centre originating locus. There was also a similar disparity in the establishment of the originating industries in call centres. Their diversity included "a natural progression from early telecommunications and health care industries" to "airlines, but I would be guessing".

While the emergence of call centres is clearly acknowledged as a phenomenon of the last half century there was no stated connection linking call centres' efficiency and/or business management practices to any established model from an earlier time. The managers' lack of differentiation between an "established" or "old" model of management and its "new" environment of practice was also evident from exchanges in relation to the origins of efficiency business management practices. Uniformly, the managers appeared to credit call centres as the initiator of an efficiency strategy rather than to understand its position as an adaptor of established efficiency management theory and practice. The managers' views favoured call centres as initiators of efficiency optimisation rather than inheritors of an established management model.

During the exchanges at this point, the logics of as cost-efficiency and customer-orientation were expressed in different ways which reflected varying degrees of tension. One manager considered call centres as predominantly an exercise in cost-efficiency. This view was expressed as

> It became a more cost efficient way of dealing with your customers. From that time call centres have certainly evolved dramatically through the use of technology to where they are now, on a global basis, the only real cost effective way of dealing with your customers...So, yes, call centres are the most efficient way to interact with your customers.

Similarly, another manager described the evolution of call centres as having "grown out of a need to replace other face-to-face customer service outlets, such as banks, which may have reduced their retail outlets and had their call centre take on some of that business". This "need" was then

explained as twofold. One is the cost associated with property where multiple (retail) sites may be required compared to possible one (call centre) outlet, therefore offering economies of scale; and second of all is the efficiency gained by having staff gathered in a consolidated area, training in a consolidated product, and possibly carving out a portion of the business and being able (to reduce workload) to handle one or multiple areas of specific product or inquiry. The customer-oriented side of the business appeared a secondary consideration.

> I believe that call centres have developed with a view to saving some expense, but (customer) convenience as well.

In spite of a lack of reference to F.W. Taylor, Scientific Management or other efficiency model as influential in contemporary efficiency performance management practices, either as a lack of awareness or by design, their respective efficiency performance measures were understood to be "mathematically based" with Erlang theories being acknowledged by the majority of managers.

> If you are looking at things like rostering systems we use a number of Erlang theories that sit behind, including best service routing and AHT.

This was also clearly evident in the response from one manager who considered, when asked about efficiency models, Service Level calculations and mathematical formulae, that

> We really work around our call forecasting system to work a lot of that out. Basically it operates on call trends and event trends, Erlang theories, all of that, and it takes into consideration your various occupancy levels and the handling times you have built up on an historical basis.

The managers' lack of understanding, or lack of acknowledgement, did not impact on the research findings which claim call centres as grounded in Taylorist principles. In fact, it became helpful in the inductive analysis where key elements emerged from the data that supported a "reading" proposing call centres as an ethnographically and culturally-based workplace community.

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5.3.2 Cyclical Narrative

In claiming call centres as an ethnographically-based work-specific community Taylor's Scientific Management model is embedded in a cultural narrative which is also a cyclical narrative.

Diagram 5.1 – The Cultural Narrative of Call Centres and Taylorism
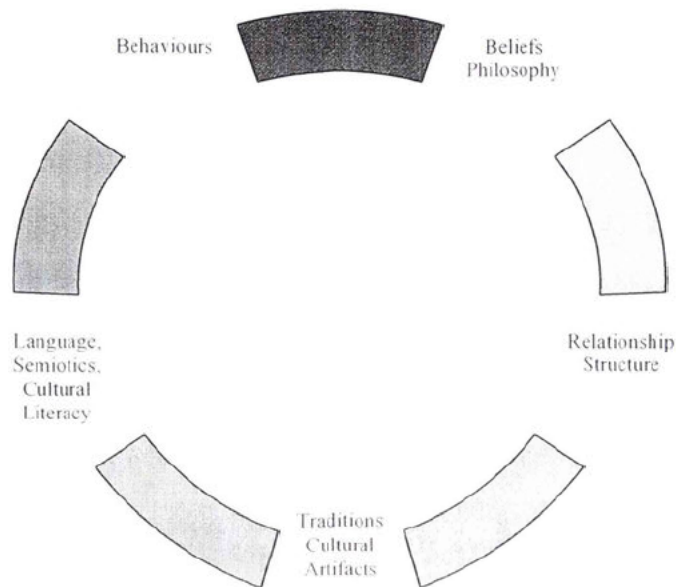
5.3.3 Beliefs and Philosophy

In call centres as a cultural environment, the foundational beliefs of the community are expressed by its members, particularly members of authority who influence others' understandings. Beliefs and philosophy, as they are used here, are proposed as those fundamental views which reflect the business community's convictions, shape their business actions, and indicate a willingness to represent the business community's values as responsible and ethical, particularly in the enculturation of new business community joiners.

The passing on of these beliefs and philosophy from generation to generation of call centre employees may occur in a structured way, such as through written texts, or unstructured way, such as through

storytelling and/or observation. The task of new members is then to interpret the actions of other more established community members in order to position what is said and what is done within a wider framework of cultural understandings. This may result in an interpretation with a tension between rhetoric and practice. In clichéd terms, reaching internalised cultural understandings as to whether the "talk" or the "walk" is more influential in workplace performance measurement and management ultimately facilitates their own cultural passage.

This in turn provides a framework which is fertile for the decoding of desirable and acceptable behaviours and, subsequently, the culturally acquired understandings relevant to socialisation and participation. In their turn, CSRs as community members come to reflect and espouse the community's convictions as a shared philosophy and, cyclically in their turn, act as mentors and role models to others through their inherited or cloned actions and behaviours.

The data indicated that the belief system of the managers, which drives the cultural understandings and actions of the community, acknowledged both logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation and reflected a tension between the two. When this tension required prioritisation however, the managers indicated the prioritisation favoured the logic of cost-efficiency, generally represented as a quantitative measurement in efficiency performance management. Therefore, if the managers have a belief system and holistic philosophy which prioritises quantitative measurement over qualitative measurement, sequential to this is the assumption that this will be conveyed to CSRs through community practices, particularly those which are influential pedagogically.

In this research, an evaluation of what the community says and what the community does is interpreted from the perspective of the rhetoric of practice as teaching (encoding) customer-oriented logic and the reality of practice as learning (decoding) cost-efficient logic. This process of encoding/decoding enables to CSR to make culturally-relevant decisions in

their meaning making and reconstructions of knowledge in the workplace as facilitating their acculturation.

To support this proposal of a community belief system, one manager verbalised the notion of a holistic community philosophy of which they, as "elders" or managers are "the custodians".

> Our company requires us to understand and manage our business at the most productive level we can. So I think that there is a discipline that applies here...and this discipline sets a framework for us to make sure we understand our business and understand the efficiency drivers behind it.

This view indicates that, despite the adaptation of Taylor's model to accommodate the inclusion of the customer and the emergence of the customer-orientation logic, the underpinning management philosophy, which becomes representative of the ethno-cultural community, is a disciplined framework with efficiency drivers as cultural beliefs.

The managers also exposed the tension of the logics by describing them as separate and competing in their cultural understandings of call centre management prioritisations. This could be seen through expressions which juxtaposed customer orientation with qualitative measurement and cost efficiency with quantitative measurement as separate logics representing the rhetoric of practice and the reality of practice respectively. This pragmatic reality in the prioritisation of the logics was reflected by another manager who noted:

> The ideal would be that we focus on quality rather than productivity or quantity but the reality is that a shift has been made recently where we need to focus on getting to more calls rather than providing the service we would like to see. Our position is that we are trying to do both, but really, if push came to shove, the focus would be on the productivity as opposed to the quality. And I know that is not best practice, but it is the reality of call centres.

The relentless drive for efficiencies underpinned the managers' beliefs and their role as cultural purveyors of efficiency performance management and its measurement in the call centre community. From an ethno-cultural perspective the operationalisation of these underpinning beliefs

and general management philosophy therefore nurtured a workplace culture which actively brought the logics and the tension to life. The machinery of their maintenance could be seen through culturally relevant traditions encompassing rituals, processes and procedures, as well as the emergence of a cultural language unique to call centres. In other words many factors signaled the cultural essence of the community, including a range of culturally symbolic artifacts.

5.3.4 Relationships Structure

Each of the three call centres had a hierarchical relationship structure which could be generically represented by the following.

Diagram 5.2 – Ethno-Cultural Community Relationships Structure
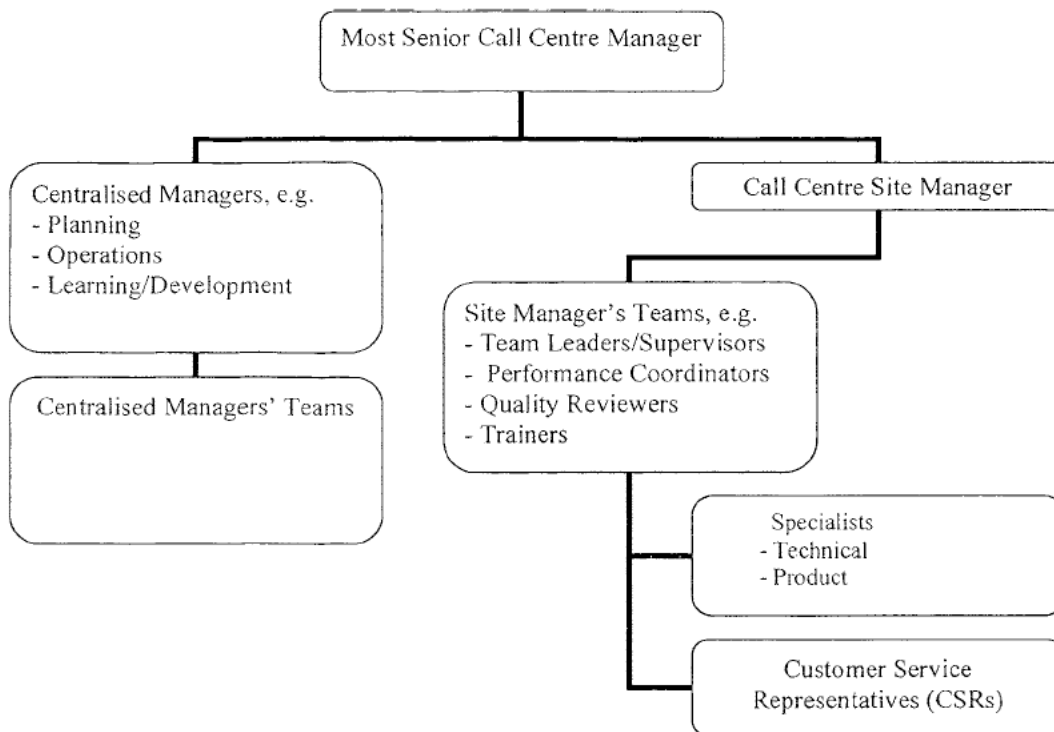
The significance of this structure, from a cultural ethnographic community perspective, was that the hierarchical pyramid also established the nature of the relationships in terms of status and authority, and power and control. A "reporting line" indicated and assumed a degree of respect

from those in lower status positions would be forthcoming for those of more senior status. This generally acknowledged the more senior roles were associated with a greater knowledge, experience and wisdom (in managerial terms) with regard to the community's philosophy and beliefs. While any correlation in terms of increased remuneration for progressively more senior roles is not relevant here, what is of more significance is the notion of community "elders", that is, a community structure which values knowledge and experience as a legitimate storyteller and teacher. This knowledge then acts as a cultural text to be passed on to other community members as cultural teachings. However, as already evidenced, with the managers' understandings also reflecting a tension in the logics, it was understandable this tension would manifest itself in their "teachings".

Conveying and managing the two logics as "teachings" therefore stemmed from these efficiency grounded foundational beliefs and philosophy in call centres, with the "teachings" ultimately delegated to members within, in a tiered structure of authority, power and control. The role of the Supervisor or Team Leader, which bares a correlation to Taylor's Functional Foreman, was also significant in this aspect of culture and community as the managers stated that they relied on them to be performance as well as people managers, to "have their finger on the pulse", understand and report on what issues may be affecting "team members and their performance", in other words to act as key intermediaries in the relationship structure as "a valuable part of communication with management and staff".

> (Supervisors/Team Leaders) are the first point of assessing productivity and efficiency of staff, and they are responsible for addressing productivity and efficiency issues and also obviously for recognising benefits or good performance in efficiency and productivity.

A significant comment from one of the managers, "Team Leaders are watching (CSRs') behaviours" which indicated the relationship structure

was integral to monitor, manage and maintain desirable behaviours as performance-based expectations.

However, in this relationship structure, knowledge sharing, and the managers' inclusiveness of employee representation in decision making processes, was selective for a number of reasons. One manager's view was that the decision which excluded CSR's in the initial stages of technology choice and development was a conscious one justified by the opinion that "when we are building a business case, we cannot spend a lot of time on engaging". By citing exclusion from participation and a need to be "discreet", the manager justified the position with references to issues of confidentiality, time constraints and the sheer difficulties involved in the logistics of adopting a consultative process. This was also complemented by one manager's comment that "on some issues there were occasions when it would have been preferable not to consult with unions". Such views have been interpreted as favouring a workplace relationship structure which continues to restrain post-industrialist notions of industrial democracy in favour of a culturally, historically based hierarchy of control. Within the theme of a cultural community it established a clear hierarchical social relationship structure which has endured since Taylor.

This selective knowledge sharing also provided an example of a cultural text in itself, in which learning from what is not said or not shared has the potential to actively and significantly realign existing individual understandings and meaning-making in the community. This role of passive learning through decoding the text and its "value" became a part of cultural literacy which sat outside any "formal" assignment of workplace competency in the call centres.

5.3.5 Traditions, Cultural Artifacts and Cultural Texts

Traditions, cultural artifacts and cultural texts, which include rituals, processes and procedures, were culturally meaningful within the call centre community. Many Taylorist elements as cultural artifacts became the basis for constructing a cultural text, both literally and figuratively,

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which took on a representational cultural role of community traditions in relation to the two logics and the prioritisation of quantitative and qualitative measurement in efficiency performance management within the community structure.

While many of the Taylorist based elements will be reviewed as pedagogically influential in the Pedagogy Construct, it is relevant at this point to argue for the recognition of some artifacts as primary cultural texts and others as secondary texts. The use of primary and secondary here relates to the prominence of the cultural text in qualitatively-based "research measurability" terms. Therefore cultural texts evident at the time of Recruitment, Induction Training, On-the-Job Training, Performance Review and Self-Regulation have been selected as the cultural junctures to review as they represent spikes in cultural understanding and meaning making due to tangible nature of the texts provided. Correspondingly, secondary cultural texts are proposed as those texts which permeate cultural meaning on a more static, sub-textual level. Some examples were found to be Centralised Management, Time and Motion Studies, Atomisation and Specialisation, Wages, Incentives, Tools/Technologies, Layout and Design, Routing, Standard Times, Standards, Soldiering, Cost Analysis, Stock, Accounting, and Distribution. As an overview of primary and secondary cultural texts the following examples act to support and to position the argument.

The managers considered that **training, standards and quality review** were avenues where process improvements were key to both short and long term efficiency gains and therefore, through interpretation, as mediums of culturally influential and relatable meaning. One manager advocated for efficiency gains through a review of **standards**, which would consequently require a realignment of performance evaluation criteria at the time **inspection/quality review.**

> We are also looking at a new phase of efficiency gains in our internal
> processes. For example, for some time our staff have been used to what

we call a 'warm transfer', where they will stay on the line to announce a call (when transferring the call on to someone else). This is often enjoyed by the customer, but not a lot of value to the customer to be honest other than (being considered as) good customer service, but it costs a lot. This will be replaced by a 'cold transfer' (which requires no waiting on to announce the caller).

Another manager's view combined **training** and **distribution** as an efficiency endeavour and, as a consequence, a cultural medium which defined behaviours to drive efficiency performance management and its measurement.

> Training would be (one) key thing, that is training both our customer and our staff on how they can interact with our processes to make them more efficient and get the right outcome.

"Training the customer", in terms of gaining efficiencies through a **distribution** channel shift made available by **tools/technologies**, was evidence of a further cultural artifact and cultural text, with another manager confirming that "we have a self-service strategy around one segment of our market that we are very strongly trying to push out (into an alternative mode of service and distribution)". This efficiency based cultural obligation as described by the manager (as a result of philosophy and beliefs) was as follows.

> Yes, (there is a view) to push customers to other means or cheaper means of communicating with the company, be that by internet, by fax or by email. But along with that comes the education of the customer as well. So, yes, we may move customers into one stream or another stream, but at the end of the day the customer at some point of time...still wants to make contact with the company. Perhaps they are having some difficulty in finalising or understanding the internet transaction (which channel they are now forced down). So I guess we are seeing a change in the type of call the customer is making and as such, in some instances, you may see an increase in calls in a different customer stream.

From another perspective, **routing, atomisation and specialisation, and standard times** became included as further relevant mediums.

> Americans (as part of our customer base), believe it or not, still like to telephone in. It saves them time. They don't want to have to spend the time writing an email and waiting for a reply. They can get their information within a couple of minutes by making a call to, generally, a toll free number.

The crucial link in this observation was twofold. Firstly, the customer has recognised telephone contact ultimately "saves time" and therefore placed a personal value on "time efficiency" and "telephone contact" from the myriad of customer-oriented contact offerings now available in each of the call centres. Secondly, and more importantly, in reality, in operationalising a belief and philosophy which values efficiency performance management, this outcome is a customer "luxury" which was open to manipulation. The manager at one call centre intimated that, in the event that they were to strategise around channeling customer contact to alternative "efficiency preferred channels", it could potentially manipulate call wait times in order to produce a more desirable outcome. In other words, by increasing customer wait times for telephone contact this would actively encourage customer contact via a medium other than incoming telephone calls.

Wages and **Performance Review** were also interpreted in terms of their ability to act as cultural artifacts and therefore influence cultural texts. In light of the managers' beliefs, the interpretation was that workplace efficiency is a cultural obligation. It was therefore logical that the managers would consider rigorous performance measurement as part of that belief structure, as indicated by the following.

> I would probably argue that CSR is the most measured position, role, or industry type job you could have. We can measure how long they take on calls per half hour period, how long they have been on breaks, when they come back...(and so it goes on).

This reflection was equally shared by others managers irrespective of the size of the call centre, with one manager observing that

> (CSRs) have performance agreements, which are very much aligned to the (business) strategy, in what they need to achieve and how they need to achieve it. They are measured against that at least on a monthly basis, they have formal reviews against their performance, and then half-yearly and yearly they have a formal review delivered with a score which is linked to their remuneration.

When asked at what point an employee negotiates their performance "agreement" and what flexibility there is the "negotiation" the response was

> It is probably negotiated after they join but in reality the sustainability of their employment is very much based on that, and their remuneration is based on that, so it becomes embedded in their (employment) contract in my view.

The terms "negotiation" and "agreement" therefore appeared to be used loosely as in reality the CSR had little involvement, other than acceptance. This was also significant in terms of the community's **relationship structure** outlined earlier. Additionally, the valorisation of numeric performance indicators was interpreted as "performance currency" and represented a cultural text also in assigning cultural value and meaning.

5.3.6 Language, Semiotics and Cultural Literacy

A further cultural marker in the cultural and cyclical narrative is language and the mediums through which cultural communication and understandings take on meaning. Call centres have a language which is unique and work specific, and predominantly semiotic in nature, that is the combination of specific words and numerics are meaningful within a call centre efficiency-based cultural context. Some examples extracted from the managers' stories are as follows.

> Traditional productivity measures like occupancy, availability to take calls, and those type of measures, we again set in context of what we understand are the key objectives for our call centre.

> The AHT calculation is driven by historicals, actuals and understanding the profile of calls and the mix of calls. What you overlay on that in terms of your objectives for efficiency improvement or anything else is probably a separate calculation.

> There is generally a Service Level set within 20 seconds or 30 seconds, so I guess the calculation then become about what Service Level objective you want to set for your business and within your business. Then do you have the resourcing to meet it.

The above examples of culturally significant workplace artifacts are however abstract until operationalised. The workplace contextuality of call centres provided the contextualised framework within which the decoding

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process took place and meaning making occurred. For example, an organisational chart which defined the relationship structure of the workplace is an abstract artifact until its operationalisation in practice redefined it as a cultural text. This text assigns cultural significance and meaning to the relationship structure which includes the nuances of authority, power and control which become meaningful in the reality of practice in the workplace. Fresh cultural understandings, based on the decoding of contextualised workplace cultural texts, revalidated and/or realigned existing cultural knowledge constructs.

Therefore literacy within the community workplace is interpreted as requiring a high degree of cultural and semiotic literacy through the contextualised meaning of the words; that is being able to decode a range of semiotic signs, signals and other cultural artifacts which convey culturally relevant meaning. Collectively, these attributes are referred to cultural literacy.

5.3.7 Culturally Desirable Behaviours

Culturally desirable behaviours also became inductively evident when reviewing workplace artifacts from a culturally oriented perspective. One example related to the implementation of an **incentives plan** in one call centre.

> We have a system here which is "ideas based". It might be a process change, or it could be anything. And a lot of things are implemented because there are savings involved, either time or cost wise and they are rewarded for coming up with those. And yes, we have achieved some really good efficiencies through the ideas that they have come up with.

Demonstrating the behaviours which are valued therefore received recognition, acknowledgement and also implied endorsement for promotion and career advancement, with one manager observing that "for promotion here (in this call centre) you need...to have drive and a willingness to go for targets".

More specifically, one call centre had prescribed behaviours as part of their performance measurement and management strategy.

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> The reason we came up with an equal division between the three (qualitative, quantitative and behavioural) is that we felt they were equally important and we wanted to express that to staff. The message is that we don't want you to be efficient at the expense of quality, but, on the other hand, we don't want you to over service the customer either where we are not going to add any value...Behaviours are linked in because, (in a measured environment where you can manipulate data), you can get great results. So if you cheat to get good results on the quality and quantity side, then you will get marked down on the behaviours.

However, some of the managers' descriptions around this strategy also highlighted the tension between the two logics, and the need for the logic of customer-orientation to be contained in term of its delivery.

> From our quality program, while the individuals actually get a score, we are scoring the process rather than the individual. For example, the individual might have delivered a very nice service to the customer but we evaluate the call in terms of why did the customer call.

In other words, the key was evaluating a CSR's ability to deliver "efficient" tailored (Taylorised) customer service rather than the individual's general capability to deliver a high level of customer service. This differentiation became one of the call centre's drivers in efficiency related change, as revealed by one manager.

> (In relation to) call monitoring, well, that part of our quality program is going through a whole revamp at present because it has just been measuring the 'niceness' of the call whereas we are now looking at process.

When questioned about 'niceness' and 'process', it was explained as

> (To date our focus has been) that (CSRs) said the customer's name the right number of times, and used the set greeting, so the softer skills. And we are not saying these are not important. They are absolutely important. But we are talking about removing them from our quality program and making that a behavioural measure because at the end of the day it is all about how they deal with the customer and the timing they use.

So the linking of behaviours to time constraints and performance measurements appeared to make a clear connection favouring a cost-efficient logic/quantitative measurement focus as culturally desirable behaviours within the community.

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> We do have processes around the performance management perspective.
> For example, around the behaviours, there was quite a document put
> together for the staff with scores on a 1 to 5 basis with 3 being 'meets the
> requirements', 5 being 'great', and 1 being 'atrocious'. We actually go
> through each of the team behaviours.and we have defined what each of
> the behaviours is that fall into each category.

In this call centre this holistic behaviourally related performance
(productivity, quality and behaviours) combined with **wages** and
incentives to define culturally desirable behaviours through a self-funded
quarterly bonus program.

> We set targets about the standard productivity and quality targets that
> are required. So the increase in productivity will have made our call
> centre more efficient and in turn that efficiency saving is used to pay for
> the bonus.

Each of these components has illustrated that call centre do have the
cultural structure which supports a claim to be considered a cultural
community. The nature of the cyclical narrative acts to embed the cultural
philosophy and beliefs through the relationship structure which support
the traditions, artifacts and texts as language, and semiotics to produce
culturally desirable behaviours. The cycle is recommenced through the
cultural reinforcement of the philosophy and beliefs, and so on.

In closing this section on the Contextuality Construct, and the three key
dimensions which provide its frames of reference, namely Historic-
Scientific, Social-Political and Ethno-Cultural, it is this holistic ethno-
cultural framework which facilitates culturally based teaching and
learning through multiple mediums. These pedagogical practices transition
the abstract rhetoric of practice into the contextualised reality of practice
directing it into mean-making and behaviours which are culturally valued
and rewarded within the community. The teaching and learning of cultural
beliefs, traditions, behaviours and their management is the subject of the
next section, the Pedagogy Construct. Through the data and analysis of
the data, an interpretation is proposed which focuses on teaching and
learning as encoding and decoding cultural texts in relation to the

prioritisation of the two logics, cost-efficiency and customer-orientation represented as quantitative and qualitative measurement respectively in efficiency performance management.

PART B – PEDAGOGY CONSTRUCT

5.4 Pedagogy Construct

The Pedagogy Construct is framed by two premises or assumptions; firstly that workplace contextuality exerts direct influence on shaping workplace pedagogical practices, and secondly that contextuality in this research is holistically represented as an ethno-cultural work-specific community, which is inclusive of historic-scientific and social-political dimensions. For these reasons, the pedagogical practices, incorporating both teaching and learning within the community, is designated as **ethno-pedagogy**. This moniker is considered to reflect the research claim of the ethnographical and cultural nature of teaching and learning practices in call centres.

Acknowledging again Rhodes and Garrick's (2000b) consumption of texts and Grossberg's (1997) mobility of texts and a de- and re-reterritorialisation of culture, these led to broader interpretations which were integral in the development of the research arguments presented here. From the perspective of workplace learning this is significant for two reasons. Firstly it legitimises the notion of workplace learning as having a cultural basis, and secondly, as a consequence, it advocates different perspectives or "readings" of workplace practices which influence learning.

This suggestion does not exclude the relevance of existing learning theories and practices but rather it is seen as encouraging fresh thinking and viewpoints. Some of the relevant learning theories and practices drawn on here are constructivist, formal, informal, experiential, situational, social

and literacy in positioning the research within the holistic framing of workplace contextuality as influential in call centre workplace learning.

In the relationship of contextuality, learning and "objects", Dewey observed "in actual experience, there is never any such isolated object or event, an object or event is always a specific part, phase, or aspect, of an environment experienced world" (cited by Guile & Griffiths 2001, p.118). This observation aptly provides an avenue of exploration which foregrounds the value of objects, events, procedures, processes and aspects of the environment in workplace learning.

Therefore the research, grounded in ethno-cultural contextuality, examined **cultural artifacts** that produce **cultural texts**. These **cultural learning agencies** are in forms which are explicit and implicit, written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken. As a consequence "literacy" to operate effectively in the workplace is considered outside the conventional parameters of reading and writing. The interpretation consequently focused on cultural literacy as a process of interaction, socialisation and meaning making in and with the community's cultural artifacts and texts, both animate and inanimate.

In pursuing this avenue of thought, the community's "artifacts" are argued as semiotically significant and culturally meaningful when operationalised in practice. They produce, both individually and collectively, cultural texts which shape teaching and learning through the encoding and decoding of language, social structures, signs, signals, symbols and their cultural meaning. It is this process of encoding and decoding which allows knowledge constructions to be aligned and realigned based on what is visible and invisible, structured and unstructured, explicit and implicit, socially and unsocially based, ultimately facilitating the interpreting and re-interpreting of their significance and cultural meaning.

In differentiating between the terms of teaching and learning within pedagogical practices, the scope of "encoding" is loosely framed as

"teaching" which came to represent the "rhetoric of practice", that is, explicit knowledge generation, while "decoding" represents "learning" as the "reality of practice", that is, implicit or tacit knowledge acquisition. The use of "rhetoric of practice" here specifically relates to the encoding of a cultural text which favours one logic while diminishing the significance of the other, which "encoding", ultimately, is not reflective of the "reality of practice" as understood by CSRs. In other words, decoding plays a more significant role in workplace learning in terms of understandings relative to performance expectations.

Cultural texts, as pedagogical conduits in call centre teaching and learning, supports a general learning theory and epistemological assumption that learning additionally occurs in unstructured or informal ways. Through the development of this assumption, cultural texts were then inductively analysed in terms of structured and unstructured and became acknowledged as **cultural text influencers** in workplace learning. The former "structured" was reviewed from the perspective of structure and management control of the text, while the latter "unstructured" was reviewed from the perspective workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy. These three cultural text influencers were reviewed at the five key definable cultural junctures with interpretations made on their influence to shape cultural texts in the privileging of the logics.

This Pedagogy Construct explicitly examines and interprets **who** (the authors, the speakers and the audience of the logics and performance related texts), **when** (the key primary measurable cultural junctures for encoding and decoding texts), **how** (the form which the cultural texts take in terms of cultural artifacts, such as curricula [written], storytelling [oral/aural], language and displays [semiotics), **what** (the text influencers which are apparent in the encoding and decoding of logics), **where** (the positioning and the delivery of the texts in the workplace teaching and learning environment), and **why** (the role which contextuality plays).

5.5 Efficiency Gains, Logics and Tensions

The managers' all had a very clear focus on their accountability to deliver efficiency gains. The manner in which these could be delivered highlighted a tension in the logics to varying degrees. Their descriptions on the importance of gaining efficiencies as a business strategy in call centres, and how this could be achieved, covered a wide range of subject areas. Interpretations relative to efficiencies gains and the tension of the logics which these gains create therefore draw comprehensively across Taylorist elements. In some cases the managers' stories reflect an attempt to balance the logics, whereas in others, the reality of a prioritisation is evident, and made without much apparent deliberation.

The tension in the logics became evident when the managers were asked to describe the key business objectives of their call centres qualitatively and quantitatively. Qualitatively, the seven managers uniformly acknowledged that the key objective of their call centre was that of customer service which situated the call centre's objectives predominantly in the customer-oriented logic. One example of this customer-oriented business focus found expression in:

> The key business objective here at the moment would be to provide customer service over the telephone, covering any inquiries or actions that (customers) may require in conjunction with our products. So our objective is to support all of our customers, both from the public and agents, of our products and their enquiries.

With such qualifying comments as "here at the moment" it implied some flexibility in the prioritisation of the focus. For another manager the focus was succinctly stated as "selling the company product and providing customer service". Drawing on the description of another manager, the objectives adopted a holistic approach which acknowledged both logics.

> Our key objective is to generate revenue for the company through various mediums, such as our call centre and via our website, in a timely fashion and provide customer service of a standard which will attract customers to want to come back.

One of the remaining manager's descriptions expanded on this view to distinguish efficiency into various classifications, such as cost and time.

> The primary objective of this call centre is to provide customer service for our customer base, and to do it in the most cost-efficient and time-efficient way that we can.

So at this point, the call centres' key business objectives were described by the managers in qualitative terms as favouring the logic of customer-orientation, with other cost-efficient considerations appearing secondary, or at best equal prioritisation. This came to represent the rhetoric of practice. The managers were then asked to ascribe a quantitative percentage weighting to each logic which came to represent the reality of practice. Although the quantitative weightings varied between managers generally (70/30, 60/40, 50/50), even managers from within the same call centre, the apportioning of a weighting to each logic clearly favoured cost-efficient/quantitative measurement. A manager at one call centre expressed this view as,

> I would have to say that (the percentage weighting for a quantitative/qualitative focus on performance) would be 70/30.

Another manager attempted to remain seemingly "neutral" in the apportioning of the weighting, or least "flexible".

> Ideally I would like to think that the weighting is 50/50, but it does require some flexibility. In reality we waver between fulfilling the operational need of the time and business driver of the time.

Other expressions of weighting included 60/40 or just verbal confirmation, such as:

> The key objective is to maximise the value to the customer and to maximize the efficiency at the same time...but I think there is a weighting towards efficiency rather than quality.

During discussions with the managers however it should be noted that the customer and the measurement of "quality" of customer service was described as an abstract, dehumanised component in determining the best ways to gain efficiencies. In this way the managers appeared to have the

ability to distance themselves from a further obligation to consider customer orientation as a logic which resided outside of its measurability as a call centre (Taylorist) element or in terms of potential efficiency gain.

Therefore there was a clear tension in the logics. This provided the framework for the next stage of data analysis and interpretation which examined the pedagogical processes behind "the translation" of the logics and their weighting into workplace teaching and learning.

PART C – PRIMARY CULTURAL TEXTS

5.6 Cultural Junctures, Artifacts, Primary Texts and Text Influencers

The first of two diagrams following represent the findings as "unweighted logics", with the second designed to depict "weighted logics". The first, "unweighted logics", serves to explain the format of the diagram.

5.6.1 Cultural Junctures/Cultural Texts (Unweighted Logics)

Diagram 5.3 – Cultural Junctures/Cultural Texts (Unweighted Logics)

Cultural Junctures/Cultural Texts (Unweighted Logics)
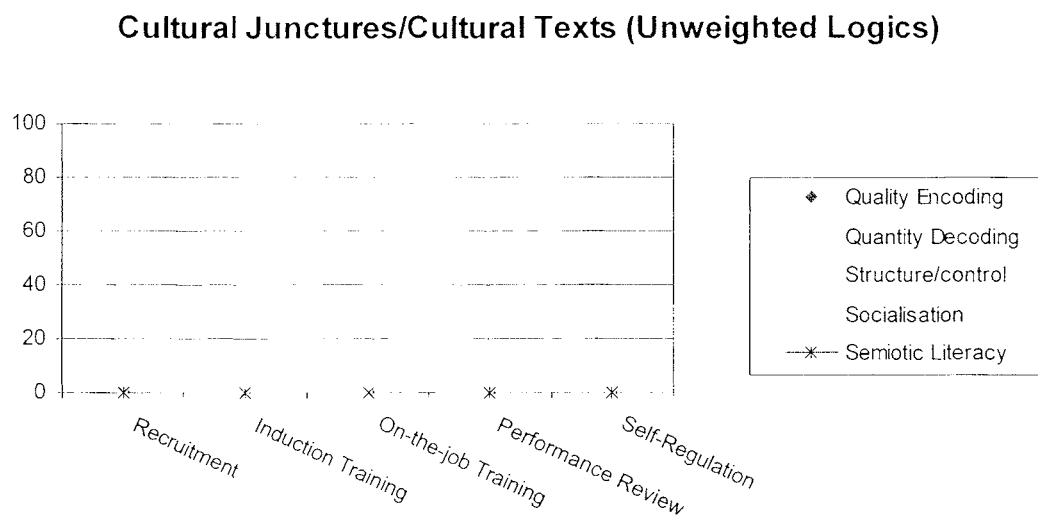
Cultural Junctures

The horizontal axis represents the five key cultural teaching and learning junctures determined as measurable points, that is, key points at which the managers could assign "weightings" to the logics of cost-efficiency (as quantitative performance measurement) and customer-orientation (as qualitative performance measurement). This would confirm not only a tension in the logics but only it would track the transition of the understandings at the various junctures. These junctures represent progressive employment stages in the meaning making world of a CSR, and therefore definable junctures at which changes in meaning making and knowledge reconstructions could be gauged. The five cultural junctures are:

- **Recruitment**, the first juncture, involves the process and criteria used in the selection of customer service representatives (CSRs).

- **Induction Training,** the second juncture, encompasses the call centre's "formal" structured and management controlled quasi-competency based training program that provides the newly employed CSR with a set of skills which allocates them initially to a single skill set silo. At a later stage, the CSR will receive further structured and management controlled competency based training to include additional skill set silos, commonly referred to as multi-skilling. This practice allows the call centre the flexibility to utilise or atomise a CSR skill set for an efficiency advantage on a call by call basis through technology manipulation, for example, the routing of calls. This training occurs within the call premises but in a training room which is generally isolated from the operational call centre community.

- **On-the-job Training**, the third juncture, refers to the mentoring process to assist in the operationalisation of the theoretical skills gained during induction training. This includes a variety of one-on-one mentoring (for example though a "buddy" situated beside the CSR or through an internal helpline) or small group sessions "on the floor" to take

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advantage of a "spare five minutes" in a lower than forecasted incoming call period.

- **Performance Review**, the fourth juncture, includes the processes whereby a CSR's performance is formally reviewed both qualitatively through remote call monitoring, and quantitatively through statistical information.

- **Self-regulation**, the fifth juncture, refers to the accumulation of a progressive enculturation or acculturation process during which a CSR has relayered individual understandings or knowledge acquisition of the cultural nature of the environment in relation to the prioritisation of quantitative/qualitative performance management. The CSR at this point is considered independently operational and experienced in a number of skill set silos with an ability to self-regulate their performance in a manner which is aligned to the contextual, community-specific cultural texts.

"Weighting" of the Logics and Cultural Texts

The vertical axis represents the weightings which the managers assigned to each of the logics at each of the cultural learning junctures. These are represented in the above diagram on the vertical where 0 represents low percentage or influence and 100 represents high percentage or influence. Based on the earlier findings in the tension of the logics, where it became apparent that the managers described their key business objectives qualitatively as favouring customer-oriented logic, but when they asked to assign a quantitative percentage weighting to each of the logics, cost-efficient logic was prioritised. As a consequence, and in conjunction with "weighted logics" findings following, these became reflected as **cultural texts** which reflected the **rhetoric of practice** and **the reality of practice**, and traced the transition in a CSRs' understandings of the prioritisation of performance expectations as a community member over the five junctures. The rhetoric of customer-oriented logic was more prominent at the time of recruitment and training, whereas at the other

end of the employment stage, self-regulation in the workplace, a CSR's understanding reflected the reality of cost-efficient logic as prioritised.

Due to the change of workplace settings over these junctures and the pattern of weightings at the junctures, "teaching" came to represent the understandings **encoded by management** as the rhetoric of customer-oriented logic. "Learning" on the other hand focused on understandings which became **decoded by the CSRs** as the reality of cost-efficient logic. Working labels of "encoding" and "decoding" encompass in broad terms in this research structured teaching/implicit knowledge acquisition as encoding a cultural text of customer-orientation and unstructured learning/tacit knowledge acquisition as decoding a cultural text of cost-efficiency.

Therefore, for "tracking" purposes, these are represented on the diagram as red Quality Encoding and yellow Quantity graph lines. Their abbreviations from "cultural texts which encode management's rhetoric - based customer-oriented logic as a qualitative performance measurement" and "cultural texts which decode CSRs' practice- based cost-efficient logic as quantitative performance management", respectively, were primarily influenced by space and readability constraints.

Cultural Text Influencers

With a clear indication that the encoded and decoded texts reflected a tension between customer-orientation and cost-efficiency, from a CSR's perspective it became evident that these understandings has been reconstructed and meaning reassigned at the various junctures. The research focus then turned to inductively examining cultural text influencers in relation to encoding cultural texts favouring customer-orientated logic and decoding cultural texts which prioritsed cost-efficient logic.

The three key **cultural text influencers** which impacted on qualitative performance encoding (customer-oriented logic) and quantitative performance decoding (cost-efficient logic) were interpreted as:

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- **Structure and management control of texts** which refers to the degree of management control over the text through explicit instruction regarding content.

- **Workplace socialisation** which discusses a CSR's freedom to interact in and with the call centre environment and community in terms of artifacts and people, where passive acquisition (such as observation, listening) and active acquisition (such as engaging in discursive exchanges) lead to a relayering of existing cultural knowledge either consciously or unconsciously.

- **Semiotic literacy** which encompasses artifacts, such as language and the location of displays which communicate cultural signals. For example:

- There is a unique semiotic language used by community members resulting in meaningful exchanges.

- The positioning of people, equipment and displays are also proposed as semiotic signs with literacy in reading the underlying hidden text leading to the reinforcement of cultural understandings, such as.

  - Access to supervisors, team leaders or specialised product experts is only available through an internal helpline and any form of mobility around the call centre is discouraged.

  - Electronic data boards, individual computer tickers or screen banners may form part of the ritual to generate individual and/.or general statistical information such as calls waiting and how the day's progressive performance measurements compare to Key Performance Indicator (KPI) targets.

5.6.2 Cultural Junctures/Cultural Texts (Weighted Logics)

Diagram 5.4 – Cultural Junctures/CulturalTexts (Weighted Logics)

Cultural Junctures/Cultural Texts (Weighted Logics)
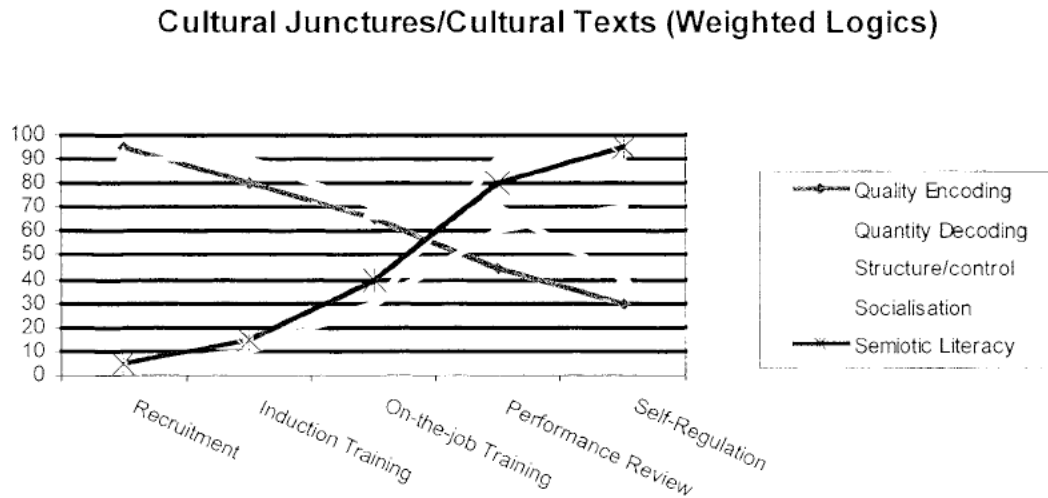
The managers' descriptions therefore provided the initial validation of the tension between the logics as quantitative and qualitative performance measurements. From this grounding the CSRs' progressive workplace learning and acculturation into the cultural community's "worldview" could be interpreted through the weightings which managers assigned to each of the junctures. The key artifacts, texts and influencers which shaped the weightings and the CSRs' understandings and reconstructions of prioritised performance expectations are represented in the following.

5.6.2.1 Recruitment

At the first juncture, Recruitment and Selection, two primary artifacts as cultural texts were analysed. The first was the managers' verbal description of the CSR selection criteria which unanimously focused on qualitative performance highlighting quality customer service delivery, good listening and problem solving skills. While a motivational and behavioural fit and computer literacy were included by some, there was no verbalisation of performance efficiency as a criterion.

As further endorsement of these findings an independent survey was conducted by the researcher whereby the more prominent advertisements in *The Sydney Morning Herald, My Career Section* and call centre customer service representative positions were reviewed for a period of time (June-October 2003). This came to represent the second cultural artifact. Of the fifteen customer service representative positions reviewed, the selection criteria in the advertisements was found to be similar to the qualitative data of the researched call centres, namely that the criteria targeted in recruitment and selection focused predominantly on customer service orientation, good communication and problem solving skills and computer literacy. Only one advertisement stated a selection criterion of "meet daily service targets" as a requirement of the position, while another stated a call target. However four others, of those reviewed, stated or implied that those applicants with previous call centre experience would be highly regarded. This is interpreted as signifying that those call centre experienced applicants were already acculturated and bona fide community members.

The managers however did not equally view previous call centre experience equally as an advantage. In fact, some managers considered that it may be more problematic than beneficial in fostering the community's desirable behaviours. There was a distinction however between previous experience in relation to the field of business (such as health services, financial services, etc as generic examples only) or to the occupation of call centre CSR. In the case of the former, one manager observed that that, due to a CSR's requirement to learn a broad and complex product range, "previous industry (rather than call centre) experience would be a goer for us". In the case of the latter, several of the managers considered that its value in the recruitment process could be viewed as either beneficial or detrimental. Whereas one call centre's focus was on "customer service skills but it does not have to be call centre (related)", another considered that "(the usefulness of) previous call centre

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experience and skills, with the burn out rate of people in call centres, would depend on the individual". This manager further acknowledged that "we try to avoid 'life time' call centre people as we do recognise that there is a burn out rate about being able to work in a call centre". This prompted the question to establish the call centre's attrition rate with a response of "it is probably sitting at about 24-25 percent at the moment".

One manager positioned call centre experience in terms of desirable behaviours.

> (We) have moved more towards the behaviours and you really need to be careful about taking people who are just doing the call centre merry-go-round where they are just jumping from call centre to call centre in the same role and why, because they get up to speed very quickly and then get bored; or people who potentially have not worked in a call centre before and they are not sure if they really understand the whole sitting at your desk for eight hours a day sometimes taking abuse for a good part of that. So you are really looking (for CSRs with) the ability to take ownership, contribute, take ownership of their own development as well as their role rather than necessarily skills.

In terms of attempting to recruit CSRs prone to deliver desirable behaviours many companies, including call centres, have established a position "profile" with various psychological, behavioural and aptitude testing as part of the process. The premise of industrial psychology was that "using aptitude tests, it was possible to determine in advance the suitability of workers for various positions by classifying them according to degrees of 'intelligence', 'manual dexterity', 'accident proneness', and general confirmability to a 'profile' desired by management" (Braverman, 1974, p.144). This was highlighted by Braverman (1974), drawing on Mayo, as a vain attempt "to calibrate individuals and anticipate their behavior in the complex and antagonistic dynamics of social life" (p.144). Each of the call centres also acknowledged that they utilised assessment tests and/or assessment centres as part of their recruitment process to determine and rank the applicant's suitability in relation to the profile of customer service representative. The managers' involvement at this point varied with one manager noting

> We outsource our recruitment, and they go through an assessment centre. We can look at their (results) and we do a final interview (and review).

While another observed

> I will attend the assessment centre and give them a spiel about the company and the benefits, but the reality check is that you are sitting at your desk for 7 plus hours, you are told when you can take your breaks, ...but then on the other hand it is very rewarding...and there are opportunities for those people who are prepared to take ownership of their development (with promotion favouring those individuals) who are prepared to go for their stats.

While all three centres had a CSR "profile", the managers of two call centres spoke more openly about the less tangible aspects of the profile specifically including the "behavioural" and "motivational fit" of the applicant to the role and the call centre environment as important and carrying weight in the selection process. To some unquantifiable degree the recruitment and selection process was understood by the managers to include an evaluation of the behavioural and motivational suitability of an applicant. One manager when asked how successful the profiling of employees was in recruiting the "right person" to develop into a "first class man" (in the Taylorist sense) claimed it to be a good indicator "as far as I know".

> You do find the type of people you need in a call centre, that are going to know the 14 different systems that you use and the 16 product changes that happen every day. They are usually a little bit younger, sometimes have a bit of an attitude and see it as a bit of a stepping stone. I do believe that the more you work on their behaviours, working on their interaction and getting them to understand business decisions (even if they do not necessarily agree with them), talking to them, giving them feedback both positive and areas for development, and trying to turn them into someone who is accountable for their contribution and who understands what they are here for rather than just someone who pumps our the calls, scripts everything the way you want it, scripted so that they get 4 out of 5 for quality.

However what also became evident from the research and a review of the advertisements, and will be elaborated on in the review following later on Incentives, was an appeal to work motivators. The use of phrases such as

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"being a team player", becoming "community members" and "handling blue-chip clients" were frequently presented in an intimate first-person exchange which focuses on "your" success as equating to the company's success which in turn is attributed to its employees and their motivation. Also playing a role in work motivators were work environments which are quoted as state of the art, "busy, buzzy, happening", dynamic, fun loving, where career development is actively encouraged for those who are enthusiastic, energetic and passionate. One manager specifically mentioned focusing their recruitment and selection drive of Generation Yers as they represent a significant employable target market. This in turn focused on their work motivators which, as one example, may be their career development.

> I know that there is a lot of thought put into it here from a recruitment or HR perspective about the whole Generation Y thing,...looking at what are the things that drive people in a role, and how can we promote those as opposed to things that may have been something (relevant) three or four years ago. It also depends on what other call centres are around you. Here we have a big and small (call centre) around us so we need to look at what they are offering and what is different about working here. People really are into career development, and they really want to know that there is something in it for them and that they are going places. I don't necessarily think that the tenure has changed...and I think that 12-18 months is pretty average. If you want someone for longer then you have to manage the whole expectation of development and end up with possibly 15 consultants (vying) for one team leader position.

Correspondingly, in the advertisements reviewed, some of the listed inducements in the advertisements were "benefits galore", including product discounts, commission, extensive training, traineeship, travel benefits and educational subsidies and exciting career path.

These findings are also supported by Deery & Kinnie (2002) who claim that the CSRs represent the 'face' or 'personality' of the company and that some organisations attempt "to instil values of good customer service...by way of cultural or normative control" (p.5). The authors, drawing on Leidner (1993), describe this as "transforming workers' characters and personalities" by developing "an internalised commitment to quality

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service... through induction, training and performance appraisals" (p.5). Callaghan and Thompson (2002), cited by Deery & Kinnie (2002), extend the view to include recruitment techniques focusing on personality traits and service-oriented attitudes, while Korczynski et al (2000) in Deery & Kinnie (2002) suggest that normative control through self-control and self-identification with company values in the induction training phase may be considered as acceptance of efficiency performance management techniques in the name of a shared objective, such as customer service.

On initial entry into the community, that is during the formative stages of meaning making and knowledge constructions, it is claimed, consequently, that there is high encoding of the qualitative cultural text as well as high management structure and control over the text. As this stage there is also very low, if any, social interaction within the workplace environment or community and virtually no workplace semiotic influence due to the fact that most of the recruitment and selection process is conducted within a controlled environment and generally away from or with a limited view of the call centre "floor" environment. Therefore, the CSR's meaning making and knowledge construction at this point is understandably more attuned to the managers' qualitatively based rhetorical view, while simultaneously remaining at the considerable distance from the managers' cultural understandings in regard to the prioritisation of quantitative performance, or cost-efficient logic.

5.6.2.2 Induction Training

At the second juncture, Induction Training, there were two primary artifacts which emerged as cultural texts, competency based curricula and its quantification. The first, competency based curricula, which is call centre specific, is suggested also as bearing the hallmarks of Taylorist atomisation, which includes a selective use of instruction cards with a step by step sequencing. Competencies are modularised and their acquisition is remote from the workplace, in terms of their contextualisation even if not geographically. Each of the call centres conducted their induction training

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programs in a "formal" training room environment on the call centre premises yet remote from the "floor" either at a different side of the building or different floor, as specific examples.

The program of each of the call centres was extensive, generally 12 weeks in total, and it was interspersed with on-the-job training in one-on-one or small group environment, which is included in the training duration total (significantly in relation to wages). The philosophy was a staged or step-learning one, based on learn-practice-learn-practice. In each of the call centres, there was a division of hard and soft skills based on technical, procedural and customer service training, with the first two uniformly receiving a greater focus.

The training program in one call centre was significantly apportioned towards systems training as there were nearly 20 different systems which were relevant to a CSR's role. Whereas the systems training required many weeks to complete, by comparison, there was just one "quality day" allocated focusing on "how to communicate with a customer, how to provide a service by first point resolution rather than putting a customer through a situation which requires them to make several calls". The priority of focus on technical skills, processes and procedures, and locating information with the least required key strokes was common to all three call centres. Despite the reference to the value of customer strategy around "first call resolution" in which the CSR potentially had some autonomy and tools to resolve customer service failures, ultimately the "talk" focused on efficiency gains through various processes, with the same later manager quoted as saying efficiency gains were "a strategic imperative" as was establishing the call centre as "the lowest unit cost provider".

The training program as far as instruction is concerned was modularised competencies. At the initial stage one set of competencies was acquired to allow a newly employed CSR to then go "on the job" and operate in one skill set silo. So the competencies of each module are

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explicit, but decontextualised, and fail to fully acknowledge the dynamics of the workplace in terms of other texts, such as relationship structures, etc. However, the instructor-learner relationship is one sub-text which is claimed as being "stored" for later retrieval and meaning making.

In terms of forms of instruction, there was a range including instruction books, procedural manuals, system help menus and systems, word searches, and instruction-style cards. Whether it is system or procedural training, the instruction-style cards were geared to minimal key dot points, such as Step 1 – Go to X Screen, Step 2 – For Y System/Procedure, go to .... Once the "procedure" or "process" was accessed there would also be either a dot point instruction card/checklist or a sequencing of screens to ensure no step from the process was missed. One example was in the sale and distribution of a product, the CSR made the sale, confirmed the purchase agreement conditions, transacted payment and arranged for a mail out.

The primary focus at this point is on qualitative performance, in terms of "getting it right now", as one manager described it. Another manager, who was more expansive in response, additionally confirmed this quality-based approach.

> I guess that it is not so much on quantity because that is a quality that you instill as that trainee moves out into the real workforce, or into your real operation. The focus of our trainers is one of delivering information about the systems and product. So it is really a focus on quality and getting that information learnt and being a new employee's second nature if you like. And then the focus comes along a little bit later on in terms of building up the quantity of work load performed, and that comes through the quality you are able to deliver and being more efficient, more knowledgeable and how to handle the different customer enquiry types. So, one leads to the other.

However, at this juncture, there is also a sub-text signifying a conscious or unconscious awareness of efficiency in terms of quantitative performance measurement. Teaching and learning within set time constraints are established, and they are generally suited to a middle of the road knowledge acquisition learner. In other words, the trainer would

not proceed at the rate of the fastest, nor the slowest, but rather the pace of a learner somewhere in between. This does not automatically exclude the slower learner from job suitability as they may have to opportunity to "practice" in their own time, or receive some one on one instructor mentoring so that they are able to "catch up" in order to demonstrate that "they can cut it in the real world (of call centres)", as one manager suggested.

> In the training stage the quality/quantity ratio would rate at 80/20, including a person's ability to retain the information that is being trained to them. Quantity wise, well it is probably not quantity as much, but you certainly identify very early on in the training who is going to cut the mustard in terms of their whole approach and ability to learn and utilise the systems. At that point in time you make an assessment then about whether a person is going to cut in out there in the real world. So, there is focus on quantity but it is more quality related.

The second artifact and its text was the assessment of competencies presented as quantitative percentage outcomes, which is acknowledged as differing from a general view of competency assessment. In other words, the call centres assigned quantifiable "degrees of competence" as it were. There were progressive assessments at various stages during the training, generally at the completion of a group of modules or individual competencies. Their assessment and presentation varied between call centres with two call centres assigning a percentage grade. The minimum percentage required to proceed to the next stage varied, however one manager confirmed that "based on those we will then make our judgements at those early points as to whether someone can have the opportunity to try again (if the required percentage is not reached) and progress or say that we really don't think that this is the job for you". At the other call centre assessment was not given to the learners as percentage scores but rather as "confirmations of learning" which aligned to achieving modularised competencies or skills acquisition through assessment. However, in this case, a percentage rating was assigned and

although it was not available to the learners, it was available to the supervisors and other managerial staff in the call centre.

Therefore at this point there is still a high management structure and control of the qualitative cultural text, and although there is still high encoding it is less than at the Recruitment stage. Similarly although there is marginally more social interaction with the workplace environment or community than at Recruitment, this occurs as isolated incidents with management (trainer) presence. For example, when there is a break in training, a common break out room or tearoom may be used by new inductees and established CSRs. Therefore there is some reserved social interaction at this stage relegated mainly to listening to stories, anecdotes or comments of experienced CSRs. There is also a shift in the degree of semiotic influence in terms of CSR introduction to the semiotic language used by the trainer, such as references to strict adherence to rostered start/ break times, timed calls etc,. This aspect of "informal" cultural learning however sits outside the "formal" qualifications as decontextualised "competencies". So, at this point, there was a relayering of the initial cultural understanding.

Sub-textually there are also other aspects to be considered. Person (ed. 1929) pre-empted an ongoing and contemporary business debate which juxtaposes a cost benefit analysis of training as a return on investment on the one hand with non- or low productivity on the other. He observed that "in many businesses and industrial companies an intermediate stage for the employee has grown up ...between employment and beginning production... the training period" (p.239). Person (ed. 1929) continues by noting that a rigorous selection testing phase "will throw light upon probable progress during the learning period", thereby providing "an excellent criterion of future production" (p.239) if progress reports are carefully maintained. "Nevertheless", Person (ed. 1929) concludes, "training is an expensive period of non-production" which therefore dictates that it should be kept to a minimum (p.239). In addition, and of

particular relevance, Thompson (1917a) notes that "Scientific Management adds a quantitative value to education" (p.165).

The tension of logics was apparent from the managers' comments which on one hand favoured the longer term investment in training, whereas on the other another manager from the same call centre revealed plans to reduce training duration "to a minimum". While this does not automatically assume that reduced training equates to a lack of investment in training or diminishment of quality learning outcomes, it could be argued as seemingly dichotomous on face value. One manager, in describing training advised,

> We spend so much money and time on training. We have such ongoing training there is a great ingrained environment towards training, and, I think, in recent years there is less stinginess about training. I think that we openly work proactively towards our training and we have lost the bean counter attitude in terms of training. We are working towards the belief that training saves money in the long run because it is an investment.

In contrast another manager from the same call centre explained that by placing traditional face to face training modules online it would reduce a 15 day induction training program down to 5 days. This was viewed as a significant efficiency saving strategy, implying agreement with Taylor, that training is a non-productive period which needs to be kept to a minimum. Such a contrast in views from within the same call centre could only lead to an assumption that rhetoric of quality and customer-orientation prevailed in the narrative at that point, highlighting a tension, while the other managers focused on efficiency based practicalities in their interpretations of the company's training or learning and development. Each of the call centres had or was in the process of placing some training modules on their local intranet sites. According to the call centres, this method was used with varying intentions. On one hand it was used to complement the face to face training module, and on the other hand it was seen as a longer term solution to self-paced, non-instructionally led computer-based training.

5.6.2.3 On-the-Job Training

On-the-job training was a period of introduction to the workplace, or the "floor" as it was generally known. It was a period of confirmation of the transfer of acquired "formal" competencies through their operationalisation. On-the job training referred to one-on-one "buddy" or "mentor" training with an experienced CSR, or in a small group being mentored by one or two experienced CSR. This may also occur in stages as in the one-on-one situation the experienced is able to listen to the entire conversation and take over control of the keyboard and/or the verbal interaction at any time if required. The buddy can also be on "mute" which will allow them to give instructions to the CSR on where to go, what to do, etc without being heard by the customer. At the end of each call there is generally a short debriefing time, as the experienced CSR will be time-conscious almost by default, prior to going 'available' for another call.

Following on from this, and still considered as on-the-job training, is a progressive group mentoring stage, where the degree of assistance is less and the mentors are no longer listening to the customer's side of the conversation. Therefore, at this point, the experienced CSRs as group mentors are generally relying on the new CSR's interpretation of the customer's requirements to guide them through the process and assistance as required.

> Although we are not exclusively training staff in understanding efficiency, we are training them to deliver something in the most efficient way…and the effectiveness of training is on how to use the system…and even in less formal or non-class room environments, it is still about their ability to use the system and handle that (efficiently).

The on-the-job trainers usually have a checklist of "competencies" and "behaviours" which they complete/report on in relation to the performance of each new CSR. Once again, this was represented as a quantified rating, generally 1 to 5, with 1 being not meeting the requirements and 5 exceeding the requirements.

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Although there are numerous artifacts and texts to draw on at this stage, two primary ones have been selected for presentation at this third cultural juncture, On-the-Job Training. The first is the general initiation into the workplace where such activities as a quick turnaround of a workstation known as "hot desking" to avoid any significant delay in logging on to the systems used to measure "stats" mark the initiation into the workplace enculturation process. This is also accompanied by such sub-textual occurrences as the on-the-job trainer's time consciousness in debriefing after each call, attention to taking breaks at the specified time, etc. The second is the lack of freedom of movement within the workplace, where the CSR's attachment to computer and telephone has been likened to an umbilical cord. If assistance is required, enquiries are directed through an internal helpline. After an initial period of one-on-one or group reliance on experienced CSRs as on-the-job trainers/mentors, at some point they will encourage the new CSRs to contact the internal help line for assistance as this is a reflection of how it will be when they are "out on their own".

At this point, although management structure and control of texts in the form of "checklists" was found to be relevant, the on-the-job trainer was much more spontaneous in his/her dialogue often suggesting a better or quicker way of doing things, offering tips on who/what to watch out for, etc in an "informal" manner. All of this has a significant effect on the relayering of previously acquired cultural knowledge now that the degree of socialisation with other workplace artifacts and community "on the floor" has increased. The range of semiotic literacy is also increasing through individual observation, discursive exchanges, listening to story telling and the regurgitated use of call centre semiotic language which create a meaningful picture of behavioural and performance expectations. The workplace environment becomes another source for decoding of meaning, such as their introduction to workplace performance displays by individual and/or team and /or call centre against targets and KPIs, electronic

message boards or individualised computer tickers/telephone console which (showing their skill group, call waiting, incoming call by IVR inquiry type etc).

This adjustment in understandings and reconstructions of knowledge was signified by one manager who noted:

> (Qualitative performance) would be the prime focus during training, but we will be making it clear, particularly during practice sessions or practical exercises, about how things are measured. So we actually start measuring their productivity from day one when there's an opportunity. So, during on the job training and the crèche environment we start giving them feedback. But in actual (formal) training it is a focus on quality and that would be 70 percent. The way we work and how we doing things around here would cover the other 30 percent. But as soon as they get into the practical exercises we measure them as we would if they were on the floor, so that they will productivity feedback, quality feedback and behavioural feedback the minute they start taking their first practice call.

However, for internal purposes, the outcomes are recorded as both competency achieved and as a percentage. This was indicated by another manager who claimed:

> (Performance reports) are used on a daily basis to track the performance of the inductees throughout the course. So these trainee performance reports record a number of things. They record attendance, time keeping, confirmations of learning, whether that person is deemed competent in those areas and what the competencies are. So their team leader (when they go out onto the floor) can go in at any time (to the centralised technology based system) and see how that person is tracking (prior to arriving in their team).

5.6.2.4 Performance Review

Although Lodge observed in Thompson (1917b) that "speed has nothing to do with quality" (p.89) Thompson himself (1917b) notes that "*inspection does* have something to do with quality" (p.90, original emphasis). Neither adequately addresses however that, when combined with Standard Times and Standards, is about the interaction and balance of quality and speed (or quantity). This was not lost on Thompson (1917a) who notes that, by acknowledging Scientific Management as "essentially a rigorous enforcement of standards", it is then easy to see why "a high standard of quality emerges and is maintained almost automatically" (p.90). Thompson

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(1917a) later confirms that "increase in speed, properly secured by the methods of scientific management, improves quality" (p.99).

> It is an indisputable fact that in plants where scientific management prevails, the quality of the product is better than it ever was before, and is not surpassed by the output of any other type of management (Thompson 1917b, p.99).

This is endorsed by Person (1929) who observes that the determination of performance standards hinges off the establishment of work procedures being set up and operationalised. Thompson (1917b) also recommended that Taylor's "inspection should be concentrated in some spot isolated from the production end of the plant" (p.93), which in fact is the case with remote call monitoring in call centres in terms of what, how and who ("the inspectors", pp.92-93).

This juncture, Performance Review, had two primary artifacts also which generated cultural texts. The first was the daily/weekly and/or monthly statistical quantitative performance evaluation which details such performance criteria as calls taken, average call handling time (with a ratio of talk time to wrap time) and idle time per skill set silo, presented in seconds. It is appreciated that such semiotic terminologies may not have any significance to the reader however the aim is to convey a sense of performance measured in a complex, detailed quantitative manner in which seconds have an efficiency value. This performance review is generally delivered by a team leader or supervisor with the managers indicating that their key focus is achieving KPIs through CSR people management.

The second is that of qualitative performance evaluation, generally through remote call monitoring either in live time mode which may include audio and/or computer sequencing, or via random tape recording of calls which are evaluated later. The evaluation is conducted by persons who have developed through the ranks and addresses levels of customer service measured in quantitative terms of efficiency, such as questioning to

establish customer need, utilising computer systems to ensure the least keystrokes are taken to retrieve product information, etc.

> The (quality performance review system) is all online. So you actually listen to the (recorded) call online and (the reviewers) are working through a series of checklists, and you click to say (the CSR) did this or didn't do that, and (the reviewers) grade these as a 4 or whatever, and it brings out a final for that individual call.

The quantitative measurement of quality of performance may be in a range of 1 to 5 with 1 being unacceptable and 5 being excellent. Such quantification of quality is further atomised into criteria with sub-sets. For example, one element may be "call greeting" with sub-sets of uses approved wording, provides own name, uses customer name (provided through CTI), which are individually evaluated prior to an holistic call quantitative rating being given. Again the intent here is to convey the atomisation, complexity and quantification of qualitative performance and its measurement. Measurement against the criteria is generally a manual process, which aspect was noted:

> While the delivery of performance is highly manual and highly interpersonal the factors that sit behind it and the calculation of someone's performance is very automated, quite technology-based and very numeric.

In one call centre the qualitative performance review was a combination of remote call monitoring and call recording with specialised people "who review the calls and write up performance".

> (Qualitative performance) is being measured by a (specific) team who sit down and do call analysis. They rate a certain number of calls (per CSR) every month and they provide an overall score, and the overall score that we are looking to achieve is 3 or above, with 3 being 'meets the criteria'.

Although there is an electronic recording of the outcome, the process itself was both subjective to the reviewer and manually registered. Technology was seen as being an advantage in regard to performance subjectivity as many of the software products available also claim to address such concerns as inter-rater reliability.

> Electronically using X program which records the call and has a scoring system attached to it and also a training needs analysis. So, even though we record every call, we (also) do a number of quality checks using a mixture of side by side (in situ monitoring). If you then do a real time monitor or call recording evaluation you see what they are actually delivering (as a comparison to what they delivering when you are sitting next to them).

Not all types of qualitative performance measuring was accompanied by screen dumps or screen scrapes according to the manager, but when questioned whether it included a keystroke check, the response was "if they are doing call recording they will do some of that".

The managers acknowledged that although both quantitative and qualitative performance feedback was provided to CSRs, the quantitative aspect of performance is conducted and fed back to them more frequently than the qualitative aspect of their performance.

> (Individual CSR) productivity, their AHT, etc, they get daily via email or some of the team leaders might write it up on the whiteboard. They try to use a variety of methods. Qualitative performance, because you are not listening to an individual consultant's call every day, they may just get that month to date, or once a month.

By assigning a numeric value to the quality of performance it not only highlighted the quantitative nature from a management perspective, prioritised over the worded values which each numeric represents, but also it was significant in the decoding of performance prioritisation. This aspect was clearly highlighted by one manager who noted:

> An ultimate (performance) score is presented as a numeric rating at the end of the year, but we have to do (the behaviours evaluations) also as it is linked to their remuneration.

What the managers were aiming at, performance wise, was summarised by one manager's view:

> In people's performance over a period of time there are going to anomalies and you should not be cracking the whip for just one statistic did not meet what it should for an hour of the day. We are looking for trends rather than one off situations.

It became clear, however, that while many CSRs have the ability to acquire the knowledge and the skills, it is their workplace performance in terms of behaviours which is considered a critical performance indicator. This also raised another aspect of numerically measured "behaviours" in one call centre as an independent performance indicator, whereas in the other call centres behaviours were seen to be incorporated in other performance measures. This behavioural measure was viewed by the managers as being "driven by the team leaders who sit down one on one assessing against a range of behaviours".

> It is the conversations around the behaviours that the team leaders keep diary notes about and feedback both good and bad with staff.

It therefore logically follows that decoding the cultural texts in terms of performance measurement and behavioural expectations, this would provide a further platform for a restructuring of meanings and a shift in the perceived percentage weighting apportioned to each during the employment of a Customer Service Representative (CSR). Whereas the weighting was presented as favouring qualitative performance/customer-orientation interpretation at the Recruitment and Induction Training stages, there was a shift during On-the-Job Training to a more neutral position. However at this juncture, Performance Review, there were clear indications which favoured the delivery of quantitative performance over qualitative as the dominant measure of performance. This is enhanced by quantitative statistical performance being more frequent than the qualitative performance feedback, and the presentation of the latter as a quantified measure.

When asked how performance indicators are presented to staff, one manager considered that "it is numeric (quantitatively expressed) from a management perspective, however at the staff level it is initially in worded values and standards (prior to delivering a rating)". Consequently, as another manager observed, despite the use of

...worded values and attempts by various people (to maintain a qualitative focus on performance feedback), at the end of the day it is always going to be 'cut to the chase, give me my score' because this means whether there is a pay rise or a bonus.

At this point CSRs were now well integrated socially within the community as a fully fledged rather than peripheral member. They become progressively more attuned to the significance of workplace semiotic signals which prioritise quantitative performance such as electronic data boards, workplace performance related displays of where they are positioned in their team's performance, where their team is situated in the overall call centre's performance and how this relates to KPIs. Their semiotic language exchanges are now meaningful, cultural and contextual during social interactions, such as "I got a 4 in my eval today" or "I need to reduce my AHT by 5 seconds", and their position as story listener has now shifted to include story teller. Meaningful exchanges in semiotic language appears at this stage to be quite natural and unconscious and the cultural "reading" of semiotic signs and signals around the workplace environment appeared intuitive in the decoding of cultural meaning.

5.6.2.5 Self-Regulation

The workplace artifacts, such as workplace displays which focus on "performance metrics" or "balanced scorecards" (Batt & Moynihan 2002), electronic displays which measure individual and collective performances, displaying the number of calls waiting in each skill group and the average wait time for each call, were all interpreted to be significant cultural learning conduits. At the final juncture, Self-Regulation, the data suggests that enculturation or acculturation into the call centre ethnographic community, where their CSR's understandings that performance measured quantitatively has a higher business objective value than qualitative performance, is now more attuned to the managers' understandings. Their socialisation and semiotic literacy is now fully integrated and based on this expertise they may now in turn act as recruiters, trainers, on-the-job

trainers, product or technical experts, performance evaluators of quantitative and qualitative performance or even express interest in career development to call centre team leader and/or other managerial positions.

When managers were asked whether CSRs would consider quantitative performance was prioritised over qualitative at this point they unanimously favoured quantitative performance, which now aligned CSR and managers' understandings expressed as a reality of practice.

> There is an adjustment when going out into the workplace (on their own). When you get onto the floor the aim is to still have a balance (between cost-efficiency and customer-orientation), but I think that there is a greater emphasis on quantity (rather than quality).

One manager expressed the view that this may be a misguided perception claiming:

> While an annual review is heavily focused on qualitative, our ongoing operational management of staff and feedback from supervisors is often based on quantitative. For example, your AHT is X seconds and this is Y seconds above the average for the group. So I think that staff may say (quantitative measurement is the prioritised focus) because they hear "AHT, AHT" or some other quantitative measure, but perhaps they forgot the 10 minutes (qualitative) explanation with has accompanied that. So I think the answer may not truly present where the balance is, but I think that is just human nature.

This is suggested as confirmation of Garrick's (1998) view regarding the valorisation of financial and numerical performance indicators (p.6) and to support Doray's (1988) view that the individual worker could see the quantitative dimension of work only in terms of a personal relationship to a norm (p.99). The reality of the CSR role appeared to be an expression of such a relationship. A CSR prioritisation of cost-efficiency logic over customer-oriented logic was clearly highlighted in one manager's reflection

> I think is always one of those things that time and time again CSRs are always saying '(performance) is always stats driven' and 'I am told that I have to do this in a certain amount of time'.

Another manager considered that, realistically, practice had a weighting of 60/40 favouring quantitative over qualitative. However, when asked what a CSR would consider the reality, the manager reflected

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> (The CSR) would say it is more quantitative than qualitative, so they would probably say 70/30 or 80/20.

Although the weighting varied between managers, collectively, the prioritisation in quantitative/cost-efficient weighting was similarly reflected by another manager who noted,

> Realistically I think they would focus on quantity or efficiency. I think they would forget about the behaviours side. Logically they would forget about that as it is a very subjective measure. So I would say the weighting would be 60/40 (favouring quantitative). One of the reasons for that is that the organisational strategy at the moment at the highest level is to be the lowest unit cost provider.

When asked if this was an efficiency driver the response was "absolutely, it is a strategic imperative". In another call centre one manager noted:

> I think the employees at this point in time (would voice) a solid swing towards the quantity side simply because they know that workload for us is money, and the more work they get through, the more money this company makes. So they have a focus on the quantity side, but certainly quality comes into that in how they deliver quantity.

These revelations, despite one manager's explanation as to why this CSR perception may be misguided, were more closely aligned to the managers' prioritisation of quantitative performance management when asked to ascribe a percentage weighting in their key business objectives.

> I would have to say that yes, (CSRs) would view performance management as favouring quantitative measurement. And I would say that even for myself. I have a mobile phone and I get updates (*then turning to the vibrating phone on the table which had been left "on" as the manager had to be contactable at all time, the manager continued by saying*) and, look, actually the 11 a.m. results have just come through. I don't get quality results, I just get the quantity stats texted through to me (every half hour). So, no, I don't get the quality stats. I don't get the person who took the most difficult customer but didn't throw themselves out the window but dealt with it professionally. This (*showing the text message*) is what I get and I do get calls from my manager when we are not meeting service level. So the reality is that we need to work with resource planning to ensure that we have the right bums on the right seats that will allow us to meet our targets. And we need to work with people to get them within that zone of X and Y seconds handling time.

Therefore from a job initiation which promotes the qualitative side of performance and customer-oriented logic there is a progressive shift in

understandings and knowledge (re)constructions through encoding/decoding the meaning of cultural artifacts and the texts they generate as employment continues. Over the course of these five cultural junctures there was a progressive decrease in the qualitative text/customer-oriented logic encoding balanced by a progressive increase in the quantitative text/cost-efficient logic decoding. This latter increase is accompanied by a corresponding increase in the degree of workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy and associated with a decrease in the management structure and control of texts. It is therefore argued that the tension between qualitative and quantitative performance is resolved in research terms through practice-based understanding which position qualitative performance as a component of quantitative efficiency measurement. This further embeds Taylorism as the scientific, historic, social and cultural foundation for call centre management practices as Taylor's inspection of quality is one measure of efficiency in Scientific Management.

PART D – SECONDARY CULTURAL TEXTS

5.7 Secondary Cultural Artifacts and Texts

Although these five cultural junctures have been extracted for a separate review and interpretation, as mentioned earlier another level of pedagogical influences is also claimed as underpinning the teaching and learning processes albeit in a less tangible, more subliminal manner of cultural conditioning or learning. Nonetheless, although the influence may be deemed more subtle or less direct, all remaining aspects of Taylor's atomised model and additional influences act individually and collectively as significant pedagogical influences in the transitioning of cultural knowledge constructs. Their influence in decoding and the reconstructions of meaning from those which initially favour qualitative performance

management to those which subsequently recognise the prioritisation of quantitative measurement in performance management should not be discounted.

The managers' following verbalisations highlight not only the tension between the logics and ultimately the prioritisation of quantitatively measured performance as the basis of efficiency, but also the influence of secondary cultural "texts" in the workplace as key conduits of learning.

There were two cultural text contributors worthy of mention in this section:

- Elements of Taylor's model
- Story telling

This section is also integral in establishing the interrelationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning, and cements the notion of the cyclical narrative.

5.7.1 Elements of Taylor's model

Call centres have earlier been established as grounded in Taylor's Scientific Management model in the historic-scientific dimension of the Contextuality Construct, with 19 elements atomised for review, three of which have already been addressed in the previous sections. Extracts from the managers' descriptions depict the remaining 16 elements of Taylor's model as workplace cultural artifacts and secondary cultural texts. These cultural texts as mediums of workplace learning are implicit, informal in an unstructured sense and static; that is they are a continuous yet inconspicuous part of every day workplace practice. It is however their very routineness which may contribute to their being overlooked as significant in meaning making and cultural learning. The remaining 16 elements are:

- Planning (Centralised management)
- Time and motion studies
- Atomisation and specialisation
- Wages
- Incentives

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- Tools (Technologies)
- Layout and design
- Routing
- Standard times
- Standards
- Functional foremen (Supervisors/Team Leaders)
- Soldiering (Productivity manipulation)
- Cost analysis
- Stock
- Accounting
- Distribution

Taylor employed a full complement of Planning Department officials to look after all elements of production, routing, instruction cards, time study, order of work, recording and cost accounting, as documented by Nelson (1980), and according to Thompson (1917b), the planning department's "bulletin board" represented "exactly the state of progress of all work in the shop" (p.71). When combined with routing, the orders on the bulletin board can be moved to a "position where it will take precedence of any other orders" (p.87). In other words the "planning department" was seen as the critical foundation in the effective and efficient operation of Taylor's model.

Just as the Planning Department was the key to the effective and efficient operation and outcomes of Taylor's model, the call centre research findings unanimously demonstrate that a **centralised management** strategy is practiced with the same responsibilities as Taylor's Planning Department, including "the separation of planning from execution" (Thompson 1917a, p.47), which covered "all areas of production" and "order of work" with a view to efficient practice.

In addition to property and people efficiencies, one manager rationalised centralised management as a means to deliver uniformity or consistency of measurable performance across call centre sites.

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Also (the strategy of centralised management) was driven by a desire to achieve a consistency (in the) delivery of the product. It did not make sense to have centres acting autonomously and making decisions specific to just one centre. So it makes perfect sense then to have one centralised management structure in order to deliver that.

Although the logics of cost efficiency and customer orientation are both evident in the expressed rationalisation, a high degree of structure and control of cultural texts is required in the operationalisation of quantitative and qualitative consistency, with significant interaction with Inspection/Quality Review.

Taylor's time study, as quoted by Braverman (1974), may be defined as the measurement of elapsed time for each component operation of a work process, measured by a stopwatch. Collaborating with Gilbreth and his studies on motion, **time and motion studies** jointly consisted of the analysis of operations into their elementary units. This analysis determined the optimum time and movement for the performance of each of these units, and establishing a "predetermined work time", the most popular of which was known as Methods-Time Measurement (Braverman 1974, p.175). This impacted on "effort" in two ways, the motions of the operators and "the redesign of the machines and equipment to the end of reducing the necessary motions to a minimum" (Thompson 1917a, p.82).

All three call centres had commissioned or intend to commission time and motion studies and/or utilise in-house specialists to perform time and motion studies on technological, procedural and administrative processes. This was/is done with a view to identifying a prescriptive path for efficiency gains which, irrespective of whether it is realised in the form of resource, effort or time, will ultimately equate to cost efficiency. The managers' views reflected a significant correlation and relationship between the time and motion studies and call centre efficiency measurement and management. One manager acknowledged that "we have had three time and motion studies conducted in the last ten years", which were commissioned at a time "when there has been a move to new

technologies". This view was more succinctly evaluated by one of the other managers as "the two instances (of commissioned time and motion studies) have been to address specific issues, and, yes, (specifically) to address an efficiency problem". Despite the comments being later qualified as "the focus is on providing the CSRs with technology which will allow them to do their job quickly and efficiently", the learning underpinning the belief system in the community is evident as favouring cost-efficiency.

Atomisation, as described by Thompson (1917a), involves (a) analyzing the operations of the workmen into their elementary motions, (b) eliminating all unnecessary elements, (c) determining a reasonable minimum time to perform the remaining elements, (d) summing up the elements as a minimum time and (e) determining and adding a percentage of allowance for such necessary factors as fatigue, interference and inertia to give a final time against which performance and bonus payment will be measured and paid (pp.53-54). It then allows for **specialisation**, that is, atomised work elements to be performed by people who become specialised in that single element, with "intensive individual teaching of scientifically ascertained methods, developing the capacity of the workmen to its utmost limit" (p.132). This has been referred to by Braverman (1974) as not only "the analysis of the labor process" but also "the creation of the detail worker" (p.77). This added a dimension of considering "skill" as mental and/or manual and the positioning of dexterity within that.

All call centres actively practiced an adapted version of skill atomisation (as skill sets rather than isolated components of one skill) and flexible specialisation with one manager observing that the call centre "divided (customer enquiries and related CSR skills) by customer type and product type. Another manager, in relation to flexible specialisation, commented that "we have three priority groups...and we flex our rosters to be able to move a small group in the biggest pool (into other skill groups as required)".

> We have the facility to divide out one specific skill or call type. Workload is there for them to handle this skill solely for their entire working day, and that's where incoming workload volumes can dictate that to a degree in that you will get greater efficiency out of a person who is single-skilled because that is what they are dealing with day in and day out and they therefore must be more proficient. It makes good business sense in order to lower your handling times for that particular business stream (provided that the workload is sufficient).

This aspect as a secondary cultural text also had clear implications which underpinned culturally based understandings and reconstructions of meaning. Skill atomisation, that is the separation of one skill as a complete unit of work, in isolation does have wage benefits to the company as the CSR is paid at a lower rate for performing a single or limited range of skills. While this may represent cost efficiency it needs to be balanced against any period of unproductivity due to the inflexibility of their existing skill profile. However, all three call centres adopt the practice that, as the CSR demonstrated their competence in the single skill or limited skill range, they were then progressively trained in a wider range of skills, events and customer base.

The impact of this on **wages** was significant. This increased their wage progressively over a period of time to a maximum amount at which point they are paid according to skills acquisition rather than skills utilisation. Skills acquisition and competence however increases the flexibility with which the call centre's operational management team can most efficiently utilise their skills through best service (or call) routing. This means that technology will direct the customer enquiry to the first available CSR with the required skill set profile irrespective of their geographical location across the call centre network. This concept of flexible specialisation is considered to reap greater efficiency rewards rather than maintaining resource-inflexible, specialised skill set silos other than in induction training situations. In other words, Braverman's (1974), quoting Babbage, reference to "the labor power capable of performing the process may be

purchased more cheaply as dissociated elements than as a capacity integrated in a single worker" (p.81).

> There would be a (wage) differentiation, up to the point where a staff member is skilled in all functions and all call types, then the salary paid would be appropriate to their overall skill level irrespective of where the company chooses to allocate one or all of their skills at any particular time. But the company would determine when you gain that skill and therefore advance in salary.

Therefore, wages is also argued as being a cultural artifact producing a text through which cultural meaning is made and learning occurs. When asked if there were any concerns about subjective bias in relation to the performance-based pay system, the manager responded

> No, not really, because we do have quite a rigorous remuneration review process every year. We don't just automatically roll up through salary bands each year. We go through and look at high performers, low performers, what is the CPI, etc. We get allocated a budget and we allocate that across the staff. They also get an STI (short term incentive) bonus target which is linked very closely to their performance.

The quantification of quality performance extended to the use of **incentives** also as a cultural conduit. Looking back in history, the introduction of a bonus system, or higher pay packet, is quoted by Thompson (1917a) as "the unusual day's wage for the unusual day's work" (p.122) which acted "as a stimulus to increase efficiency...easily substantiated by the facts" (p.80).

> In one of our call centres we have a performance pay component in our agreement with our staff which works well, and we are now entering into discussions with the staff to extend and expand that performance pay contract. So this will be the true litmus test. We would like to introduce this to our other call centres, but the unions have fought vigorously to keep it out of the workplace.

A further example of incentive was one which was ideas-based in which employees could put forward their suggestions for improvements to systems, processes and/or procedures, etc. The employees whose ideas were successful in terms of "uptake" had the opportunity to see the idea through to implementation by working with the system developers, etc. provided they could be released from the workplace. This suggests the

range of CSR work motivators is broader than Taylor's model which focused on financial gain. However, it is also very much based on efficiency gains with the "winning" ideas being ones which would result in an efficiency saving.

> We ask (CSRs) to identify opportunities for efficiency. We then generally hand it on to other teams to actually develop and implement an idea which is prioritised.

Therefore a call centre management strategy of inclusiveness and cooperation, such as "we welcome your input", "your ideas are valued", "let's work together to make improvements", "knowledge sharing has benefits" appeared to favour efficiencies rather than any genuine socially-based transition. Behind the scenes associated "number crunching" confirmed "whether a real benefit has been realised and whether we exceeded our benefits after payment of the bonus to staff as well". This aligned with Thompson's (1917a) observation that Taylor's production philosophy was based on "higher wages bring a decreased cost" (p.184).

The artifact of **tools/technologies** should be accorded particular attention as a teaching and learning conduit. The use of tools and the implementation of technologies or systems to make "work tools" more effective and efficient is not a new phenomenon. From the time Taylor made the observation that "a heavy stream of water thrown upon the shaving at the nose of the tool permitted a one-third increase in the cutting speed of the tool", tools and their usage were pro-actively pursued for efficiency gains in Taylor's model (Nelson 1980, p.57). The changing factory system from the 19th to 20th centuries came to represent the product of interrelated development in technology, management, and the utilisation of labor, with technology becoming influential in determining the day to day activity of the factory.

While Nelson (1980) claims that technology was the least well known component of Taylor's factory revolution and Braverman (1974) acknowledges that the role of technology development was "minor" (p.85),

technologies now have come to represent a major source of both call centre efficiencies and therefore pedagogical influence as cultural conduits.

Batt & Moynihan (2002) recognise that various strategies as IVR, ACD and more recently voice recognition have facilitated centralised remote servicing via technology-mediation in call centres, while Conboy (1999) claims that Australian call centres' high adoption of specialist software for monitoring and forecasting traffic, staff and customer contact management is one of the industry's strengths, with "strengths" interpreted as favouring the ability of technology to monitor and control efficiency-based performance practices. As Landes, cited in Braverman (1974) observed, "indeed, if anything, the growth of scientific management owed much to the concerns and achievements of technology" (p.157). Similarly, Braverman (1974) noted that "science in its beginnings under capitalism more often formulated its generalizations side by side with, or as a result of technological development" (p.157).

Whilst all managers were aware of the need to continuously review existing practices and identify efficiency opportunities, one key avenue which featured strongly in the strategy was technologies. This view became evident from the managers' perspectives also, with one manager offering:

> We actively look to technology as a source of efficiency (gains)...and I would think more so going forward...It is all about looking for ways to automate backend processes and streamline processes.

A range of technologies, now considered as call centre staples and integral to efficiency performance management in call centres, were present in the sites. The ones which were managed by the centralised management team were the Interactive Voice Response (IVR) which, when customised, identified calls by inquiry type and customer base value prior to routing through an Automatic Call Distributor (ACD) which searches for the best service/call routing to first available CSR with the appropriate skill set irrespective of geographical location, and a resource rostering system (TCS or similar) which calculates the number of CSRs required

across the network in each call centre for each half hour of a call centre's operating hours by skill set. Additionally to these centrally managed systems there were call management systems (CMS) which monitored adherence and compliance by site. This system indicates, generally through colour coding, each CSR's status in terms of call handling (such as within Talk Time, exceeded AHT, in Wrap, in Idle, Unavailable etc). In other words, they act as electronic versions of Taylor's bulletin boards which "shows exactly what order each man is now working, exactly what orders are at his machine ready for him to work on when he gets through with his present job, and it shows also all orders in the shop that have not yet been assigned to particular machines (Thompson 1917b, pp.71-72).

A review of technology-based efficiency gains in the three call centres revealed that technology permeated both short and long term strategies, and, although there was a superficial customer-oriented logic, the reality in practice was primarily related to efficiency logic. Following are several examples selected from the data to support this interpretation.

The first was computer-telephone integrated (CTI) technology which works on the principle that the caller can be identified in advance through the IVR (Interactive Voice Response) through either speech recognition or touch phone technology. There was also a range of desktop technology integrations now available to CSRs such as electronic faxing and short text messaging (SMS) from the desktop. The marketing of these technologies was confirmed by the managers as focusing of their ability to deliver efficiency gains with the onus then on the call centre technology assessors to "distill that (marketing rhetoric) down and set time aside to examine (them) in detail to see where the efficiencies are".

Some of the managers also mentioned that some call types, designated as high volume and/or as a "no value added", have been reviewed in each of the call centres for their potential to be technologised or, "informated away", either wholly or partially, thereby gaining further efficiencies. Some general examples of this strategy are evident in the wider call centre

community where companies offer automated 'pay by phone' credit card payments or BPAY options, or Telstra's introduction of natural language speech recognition (NLSR) technology on their directory assistance line and other services. Such directions and strategies were not lost on one manager who claimed that "there are some projects in the pipeline which will look at this". However, of the emerging customised tools/technologies in call centres, the individual call centre's interactive web sites were generally viewed as the most efficiency effective strategy "going forward". This ability for the customer to "self-service", either for product information or sales, was actively encouraged. While there was also a customer-oriented convenience component in the strategy, all call centres envisaged that the use of the internet as an efficiency strategy would become an increasingly targeted efficiency avenue.

The outcome of this however has also impacted on the cultural text of other artifacts, such as recruitment and training.

> (Technology is) an interesting scenario because it is very real for a lot of companies who have dealt almost exclusively in the past with direct customers via the telephone. And then along came this wonderful thing called the internet and emails and online booking engines and they thought it was "you beaut", this wonderful new form of low cost transaction. But in fact it has happened exactly as you have said, that the customer enquiry type changed, and those companies did not have the type of staff employed to be able to handle this type of enquiry. So in some way they have to change their skill base to more technically based to handle the new enquires. This then flows on to the way you have to recruit staff, and also how you then on-train your staff on an ongoing basis to handle these different types of enquiries which are coming through.

This extended to a range of communication skills also, other than just verbal, as previously "back office" administrative functions such as faxing/emailing with attachments were being increasingly targeted for streamlining in order to gain efficiencies.

> (A percentage of) our interactions are now via emails, so, yes, we do need then to look at people's written skills to ensure that they are OK with the written word.

The interconnectedness of technology, a change in skill mix and distribution as a channel shift were all evident as an outcome of actively and progressively, if not aggressively, pursuing efficiency gains.

From the perspective of the influence of **layout and design** the readiness of tools, their placement or location, movement, activities and ergonomics all indicated that the working conditions of an operator would be as "perfect as practicable" (Thompson 1917a, p.68), out of which grew "the policy of the standardization of materials, equipment and plant" (p.68). Thompson (1917a) continued that work tools must be fully operational, in first class condition, well placed for ease of action with minimal manipulation. This determination was achieved through the economical use of space by determining the average space required per employee for maximum productivity. Therefore attention to workplace layout and design was an important factor in efficiency as it ensures that materials, tools and instructions are at the worker's disposal in the quantity and quality required (Thompson 1917a, p.62).

As a cultural artifact and cultural text, each call centre had a separate self-contained style work space for each CSR, albeit of different design, which housed their primary tools of trade. For CSRs these were telephone VDUs (Visual Display Units), headsets and PCs (personal computers) which provide screen information, voice or display announcements, and, where appropriate, a sequential flow of screens to complete a task once initiated. There was also use of macros or help screens, such as using "shortcut keys", largely mnemonic, such as Alt+H for Help, Alt+C for a calculator, Alt+D to insert today's date, with a +10 (for example) to nominate a cut off option/expiry date for offers on documentation, etc, all geared to reducing CSRs' keystrokes to complete a transaction to a minimum.

All three call centres operated an internal or intra-call centre telephone assistance line for CSRs who wished to clarify an issue and required support of a technical, product, process or procedural nature. This facility

was also linked to best call/service routing where the first available assistance line expert, irrespective of geographic location, would take the inquiry. Some call centres also had the added technological advantage of viewing the CSR's screen which permitted the support advisor/technical expert to check the screen responses or similar, and also, through verbal instruction, monitor that their instructions and consequent CSR action was being followed accurately with keystroke efficiency. Behaviourally, CSRs are instructed to use the assistance line rather than physically leave their work space and approach a product/technical expert or team leader/supervisor for assistance. There is little room in the decoding of such behavioural performance expectations other than the reduction of CSR mobility in the workplace and the prioritisation of time efficiency, controlled and measured performance accountability at all times which, in itself, minimised social interaction during work and simultaneously acted as a cultural text.

Additionally, all call centres had undergone a significant refurbishment or moved into ergonomically friendly workplaces within the last five years. This ensured that the layout and design including upgrades of technologies was as space-, labour-, effort- and cost-efficient as possible. CSRs were aware of the positioning of team leaders and supervisors and their performance management systems, which resonated with "electronic panopticons" (Fernie & Metcalf in Holman 2002). In addition, other visual performance tools such as electronic message boards were all strategically placed for easy CSR viewing.

In relation to CSRs' telecommunications and computer systems, electronic and, where appropriate, paper based manuals were all within easy access without requiring any need to leave their work space. The physical environment of each call centre was also aimed at being bright and light, well insulated and allowing physical eye contact with colleagues. This provision of a physically modern and comfortable workplace, when

combined with a range of staff amenities, was considered by managers as important.

The other important area was the advancement in technologies to receive and sent faxes, as one example, via computer systems rather than having to leave your work area to go to the fax, which practice one manager considered was "a license to waste time by stopping to chat with people on the way". When asked specifically about call centre layout and design, particularly in relation to such items in the workplace as facsimile machines, a manager responded that CSR movement around the call was designed to be:

> Minimal, and we try to remove it where it does happen, even though I know that that may sound terrible. Faxing to and from clients is now done electronically through their desktops.

Another secondary cultural text is that of **routing** which, according to Person (ed. 1929), is control of the productive process (p.263) "to determine the operations that are to be performed on each piece, what type of machine and fixture is best adapted to perform them, the sequence in which the pieces should be completed and the order in which assembling can be most economically and efficiently done" (Thompson 1917b, p.81). In another text Thompson (1917a) notes that "the routing system usually involves the preparation of separate job tickets, inspection orders, and move orders for each operation" (pp.63-64) wherein "waiting for work by the operation has been practically eliminated" (p.66). This philosophy is clearly identifiable with call centre call routing processes.

Routing, referred to in call centres as "best service (or call) routing", was found to be a common practice in all three call centres in the spirit of Taylor's philosophy of eliminating delays between jobs. This was achieved by a combination of technologies and human interventions, such as IVR (Interactive Voice Response) which identifies a caller by inquiry type and customer base by touch telephone key pad selections, ACD (Automatic Call Distributor) which then searches for and routes the call to the first

available CSR with the required skill set irrespective of geographic location. This is also reliant on a resource rostering system which projects the correct number of CSRs by skill set for the anticipated customer events per half hour. Call centre management systems also monitors these aspects on a second by second basis and if, for example, there are a number of calls waiting to be answered in a skill set with no available CSR, flexible specialisation then becomes critical for efficiency. CSR skill set profiles, the prioritisation of routing by classifications of inquiry type, customer value, etc and flexible specialisation allows management to instantaneously prioritise one skill set over the other, or reduce it to one or the other at any time and for any duration in order to have a selection of calls answered more expeditiously. As a cultural text therefore it carried significance particularly its interconnectedness with the atomisation of skills and the creation of skill sets and silos, which became defined by Service Levels, the type of "event" required and the "value of the caller. Culturally therefore, routing as a text was interpreted as playing a role in meaning making.

Person (ed.1929) notes that in Taylor's Scientific Management a production schedule "depends upon the time consumed in processes and between processes" (p.224) and the establishment of **standard times**.

> By the use of standard operation times, as developed in the predetermination of methods and tasks, a predetermination of the total time to produce a part is developed. By means of this time the equipment necessary to produce the product at a definite rate...can be determined (Person, ed. 1929, p.224)

Standard times also became a cultural text and relate to Service Levels which are assigned to skill groups (based on customer value, type of event, nature of the enquiry, etc) and also to individual CSR call or event handling requirements.

> Industry wise I think it is this whole 80/20 thing, and there are several things that you need to take into consideration. The customers you have and what is their tolerance, what is the service you are providing, for example, a paging service you would expect to have it answered quickly whereas technical support for internet, people may be prepared to wait a little longer, such as 40 seconds rather than 10 seconds. So, as I said at

the start, you have different Service Levels for different customer levels. Do you really want to be the best? Do you really have the money sitting around to have a 90/15 Service Level? Is that really going to give you better customer satisfaction than 80/30? At present we have 80/30 for (one group) and 85/15 (for a prioritised group). On our report that we get, our interval report and the daily reports, it's actually got everything from 'in 15 seconds', then in 20, 30, 40, 50, 60, and 60 plus. So we can have a look and say what pools of people are we answering in each of the groups and (ask ourselves) what would it mean to us (as a business), how many staff would it mean, is it cheaper for us to have more staff and not have people waiting on hold, so what is the cost of an hour on hold versus the cost of an hour for a consultant.

The tension between the logics is self evident in the juxtaposition of the quantification of "service levels", and the philosophy underpinning their determination, such as event type, customer value, etc. One manager also confirmed that "yes, absolutely" the call wait time was dependent on the type of transaction and the customer, which sends a clear cultural message to CSRs.

Work **standards** is another of the atomised aspects of Scientific Management with Thompson (1917b) stating that "the first requirement of a good system is definite written instructions as to what is to be made" (p.79) and how that process is to take place. Person (ed. 1929) validates this approach through observations such as "the vitally important thing is to devise a method which, while being effective, completes an operation with the minimum amount of effort, and is always used when that operation is being performed" (p.193). Additionally Person (ed. 1929) also makes reference to "written routines – standard practice instructions" with each written routine containing detailed instructions of duties and procedure which "define the function and serve as a guide to any new incumbent in case of the sudden removal of the experienced functionary" (p.246). The significance of standards, as a workplace cultural artifact and cultural text, in contemporary times includes Boje and Winsor's (1993) suggestion that such 20th century "initiatives" such as Total Quality Management (TQM) represent a hidden agenda in the resurrection of Taylorism, "where the interests of the workers are subjugated or trivialized

in relation to the "performativity" (Lyotard, 1984) requirements of the firm" (p.68).

Within the concept of TQM and the "quality assurance" style of documenting work processes and procedures as "standards" each of the call centres had adopted this approach in varying degrees of rigour. The effectiveness of each particular process or procedure as a "standard" is readily traceable by a review or audit trail of each individual element in the sequencing of a task. Collectively the division of processes and procedures into meaningful atomised categories and sub-categories according to the business, and then further fragmented (such as how, where and why this fits into the overall business objectives and strategy, where to find information, when to use it, who has responsibility within each procedure, what actions need to be taken and what documentation needs to be used, etc.) is intended to "add value" through the customisation of delivery with a view to its consistency and uniformity. While this was not viewed as prescriptive in terms of reading from scripts, it was found to be prescriptive in terms of performance criteria.

The next of Taylor's elements is that of **functional foremen** with their contemporary counterpart being **team leaders** or **supervisors.** There were two parts to their role in Taylor's model, foremanship and specialised function (e.g. gang boss, repair boss, speed boss, etc). While their role has been discussed in earlier parts of this thesis (relationship structures and inspection/quality review as a primary cultural text), its role here as a cultural text is also significant. As Thompson (1917a) observed their overall function was related to "securing harmony rather than the mere upholding of authority" (p.10). In the contemporary setting of call centres, similarly the joint roles, workplace harmony and authority, in the hierarchical and social relationship structure became embedded as secondary cultural texts in meaning making, in terms of who speaks and with what authority, who observes and with what consequences.

> Their key objective is to be people managers. (We) rely on this supervisory level to be
> floor manager by monitoring our (call centre's) adherence, that staff are where they
> should be, doing their job, and they also provide us a good insight into staff morale, what
> is driving problems and what are the issues which management need to look at. They keep
> their finger on the pulse.

In relation to the business management aspect, their key role entailed a constant review of where business and individual KPIs were not being met and taking or recommending appropriate actions, identifying issues which may be affecting the business, and acting as a communicator between management and staff on management and key business objectives. In relation to the people management aspect, this included the performance review of individuals and teams ensuring both the qualitative and quantitative performance targets and behaviours were being met and maintained. The focus on behaviours and community spirit was demonstrated by one manager. While the idea initiated from management, the CSRs were required to engage in and to create their own work related values. In other words, CSRs were able to write their own work-based culturally meaningful community narrative.

> We really try to focus on the fun bit and the difference that people can
> make. So people understand that coming to work can be about having
> fun as well. We have a program which is very much based on behaviours.
> Our organisation has been very values-based and we have interpreted
> them, that is, what we have tried to do is turn the old stuffy values into
> younger, funkier behaviours that the staff can relate to in the
> environment they work in. Whereas in a corporate environment they
> might be 'integrity' and 'honesty' for example, we have turned them into
> little sentences or phrases that people could link or associate to a large
> wall poster for example. They are based around team work, caring for the
> customer, making a difference, etc. We try to link all of our programs to
> that one, such as the way they raise ideas, the way they raise suggestions
> about how something can work better, improve delivery from a quality
> perspective or a process from an efficiency perspective. They are meant to
> be very personal about the way you do your job. They are not a customer
> promise.

Soldiering is the term Taylor used to refer to the deliberate practice of workers taking longer than required to perform a task, in other words to knowingly misrepresent their productivity capability. The practice has two

instigators according to Braverman (1974). The first is a natural instinct and the second relates to the systematic way in which workers adopt a slower pace to reduce their productivity. The managers and call centres agreed that **soldiering/productivity manipulation** was one aspect of work performance which kept the managers and key performance reviewers forever vigilant. In considering its capability as a cultural artifact and cultural text, the observation of one manager was seen as relevant.

> (Detecting productivity manipulation) may take a while, but with the capability and sophistication of statistical data they will always be caught out.

Moving on, the significance of **cost analysis** in Taylor's model is very important. Thompson (1917a) notes that "successful (Taylorist) practitioners...have always been guided by financial considerations" (p.51). Continuing, Thompson (1917a) states that "it is safe to say that scientific management shares with the modern movement of cost statistics the credit for the wide-spread interest in the improvements of methods and details in factories of every type" (p.101), which had the "direct result of pointing out the necessity for production systems to eliminate waste made evident by cost statistics; and the two movements have, therefore, gone hand in hand" (pp.101-102). Therefore, as a cultural artifact and cultural text its significance also continues. Every efficiency savings, whether it was time, effort, resource or technology related, was the outcome of cost analysis. Various cost calculations have been made prior to weighing up and considering all the implications one proposed change may have.

One manager observed that "everything is related back to a cost on the business", while another commented that "in determining which option of several would be best, it comes down to cost analysis". For example, what is the cost of increasing staff numbers as opposed to the cost of increasing customer wait times taking into consideration the potential for a higher abandoned call rate and a possible projection of lost business. Each call centre confirmed that in selecting technologies, for example, each

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purchase recommendation and capital expenditure submission must be accompanied by a detailed return on investment calculation where every component has a detailed cost analyses attached to it. These analyses may include projected savings through employee downsizing, training time reduction, adjusted standard times, projected increase in sales, product diversification, etc.

The principle of **stock** in Taylor's Scientific Management was based on consumption patterns guided by what stock was required, when to order it and the quality and quantity required (Thompson 1917a, p.60). Relevant considerations included what is a safe minimum stock, whether the stock required was for the natural course of work or just to meet a specific job, how long it takes to get the stock delivered and ready for production, where the stock can be housed, what preparatory work needs to be considered prior to the stock arriving.

Stock, in relation to call centres, bears a striking resemblance to "call centre resource staffing levels". The analogy is not intended to dehumanise human resources, but rather to highlight the adaptability of Taylor's elements of "stock".

- Recruitment (delivers the "safe minimum stock" as minimum resource numbers available for the production process);

- Training (represents "how long it takes to get the stock delivered and ready for production")

- Centralised Management (ensures appropriate staff resourcing by half hour and skill set as "the stock required for the natural course of work", with "extra stock" as staff resourcing on overtime (or similar) holding relevance "to meet a specific job", such as a short term marketing initiative

- Layout and Design plus Tools/Technologies incorporate "where the stock can be housed" in terms of call centre seat capacity, rostering and actual seat availability while Tools/Technologies has relevance in "what preparatory work needs to be considered prior to the stock arriving"

such as assigning computers with appropriate working systems for the product range, information systems, setting up of skill sets to be assigned to each CSR, etc.

Person (ed. 1929) describes **accounting** in Taylor's model as "a system of accounts, or of statistical records in accounting form, which permits current posting of the costs of achieving results, segregated into ledger accounts which correspond to units of organization responsibility" (p.269). It requires detailed atomisation of every aspect of the business from a cost perspective, with the assigning of forecasting budgets.

The research findings indicated that in each of the call centres there was an Accounting Department which monitored all of these aspects. Each call centre had "an operating budget" with objectives for efficiency savings as operational imperatives. As one manager described:

> When we have improved our AHT, the budget man takes that money. It comes out of my budget. There has been an (efficiency) benefit realisation and it has been identified and signed off.

In support of the research argument to have this considered as a secondary cultural text, Rhodes and Garrick (2000a), drawing on Casey, caution that any organisational discourse in relation to the 'cogito-economic' employee, may influence the shaping of workplace identities through a 'hidden curriculum' that produces 'acculturated employees', and reference to the employee in economic terms (p.8). This complements Garrick's (1998) earlier observation of the valorisation of numerical performance indicators (p.6).

The final, yet very significant element of Scientific Management to receive attention as a secondary cultural text is that of **distribution**. While Thompson (1917a) admonished that "it will soon be a reproach to society if the principles which have been so fruitful in production are not studied, mastered, reshaped and applied to the problem of distribution" (p.131) call centres could lay some claim to addressing this reproach. One effective strategy, the managers agreed, for sale and distribution of product had

been to successfully promote web-based customer interactions. In relation to distribution, another manager noted:

> I know that there are lots of call centres that have a lot of money from Research and Development that are proactively hunting down costs and are able to be more proactive and more progressive in finding (distribution) channel shift and finding technologies that customers have to use.

This comment was balanced by another manager's view that "yes, I think efficiency is largely driven by us looking for automation and technology opportunities (for distribution channel shift)".

Each of the call centres considered that there may be future opportunities for further contact/distribution efficiencies through web-based technologies but only one considered this as an imminent business strategy, specifically observing:

> While there are wait times on the telephone, people like to use the web and the web is growing, and people are finding it more acceptable. So in some respects wait times, and I mean reasonable wait times, can not only balance costs but also help (distribution) channel shift. I am certainly not saying that we allow calls to wait a long time, but if there is an opportunity for the customer to do it themselves on line, at their leisure, it can be a good thing.

The intimation that wait times had the potential for manipulation as a driver in product distribution channel shift was evident. In addition to a possible strategic manipulation to facilitate distribution channel shift, another emerging efficiency factor and strategy which became evident in exchanges with other managers was the company's openly acknowledged "self-service" strategies, the call centre web-based "do it yourself" (DIY) option. One call centre manager acknowledged that "if we can improve the ability for customers to self-service then that is probably the biggest opportunity for us in efficiency". It was seen as a strategic future direction. Customers in this sense also included the "agents" mentioned above.

> (Technology and distribution), where we are rolling out self-service to our agents and customers, has played a big part of (efficiency savings).

Therefore the call centre's strategies around product distribution and manoevring customer contact channel choice and shift was viewed as a cultural text which CSRs sub-textually decoded as meaningful in prioritising cost-efficient logic.

5.7.2 Story Telling

While the foregoing outlines the impact of each of the elements of Taylor's Scientific Management model to create an artifact which produces constant sub-textual reconstructions in cultural learning, there are other mediums to be considered also. Story telling was also viewed as cultural artifact which conveyed cultural meaning. The stories and their telling acted as cultural teachers which facilitated learning. By telling stories, factual or anecdotal, or listening to stories, or third party recounting of stories, its significance as a cultural marker became evident. In the case of anecdotal, even allowing for some latitude for the story's embellishment over its passage across time and individuals, its essence as a cultural "educator" and conduit for learning is significant. In analysing story telling as a cultural text in this research, themes became apparent, particularly behavioural (as process and performance) and organisational.

The three anecdotes following each carried a strong cultural message. The first was behavioural, associated with processes underpinning Standard Times and Standards, the second was also behavioural and associated with Soldiering/Productivity Manipulation while the third was associated with implementing a business strategy. The first anecdote was an exchange between the researcher and one manager during the "workplace observation" phase of data collection during general discussions on gaining efficiencies. It related to a call centre in the United States of America. In trying to gain efficiencies, measured as cost-efficiency, the call centre had "costed" the elimination of their mandatory, scripted call closure of "Have a nice day" and "Thank you for calling X company". By eliminating this Standard of call closure, a time saving of 2-3 seconds off each call was estimated (depending on the "drawl" of the

CSR/rep/operator). This calculation also took into consideration such customer responses of "you're welcome" with some potential secondary response from the CSR prior to hang up. (It is important to note here that it is not only usual practice but generally specified practice for the CSR to allow the customer to terminate the call first prior to the CSR disconnecting. This is for reasons of courtesy and because call monitoring system "flag" CSR call terminations as "hang ups" for review.)

In isolation 2-3 seconds may not seem significant either to a non-call centre professional or in a non call centre business environment. However, in call centre terms, as call centres strategise in seconds as a business terminology and practice, once these few seconds savings are accumulated over potentially millions of calls and thousands of consultants in large seat size call centres, it represents a significant efficiency saving in the form of resources, wages, with significant associated impact in terms of adjustments to Standard Times, Service Levels, Key Performance Indicators, etc. In its role as a cultural text, the importance is not whether the "story" could be substantiated or not, but rather that it is meaningful to members of the call centrecommunity, and an artifact and text which educates. In other words, its veracity was eclipsed by a greater interest in the power of storytelling as a cultural text.

The next example, the second anecdote, associated with call centre "soldiering", related to answering calls where the CSR pretends not to be able to hear the customer thereby becoming "legitimately" able to release the call. This release occurs either after the customer hangs up believing there is a line fault or by the CSR pre-empting their own call termination with an offering along the lines of

> I regret that I am unable to hear you. There appears to be a fault with the line or possibly your handset. In the event however that you are able to hear me I suggest that you try again.

The performance based significance of this is that it registers as a call taken in the CSR call count of the hour or day etc. Additionally, if the CSR

estimates that their AHT (Average Call Handling Time) is higher than their performance target, a number of short duration calls may assist in an overall lowering or reduction in their AHT. These short duration calls can be detected by management's analysis of call duration statistics, which would identify a higher than average "short duration" call count for this individual CSR.

The final aspect of story telling is the communications from the managers themselves to their staff, including CSRs. For the most part, the managers indicated that, in initiating communication with CSRs about the business, it is generally one way from the manager via various mediums such as a manager's letter to staff, local team briefings by the team leaders/supervisory staff or "the manager's direct reports". In addition there were designated "communication days" where all "rostered on" CSRs are released in small numbers to attend and they all hear the same consistent message". All the managers agreed that their local intranet were seen as a prime source to update CSRs on business objectives and meeting targets.

> There are many ways we communicate (with CSRs), and for us it is on our intranet. We send emails, monthly development sessions with their team leaders, we give them updates on quality.

Other managers favoured a more personalised approach in addition to technologies.

> We regularly share information whether it be from myself personally with employee briefings, or via my management team, or via our supervisors or team leaders. So, I guess that it is "in your face" communication to get the message across. Likewise we use our local intranet, newsletters and it is also important that senior management communicates with the staff at every opportunity. As such our CEO is regularly on the road and whenever he is in one of our call centre locations, he will take the time and effort to do employee briefings as well and he also uses the local intranet to communicate. I think then at all levels, whilst it might be nice to have more communication with staff, we certainly make every endeavour at every opportunity to let our staff know what is going on in the company, and what we are trying to achieve.

This idea of cultural texts is also reflected by Mulholland (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds. 1998).

> Managers at every level had some responsibility for enculturation programmes through regular team briefings when quality programmes, efficiency drives and performance targets are advanced...particularly in areas such as customer service" (pp.198-199).

PART E – CULTURAL LITERACY

5.8 Semiotic Language, Semiotic Literacy and Cultural Literacy

In addition to the numerous examples throughout the thesis to date which have already illustrated a call centre semiotic language, this aspect in cultural learning can be claimed as a cultural text. From the researcher's perspective as "an insider community member", the exchanges in the interviews and during workplace observation became reliant on a high degree of semiotic literacy. A further selection of semiotic language examples from the interviews confirmed this observation.

> We have separate AHT drivers for the different sectors of the business, and, yes, it is in seconds.

It needs to be highlighted again that it is not just a matter of knowing what AHT means or other call centre specific terminologies, but it is also an interpretation of their significance. For example, call centres talk in "seconds", and this is extremely culturally and contextually meaningful. In other words, the meaning from the sub-text, or the contextualised over the abstract, is where the meaning lies. One manager, when confirming that targets are quantitatively defined and mathematically calculated, said

> Service Level is "percentage in", AHT is "seconds", Quality is "out of ten", Productivity is "a percentage". So, yes, they are all numerical and therefore there is all the calculation that goes into them.

> We are looking at maximising our seat occupancy by perhaps going into shift work.

> We are actually way over (budget) at the moment because when they
> budgeted for shrinkage what they did not take into account was (an
> increase in training days), and telephony coming in, and other things,
> which resulted in an increase in times (standard, AHT, talk, ACW, idle).

From a researcher's perspective during the data collection phase no explanation of the terms or their significance was required. While the meaning was clear, the analysis became its cultural meaning as a workplace learning perspective. These quotes, together with those mentioned through the findings, are seen as reinforcing the research findings through the notion of semiotic literacy and a highly contextualised language as cultural currency.

Cultural literacy is a term that has come to represent the contextualisation of meaning and its relevance in understanding the prioritisation of cost-efficient logic in performance management. This understanding is culturally based and it is part of a holistic enculturation which embeds a CSR in a holistic cultural sense within the call centre as an ethno-cultural community. In this process the CSRs' understandings become aligned to those of the managers, as demonstrated in the earlier presentations of the findings. This is an outcome which, it is argued, is not principally by structured intent, but rather through immersion in the community and the reconstructions of meaning made from informal or unstructured learning.

The decoding and meaning making at the five cultural junctures from all the cultural artifacts and all the cultural texts, both primary and secondary, required the CSR to establish a degree of cultural literacy which ultimately prioritised the logic of cost-efficient logic in call centres' performance management. Cultural literacy is a progressive transition over the employment of the CSR. Although there is no desire to isolate any one of the interdependent components presented here in cultural learning as dominant, semiotic language should be highlighted as the binding element which brings them to a verbalised status. Therefore semiotic literacy is a

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significant component in cultural literacy and the assigning of workplace meaning through workplace contextuality.

There is a notion that culture is multi-layered with separately activated nuances of meaning, reflexively constructed, adjusted and adapted in relation to contingencies. Drawing on Gubrium and Holstein (1997), mission statements, employee values, customer charters, etc. and those activities which engage cultural members in their formation could be argued as forms of Warhurst and Thompson's (in Thompson & Warhurst, eds.1998) "cultural engineering", which they refer to as "elevated from an aspect of managerial activity into the driving force of workplace transformation, when new managerial discourses simply displace old corporate realities as the focus of attention" (p.11). Their term of "cultural engineering" however is of particular significance and relevance in this research for its double entendre. Ethno-pedagogy facilitates cultural learning which is grounded in the depths of the workplace's evolution as contextuality based frames of reference.

Chapter Six – Thesis Conclusion

6.1 Chapter Introduction

The premise of this research has been to examine the relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace pedagogy and the influence which contextuality exerts on the teaching and learning processes, specific to incoming customer service call centres and with a focus on efficiency performance management. The research has therefore been framed by a holistic research question of "how does workplace contextuality influence workplace pedagogical practices in relation to the logics of cost-efficiency and customer-orientation in efficiency performance management in incoming customer service call centres?". Two constructs, the Contextuality Construct and the Pedagogy Construct, have provided the framework for the presentation of this thesis.

6.2 Contextuality Construct

In the **Contextuality Construct**, three key dimensions were found to be influential in situating the contextuality of incoming customer service call centres. The first dimension, **Historic-Scientific**, investigated claims that contemporary workplaces represented "revitalised Taylorism" (Garrick 1998) in general terms, and in more specific call centre terms, the "hallmarks of an engineering model" (Deery & Kinnie 2002, citing Herzenberg et al, p.4). However, while references or inferences to contemporary workplaces as Taylorist appear to assume a correlation little substantiating evidence could be found. What is intended here as "substantiating" is a detailed atomisation of Taylor's Scientific Management model in order to legitimise the use of "Taylorist" in association with a workplace, and in this case, call centres. In this research this substantiation additionally provided a perspective of

considerable depth on the relevance of workplace contextuality in workplace pedagogical practices.

Hence, this approach, which claims research originality, has highlighted both the relevance and the significance of an historical perspective to gauge influences relevant to contemporary efficiency management. Nineteen elements were atomised within Taylor's Scientific Management efficiency model and their correlation to contemporary practices in call centres was analysed.

Although the origin of Taylor's Scientific Management was in machine-shop production, steel mills and factories in the late 19th century, the adaptability of Taylor's philosophy and model had been acknowledged in literature as having merit in administrative environments also. While there is a greater affiliation of call centres to administrative environments rather than steel mills, the essence of this research is not based on the similarity of the environments but rather the longevity and adaptability of Taylorism as a management philosophy and model in a workplace where efficiency continues to be a business imperative. Significantly, Braverman (1974) refers to the "imitation of manner rather than matter" (p.164).

Similarly, although a proportion of the literature drawn on in the correlation is approximately 80-100 years old, its relevance lies in its currency of application rather its recency of authorship. Therefore, the key to understanding the philosophy of Taylor's Scientific Management is considering it as a scientifically process-based business administration management model with much wider implications than its relatively low adoption in factory, steel mill or industrial environments in the early 20th century during Taylor's lifetime. This is acknowledged by one of early and more prolific advocates of Taylor's Scientific Management, Thompson (1917b), who observed that "scientific management remains a mere disembodied spirit until it becomes incarnate in some system of administration (p.5).

The research findings indicate that:

- A strong correlation in all 19 elements was found based on the descriptions of Taylor's Scientific Management in literature and the managers' descriptions of contemporary call centre practices.

- Incoming customer service call centres (as relevant to this sample) could legitimately be claimed as Taylorist in nature, a claim which has provided the platform from which the other aspects of the research were investigated.

Despite Taylor's model being acknowledged, for the most part, from the late 1800s to the early 1900s as an exemplar of efficiency management, Braverman (1974) claims that "(Scientific Management) entered the workforce not as the representative of science, but as the representative of management masquerading in the trappings of science" (p.86). His well known critique provided the frame of reference for the second contextuality dimension, **Social-Political**. Its aim was to question the influence of the critique in effecting social change in the contemporary adaptation of Taylorist practices in call centres. Five elements of Braverman's (1974) critique of Taylor's system, relevant to this research, were examined.

The research findings indicate that:

- While a focus on company profitability and stakeholder interests are considered sound business practice, the call centre managers did not equate call centres to politically or capitalist driven business environments. Call centre managers did not generally view call centres as sites of political affiliation, in terms of a particular political party or genre, or socialist affectation.

- Similarly, while there was union representation in each of the call centres workplace relations were considered to be industrially harmonious with unions only moderately active and not considered to carry any significant bargaining power.

- In general terms, the notion of call centres as production/assembly lines or sweat shops was considered to rest with misinformed perceptions and the unscrupulous practices of a disreputable few.

- However, the creation of a workplace which values a process driven, rule based environment were evident, with the notion of autonomy being narrowly defined in terms of self-determination in the ordering of prescriptive processes and procedures. The three call centres were found to operate predominantly in a rule orientated work environment with defined parameters of autonomy. Therefore any degree of industrial democracy operating within the call centres would be argued as highly controlled and aligned to Taylor's disposition in which "he did not grasp sympathetically the aspiration towards industrial democracy" (Thompson 1917a, p.29).

- Contrary to any acknowledgement of worker deskilling, the managers generally highlighted the requirement for the multi- or up-skilling of CSRs. This was largely due to the progressive automation of a range of existing tasks and, as a consequence, the need to handle the higher end complex customer enquiries on, what is envisaged to be, a protracted basis. With artificially intelligent technologies being actively pursed to replace high volume, low value tasks or skills where possible, the polarisation of call centre skills appeared to have become more pronounced.

- Overall, however, the findings indicate that there is no significant change in the contemporary adaptation of Taylor's model or management philosophy which would warrant recognition of Braverman's critique as influential in effecting social change in the adaptation of Taylor's efficiency model in call centres.

With these two dimensions in place as the grounding for call centre contextuality, what inductively emerged from the data was the notion that

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call centres are a specific and unique work community with shared understandings of efficiency practices which are ultimately framed by the historic-scientific and the social-political findings presented in this research. The third contextuality dimension, **Ethno-Cultural**, therefore argued for the recognition of a call centre as a culturally rich work specific ethnographic community. This recognition was argued from a perspective of a deterritorialisation of a traditionally understood ethnographic community, and its reterritorialisation in the form of a work-specific community. The community is bounded by efficiency management beliefs, philosophy, customs, rituals, traditions and a relationship structure which have evolved over a period now encompassing three centuries and an evolved meaningful semiotic system encompassing both artifacts and language. This dimension was examined from the perspectives of:

1. Evolutionary Understandings
2. Beliefs and Philosophy
3. Relationships Structure
4. Language, Semiotic and Cultural Literacy
5. Traditions and Cultural Artifacts
6. Culturally Desirable Behaviours

The findings indicate that:

- Even though managers did not consider that contemporary call centre practices were modeled on any established efficiency management theory or practice from earlier periods, there was a clear correlation from their descriptions with Taylor's model, as evidenced in the Historic-Scientific dimension.

- The continued regeneration of Taylor's beliefs and philosophy was found to act as a self-perpetuating cyclical narrative where a hierarchical relationship structure in turn acts to maintain established efficiency traditions and "efficiency-as-culture" processes and procedures. This, in its turn, is reinforced by the evolution of work-specific culturally-based

texts, including a unique semiotic language and workplace semiotic artifacts which assign cultural meaning through decoding. In this process, cultural and semiotic literacy within the community predicated desirable culturally oriented workplace behaviours and performance expectations. Through replication and reinforcement, cultural beliefs and philosophy, based on 19th century Taylorist principles, provided the model for present efficiency practices in call centres and one which is predicted, as evidenced here, to dictate the future, creating a cyclical narrative on two levels – within the model and across time, past, present and future.

6.3 Pedagogy Construct

The **Pedagogy Construct** examined principally what and how workplace teaching and learning practices were grounded in and influenced by the contextuality findings. Consequently, drawing on the holistic Ethno-Cultural dimension of workplace contextuality, workplace learning has been determined as residing principally in workplace cultural texts. The research examined the nature of the texts and their relationship to and influence on workplace teaching and learning. The scope focused on teaching as encoding the rhetoric of practice and learning as decoding the reality of practice in relation to the prioritisation of the logics of customer orientation and cost efficiency respectively.

The findings initially determined the following:

- Managers' descriptions of workplace practices and efficiency gains favoured cost-efficiency logic over customer-oriented logic.

- When asked to qualitatively describe their key business objectives the descriptions prioritised customer-oriented logic (which became the rhetoric of practice).

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- However, when asked to quantitatively assign a weighting to cost-efficiency logics (as quantitative performance) and customer-oriented logic (as qualitative performance), their weightings of the logics favoured cost-efficiency over customer-orientation.

- Therefore a tension in the logics was evident.

The research then focused on examining how this tension became translated into pedagogical practices. This was approached from the perspectives of:

- **Who** – the authors, the speakers and the audience of the texts.

- **When** – five key **cultural junctures** for encoding/decoding performance expectations in relation to cost-efficiency and customer-orientation logics were established (recruitment, training, on-the-job training, performance review and self-regulation in the workplace).

- **How** – workplace **cultural artifacts** (such as written curricula, oral/aural story telling, language usage and semiotic displays) were assessed as creators of **cultural texts,** representing the logics, which acted as learning conduits in relation to the logics and performance expectations.

- **What** – as the understandings and weightings in the logics shifted over the course of the cultural junctures and became evident, **cultural text influencers** were inductively considered, with three key influencers found attributable (structure and management control of texts, workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy).

- **Where** – in what workplace settings, as **formal and informal workplace settings** did encoding/decoding and meaning construction in relation to the logics and their weighting occur.

- **Why** – in what ways were these connectable, as an interdependent relationship with **workplace contextuality,** with learning as theory, discourses and practices.

The findings indicated that:

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- Workplace learning is a process of workplace acculturation based primarily on the decoding of cultural texts in the forms of oral/aural and semiotic, written and unwritten, spoken and unspoken texts. Cultural texts were classified as "primary" in order to focus the research in terms of scope, manageability and "measurability", which term is used qualitatively here, and "secondary" in order to highlight cultural texts as ongoing sub-texts in cultural meaning making.

- Over the course of the five key cultural junctures, a progressive decrease in the qualitative text encoding customer-oriented logic (the rhetoric of practice) was counterbalanced by corresponding increase in the quantitative text decoding (the reality of practice) cost-efficient logic. This latter is accompanied by a corresponding increase in workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy and a decrease in the management structure and control of texts.

- A clear interdependency and relationship with call centre workplace contextuality was established. With call centres grounded in Taylorist practices, the ultimate understandings and prioritisation of cost-efficiency, as holistically incorporating the quality of product (customer-orientation here) as one component rather than a separate driver, was in keeping with the origins of the management model.

- Current learning theories and discourses have been questioned in terms of their containment of assumptions. One aspect which received some attention was learning setting as sites of formal/informal learning. While formal and informal learning theories are acknowledged, the learning environments or settings in which each occurs are not necessarily synonymous; that is, informal learning can occur in formal learning settings and vice versa. Similarly, other learning theories, such as constructivist and the social nature of learning, while apparent and relevant in the research interpretation, also provided an opportunity for lateral consideration, with particular focus given to the semiotic nature of cultural texts.

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- By broadening existing, arguably underdeveloped, theorisations surrounding the contextualised nature of and the role of semiotics, semiotic language, cultural texts and cultural artifacts in workplace learning, these are presented as significant workplace learning conduits.

6.4   Research Implications and Future Research Potential

This research has implications for both theory and practice, and, as a consequence, also creates possibilities for theory-based and/or practice-based research in the future.

6.4.1 Theory-based implications and Future Research

The findings have the potential to significantly enhance constructions of meaning regarding the relationship of workplace contextuality and learning. A rigorous inquiry in situating call centre contextuality within a framework of historical, scientific, social, political and cultural significance may broaden the breadth and depth with which workplace contextuality could be reviewed and, as a consequence, its key role in shaping workplace learning practices. As a continuation of this, the research further contributes by advocating the broadening of current discourses on formal and informal learning theories, as well as constructivist and social learning theories. By presenting extended interpretations and understandings of their settings, such as informal or unstructured learning within formal or structured teaching settings, and their forms, such as semiotic artifacts and language, there is advocacy for the relayering of meaning making and knowledge constructs.

In essence, approaches which continue to challenge the notion of containment associated with existing assumptions and established learning theories and which favour the interrogation of new constructs as a consequence of reflexive, inductive and research-based inquiry should be viewed as invigorating current discourses. By directing the workplace learning theoretical gaze to an example of a specific contextually rich

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ethnographic community, notions of decoding, cultural texts, workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy offer emerging opportunities to re(de)fine conceptual frames.

6.4.2 Practice-based implications and Future Research

The findings also have practice-based implications for efficiency driven work environments, particularly where workplaces practices are grounded in F.W. Taylor's Scientific Management efficiency model. While, based on the sample of the research, the most apparent audience interest would be incoming customer service call centre managers and workplace educators, there could also be interest from the wider call centre community, and indeed other business managers and workplace educators in workplaces where key objectives are aligned to efficiency performance management. These implications, although focusing on pedagogical practices in this research, have also revealed a bearing on efficiency management workplace practices as well, which has translatability into other industries and workplace environments. In relation to the Ethno-Cultural dimension, considering the workplace as a culturally based community and therefore as one of historic, social and cultural depth, may also engender a different approach to management, and foster an enlightened focus for future business and management related research.

The Pedagogy Construct, from a workplace learning perspective, provides multiple implications for practice. In general, an informed understanding of the relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning could widely enhance the choice of learning strategies adopted in the workplace. Firstly, in relation to both teaching and learning, workplace contextuality as one of social and historical depth needs to be more consciously acknowledged and understood by both managers and workplace educators as a starting point. Through this lens, business objectives and related logics could be examined as sites of tension, either competing or complementary, and their role in the emergence of conflicting understandings between rhetoric and practice

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could be resolved or managed more effectively. Seccondly, considering the workplace contextuality from the perspective of a cultural ethnographic community allows the notion of cultural texts in multiple forms to be more rigorously examined as learning conduits, and as sites of encoding and decoding cultural meaning both explicit and implicit. Thirdly, in discussing formal and informal workplace learning theories and learning environments, greater acknowledgment of the role of semiotics, cultural artifacts and semiotic/cultural literacy would serve to consciously facilitate the choice of form, content and location of the text with a clear learning outcome in mind.

From a pedagogical viewpoint, there is another implication from the research which holds an interesting avenue for further exploration. Casey in Boud and Garrick (eds. 1999) suggests that technologies may represent "a new site of tension and sublimated confrontation" (p.23), with employees being "controlled and disciplined...despite 'empowering' policies, job enrichment and 'participatory management' programmes" (p.23) and "once employee and contractee have learned such attitudes and behaviours through experiences of the organisation's culture of work and everyday management practices, they are very difficult to unlearn and eradicate" (p.23). In the event that advocacy of social change prevails in the form of an alternative model or adaptation to Taylor's model, one which is more socially progressive in a post-industrialist workplace site of practice and learning, then the issue of "unlearning", a cultural deconditioning as it were, and the early stage of creating a new culture would not only need to be addressed, but also it would represent an exciting research opportunity.

Finally, Garrick's (1998) citation of Boje's observation may also generate some future research interest.

> ...learning occurs in the minute-by-minute interactions and the spaces along the hallways, lunchrooms and e-mail networks. The iron cage of the bureaucractic teaching machine is so ubiquitous and (seemingly) benign

that the prisoners of modern learning no longer see the bars, the gears, or question the learning agenda (p.79).

Therefore, it could be argued in summary that ongoing dissonance or disharmony between the logics may benefit from investment in resolution.

6.5 Summary

Although many workplaces may position themselves in the post-industrial discourse, others remain bound by industrial discourse, either as a consequence of their contextuality and/or by design. This, however, should not detract from their ability, if regarded as research-based sites of learning, to contribute to the workplace learning debate in a meaningful way. One such example is the incoming customer service call centre.

This inquiry, based on an interpretive ethnographic case study of seven managers in three incoming customer service call centres, has illustrated the relationship between workplace contextuality and workplace learning. The key focus of the contextuality and learning was specific to the logics of cost-efficiency (measured quantitatively) and customer-orientation (measured qualitatively) in performance management, with the managers' descriptions revealing a tension between the cost-efficient and customer-oriented logics; that is, rhetorically the logic of customer-orientation was prioritised, while the logic of cost-efficiency more accurately represented the reality of practice.

The evolution of incoming customer service call centres as a unique ethnographically and culturally based community engenders a workplace where learning principally occurs through progressive relayered knowledge constructions as a consequence of an acculturation process of encoding and decoding cultural texts and becoming culturally and semiotically literate in the workplace. The key influences in Customer Service Representatives' (CSRs') meaning making and the relayering of knowledge constructs were found to be influenced by the structure and management

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control of the cultural texts, as well as by workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy.

At the time of a CSR's recruitment, the cultural text is highly structured and controlled by management with extremely low workplace socialisation and/or semiotic literacy. However, progressively over the next four key cultural junctures, ending with self-regulation in the workplace, the influences of workplace socialisation and semiotic literacy progressively increase from low to high, while correspondingly, the structure and management control of the texts decrease from high to low.

The findings and their interpretation substantiate a claim that this thesis represents an original approach to "informal" workplace learning, foregrounding the roles of contextuality, culture, texts, artifacts, socialisation and semiotics as staples in workplace learning in incoming customer service call centres. Ultimately however, while the comparability, transferability and/or translatability of the findings to similar groups or environments may be inferred as having applicability outside the confined research sample, in keeping with qualititative, interpretive research perspectives, there is no intent to make a generalised claim to this effect.

In closing this thesis it is apt to draw on two quotes from Thompson (1917a), written some 90 years ago and some decades after the relatively low adoption of Taylor's model in industry.

> There is some consolation in the thought that a later generation may count (this book) an original, or at least contemporary, source (p.v).

> Perhaps in the fullness of time the many records available ...will be at the same time a history of a highly important development in modern (working) life (p.15)

Speaking from the perspective of "a later generation" with some hindsight due to the "fullness of time" there are two important aspects. Fristly, it is acknowledged that "despite the passage of time" the relevance of Taylor, Scientific Management and the writings of early and loyal supporters of his efficiency management model continue to

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hold substance in efficiency management practices today as evidenced in this research. Secondly, and equally significant in the research argument, is also the notion of "because of the passage of time". The distancing from the early days of Taylorism, in the late 19th century, now permits new perspectives and representations on "the culture of efficiency" as a cultural and ethnographic "way of (work) life", drawing on the Taylorist workplace of incoming customer service call centres as the case study example. As a consequence, by foregrounding the concepts of culture and ethnography in workplace learning it is hoped that this research narrative does bring to life the "everyday" and the "mundane" in an engaging style which reconstructs the group being studied. In doing so, the fresh approach and perspectives on workplace learning presented in this thesis are considered to constitute an academic contribution worthy of some reflexivity in the field of education.

Appendices

Appendix A – Research Method

A.1 Ethics

All research which involves human beings needs to consider ethics and the related ethical issues as well as obtaining ethics clearance to conduct the research. In this case, approval to undertake a pre-defined research study has been obtained from the researcher's university as part of candidature for a research-based degree. Ethics approval is subject to a rigorous process of examination based on complying with the principles including: there are no risks to participants, or they are justifiably minimized and outweighed by the anticipated benefits of the research; the rights and welfare of participants are protected avoiding any psychological harm or discomfort; participation is voluntary and participants provide informed consent confirming their right to know the nature, purposes and duration of the study, particularly as it relates to a site or individual. An informed consent letter, which requires signature, additionally introduces the researcher, their institution, a contact person should further inquiries or discussion be required, the participant's right to discontinue, and ethical requirements in relation to confidentiality of identity and information provided, its usage in the form of anticipated publications and its storage, and other relevant information if required. It is also generally accepted as part of ethical practice in research that it neither involves deception of the participants, nor supports any misrepresentation or falsification of the findings.

Specific to this research, the university's clearance to proceed with this ethically approved research study included a submission detailing the purpose, duration, significance and relevance of the anticipated research study, the planned process for approaching call centre sites and individual participants within those sites, what is required from the research participants in terms of participation, etc, where it is to be conducted, how

anonymity (if applicable) and confidentiality of the participants will be observed, details of data collection tools with outlines of anticipated interview/survey questions. This submission also included a draft letter of informed consent.

Once ethics clearance had been obtained by the institution's Ethics Committee, the researcher was then able to initiate the process of contacting the sites and, subsequently, the participating individuals as described in the following sections. Signed letters of informed consent are held in relation to each call centre site, and each participating individual within each site. While these cannot be claimed as anonymous, their identity is confidential and their privacy treated as a matter of seriousness with only the researcher and the researcher's supervisor aware of the identity of the sites, and only the researcher aware of the identity of the participants. The data (in the form interview and field notes) is stored as a combination of hard copy print out on paper, tape recordings and electronic format with backup copies held by the institution and/or the researcher in a secure environment, with the originals to be held for the required period of time.

A.2 Scope

As mentioned in the introductory chapters, there are two main classifications of call centres – incoming and outgoing. Their differentiation lies in the initiator of the contact between the customer (or potential customer) and the call centre. In incoming call centres it is the customer who initiates the contact with the call centre, and in outgoing call centres it is the call centre which initiates the contact with the customer. These latter call centres are generally known as tele-marketing, and fall outside the scope of this research.

The research scope has been intentionally limited to incoming call centres, further defined by a customer service orientation, in other words, incoming call centres which provide customer service as a product. The scope also included incoming customer service call centres which act as a

primary point of sale and distribution of company products, many of which are now paper based and can be distributed via mail, fax or email, for industries such as (for illustrative purposes only) those located in the financial, health, entertainment, transport and tourism sectors. Primary point of sale also encompassed outsourced call centres; that is call centres which are contracted as first point of contact for company representation. These became two of five generic criteria for selection of research participants to ensure a degree of integrity and compatibility within the same case study.

The third criterion related to conducting research in "established" call centres; that is the call centre had been operational for a minimum of three years. This was considered as adequate time for the purpose of the research to ensure that management patterns and performance expectations would be sufficiently well defined and settled. The fourth criterion was that the call centre offered at least one "formal" training program to employees, with "formal" is this sense referring to an instructor facilitated face-to-face environment where training time is operationally pre-allocated and course participation is a requirement of induction training. The fifth criterion related to the resource size of the call centre which, for this purpose, was is measured in terms of number of staff, not seat capacity, as explained in the introductory chapters of this thesis. In this criterion, the aim was to ensure that the research would monitor any significant changes in the data obtained which could be potentially attributed to employee size. The size in terms of physical space of the call centre was of no consequence to the research. However this needs to be distinguished from the call centre layout which is a subject of separate review in the research.

The first four (incoming, customer service, primary point of sale, a "formal" training component, and employee size) were seen as clear parameters of scope definition which was supportive of and conducive to the relevancy of inter-call centre data in terms of determining similarities

and/or anomalies. The fifth acted as a cross reference, a variable of sorts, to monitor its effect on the shared nature of the data in order to constitute one collective case study. The parameters of the scope in terms of research aims are also clearly defined as examining key aspects of incoming customer service call centres' contextuality and pedagogical practices with specific reference to a claim that two logics create a tension in call centre cultural understandings.

The research additionally acknowledges that call centres are complex and multi-faceted with a diverse range of potentially researchable problematics. Some issues of interest and potential influence presented themselves throughout the research, such as organisational culture, call centre attrition, incentive schemes as performance motivators and worker identity. However, while these may have some peripheral bearing on the research content, they are acknowledged as potentially deserving of an independent research focus, and their adequate contextualisation could not be reasonably included here. They therefore remain outside the scope of this thesis.

A.3 Sampling and Selection Process

Sampling, as suggested by Potter (1996), is concerned primarily with "gaining access to relevant evidence about the phenomenon" with the two key words being "access, which reflects a practical concern, and relevant, which reflects a validity concern" (p.104). Potter (1997) further clarifies that although access addresses "how", sampling is more concerned with "why this sample". The following section on the practical implementation of sampling highlights its positioning within various theoretical discourses. The relevant theories attached to the practical implementation include purposive sampling, that is the selection of specific call centre sites based on their "typicality" (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000) and potential to reveal "information-rich cases" (Merriam & Associates 2002). There are also elements of criterion-based sampling where the call centre sites in the selection process were required to comply with the set of criteria.

The call centres which were initially targeted for participation were sourced from listed information accessible to the researcher as a member of various call centre associations and from attendance at various call centre conferences as well as related call centre activities over a number of years. From this platform no specific industry group was targeted. Those call centres which met the criteria represented a diverse range of industries, which was considered a strategy for strengthening the data through industry triangulation. For this reason the number of call centres targeted as constituting a case study was established as three, ensuring that the stratification of resource size and industry acted as independent variables in a qualitative rather than a scientific sense. Initially six call centres of differing resource size and industry representation, and fulfilling the remaining five criteria, were identified and, once ethics approval had been received, they were approached to participate in the research.

Initial contact with each of the six identified call centres was made by telephone to confirm an up-to-date name and position title of an appropriate senior call centre manager with authority to grant or deny research access. This identified key call centre contact was then approached through telephone contact from the researcher outlining the purpose of the research request and suggesting that a face-to-face or, if more convenient, a further telephone conversation or email contact be established to facilitate a more detailed explanation of the research with appropriate question time at his/her convenience. The plan was that if no call back or direct communication had been reciprocated within three weeks, one further attempt via a telephone call would be made. However, this was not required. Within the allocated response time frame two telephone conversations with nominated personnel of the call centre contacts confirmed verbally their call centre's non-participation. Another three, through direct verbal communication, agreed to a meeting to qualify their tentative interest in participation, and the sixth did not respond.

Pending a response from the sixth potential call centre site, three face-to-face meetings with a senior call centre manager from each of the three sites, with research authorising designation, were scheduled and conducted, with each of approximately one hour's duration. For the occasion the researcher had prepared a Research Information Guide, detailing:

- the researcher's identity
- the university being attended and the degree being undertaken
- the aim of the research
- the number of research participants (managers)
- their key areas of managerial responsibility and accountability
- the anticipated duration and frequency of access to participants and to the call centre site
- the method of data collection (see below for supplementary information)
- data storage
- data usage

A consent letter had also been prepared and included, ready for signature. Questions were welcomed at any stage if clarification was required.

Some additional considerations in these primary contact stages were:

- setting up a meeting in an environment and at a time of convenience the research authoriser
- discussing the issue of the organisation's and individuals' privacy and confidentiality of information and identity
- adhering to privacy legislation due to the receipt of signed informed consent letters and collection of data
- outlining the requirements of the ethical research practice
- providing an overview of questions to be asked with a broad overview of their purpose
- assuring the authoriser of the honesty and integrity with which the data will be presented

- describing the data collection methods based on of one-on-one interviews, its anticipated duration, tape recording and transcription verification processes, and a potential need for paraphrasing to protect identification of either site or individual

- explaining workplace observation and workplace documents within the data collection context

- emphasising the rigour of the university's Research Ethics approval process.

During these meetings, authorising senior managers of two call centres signed the consent at the conclusion of the meeting, providing the names of the persons to contact with suggested timing and method for this to occur. The third authorising manager requested more time to further consider the proposal, intimating participation was the anticipated outcome, and stating that in this eventuality the consent form would be forwarded by mail together with the names and contact details of the nominated participants. This did occur within three weeks from the date of the meeting.

Therefore at this point the researcher had, in hand, the signed informed consent letters from each of the three call centres' research authorising managers together with contact information for seven nominated call centre individuals with key managerial responsibilities and accountabilities across a range of relevant call centre functions. These specifically related to planning, resources, operations, technology selection and HR functions focusing on training, development and recruitment. It was acknowledged however that, although call centre site consent had been received, this did not automatically assume the nominated individual contacts would respectively agree to participate and sign their individualised informed consent letters. The sixth call centre had still not responded at this point and no follow up contact was initiated pending the outcome of the individual informed consent of the seven nominated call centre contacts as research participants.

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The authorising managers requested an interim period be observed prior to making individual contact which accorded them sufficient time to contact and brief the nominated individuals, advise that company consent had been given and their co-operation was sanctioned but not mandatory. Once the interim period passed, contact was then initiated with the nominated individuals. This was done by telephone or email initially to establish if they had been provided with the Research Information Guide from the authorising call centre manager, if they required additional information, if they would like to meet face to face to discuss their participation further, or if they considered they were sufficiently well informed to make a decision regarding consent to participate. These individuals were given an opportunity to meet with me either individually or as an individual call centre site, so that, if required, further explanation or queries regarding the research purpose, could be provided and answered, and potentially to build some face to face rapport prior to the actual interview. All individual call centre managerial contacts verbally consented to participate and each was happy to allocate a nominated period of time prior to the research data collection site visit to discuss any additional information and questions.

The initial identification of call centres as potential research sites also involved "preferred sites". This was influenced to some degree by their geographic location and accessibility in terms of transport, time and cost, as all research costs associated with the research were self-funded by the researcher. This method of "population" and "sample" selection was neither considered prejudicial to the research outcomes, nor requiring classification as a convenience sample, due to the potential number of call centres from which the sample could be drawn. A further six call centres were tentatively identified as potential participating sites in the event that the call centres who were initially contacted did not consent and/or did not reply. This was underpinned by an assumption that a number of identified call centres would be reluctant or unable to participate. However

the desired outcome, that is, to enlist three of the twelve identified as potential research sites, was fruitful, with only one insignificant adjustment required, that is the realignment of the call centre size stratification groupings.

A.4 Research Sample

As detailed above, three call centres, of the six sites initially approached, consented to participate. Their stratification by employee size falls into the categories of 50-100, 101-250, 251 plus. The process of site selection, obtaining site participation consent from a research authorising manager and the contacts details of individual participants has already been made transparent. With regard to the individual participants in each of the call centres, three facets or key areas of responsibility/accountability were targeted. These were (a) longer term planning and/or setting efficiency and/or performance targets, (b) shorter term operations and/or evaluating, selecting and/or implementing new technologies, and (c) training including development, and recruitment if possible. Two of the authorising managers nominated three individual persons each in their respective call centre with key responsibilities as outlined. The third authorising manager nominated one contact only, advising that this person would be able to speak knowledgeably on all of the research subject areas of interest (as outlined in the initial research outline contact letter). The seven nominated contacts across the three call centres were then approached independently for their consent to participate. All seven agreed to participate, with all site and individual signed informed consent letters being held by the researcher in a secure environment as part of the research obligations and ethical practice.

This outcome in enlisting the research sample was considered very positive as it is understandable that a preparedness to participate may be tempered by a wariness or cautiousness. Such considerations would no doubt have included weighing up assurances of company anonymity in the research reporting stage, any inadvertent release of company confidential

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information divulged in good faith, research reporting which reflects poorly on the organisation, the call centre site (even through confidentiality as a principle was understood) or the industry, inappropriate utilisation of findings, and even such basic concerns as the disruption to the normal work day or the allocation of time.

The ability of the researcher to build a call centre rapport from a professional collegial perspective was beneficial in establishing a researcher profile of authenticity and credibility, and one in which such understandable concerns were transparent and openly discussed. There were stages of progression in this bona fide process which developed from provisional acceptance and assumption of non-deception through to one of a crucial relationship of mutual trust and the integrity of the research. This included one which was also respectful of the researcher's role as caretaker of the research participants' insightful honesty and the authorising manager's role as "gate keeper" to protect the site and its participants in relation to confidentiality and accurate representation.

In terms of the managers themselves, they did not come from an engineering or scientific background. Their call centre management expertise in relation to their individual key areas of responsibility has evolved through such avenues as Human Resources, Business Administration, Finance and Accounting, Learning and Development, and Customer Service with several of the managers being able to directly relate to the CSR role having achieved progressive promotions through hierarchical ranks to managerial leadership positions in call centres. In this regard, one manager claimed that appropriate "qualifications" have been "acquired through experience" rather than formally recognised knowledge channels. The managers' individual call centre experience and expertise ranged from just over 1.2 years to 18 years and the number of call centres at which they had worked ranged from just one to three, which additionally highlights the inter-call centre transportability of knowledge, skills and cultural understandings.

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A.5 Instrumentation and Authenticity

There was no collaboration with other researchers or with participants which needs to be acknowledged in this research. In this interpretive, qualitative research the researcher has been the sole instrument for the data collection, and essentially it is the researcher who made decisions on what questions to ask and in what order, what to observe, what to record in a generalised sense. Therefore, considerable interest must necessarily focus on who the researcher is and what values, assumptions, beliefs, or biases, she (in this case) brings to the study (Mertens, 1998, p.175).

Accordingly, this also raised a very important issue for acknowledgement, that of researcher authenticity. The three types of authenticity which were considered specifically in this research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000) were: fairness by acknowledging a potential for multiple realities and constructions of a situation of which this research represents one view; ontological authenticity in which the research provides "a fresh and more sophisticated understanding of a situation" (p.108); and educative authenticity from which "the research should generate a new appreciation of these understandings" (p.108).

Authenticity also carried personal indications related to the authenticity of the researcher's credentials to act in the roles of researcher (which foregrounds research credentials) and as a legitimate interpreter of call centre specific stories (which foregrounds call centre credentials) in a manner which reflected credentialled credibility throughout the research study.

A.6 Researcher Positioning

With specific reference to researcher authenticity, there are two key roles which needs to acknowledged and addressed from the perspective of data collection, analysis and interpretation. They are the juxtaposition of what is referred to as the –emic insider and the –etic outsider. The former relates to the researcher as professional call centre colleague (in an abstract rather than workplace specific sense) and community member,

which highlights the potential for subjective interpretation of research data. The latter relates to the researcher as a researcher, which carries an obligation for the objective interpretation of research data. This additionally ensures that the "voices" of the individual participants are "heard", rather than a subjective ventriloquisation of the researcher's experiences as community insider.

While this required a conscious self-reflexivity at each step of the research process, concurrently questioning and balancing the researcher's objective and subjective positions, it is also reasonable to assume that, with the research acting as the lens through which interpretation is made, this lens needs to acknowledge the researcher's own contextuality and assumption in its role of assigning meaning and providing an interpretation. Therefore qualitative interpretive research is not claimed to be "value free", or alternatively "value laden", in either a general sense or specifically in relation to this research. Rather it should be considered here in terms of integrity to be "value conscious".

One of the key considerations in research methodology choice and the mechanics of its instrumentation is researcher positioning, that is, the perspective from which the researcher is viewing, interpreting and reporting on the data. Two established positions are the objective observer in a controlled environment, which would be applicable in scientific-analytical approach, or as subjective observer in a naturalistic environment, such as that which is attributed to the interpretive, qualitative ethnographically based approach. The use of "subjective" here however warrants some caution as there is also a dual positioning within this approach worthy of discussion.

In ethnomethodology, with its roots lying in the way the experiential world is produced and experienced (Gubrium & Holstein 1997), one of the key characteristics lies in the role of the researcher as community member as well as a researcher, and the ability to differentiate, analyse and interpret both the objective and the subjective data. The authors state that

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the term "member" is a key concept and, drawing on Garfinkel and Sacks, the term refers to a person who has not only a mastery of the natural language of a setting or community but also has the ability to use this to engage in the production of commonly understood knowledge which is a reasoning that defines a linguistic community. The researcher is seen as possessing the practical linguistic and interactional competencies through which the observable, accountable, orderly features of everyday life are narratively reproducible. Accordingly, creating, sustaining, and managing a sense of objective reality confers a much greater agency and responsibility on the researcher's interactional and interpretive skills in their reporting of the participants' real world (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.41).

The ethnographer's authority in terms of legitimised representation is a challenged one as representation creates a tension between the interpretation of the experience and accuracy of the text. Behind the interpretation lies the "personal biography of the gendered researcher, who speaks from a particular class, racial, cultural, and ethnic community perspective" (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p.23). "The gendered, multiculturally situated researcher approaches the world with a set of ideas, a framework (theory, ontology) that specifies a set of questions (epistemology) that are then examined (methodology, analysis) in specific ways" (p.23). Behind this the biographical contextualisation of the researcher "leads the researcher to adopt particular views of the 'other' who is studied" (p.23).

Gubrium and Holstein (1997) further claim that a heuristic proximity in ethnomethodology is the act of balancing being close enough to bring practice into focus yet not to the extent of being naturalistically engrossed. This enables the ability to differentiate between the describing reality to describing reality-constituting procedures. In other words, if the researcher is a "member", the focus is achieving clarity of the experienced world as a topic of research, rather than the researcher's experiential

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knowledge acting as a resource. In this research the researcher's experiential knowledge serves only as a secondary resource to authenticate and legitimate the primary resource findings.

Therefore, in ethnomethodology, the researcher needs to put aside their "member" role to move beyond what Schwartz and Jacobs (in Gubrium & Holstein 1997) refer to as a "reality reconstructor" and the voices of authority need to remain with the research participants. This creates what Garfinkel and Sacks (in Gubrium and Holstein 1997) refer to as giving due consideration to postponing judgements on the research data in order to make evaluations based on "their adequacy, value, importance, necessity, practicality, success, or consequentiality" (p.43).

Idealistically, this dual positioning endeavours to moderate attributing the interpretation of data as "value-laden" as briefly mentioned earlier. Realistically however, while every effort is made to minimise the value-laden interpretation, there are assumptions which the researcher is bringing to the research, either consciously or subconsciously and it is an acknowledged characteristic in undertaking interpretive, qualitative research with the researcher as a research instrument. As a form of redress, the rigorous processes utilised in data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data supports what Guba and Lincoln in Mertens (1998) suggest is the role of objectivity being replaced by one of confirmability. This is based on the notion that data, interpretations, and outcomes are rooted in contexts and persons external to the researcher and are not figments of the imagination. Data can be tracked to its sources, and the logic used to assemble the interpretations can be made explicit in the narrative (Mertens 1998, p.13).

A.7 Data Collection Method

In the initial planning of the data collection research stage it was necessary to reiterate the research aims and purpose in conjunction with a well informed methodology choice. This facilitated the selection of the most complementary tools for robust yet focused data collection, its analysis

and interpretation, in other words, for the operationalisation stage of the research. The research is obliged to establish indicators that provide evidence that the data and its analysis are trustworthy and believable, with key words of dependability, credibility and confirmability in post-positivist qualitative research terms loosely equating to positivist quantitative research counterparts of reliability, validity and objectivity respectively.

Dependability is the process of examining the consistency of independent observations and the manner in which the researcher provides "holistic, integrative interpretations of collected performances that seek to understand the whole in light of its parts...and that ground those interpretations...in the textual and contextual evidence available" (Moss, cited in Mertens 1998, p.291). Credibility is based in the rationale of the way in which the researcher represents the viewpoints of the research participants. Confirmability assesses that there is a chain of evidence in the data and its interpretation.

A.8 Triangulation

One of the methods of establishing research rigour in interpretive qualitative research is the triangulation of data collection, which clarifies, confirms or questions constructions of meaning from three different perspectives of the phenomenon. The three perspectives deemed appropriate to this research were face to face interview, workplace observation and document review. This method establishes a supportive and cross-referential framework for data analysis for qualitatively objective interpretation and the qualitative assignment of the term "confirmability" via a theme of concurrent validity (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2000, p.115), that is, each source confirms the findings.

Although the intent of triangulation is confined theoretically to methods of data collection, in this research the notion of a three dimensional view has been extended to other levels of the research also. Three call centres were targeted to constitute the "case" of the study with three key call

managers from each site (depending on call centre size and manager availability). Additionally, in a broad holistic sense, the interpretation of the data is also triangulated in terms of objective researcher, subjective community member and theoretical positioning. The accumulative and compounding nature of the inductive analysis of these "trilogies" serve as cross-referential confirmations of emerging meanings. These multiple sources of data support research claims of rigour by demonstrating credibility, confirmability and dependability.

A.9 Data Collection Tools

The data collection phase consists of three tools to support data analysis triangulation. The first was the face-to-face in-depth interviews with audio tape recording of each of the seven call centre managers as research participants. The second was call centre workplace observation in relation to visible efficiency performance management tools with this information stored in manually written, abbreviated field notes. The third was document review entailing a review in situ of documents which were potentially influential in the mean-making process. In relation to the length of the data gathering process, Lull quoted by Potter (1996) observes that its duration should be long enough "to insure that the behaviors observed are not staged for the researcher's benefit, thereby obscuring valid identification of concepts and relationships" (p.112).

The following documents the three individual aspects of data collection which collectively contribute to holistic data analysis, each identifying the data collection method, considerations and duration.

A.9.1 Interview

The interview as a technique of gathering data can be characterised as structured, semi-structured or unstructured. The data collection tool of interview in this research falls within the classification of semi-structured standarised interview in which the same or similarly worded questions were asked of all participants yet allowing flexibility in the order of posing the questions. This was attuned to each participant's responses thereby

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generating a more natural and responsive environment. The order of the questions asked also related to the manager's key area of responsibility, with a focus on their key area of expertise and responsibility in the earlier stages of their interview and their interaction with other key areas of call centre business environment during the later stages of the interview.

The semi-structured nature of the interview was aimed at creating a more conversation style interaction aligned to rapport building through mutual "member" credibility and acceptance. Underpinning this was the specific aim of engendering a sense of trust and comfort with a situation where open and honest responses are critical to the integrity of the research process. This also acknowledged that there may be some understandable apprehension on their part that either their call centre or themselves individually would be viewed or represented in a poor light, even though they clearly understood that their identity as individuals and that of their site was confidential and would not be revealed.

This approach was viewed as minimizing what Walford (2001) suggests as participants viewing the process "as a 'formal' occasion" during which they "will only give what they are prepared to reveal about their subjective perceptions of events and opinions" and which may be "at some considerable distance from any 'reality' as others might see it" (p.90). The researcher's positioning as both community member (-emic) and researcher (-etic) was therefore viewed as integral in laying the foundation for the collection of trustworthy data from participants.

The individual call centre manager interviews were conducted as a single meeting per participant in managerial offices situated on the premises on each of the three call centre sites, which offices were not in view of the call centre "floor". Key strategies in conducting the interviews focused on Cohen, Manion & Morrison's (2000) suggestions to establish trust, overcome reticence, choice of vocabulary, to avoid any perception of the interviewer as authority, spy or plant (pp.124-125), and to keep to the designated area of interest. Effective techniques suggested were to be

informed and knowledgeable on the subject matter, to maintain an interview structure with relevant and focused questions, to use clear and appropriate language with the capability of linking interrelated responses through active listening and to clarify accurately responses where required.

Other courtesies were also taken into consideration such as being punctual for the scheduled interview, having advised in advance that an area with minimal noise and with access to a power point for the tape recorder would be ideal, and also adhering to the duration indicated in the research information guide. These were considered as the minimum requirements in order to show respectful acknowledgement of their time and voluntary participation.

The individual interviews were estimated to take 1-1.5 hours per participant, however in reality the duration of each varied from 1 to 2.5 hours. This latter extended duration was the direct outcome of informative and elaborative responses and subsequent digressions with a few effusive participants. In these cases, participants were advised that the time frame anticipated for the interview was being exceeded with options of continuing rescheduling to continue at another time, or considering their contribution and participation as fulfilled. On the limited occasions where this was relevant, the participants consented to continue on with the interview. A total of 11 hours was spent on face-to-face interviews, which is a little in excess of 1.5 hours average per participant. The order of the interviews by site and managerial responsibility was inconsequential and arranged around site and participant availability.

A.9.2 Interview Questions

Potter (1996) notes that the interviewer seeks to gather cultural data by asking three types of questions: "descriptive" in order to collect a sample of the subject's language, "structural" in order to discover the subject's cultural knowledge and "contrast" in order to reveal the meaning of the terms in the subject's native language. In creating an "ethnographic

context", qualitative researchers must recognise that the person being studied "decides both what to say to the interviewer and the precise meaning and significance of what he is saying" (Potter 1996, p.97, citing Schwartz & Jacobs). The value of the ethnographic-ethnomethodological context lies in the researcher's ability to interpret the participant's constructions of meanings in this defined cultural milieu by delving further into their responses and by asking predominantly directive research questions which are designed to obtain specific facts or opinion. Therefore the interaction between the two parties represents an exploratory track to delve further into their world of meaning. In this way, this form of interviewing is responsive to what is being said. Of relevance to this research is Hedrick et al's suggestion in Mertens (1998) of "a taxonomy for categorizing research questions" (p.51) such as correlational, impact and descriptive.

The contextuality construct's "historic-scientific" related questions were "correlative" as they attempted "to identify relationships to enable the explanation of phenomena" (Mertens, 1998, p.52). However, the contextuality construct's "social-political" related questions were "impact", based on Mertens' (1998) view that "here the researcher's aim is to identify effects, to establish causal links" (p.52), interpreted here in a non-positivist manner. Concluding, the ethno-cultural and pedagogical questions were "descriptive" as they were "designed to produce information about what is or has been happening in relation to the target of the research" (Mertens 1998, p.52). The responses therefore required the articulation of understandings relative to the "teaching" and "learning" of the two logics in efficiency performance management, which inductively included evidence of culture, language and semiotic literacy in the communication of efficiency performance expectations and constructions of meaning.

Conscious consideration was given in the writing and ad hoc posing of research questions to be unbiased and non-leading including any voice intonation or body language which may indicate pre-conceived

assumptions or dissatisfaction with responses. This also accepted that the "accounts produced by the interviewees must never be dismissed as ideological distortions" in which "even inaccuracies are themselves data" (Potter 1996 p.97). Therefore, while on one hand, this clarified the role of the researcher as non-judgemental passive data gatherer during the interview, on the other hand it was balanced by the willingness of the managers to elaborate on their answers in a noticeably revealing and trusting way, appearing to identify more with the researcher's persona as professional colleague rather than researcher

A.9.3 Interview Transcription and Authentication

The element of interview transcription adds another dimension to the data, its analysis and interpretation. At the point of collection and transcription it is recognised as a primary source of research data. Walford (2001) notes that "the interview ...is not a transitory conversation, but one that is invested with significance" (p.87). It offers an opportunity for analysis subsequent to the interview and therefore requires some attention to ensure, as Walford (2001) cautions, that examples "drawn from the data bank" (p.95) are not represented out of context and therefore potentially misinterpreted.

Within two weeks of each interview, each audio recorded interview was then transcribed to an electronic format. Based on an estimate of 11 hours transcription time for each hour of taped interview, this stage required a further 121hours. It should be noted that each of the transcriptions required some modification for the sole purpose of protecting and honouring explicit company confidential information or information which could compromise individuals' or the site's identity. However such modifications did not compromise the data or its interpretation in any way. The transcribed interviews where then returned to the research participants for authentication, with a request to acknowledge the version as an accurate transcript. This authentication was received in all cases. The call centre sites and individual participant's interviews were

transcribed in the same sequential order as the conducting of the interviews.

A.9.4 Workplace Observation

Ethnographically based "observation" is generally very detailed, including elaborations on the description of the physical environment and social environment in terms groups and subgroups, patterns of interaction and frequency, direction of communication patterns, participant behaviours, informal interactions, language usage and non verbal communication. This guided, to a degree, the collection of data through workplace observation.

This component of data collection required the writing of "field notes" about the naturalistic setting with a view to providing detail of relevant physical and social aspects of environment, such as the physical positioning of the "formal" training rooms, the managers, supervisory and other performance management staff in relation to Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) and the positioning of workplace artifacts with relevance to efficiency performance management.

Atkinson in Ely et al (1997) states " 'the field' of fieldwork is...produced (not discovered) through the social transactions engaged in by the ethnographer" with the outcomes being "what the ethnographer encompassed in his or her gaze", subsequently concluding that "our sense of 'the field' resides in what may be written and read." (p.9). The authors, Ely et al (1997), therefore appear to advocate a degree of circumspection which acknowledges that field notes are the reservoir of 'facts' which contribute to meaning. In other words, they advocate that representations are not impersonal descriptors but rather they are a written record of the data as shaped through the researcher's eyes. While researcher positioning, value consciousness, subjective and objective perspectives are openly acknowledged, the data interpretation represents an informed attempt to present the way the participants see their world. This also

acknowledges that the interpretation presented here is one of many possible interpretations.

Call centre observation in situ took place in one single session in each of the three sites. The duration of the workplace observation ranged from 0.5 to 1 hour's duration accompanied by one of the interviewed call centre managers, for security access reasons. In addition to the areas of interest mentioned above, it also included observation of operationally critical areas such as call routing monitoring stations and "the floor" areas at each of the call centre sites. During this time some additional information, which was extrinsic to the interview but intrinsic to the research, was provided. Such information included the types of technologies which were currently operational in each call centre, or ones which were under review and/or in implementation. For reasons of confidentiality, technologies are referred to in a general rather than call centre specific manner in the research reporting phase. The writing of field notes at this point was minimal with key points noted only due to time restraints. A more detailed transcription was therefore imperative on the same day after leaving the site, detailing more expansively the key points of observations.

A.9.5 Document Review

The document review stage in the triangulation process of data collection involved a review of call centre confidential documents, including training curricula, training assessment processes and records, qualitative and quantitative performance review criteria and assessment. In addition, those documents and information which were visible as part of the workplace observation phase have been included. As workplace artifacts their form takes on site, team performance statistical displays by week, month, quarter or year to date, as well as some performance based individual acknowledgements naming the employee of the month and other incentive based performance initiatives.

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