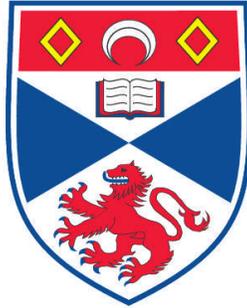


**MANAGEMENT, RESTRUCTURING AND INDUSTRIAL
RELATIONS : ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN THE
UNITED KINGDOM BROADCASTING INDUSTRY, 1979-2002**

Brian J. Quinn

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
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**Management, Restructuring and Industrial
Relations:**

Organizational Change within the United

Kingdom Broadcasting Industry

1979 – 2002.

A thesis submitted for the degree of PhD.

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I, Brian Quinn, hereby certify that this thesis, which is approximately 25,000 words in length, has been written by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

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I was admitted as a research student in October 1998 and as a candidate for the degree of PhD in October 1999; the higher study for which this is a record was carried out in the University of St Andrews between 1999 and 2005.

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ABSTRACT.

In the past decade researchers began to remedy a literature deficit in the study of broadcasting institutions – addressing in particular the issues of labour process, restructuring and industrial relations. This thesis which considers management change, industrial relations and restructuring within the United Kingdom ('UK') broadcasting industry employs a case study format with a view to highlighting the variations of industry (macro) and firm (micro) based restructuring. Organizational change was not a uniform process throughout the UK broadcasting industry and significantly different strategies were developed by management within the two main terrestrial broadcasters – in particular in attempting to fundamentally alter the organization of programme production. The labour process and experience of employees and owner-managers within the independent production sector was also distinguishable as between the two main UK terrestrial broadcasters.

In order to provide a theoretical underpinning to the empirical studies which form the centrepiece of this thesis, the four themes of contemporary labour process theory are explored. These contributions are included because examinations undertaken of labour processes have resulted in critical insights as to the nature of management and labour relationships. Together with firm based organizational restructuring of the broadcasting industry, the past 25 years have seen very significant regulatory change consequent on a variety of legislative initiatives and which are set out.

The case studies begin with the wide-scale restructuring of industrial relations within the Independent Television ('ITV') sector since 1979 (Chapter 4). The second case study (Chapter 5) is concerned with the implementation of a set of managerial strategies aimed at reshaping the labour processes within the Central Scotland ITV franchise – Scottish Television Ltd. ('STV'). Chapter 6 deals with the implementation of new working practices and what might be described as an attack on employee identity within BBC Scotland. The restructuring of the Corporation along quasi-commercial lines with specific reference to the employment of the directorate (distinct business units) system is examined. The final case study (Chapter 7) is an examination of the independent production sector tracing the emergence of a group of Producer Owners (independent production company owners) who emerged during the first half of the 1990s and who have since become a significant force in British television production. This study also traces the development of the career and networking labour of the group of individuals employed on short-term contracts by the independent production company owners.

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Introduction.

It is a fact that television studies risk becoming a scholarly ghetto – simply because the subject is so complex, powerful and, indeed, quite often profoundly mundane. Television research has tended to merge into ‘conceptual self-sufficiency’ and to become a minor concern for those engaged in media research (Born, 2000:407). Born’s description of the increasingly trivial nature of much of what purported to be television research, offers inspiration to persons seeking to assist in understanding the complex labour processes within the industry. Those who had concentrated exclusively on critiquing the *output* of media institutions – and who referred to texts, readings and resistance – have started to consider *institutions*, *industry* and *labour* in a much more pragmatic manner (Oswell, 1998:93).

The broadcasting industry has been in a state of almost constant flux since the early 1980s and the oligopolistic market (which existed until the late 1980s) has been replaced by a market where some 700 channels currently operate. In tandem with the technological and channel delivery system developments – which occurred during the 1980s – there were many protracted and sustained attacks on organized labour. The situation largely arose from the fact that from the mid 1980s, the various commercial operators within Independent Television (‘ITV’) were exposed to increasing levels of competition and which threatened to undermine advertising revenues. The British Broadcasting Corporation (‘BBC’) also suffered a significant threat to its revenues as a result of political pressure to both its cost base and funding arrangements (see Goodwin, 1997:165). The emergence of a substantial independent television production sector (both in terms of size and quality of programming) in the period after the introduction of Channel 4 in 1982, had a profound effect upon the economics of the broadcasting industry (Collins *et al*, 1988).

During the 1980s and 1990s a prolonged process evolved (within the wider economy) in the social and economic restructuring of relationships between the private realm of economic activity and the public sphere of politics and the State (Picciotto, 2002:1-2). Within the private sector, in particular, such restructuring had followed a clearly defined path – namely, that large-scale (Fordist style) production had been re-organized with individual firms adopting post-Fordist (i.e. pared-down) production arrangements. While the UK broadcasting industry broadly mirrored these changes, organizational transformation throughout the industry was not a uniform process. There were significant stylistic and organizational differences in the way the industry was restructured during the 1980s (these are detailed in Chapters 4 to 7 inclusive). It is a fact that the UK broadcasting industry experienced a revolution in employment and organizational practices during the second half of the 1980s (Brown & Walsh, 1991; Haskel & Szymanski, 1994). The industry had traditionally offered lifetime employment, structured careers with controlled entry and high levels of staff jobs together with paternalistic welfare-orientated personnel policies (Paterson, 2001). This pattern was to change beyond recognition. While one can, and must, look to the terrestrial broadcasters and the emerging independent sector as being emblematic of organizational change and restructuring, it would be a mistake to ignore the contextual theoretical contributions to workplace change.

Changes in employer practices and work organization were paralleled by a renewal of Marxist inspired scholarship – the labour process approach. The emergence of labour process theory ('LPT') involved a return to Marxist theory and provided industrial sociology with the analytical and empirical tools necessary to maintain and develop its interest in the connections between the workplace and the wider capitalist global economy (Ackroyd, *et al*, 2005:5). The application of LPT is particularly suited to a study of individual broadcasting firms' experience of organizational change since it brings a commitment not just to a simple insistence upon the centrality of work relationships but, rather, to the '...contours of a restructured world of work' (Pahl, 1988:1).

In Chapter 1, (1.1) the main theoretical developments in LPT are outlined together with four essential themes of contemporary LPT which have a particular relevance to the case studies in Chapters 4-7 inclusive. Individual themes are introduced in Chapter 1 and are developed in the case studies within Chapters 4 to 7. The first theme identifies the move away from collective bargaining (or top-down regulation) within the ITV sector to a bottom-up or individual firm based approach, (1.2)

Within 1.3 the second theme of LPT is considered and which is concerned with the impact of de-skilling and up-skilling upon creative and technical workers within the broadcasting industry, (this issue is considered empirically in Chapter 5). De-skilling/up-skilling is a fundamental tenet of the labour process debate. Since the publication of Braverman's hugely influential *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, the question of skill has been at the forefront of LPT (Braverman, 1974). Having initially ceded control of the labour process to skilled workers, ITV firms began to recognize and attack the concept of skill as a defensive refuge for employees. Managers' use of new technology and work organization to challenge established conceptions of skill was a fundamental part of the ITV Networks' strategy of corporate change from the 1980s onwards. A case study of Scottish Television Ltd ('STV') is used to trace the significant pressures placed on skilled workers through the application of new technology and which held the promise of de-skilling for management as industry-wide restructuring began to be implemented from 1986 onwards.

Questions of skill were central to the labour process within the UK commercial television sector during the 1980s. The BBC would also adapt to corporatization (i.e. moves to impel public organizations to act as though they were commercial operations) and this had a profound impact upon the Corporation (Murdock, 2003:20). The most significant consequence for the BBC was the development of structural reform so as to promote a new, more market responsive culture. One of the central issues for the Corporation – after the introduction of the internal market for the provision of services – was the management of occupational identity and, in particular, attempts to control identity as a central management objective. The conflict between managerial strategies and employee

identities is a critical element of contemporary LPT. Labour process theory of work and identity is considered in Chapter 1, (1.4) and empirically in Chapter 6 – this latter Chapter also examines marketization within BBC Scotland.

The final theme of LPT outlined in Chapter 1 reflects attempts to understand the relationship between networking, the workplace and the labour market. Networking is a critical factor in securing employment for television workers within the independent production sector and became a pivotal form of labour for workers. Theoretical contributions to networking and LPT are examined in Chapter 1 (1.5) and considered empirically in Chapter 7. Networking is also essential for Producer Owners seeking commissions. These Producer Owners have a controlling stake in independent production companies ('IPCs') and are often former BBC or ITV employees. As already indicated, Chapter 1 introduces the four theoretical themes of LPT and which inform the case studies of the restructuring of the broadcasting industry after 1979. Chapter 2 is a short and concise Chapter setting out the details of the interviews which contributed to the empirical Chapters. In Chapter 3 the essential pieces of legislation enacted since the 1950s are set out with a particular emphasis on the period after 1979 when legislation contributed very significantly to the way the industry was (and continues to be) regulated.

Chapter 4 – the first of the four industry case studies – explores the establishment and move away from collective bargaining within ITV. It will be seen that in the past 25 years a series of attacks were perpetrated on the highly regulated broadcasting production process. Workers and trade unions were forced to reorganize and reconsider their established positions regarding the notion of career and work and the once conservative layers of management within the ITV franchises began to employ labour reduction as a critical cost saving device. The old-fashioned and almost paternalistic structure of many ITV franchisees was replaced by a new hard-nosed business approach. The ITV companies would later move to a variant of the flexible model of employment where many of the production departments and centres within the individual companies were pared down in favour of buying-in programming. In simple terms, the traditional regulatory structure of industrial relations within the ITV Network moved from being a

top-down process based on National Agreements between employers and trade union, to a bottom-up re-regulating of the employment relationship. This new approach was apparent in distinctive ways amongst the various ITV franchises. By the mid-1980s ITV managers were determined that local bargaining should take precedence over national bargaining. The results of the restructuring of the ITV sector in the period 1979-2000 are traced using internal documents and archival records. It is noted that these shifts in management strategy and practices were well underway *before* the Thatcher government's decision to deregulate the industry following the 1989 Monopolies and Merger Commission Report on trade union restrictive practices.

The changes in the regulatory basis of the ITV Network were particularly significant and an individual firm based approach to the study of organizational change is undertaken. The objective in Chapter 5 is to explore the relationship between corporate strategy, the reshaping of the labour process and the issue of the re-regulation of workplace relationships – STV was the ITV franchise chosen for examination. The progression is traced from a highly regulated work environment in the period until the mid 1980s (within which managers would not attempt any fundamental restructuring of the labour process) to one in which management considered control of the labour process fundamental to continued profitability and the legitimation of a new managerial regime.

In Chapter 6 the organizational restructuring in the BBC is examined – and, in particular, BBC Scotland. It was here, from the mid 1980s, that a series of initiatives aimed at maintaining audiences and revenues in an increasingly complex and competitive market were introduced (Traquina, 1998). Various factors contributed to the position in which the Corporation found itself after the relatively low-key organizational changes resulting from the McKinsey (management consultancy) reforms of the 1970s. The intensification of competition from the growth of satellite, cable and digital television together with a deep antipathy of the various Conservative administrations to the Corporation, had utterly changed the landscape (Born, 2004:6). During the 1990s the BBC underwent a vigorous management campaign to restructure and reduce labour costs – the single biggest element in their production budgets (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:119). Producer Choice was a response

to the surrounding political, economic and technological environment which echoed the theoretical turn to 'flexible-specialization' and an 'anti-bureaucratic' public sector (Perri, 1995:2-8). It sought to change the culture of work within the Corporation by splitting up the organizational structure into directorates. Producer Choice questioned the validity of the large centralized bureaucratic structure and no longer would individuals consider themselves as 'BBC people' but, rather, as employees of the various directorates.

The marketization of the Corporation had the direct effect of shifting the concentration of those employed by the BBC from conceiving of themselves as, simply, BBC employees to individuals who needed to adapt personal, occupational and management strategies in order to survive the 'new capitalism' of the knowledge economy (Fenwick, 2002:704). In Chapter 6 an examination is undertaken of how internal restructuring of BBC Scotland impacted upon the labour process of those employed within the two predominant directorates of the restructured BBC, namely Broadcast Scotland and Resources Scotland.

The final case study (Chapter 7) explores the emergence of two groups of television professionals within the independent production sector and where independent productions achieved a significant foothold in the television programme market after the passing of the Broadcasting Act, 1990 (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994). No examination of these companies which act as sub-contractors for the broadcasting industry would be complete without an empirically based study of the role played by Producer Owners. The development of a further group of television workers, Broadcast Professionals, is also considered here – these are skilled technical and creative research personnel who are either self-employed or submit to periods of irregular employment. They are invariably required to move from one employment contract to another and depend on networking in order to maintain something akin to reasonably continuous levels of employment. This Chapter also draws upon the role of networks and labour markets which were introduced in Chapter 1.

A shift had taken place in the organization of programme production – power remains in the hands of a relatively few large IPCs, while the two main broadcasters retain very

significant production departments. In contrast, loosely based networks of television professionals had to develop ever more sophisticated strategies in order to maintain employment in an increasingly fragmented labour market.

Chapter 8 offers a review of the association between the four themes of contemporary labour process theory identified in Chapter 1 and their relationship with the four case studies in Chapters 4-7. This Chapter provides a context and helps to link the theoretical themes identified in Chapter 1 with the empirical case study findings offered in Chapter 4 to 7 inclusive.

Each case study contains only the empirical material gathered for that particular case with the exception of some brief references within Chapter 5 which are a direct result of interviews conducted for the preceding Chapter – however there is no replication of material.

Chapter 1.
Core Theoretical Underpinnings.
Introduction to Labour Process Theory and the
United Kingdom Broadcasting Industry.

Introduction.

Cultural industries are typically understood in terms of consumption – not production (see *inter alia*, Hesmondhalgh, 1996:113-114; Beck, 2003:1). The concern here is to examine the management of work organization across the broadcasting sector by drawing upon the main theoretical developments in LPT. One of the difficulties in achieving such an objective has been the substantial fragmentation of LPT since the 1980s.

This Chapter will outline four themes of LPT which provide a theoretical structure for the case studies which follow in Chapters 4-7 inclusive. In 1.1 here the development of LPT is outlined and its appropriateness to the study of labour and organization within the broadcasting industry is examined. In 1.2 the regulation of the broadcasting industry is considered and how the end of collective bargaining (as a form of State based regulation) impacted on management, work and industrial relations after 1979 within the ITV sector. The subject is then considered empirically in Chapter 4. The process of negotiating the introduction of new broadcasting technologies into the independent television sector and its consequent impact on skill (the de-skilling/re-skilling debate) is further considered in 1.3 and the topic is returned to empirically in Chapter 5 through a case study examination of Scottish Television ('STV'). Pressures on notions of Public Service Broadcasting ('PSB') /BBC occupational identity within LPT are specifically addressed in 1.4 and are considered empirically in Chapter 6. While LPT paid only limited attention to labour market activities (or networking) as a form of work, it is a central experience of both freelance employees and the owners of production companies within the independent television production sector – see 1.5. Finally the incorporation of networking into LPT is a theme considered empirically in Chapter 7.

The examination of labour process has produced three important perspectives on the fundamental nature of management labour relationships. These are the likelihood of conflict, the difficulty of maintaining control of the labour process, and finally, the contingent nature of control mechanisms for suppressing conflict (Brown, 1992). The highly technical nature of television production within the UK witnessed little conflict over the labour process in the period up until the 1980s and the complex and unreliable broadcasting technologies meant that control over the labour process rested with skilled workers. Since the very inception of television broadcasting in 1926, until the mid-1980s, groups of skilled workers held strong bargaining positions within both ITV and the BBC. In particular production was controlled by two groups until the mid 1980s – highly skilled engineers and creative workers and, as Burawoy (1979:38) noted, when workers became actively involved in the labour process they developed stakes in particular rules and objectives. However, by the late 1980s management had successfully regained the right to manage and regulate the workplace – a right which had ceded to employees for decades. As a direct result of this change in power relationships, employees would now be required to create complex forms of resistance in order to soften the reality of a management buoyed up by changes in technology and by a supportive political and regulatory environment which sought to marginalize the role of, *inter alia*, established skill and trade unions (Smith & Morton, 1993).

Changes in the UK television industry since 1979, and the intensification of change in the mid-to-late 1980s, contributed to a radical alteration in the working lives of those employed by the two main terrestrial broadcasters. Orthodox treatments of the restructuring of the broadcasting industry have largely concentrated on the importance of new media technologies together with slimmed down production teams and the contracting-in of services and programming which acted as triggers in the emergence of the independent sector and which bypassed the established suppliers (BBC and ITV) (Hazelkorn, 2001). These organizational changes eventually created new opportunities for the provision of programming through the independent television sector. As previously indicated, little attention has been paid to the way in which work organization

and labour process was remade within the cultural industries. Broadcasting labour had developed an identity which was based on its creativity, innovation and originality and these qualities were the principal reasons ascribed to the ability to attract audiences (Jones *et al*, 2005; Delmestri, 2005:976). It was because broadcasting was included under the broad umbrella of cultural industries that notions of management monitoring and control, efficiency, productivity and the individual performance of technical labour were deemed to be anathema to British broadcasting until the mid 1980s.

At first glance, the proposition that there are insufficient studies of the creative/broadcasting industry seems at odds with the increasing fashion for studying the industry's cultural dimension. However, analysis of the cultural industries has been overwhelmingly centered upon the study of the consumption of cultural output – it is a fact that most studies of broadcasting have focused on the quality or otherwise of the content of programming (Lawrence & Philips 2002:431). In contrast, this thesis seeks to place at its core, the economic regulation of broadcasting production and the actual experience of labour. In an introduction to a recent collection of essays in the field of work and organizational studies it was noted that researchers who shift focus from a concern with production to one based upon a desire to analyze consumption are, in fact, excluding employees and questions of employment relationships from their gaze (Ackroyd *et al*, 2005:7). The trend to analyze cultural output can be partly understood by the difficulty in applying traditional labour process theories to the cultural/broadcasting arena. The cultural industries tend to be treated differently within labour process literature and it has been noted that labour practices in the cultural industries do not conform to the routines which are typical of work in the contemporary capitalist economy (Toynbee, 2003:39).

If the study of work within the broadcasting industry is overwhelmingly dominated by considerations of the cultural then, what progress can those researchers from the broad labour process perspective make in the field? LPT can usefully be applied to broadcasting and the tendency to treat output of broadcasting institutions (and the manner in which programming is produced) as intrinsically different from, say, the production of cars or

steel is mistaken. Employees of both the main broadcasting institutions and the growing independent production sector were, and continue to be, exposed to the same pressures upon their working lives as workers in other sectors. As will be established – particularly through the aegis of case studies undertaken here – the broadcasting industry in the period up until the mid 1980s relied upon technical and specialist knowledge to maintain delicate equipment. Skill and discretion, bottom up regulation, a strong set of occupational identities together with networking experiences were vital components of the labour process of broadcasting employees. The attacks on labour process included deregulation, de-skilling and occupational identity change directives. The four themes of LPT outlined track the changing manner of labour regulation after 1979 and how labour responded to such change. A brief history together with an exploration of the application(s) of LPT, will be developed in 1.1

1.1

Situating Labour Process Theory (LPT).

Much of the early work on LPT was written within a Marxist framework with Braverman concentrating upon the degradation of work triggered by scientific management (Braverman 1974: 86). After Marx's death an orthodox view of the production process gained acceptance (Carchedi, 1991). In short, production was viewed as being based upon technologies which were class neutral, i.e. technological development was due to its essential laws of development and did not carry any class content of the society in which it was produced. According to this view a particular type of technology can be misused for the benefit of a small number of individuals. Braverman's work was the starting point for those interested in critical perspectives on work and organization (Braverman, 1974). Although a view exists that LPT died with Braverman, it arguably remains the dominant theoretical method for studying workplace relations. Here, Thompson & Newsome, (2004:33) argued that LPT contributed to industrial relations theories in two ways; firstly, in providing a body of rich qualitative studies and, secondly in establishing a set of perceptive theoretical insights into behaviour at work. For, as capitalism and work was

changing, LPT offered the analytical and empirical tools required to examine the relationship between the workplace and the broader economy (Ackroyd *et al*, 2005:5).

Several core themes can be found in the work of Braverman (1974) and the first, and perhaps the most influential, was the de-skilling thesis (Littler, 1990). Remaining loyal to Marx's analysis of the erosion of skills resulting from the introduction of modern industrial production techniques, Braverman accepted this as his starting point but then went further. Initially he modernized the theory by applying the de-skilling thesis to the white-collar or office based environment. He then went on to sketch a transition from production dominated by scientific knowledge and craft abilities of workers to a situation where managers could exercise complete control over the knowledge and design of the production process. Later he considered the notion of control – viewing the concept as being central to all management systems. It was, he suggested, 'essential for the capitalist that control over the labour process pass from the hands of the worker into his own' (Braverman, 1974:58).

Braverman concluded that Taylorism was not, simply, a particular managerial method but, in fact, became the general method for the organization of the labour process in monopoly capitalism. In general terms he outlined a trend of proletarianization with skilled labour being reduced in size and importance within industries which were adopting new mechanized technology, while increased numbers were being employed in the service industries. In a critique of those who view the work of Braverman as being the sole theoretical basis, Thompson and Newsome attacked a narrow understanding of LPT concerned exclusively with de-skilling and a detailed division of labour. Complete accounts of LPT contained two essential and intertwined research agendas. The first sought to understand and measure changing patterns of labour utilization while the second produced contemporary and historical accounts of the employment of managerial control within a particular workplace (Thompson & Newsome, 2004:134).

Subsequent developments of LPT –second-wave theory – were required to move on from an over emphasis upon de-skilling and Taylorism. Second wave LPT made an effort to

provide more complex accounts of changes in labour, work and organization (Thompson & McHugh, 2002:369). The objective of LPT theory was , and continues to be, concerned with examining structures and actors at different levels without reducing the workplace to a mirror expression of Taylorism (Thompson, *et al*, 2000). In addition, the tendency to provide overarching theories, it is argued, should be resisted. Third-wave LPT theory emerged in the 1990s and sought to encourage the assimilation of ‘Lean Production’ and other new management techniques (Womack, *et al*, 1990; Puligano, 2002:2). Terms such as the ‘Japanese Management Model’ (Graham, 1995), ‘Total Quality Management’ and ‘Continuous Improvement’ (Deming, 1986) were not macro social theories but, rather, reflected broader workplace transition. The changes identified varied from positive and optimistic accounts of the introduction of, *inter alia*, teamwork, while other qualitative accounts emerged casting a negative perspective of the impact of lean production (Bradley et al, 2000). This form of analysis is of particular value because it restores employees’ experience as the central concern. For, as was briefly noted earlier, the distinctive contribution of LPT lay in its capacity to recognize that the ‘rationality of technique’ in the modern industrial enterprise was not neutral in respect of class domination (O’Doherty & Willmott, 2001:4)

So what would this more sophisticated and broader interpretation of LPT look like and how would it fit around a study of work and organizational change within broadcasting? While the agency of consumers has been dissected in detail, the agency of cultural producers was, until recently, largely ignored within the area of broadcasting inquiry. The application of LPT is utilized here to provide a framework for a comprehensive research programme consisting of historically informed empirical studies focused on managerial control strategies and practices (Thompson, 2004:136; Reed, 1992). The employment of LPT as a way in which to understand the structure of workplace relationships is explained through an appreciation of task and work regulation together with the employment relationship itself.

There is no shortage of studies on the areas of creative endeavour and career within the film/media industries (Greenfield, 1989; White & White, 1992; Abbott and Hrycak,

1990). A question which remains relatively unexplored, however, is whether there is anything fundamentally industrial about the cultural industries? (Ackroyd *et al*, 2005:7). As noted earlier, product performance is evaluated within most cultural industries in a quite complex way because cultural goods have a twofold nature; simultaneously ‘artistic creations and economic products’ (Delmestri, 2005:975). In part, because of the particular way in which the broadcasting industry has reflected broader UK work and labour trends, the industry represents an interesting case study of industrial change and one which can direct attention away from the social and cultural margins in favour of a move to the centre of professional cultural production (Born, 2000:406). A difficulty for a LPT perspective on broadcasting labour (even second and third wave variants) is the view that they were too often locked within particular workplace case studies – i.e. a point-of-production focus. Successful attempts to link labour process studies to wider societal and political changes have been limited in number (Thompson & Findlay, 1999). In a determined effort to link what have been seen as disparate strands of research inspired through Braverman’s work, Thompson (1990) outlined four key elements which suggested a theoretical core of LPT.

- The function of labour in generating surplus in capitalism and the centrality of production to the system – the privileged insight this affords labour for a theoretical and political challenge to the system.
- The necessity for renewal and change in methods of production and the skill base of labour because of the discipline of profit and the accumulation of capital.
- The role and imperative of control within the labour process in order that capital may secure profit and the translation of its legal purchase of labour power into a ‘surplus’.
- Finally, although it is a given that social relations between capital and labour in the workplace are structurally antagonistic, in order to constantly revolutionize the production process capital must seek a level of cooperation from labour. Worker responses within the workplace range across resistance, accommodation, compliance and consent.

Other recent contributions to LPT praised for providing detailed descriptions of micro firm analysis have, conversely, been criticized for not providing any encouragement to those seeking to understand global capitalism. However, the theoretical principles of LPT combine analysis of the structural constraints and imperatives which derive from capitalist labour processes together with particular firm based situational scope where managerial and employee actors shape outcomes (Newsome & Thompson, 2004:156). LPT has adopted a workplace position or orientation, based on qualitative case studies allowing the theory itself to explore the informal dynamics of workplace control and labour bargaining while simultaneously locating those relationships within the broader political economy of individual economies. Indeed, this final point neatly explains the way this thesis is structured.

Critics of LPT argue that its core theory has become managerialist and methodologically deficient (Jaros, 2005:8). By suggesting that the theory is managerialist such critics contend that it is crediting managers with having more discretion in the workplace than is actually the case. The managerialist criticism is located in the belief that the Thompson core LPT theory is flawed because it tends to take the position that Braverman's work – based, as it was, upon a study of monopoly capitalism – is unhelpful in understanding conditions under contemporary global capitalism.

LPT is further criticized as methodologically deficient for progressive research (Tinker, 2002: footnote vi). Tinker predominantly attacks what he has termed, 'postmodernist LPT', but does attempt a forensic de-layering of the Thompson core LPT position. His argument is that the criteria for the selection of the core theory appears without appropriate reasoning, and that it is in fact, a social decision. He proposes that the very structure upon which this analysis is built is, at best, questionable – namely, that an understanding of worker subjectivity is not missing but is, rather, placed further down the list of theoretical concerns. (This is largely because the politics of the era in which Braverman was writing was monopoly capitalism). Recent LPT approaches to employee subjectivity emphasized how employees devise strategies to either resist or cope with managerial efforts to restructure the workplace. However, employees did not always

passively accept such change. Ackroyd and Thompson's (1999) development of the concept of employee misbehaviour is important. Their argument begins from the position that employees and management continue their struggle over four essential areas; worker identity, worker effort, working time and the product or output of that work. This reform meant restructuring tasks and occupations undertaken by employees, and reforms along these lines were much in evidence across the public sector, for example within the civil service (Fairbrother, 1994), the National Health Service ('NHS') (Seifert, 1992) and local government (Gill, 1994; Gill *et al* 2003).

That schema is broadly adopted here but with some important stylistic and theoretical differences. The work will emphasize the importance of four themes of contemporary labour process. Firstly, the attempts to reshape work through regulation by management from the mid 1980s, including attempts to de-collectivize industrial relations and the development of strategies of resistance and, later, of internal restructuring by trade unions within the ITV sector. Secondly, an appraisal of the de-skilling/up-skilling debates and how they fit into studies of the broadcasting industry in the period during the restructuring of the ITV franchise, STV. Thirdly, the attempts by employees to maintain occupational, organizational and craft identities in an era where management signalled that occupational identity was a factor in contributing to unacceptably high production costs. Finally, the engagement in networking by two groups of programme makers – the self-employed entrepreneurs of the independent production sector (who are defined throughout this work as 'Producer Owners') to secure programming contracts and to remain informed about industry wide developments – and groups of freelance production workers (defined here as 'Broadcast Professionals') to secure employment contracts.

1.2

Regulation of the Broadcasting Industry and Management of Work and Industrial Relations Change.

Studies of industrial relations have emphasized the importance of the State in shaping distinctive patterns of industrial relations. Edwards (1994:31) stressed the role of State actors in ‘..trying to handle the contradictory needs of accumulation and legitimation and having to respond to specific demands, which may conflict with other demands, stemming from particular groups within the ranks of capital and labour’ (Edwards, 1986:177). Strinati (1990:210) further argued that there was a need to integrate analyses of the State’s role as opposed to treating the State as merely an ‘appendage’ and a party not directly linked to the labour process. The most appropriate method of approaching the role of the State (in relation to the formation of industrial relations policy) is, perhaps through an examination of both the development and challenges to national collective bargaining policy which underscored ITV (and broader broadcasting industry) organizational change.

Organizational change is shaped by how the competing interests of the different actors are articulated and understood. For as Thomas (1994) argues, organizational change is structured by managerial orientation and approach, including the types of change attempted and how they are implemented. As earlier indicated in 1.1, modern working practices are designed to shape the nature of work and employee behaviour, and in recent years organizations have witnessed a significant increase in the existence of such processes including, Total Quality Management, Lean Production and Knowledge Management (Clegg, *et al* , 2002; Waterson, *et al*, 1999; Wall *et al*, 2005). As a partial response to increased organizational restructuring, trade union influence within the broadcasting workplace has declined markedly since 1979. A plethora of legislative initiatives together with significant changes in the cultural and economic make-up of the UK contributed to the increasingly marginalization of trade unions during the 1980s (Edwards, 2004). Across the advanced capitalist world, trade unions lost members on an unprecedented scale – while workplaces changed quickly because of, *inter alia*, new

technologies, changing market conditions and revised conceptions of the worker-employer relationship (Deetz, 1998:151). A further cause in the shift in the constitution of the labour market was the growth in the numbers of highly qualified, flexible employees, as an older workforce gave way to a largely University educated workforce. The UK broadcasting industry, and in particular the ITV sector, reflected and paralleled these changes. The revolution in the way labour was regulated (within the ITV sector in particular) requires a rigorous theoretical and empirical assessment rather than a mere glib assertion of the impact of flexibility. While it is a fact that fundamental regulatory policy (in terms of the awarding of broadcasting licenses) remained in the hands of the State, regulation of the ITV sector was delegated, in part, through the development of structures of national collective bargaining. The lead union which represented the interests of ITV employees during collective bargaining was the Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Trades ('ACTT'). This union developed comprehensive structures for industrial relations policy while pursuing a highly centralized and aggressive national bargaining strategy. From the high-water mark of trade union influence within the industry – during the late 1970s – the ACTT would suffer a hemorrhaging in its position as a critical contributor to the regulation of the ITV sector. While it is tempting to attribute the ending of the national collective bargaining and the system of National Agreements solely to the political ideology of neo-Liberalism, this should be resisted. As will be shown in Chapter 4, (4.3), individual firm based shifts in employer strategy which sought to undermine the labour process of skilled workers were well underway in the ITV sector before Thatcherism. It is now proposed to place in context the moves undertaken within the ITV sector to change a highly regulated production environment to an innovative, flexible dynamic workplace.

1.2.1

Regulation and Fordism.

The contention that organizational actors tend to understand work in terms of 'sub-goals' – even when they are in conflict with the goals of the organization or institution in

question – is particularly apposite in respect of the UK broadcasting industry in the period before deregulation. According to Dohse *et al* (1985); Farrant (2000), Fordism encouraged a number of sub-goals for employees which were not directly related to the economic performance of the institution. Fordism contributed – through the development of these sub-goals – to the development of highly regulated and wide-ranging work rules. One of the most important contributing elements to the success of work-groups in defending territory was the strength of trade union activism within the broadcasting (ITV) workplace. However, by the mid 1980s the influence of trade unions within the workplace declined as employers moved away from joint regulation of working conditions towards unilateral managerial control (Kelly, 2005:283).

The percentage of workers whose pay was fixed by union-management negotiation fell dramatically during this period. Within the UK, the figures showed a fall from 83 per cent coverage in 1980, to 41 per cent in 1998 (Cully *et al*, 1999:242). While over 40 per cent of the workforce was still a very substantial minority, the proportion of employees involved in negotiated agreements was in continuous decline after the early 1980s (Heery *et al*, 2003). Union membership was in constant decline since 1980 (although this trend reversed slightly in 2002-2003), and by 2001 union density was just one in four of the working population (Waddington, 2003:220). National collective bargaining (or top-down regulation) was challenged by the individual (but centrally organized) firm based strategies of the ITV franchise holders during the 1980s. For the ITV employers, any radical restructuring of the labour process and contracts of employment would necessarily involve breaking with national collective bargaining. A fundamental appraisal of these changes is undertaken in Chapter 4 where it will be seen how these substantial organizational transformations were aided, *inter alia*, by modifications in the institutions of social regulation and by the ending of institutionalised Fordism. Katz & Darbishire (2000) demonstrated that it was necessary (in order to adequately trace these changes) to re-think industrial relations theory from the bottom upwards. To do so was not to argue, pessimistically, that such a view was based upon the end of organized industrial relations, but, rather, that it represented a move away from macro-wage bargaining towards job regulation and individual firm based bargaining (Marsden, 2002: 2).

The concept of regulation (or structures of industrial relations) is a critical component in any attempt to understand the restructuring of the broadcasting industry from the period before and after 1979. Regulation of labour and the management of work within the broadcasting industry can be understood in, at least, two ways. Firstly by direct government intervention and legislation in the form of specific broadcasting policy (see Chapter 3) and, secondly, by forms of top-down regulation – essentially the processes of national collective bargaining which maintained a very clear (and relatively peaceful) relationship between the State, employer, trade union and employee. Traditionally governments have (and had) a unique ability to assist in the process of providing assistance in one form or another to institutional or firm development. The State can have a critical role in enforcing institutional change while explaining and eliminating industrial relations' crises. Governments regularly attempted to resolve difficulties between employers and trade unions and to manage and devise alliances among private industrial/firm actors. It is true that while economic restructuring, instability and crisis are virtual permanent features of the capitalist economy – lengthy periods of secure growth have occurred notwithstanding.

For ease of analysis periods of economic development are identified here as either Fordist or post-Fordist in nature. While labeling of this kind can often obscure subtle changes in economic circumstances, some shorthand description for the very significant change which took place in both the global and national economy (and within the UK broadcasting economy) is required. As Fordism and post-Fordism had no solid empirical basis, empirical evidence is provided in Chapter 4 so as to explain the evolution of the regulatory environment of ITV (from its Fordist or top-down regulatory structure) to a form of post-Fordist or bottom-up management (Muller-Jentsch, 2004:11).

Early literature in the field of labour/occupational regulation showed how specific work positions quickly became defensive mechanisms for workers (see, Crozier, 1963; Slichter, 1960). As detailed in 4.2, ITV managers could not identify individual and specific costs pertaining to the production of programming but, rather, had to focus only on the total cost of programming. Work management was largely about the organization

and movement of blocks of employees from one task to another irrespective of the size or budget of a particular programme. Under Fordism, skilled workers set out the boundaries – with management acquiescence – of work rules, which together with collective bargaining emerged as the most efficient way to regulate work (Regini, 2002:4). The underlying logic for the appropriateness of this method of bargaining was the relative homogeneity of the work force. As will be shown in Chapter 4, skilled employees (up until the 1980s) dictated the pace of organizational change and the timing of the introduction of new technologies. Governments also played a central role in the construction and restructuring of industrial relations' institutions and engaged in a process of managing industrial relations systems – the social and economic consequences of large-scale industrial relations failure (strikes, unemployment and political instability) made State intervention inevitable. Chapter 4 traces the way employers' organizations and the State contributed to a very substantial change in the critical relationships within the industry. The balance of power would shift – through the 1980s and beyond – to reside with employers and who with government assistance moved to restructure the broadcasting labour process (within ITV in particular) and which contributed to an enhanced employers' capacity for collective action. Such an outcome – while seeming to emerge painlessly in the favourable political climate of the 1980s – involved complex and wide-ranging negotiations between the ACTT and the employers' association, The Independent Television Association ('ITVA').

A Fordist regulatory paradigm denoted the supply-driven production of standardized products – organized in long production runs to achieve cost reductions through economies of scale and employing a Taylorist division of labour which attempted to separate conception and execution through standardization and de-skilling (Vidal, 1996:5). While such a definition is problematic in terms of its appropriateness to the broadcasting industry, the Fordist inspired regulatory structure of industrial relations is a useful starting point in identifying the end of the collective bargaining era within the ITV sector. While, as noted previously, the employment of Fordist/ post-Fordist schemas are very general in nature, they can provide insights into the pressures which resulted in the traditional top-down nature of the UK regulatory environment in the period after 1945,

together with the emergence of a form of bottom-up re-regulation throughout the commercial broadcasting sector of the UK economy in the period after 1979.

Before 1979 the primary objective of industrial relations policy in the UK was to secure a quiet and peaceful industrial relations environment. As will be shown empirically in Chapters 4 and 5, industrial relations policy from the late 1960s onwards was no longer functioning in the manner which had been intended with the result that ITV management had – as will be seen – largely ceded control of day-to-day regulation to the shop-floor. Bottom-up regulation which emerged through specific firm based strategies would later be used as an antidote to the control of production by groups of skilled workers. A firm-by-firm approach to the break up of the National Agreements which had regulated ITV employment relations is utilized in Chapter 4.

While it is may be possible to interpret from the empirical evidence provided in Chapter 4 that bottom-up regulation largely replaced top-down regulatory policy, the lack of comprehensive and industry-wide studies of this change in power relationships should be seen as a warning against employing ahistorical depictions of a painless transition from a form of Fordism to flexibility. To do so would be to fail to adequately address the difficulties faced by ITV management in tackling what they perceived to be an inefficient form of labour process and organizational structure. One must also be careful not to adopt, unchallenged, the thesis that new work systems emerged to invert the Taylorist labour process which was based upon de-skilled work and rigid authority hierarchies (Vidal, 1996:1). In place of de-skilling a post-Fordist or lean-production paradigm would, it is suggested, witness a highly skilled work organization reflecting extensive employee involvement and new systems of individual bargaining together with a commitment to the employment of advanced Human Resources practices (including employee involvement (MacDuffie, 1995)). As will be detailed in Chapters 4-7 inclusive, there was little de-skilled about most work within UK broadcasting before the mid 1980s. To argue that new work systems would invert the Taylorist labour process failed to adequately describe the move from the high skill/high cost production base within ITV to something akin to the flexible firm model. Further, the post-Fordist idyll noted above is only partially accurate

in describing the deregulated production environment within the ITV sector during the 1990s. As Chapters 4 and 5 will show, de-skilling increased during the 1990s with investment in new production technologies and the development of very individual/employee based HR policies which targeted expensive long-serving employees for early retirement.

1.2.2

Post-Fordism and De-regulation of Work.

As indicated in Chapters 4 and 5, management within ITV would move to devise and employ new management techniques – in the course of the mid 1980s in order to capitalize upon employee commitment while at the same time marginalizing trade union influence (Taylor & Ramsay, 1998:127). The newly defined role of the customer was one of the most significant alterations to the regulation of work within the ITV sector and beyond (Harley *et al*, 2005:10). In practice, this new regulatory principle meant devising programming to attract audiences – and not simply to satisfy the creative impulses of programme makers. During the 1980s and ‘90s, advertising revenues would be determined by the level of audience figures achieved by an individual ITV franchise – the ITV advertising customer overtook skilled broadcasting professionals as a key regulatory factor. The combination of individualistic management practices and the employment of networking/team-working and other creative and non-standard employment practices, contrived to put extreme pressure on the established notions of organizational occupational identity and the relevance of skill (Bacon & Storey, 1996). As the restructuring of the broadcasting industry progressed during the 1980s, new trade union strategies based upon co-operation with management came to be seen by many unions as the way forward (Danford, 2005:173). The most common interpretation of new or post-Fordist workplace practices was that they represented a radical move away from the workplace of old – characterized as they were by hierarchical bureaucracies (Holman *et al*, 2005:5). In terms of a more micro or firm level analysis, researchers were urged to look beyond the limited conceptions of employment relations and HRM in search of new

models which rejected the restrictions of collective bargaining (Burns, 1964; Marsden, 2002:77).

Post-Fordism increasingly demanded that ITV firms employ teams of functionally flexible, polyvalent workers able to adapt to new production technologies. As a consequence, ITV employees were beginning to be encouraged to pursue a commitment to continuous improvement and innovation while responding quickly to the requirements of the customer – a notion itself alien to established labour process within the ITV sector. As 4.4 (Chapter 4) details, the ACTT rejected any significant reappraisal of its traditional strategy (where national collective bargaining established wage rates and working conditions for all labour) until after the National Agreements had been dismantled. As will be seen (4.5) the ACTT was prepared to loose a majority of its workforce in order to maintain the integrity of its memberships’ craft skills and the specific challenges to the ACTT [and later to Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematographic and Theatre Union (‘BECTU’)] are further outlined in this Section.

In contrast to the highly regulated ITV environment pertaining until the early 1980s, post-Fordist type institutions – in applying market-forces to the domains of highly skilled craftsmen – required that individual employees be ‘committed’ and ‘motivated’ to the individual firm and not to their trade union (Crouch, 1999:206). Employees should, such theories propounded, continuously acquire new process skills including problem-solving and initiative development. The high-performance workplace was recognized as being the latest manifestation of post-Fordism and its introduction was generally associated with both downsizing and increasing workloads, together with a loss of control and autonomy for individual employees (Thompson & McHugh, 2002:151). These moves to de-regulate the economy and workplace provided trade unions with a substantial set of challenges. Post-Fordist regulatory policy tended to view the role of unions within the workplace and associated labour regulation as a contributing factor to rigidity in the workplace; the adversarial nature of unions was seen as a cause of disappointing levels of innovation within firms (Addison & Hirsch, 1989).

It is important to note that the ITV franchises were, in part, social constructions (Daft & Weick, 1983). This is particularly the case within the broadcasting industry where, increasingly, technicians were a part of the creative process of programme production and where, before the advent of extremely reliable technology, producers depended on the goodwill of technicians. Their opinions were sought by producers on a variety of technical and creative matters. While emotions (or what as managers within both the BBC and ITV referred to as, 'the ability to go the extra mile') were always an important element of skilled work within the broadcasting industry – the rise in flexible work processes placed very significant pressure on identities, and emotions became part of the regulatory process (Lange, 2002). Jessop (1990) noted that capitalism rested on the separation of the economic and the extra-economic. Within firms which reflected some of the core organizational traits of post-Fordism, the extra-economic was concerned with extracting total commitment from employees to the firm and to the customer in particular. Further, the breaking up of the industry-wide Fordist production structure of television production – which had a commitment to vertical integration – meant that ITV management could, and did, move directly to reshape the labour process. (This practice is detailed in 4.3.).

Within the United States' ('US') film and television industry, empirical evidence of the transition to a post-Fordist economy – or deregulation of the sector – may be accessed through the work of Christopherson & Storper (1986; 1989). They argued that the US film and television industry was not simply an example of the post-Fordist organization, but was the first fully documented transition of an entire industry from the classic bureaucratic, hierarchical, strictly functional and tightly defined job design of the Fordist era, to the organizational and labour flexibility of post-Fordism. In her work on the US media entertainment industries, Christopherson (1996:88) noted that the US film industry had combined oligopolistic control of distribution with production organization and which encompassed both substantial vertical integration through the studio system and production outsourcing. The outsourcing she refers to can be adapted here in order to provide a reading of institutional and economic regulatory change within the UK broadcasting industry.

Post-Fordism provided the theoretical backdrop to the dramatic decline in the influence of the corporatist national and sectoral institutions with a shift in activity from the State to the firm level (Marsden, 2002:2). Within the UK broadcasting industry, the position of trade unions was impacted by wider trends in employment relationships. National collective bargaining gave way to a peculiarly British variant of individualization (Brown *et al*, 1998; Edwards, 2004). The essence of this individualization was the widespread withdrawal of employers from collective bargaining. Although individualization was not utilized to any significant degree within the UK industrial sector, there was evidence of ‘procedural individualization’, with core groups of trade unions excluded from the process of detailing the content of contracts of employment (Brown *et al*, 1998). This was not the case within the ITV sector until after the abolition of the National Agreements within ITV during the late 1980s. Indeed prior to the decision taken by individual franchises to remove themselves from National Agreements, working groups had been set up (superficially at least) to manage change in the procedures for the implementation of the National Agreements. Trade union negotiators (in an ironic development) would return in the latter 1990s to individual franchises to negotiate individual contracts on behalf of employees. Individualization, for the most part, did not exclude trade unions from the workplace but offered incremental action by employers to reduce the scope and influence of collective bargaining while retaining, on the surface at least, some general commitment to the principle of trade union activity (Brown *et al*, 1998).

Over the last 25 years trade unions have been placed under enormous pressure through, *inter alia*, the prevalence of what is described as anti-trade union legislation (Brown & Walsh, 1991; Haskel & Szymanski, 1994; Edwards, 2003). However, as late as the early 1980s (and as noted in 4.1) ITV employers’ bargaining strategy was one which sought to buy peace in return for minimal productivity improvements. [The employers’ association’s (ITVA) limited strategic ambitions will be outlined in 4.2/4.3]. In essence, negotiations between employers’ associations and the main trade union (ACTT) were to marginalize each other’s effectiveness. Workplace bargaining was characterized as ‘largely informal, largely fragmented and largely autonomous’ (HMSO, 1968; para: 65).

By the middle part of the 20th century, technical change and the increasing complexity of industrial production meant that employers were beginning to direct control over the labour process. Managers sought a form of open-ended employment contract from employees and such processes appeared to offer little but open-ended exploitation for workers. The compromise was the emergence of transaction-rules (work rules), which sought to limit managerial authority and employee obligations.

In addition to work rules and the emergence of National Agreements, the commercial ITV sector provided for highly developed shop steward organizations. These actively involved themselves in day-to-day negotiations with managers about the minutiae of shop floor change in terms of work planning and the implementation of incremental new technology. The development of the shop-steward system helped to define the way work was regulated in the ITV sector. In reality industrial relations for the ITV Network operated largely at shop-floor level and were concerned about micro, firm based changes to the National Agreements. In addition to the highly developed shop-floor trade unionism within ITV and which had dominated debate about the future direction of the industry (during the 1960s and '70s), the employers' organizations would begin to re-assert themselves from the early 1980s. In 4.3 moves made after 1979 are set out – the emergence of new strategies devised by the ITVA in order to question employer compliance with collective bargaining and the ACTT's approach to work organization and which was subsequently defined as defensive and unfocused (Terry, 1995:208; Thompson & Wallace, 1994:50).

The crisis in the Fordist experiment lay not in the limits of the paradigms' perspective on work organization but, rather, in the levels of success which trade unions had in regulating work (Tomaney, 1990). The move to learning or post-Fordist work organizations was not achieved for the four key actors (the State, trade unions, management and employees) in a seamless transition from one era to another. It was through a series of political and economic struggles caused by the redundancy of the old mode of development which determined the process. Despite the emergence of strong industry regulation in the form of the National Agreements, there were, however, few

opportunities provided by such agreements for comprehensive mechanisms to regulate industrial conflict. This deficit provided space and opportunity for governmental attempts at regulating this situation through, initially, the formation of a commission of inquiry into the state of industrial relations.

The Donovan Commission noted that the UK manufacturing economy lacked firm-level regulatory institutions. The Trade Union Congress ('TUC') had almost no influence within individual firms or, indeed, over the actions of trade union members at firm level. Both employer and trade unions concentrated their bargaining policy at national level despite the prevalence of local deals as add-ons to National Agreements. Donovan insisted that 'managers had lost control over the workplace and could only regain control by sharing it' with trade unions (Kessler & Bayliss, 1998:36). The legislation which emerged as an indirect result of the Donovan Report encouraged the development of a number of workplace institutions, including, the 'closed-shop' and the 'check-off' systems which were both adopted by ITV and the unions. However, the desired aim of a revolution in workplace relationships – in essence a quieter period of industrial relations' history – is now widely understood as a failure (Millward *et al*, 2000). As will be detailed, the ITV sector saw the development of a critical role for shop stewards in terms of local bargaining. The initial movement to develop strategies within the ITV sector, to put industrial relations back on an even keel by utilizing employment legislation, would be seen by employers as being inherently vulnerable from non-compliance on their part. As new technologies within the broadcasting sector emerged in the US and Japan in the late 1970s, employers began to question the regulatory status-quo. The results of rigorous efforts by an empowered management within the sector which aimed at challenging the skilled-craftsman domination of production would result in devastating consequences for a generation of ITV employees.

1.3

De-Skilling and Up-Skilling; the changing nature of work within broadcasting.

Braverman (1974) considered skill to be synonymous with knowledge embodied within the craft or skilled trade. He saw successful de-skilling as occurring through implementation of scientific management where a restructured labour process would depend on managerial practices (as opposed to the workers' abilities). Blauners' (1964) contribution to the study of skill assumed that work would continually improve in terms of both the satisfaction derived by workers and in the quality of product delivered for the firm. New technology was seen as facilitating the eradication of routine and de-skilling. Conversely, Thompson & McHugh (2002) would later argue that de-skilling remained the major presence within the development of the capitalist labour process. It is evident (see Chapter 5) that elements of both de-skilling and up-skilling of labour took place within the ITV franchise, STV. In order to fully trace these apparently contradictory tendencies it is necessary to provide a full explanation of the two terms and their relevance to the study of LPT and the UK broadcasting industry. Braverman (1974:3-4) foretold the conflict between what he felt was the 'mounting dissatisfaction with the conditions of industrial and office labour' (de-skilling) and the more optimistic accounts of labour (up-skilling) Aron (1962), Bell (1973,1974) Trist (1974).

As will be clear in the series of empirical case studies (Chapters 4 to 7), the broadcasting industry witnessed substantial organizational change over a protracted period from the late 1970s. The move from rigid, specialized bureaucratic job descriptions within the field of creative and technical work, to occupations based (loosely) upon 'post-specialist' job descriptions required that multi-skilling be adopted – that employees be able to master several tasks (Howard, 1995:35). The impact of technological change within the broadcasting industry (and in ITV, in particular) removed the absolute requirement for the established competency of a generation of employees – a competency developed in part through complex demands of broadcasting technology in the period up until the mid

1980s. Thus, as one on the four themes of LPT, (to parallel the empirical work in Chapters 4 – 7) the de-skilling/ up-skilling effects of the introduction of new broadcasting and recording technology within ITV, must be traced in order to provide a full account of organizational change within the sector and the broader broadcasting economy. ITV, as will be established, had been the exemplar of skill change because of both its size and its historically poor industrial relations in the area of technology introduction. Chapter 5 details the long dominance of the complex and unreliable technologies in the period up until the early to mid 1980s and which made the acceptance of a highly regulated labour process the only choice for ITV management. It further details the emergence of management control over the labour process and skill during the 1990s – as an increasingly important weapon in improving profitability. Control over technology operation (or rather the notion of control over skill) was a critical factor, both in managements' ability to properly manage the workplace and in the traditional notion of an employee's sense of competence. Thus, professionals within the workplace who experienced ever increasing technological developments risked having their skills eroded (Chang Boon Lee, 2002). Conversely, they were provided with the opportunity to increase their skill base by a management keen to adopt modern broadcast technologies (Frenkel, 1999:27). Consequently, the maintenance of, and control over skill became a critical part of contemporary LPT.

In 1.3 here, there are two main parts – the first (1.3.1) explores the Bravermanian impact on LPT – in particular his emphasis upon de-skilling. It further traces and examines literature which has emerged after Braverman and which has developed the de-skilling/re-skilling debate. The second element, (1.3.2) develops the theme of re-skilling or up-skilling within the UK economy and its suitability for an application to commercial (ITV) television.

Section 1.3.1

The De-skilling Thesis.

As Chapter 4 will set out, in the period up until the mid 1980s, the concept and application of skill had been subjected to comprehensive restructuring in an effort to challenge the control of production by highly skilled employees within the ITV Network. In Chapter 5 a review is undertaken of STV managements' attempts to alter and later to eradicate what they viewed as the excessive control of production exercised by skilled employees. According to Braverman (1974:443) the elimination (or at least the reduction in importance) of craft skills together with the reconstruction of work as a collective or social process, destroyed the traditional concept of skill. When *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (Braverman, 1974) first appeared few would have predicted the breadth and detail of debate which followed. Braverman subsequently divided scholars of LPT into two camps – those who, albeit with certain qualifications, accepted his approach, and others who considered it inadequate to deal with contemporary developments in the labour process. Critics of Braverman's thesis have faulted him for failing to address workers' subjective experiences and acts of resistance (Knights & Willmott, 1989; Wardell *et al*, 1999). However, for every researcher who attempted to follow in the footsteps of Braverman, another attempted to challenge, if not discredit, his work (Wardell *et al*, 1999:1-2).

Despite the plea not to allow Braverman-inspired LPT debate to degenerate into a de-skilling/re-skilling impasse – the direction of much of the research undertaken in the period after the publication of his work resulted in just such an outcome (Smith & Thompson, 1998). Braverman (1974:112) argued that de-skilling was 'fundamental to all advanced work design'. In essence, the idea of de-skilling reflected the effects of technological change where work was newly defined as unchallenging. Re-skilling or up-skilling is the opposite outcome, where the application of new technology in the workplace provided enhanced opportunities for employees to use and develop new skills (Haines, 1999). The 1980s witnessed the emergence of fresh contributions to the labour

process debate which seemed to mark the end of the up-skilling/re-skilling arguments. Those debates considered, *inter alia*, the re-emergence of forms of craft labour, the rise in the numbers of multi-skilled occupations and the concentration upon professionalization. The employment of new technologies and the alleged rise in autonomy (which enhanced skilled workers' control over labour process) was also the subject of much discourse and the flexible specialization thesis was especially important (Piore & Sabel, 1984). In one of the most sophisticated accounts of flexible specialization, it was suggested that the term was given to efforts to convert traditional integrated structures into more subtle organizational forms capable of responding quickly to shifting market conditions (Piore, 1986:146). In a previous guise the theory of flexible specialization made a direct link to questions of de-skilling and labour control while simultaneously moving away from standardization (Sabel, 1982).

Post Braverman research (Zimbalist, 1979; Kraft; 1979) confirmed the view that de-skilling would inevitably result from the introduction of new technology. For ITV management, new organizational strategies based on flexible organizations were deemed necessary to compete with the emerging, low-cost, independent production sector. Removal of unnecessary cost structures – of which high-skilled workers and unreliable technology were deemed core contributing elements – emerged as organizational priorities. For management, skill became conflated with regulation, while skilled tradespeople acknowledged and accepted that they were television workers but their first loyalty was to the craft community from which they emerged. In 5.1 the acceptance of the separation of the aesthetic and the technical spheres of production is detailed – a situation where it was entirely rational for management to collude with strong trade unions and skilled employees in the creation of balkanized internal labour markets. For as Brown (1972:42-61) noted, camera crews within the ITV sector were regulated, not by ITV management but, rather, by the workgroups from which they originated. It will be seen that STV managers were dependent on the skills of the various trade groups to avoid the commercial disaster of a 'blank screen'.

While Braverman (1974) argued that the application of scientific management techniques would inevitably lead to de-skilling and the degradation of labour, his work was the subject of much criticism because of the perceived inadequate reading of worker resistance within the workplace (Edwards, 1979). Braverman was also criticised for his perceived failure to develop or acknowledge the importance of worker consent within the labour process (Burawoy, 1979). (In 5.1, it will be seen just how important employee consent was for management within STV). Minor changes to working arrangements were, indeed, possible but attracted significant payments to employees (Campling, 1992:207-211). The critical element of Braverman's work remained the analysis of the long-term consequences of the separation of conception and execution in the labour process and the inevitable increase in management control. If one understands the de-skilling thesis as a process which did not apply across all industries or individual firms at the same rate, then one can conclude that the subtlety of the Braverman argument remains entirely valid. However, the stalemate which has ensued theoretically over the last 30 years has not helped those in search of re-examination of the notion of skill, either in its variants of de-skilling/up-skilling or a combination of the two processes (Frenkel *et al*, 1999).

The fundamental difficulty in applying the de-skilling thesis to the broadcasting industry is that during the 1970s new technologies were absorbed into the existing craft-based division of labour and were appropriated by the incumbent trade groups. This situation continued up until the early 1980s when the implementation of revolutionary new recording and filming techniques resulted in individual workers becoming less challenged by their positions (Kraut *et al*, 1989). In addition, as new technology was introduced on the shop-floor it removed some of the decision making capability of workers and their autonomy (and skill level) was reduced. Agnew, *et al*, (1997) noted that technological change resulted in work becoming increasingly routine, dull and stratified – this contrasts with the complex knowledge required to operate technology within STV. As 5.1 details, the ACTT controlled the introduction of new technology. By the mid to late 1980s technological development and specific technological change on the shop-floor of UK broadcasting firms had resulted in a significant transformation in skill requirement for

workers. The ITV sector more generally witnessed the decline of discretion afforded individual technicians and with a corresponding increase in the way managers sought to direct how their employees interacted both with external customers and with internally based producer/directors (Grugulis, *et al*, 2003; Rainbird & Munro, 2003). The de-skilling of technical labour was developed in tandem with an increase in the requirement for ‘soft-skills’ where management sought to manage how employees viewed work. While the development of such interactive skills had been recognized as existing within retailing and other service industries, the emergence of substantial competition within the supply of production resources services resulted in a focus on the aesthetics of the labour market as a form of up-skilling. Cost based competitive strategies, which emerged during this period and based upon the supply of relatively standardized services (in conjunction with Tayloristic forms of work organization which made very limited demands upon the breadth of workers skills) became the norm (Payne & Keep, 2005:146). In Chapter 5 the movement is traced from a high-skilled production environment (in which the limitations of much of the production technology demanded very skilled technicians to produce programming) to one where technological advancements had provided STV management with an opportunity to employ very small numbers of skilled technical workers supplemented by low skilled operatives. In addition to the relegation of STV employees into the realm of the de-skilled, the implementation of Electronic News Gathering (‘ENG’) meant that some employees experienced both de-skilling and up-skilling as new technology was integrated into the franchise.

1.3.2.

The Up-skilling Thesis.

The past twenty-five years have seen the rapid development of information technologies together with very substantial improvements in recording, sound and production technologies within the broadcasting industry. As a consequence the issue of skill, and its potential for up-skilling, assumed a new dimension. The literature shows that workers within other industries – who survived the original implementation of new production

technologies – experienced a further significant degree of up-skilling as they were trained in new technologies (Hirschorn & Gilmore, 1992). Adler (2005) in a contribution to LPT, (relating to questions of skill) argued that the theory had failed to take account of two critical trends in work and skill adoption. He argued that labour process theorists failed to track trends in task/occupation based skill requirements. The notion of up-skilling is not simply about competence in relation to the newest technologies. Payne (1999:42) argued that all workers were now skilled – regardless of the type or quality of the job undertaken and the level of personal control, autonomy or power enjoyed. This is the fundamental difference in how skill is officially conceptualized today compared with the past when to be skilled implied some level of real market power and personal discretion over one's work. Dench *et al* (1999:xv) also proposed that the importance of skill (in terms of information technology) can be over played – arguing that most employees do not require a detailed understanding of how and why technology functions. While many employers may subscribe to the view that a high or up-skilled economy is a desirable goal – and engage in training employees in high-skill techniques – there is a legitimate concern about the cost of such training. The suggestion was made that the demand for universal up-skilling and low skill provision can have the effect of canceling each other out and further, that up-skilling may threaten the ability of firms to be competitive (see Brown & Keep, 1995:98; Keep, 1999).

The issue of skill (and related matters) is fundamental to any comprehensive understanding of labour process – indeed, the subject may be said to lie at the heart of the contradictory relationships which undergird capitalist economies (Rubery & Grimshaw, 2002: 107). In an interesting comparison to the work of Braverman, the contention is made that skill is intricately connected with the idea of working-knowledge, thus being a necessary prerequisite for successfully undertaking any task regardless of its classification as skilled or unskilled (Kusterer, 1978:138). No task is ever fully unskilled because all jobs require the acquisition of a modicum of working knowledge – comprising 'knowledge about routine processing procedures' and 'knowledge about the formal organization' (Kusterer, 1978:136). The de-skilling thesis does not consider the acquisition of such working knowledge. In a later contribution to the debate on the

existence of an inherent process of de-skilling, it was argued that skill should be thought of in terms of three core dimensions (Mainwaring & Wood, 1985:175). These include the learning of routine tasks, the acquiring of awareness necessary to perform certain tasks, together with the acquisition of cooperative skills, or softer skills such as empathy with potential clients (Mainwaring & Wood, 1985: 192; Flecker & Hofbauer, 1998).

Mainwaring & Wood (1985:192) contended that de-skilling should not be seen as a unidirectional process developing along Bravermanian lines but, rather, as a process containing two directional tracks. The first of these is specialization, where the range of skills is narrowed but the status of particular jobs may be increased, while the second fragmentation is where the level of skill required is reduced.

In his work on the notion of skill saturation, Aneesh made the distinction (going on from the previous dichotomy between specialization and fragmentation) between saturated and unsaturated skills (Aneesh, 2001:369-375). Saturated skills are recognized by an express disavowal of any creative engagement with the task in question while unsaturated skills allow greater flexibility in the application of skill. To paraphrase Aneesh, such skills have connections that house ambiguity and equivocation and thus resist complete explication and codification (Aneesh, 2001:374). Manipulation of skill, either in terms of the move to de-skilling or up-skilling, became a critical factor in the search for increased competitiveness within industry outside the UK. Outwith core LPT literature, one can review a range of sources which proclaim the importance which individual firms attach to skill development (up-skilling) arguing that it is a precondition for success (Lam, 2005). Literature dealing with the implementation of technical change upon skill has tended to offer evidence in favour of the positive correlation between organizational change and up-skilling (Greenan & Guellec, 1998). In a study on the introduction of information technology equipment in a sample of US firms it was suggested that up-skilling was merely one part of a general trend to restructuring work and organization (Bresnahan *et al*: 2002; Pival *et al*: 2005).

Friedson (1990: 433) noted how ‘professionals’ define the work they are engaged in as intrinsically valuable and beneficial to others – crucially such work does not emphasize

the importance of costs. What is important is the quality and virtuosity of the work performed. In attempting to apply the theory of saturated (as opposed to unsaturated) skills to the ITV sector (and more specifically to the STV franchise), Chapter 5 will detail the rise in ‘push and press’ technology which provided for ease of task execution and no longer depended on the development of very intimate technology specific skill levels. Further, the case study of technical and organizational change within STV provided examples of both skill saturation and its corollary. ‘Push and press’ technology offered a predictability of procedure and outcome (and was introduced rapidly after the mid 1980s). Earlier technologies were dependent on the experience of technicians to repair equipment after constant breakdowns and gave rise to a confusion of ‘working knowledge’ with ‘skill’.

1.4.

Identity and Work for Creative Workers.

Castells (1996:160) argued that the maintenance of a high level of organizational commitment by knowledge or skilled workers was essential if an institution was to prosper. By ‘prosper’, Castells was referring to the need for particular organizations to ensure that skilled workers did not keep their tacit knowledge to themselves and shared their learned skills with the organization in which they worked. This outcome could only be achieved by security of employment because in such circumstances it would become rational for individuals to transfer their knowledge to the company or organization in question. A current theme of LPT within the broadcasting sector, and specifically the British Broadcasting Corporation (‘BBC’), is that of an attack on occupational identity and, by implication, the security of occupation within the Corporation. This theoretical contribution to the study of occupational identity within the BBC and the challenges faced by it, is not predicated on the view that BBC staff were always slavish in their commitment to the organization itself. For example, Reicher’s (1985:469) model of organizational commitment does not take the organization to be a monolithic entity, rather it elicits only a unitary response from individual employees. Skilled employees have multiple loyalties – including, *inter alia*, to their occupational identities, to the trade

union organization and to the institution in which they are located. For management within the BBC, the central difficulty (set out in Chapter 6) was the possible incongruence between a strong occupational identity and loyalty to the institution and the ability of management to direct an employee's labour process.

A basic criticism of the work of Braverman was the disregard of the 'organization of consent' (Burawoy, 1979). For Burawoy, it was the labour process itself and not the factors outside the process, which created consent, by constituting workers as individuals rather than as members of a class (Carchedi, 1991). However, the organization of consent analysis excluded the real and important role of identity, both as a principle to collectively defend workers from further intrusion into the labour process and as a tool by which management sought to motivate employees (Flecker & Hofbauer, 1998). The increasingly individualizing tendencies of the modern workplace, together with the intrusion by a form of increasing corporate culture upon personal and occupational identity, contributed to the undermining of an individual's search for a stable identity (O'Doherty & Wilmott, 2001). If it was clear that the provision of discretionary effort was being increasingly downgraded by managers within the BBC in particular, with a corresponding attack on the notion of collectivity, then the study of identity formation and resistance and change became a fundamental element of LPT.

Changes in the television industry over the past 25 years – and in particular the public service broadcasting element of UK broadcasting – have contributed, through direct legislative intervention and technological advances, to a radical alteration in the working lives and occupational identities of employees. The labour process of BBC employees moved from a highly regulated system where occupational identity was firmly fixed in the minds of both managers and workers, to a situation where a fluid structure in which occupational identity was treated as an additional and unnecessary cost. Until the early 1980s a relatively fixed articulation of craft identity existed and this suited both parties (management and skilled employees) since it contributed to a stable working and production environment. The identity of craft workers had historically been tied up with the nature of public service and commercial broadcasting and which demanded a high

level of technical skill. Roles/occupations such as journalists, programme producers, technical staff and editors were preoccupied with maintaining behaviour which was deemed professional/expert as opposed to amateur (Burns, 1977; Biddle, 1979). The consequence of the prioritisation of expertise resulted in programme quality becoming one of the remaining methods for broadcast employees to exert control over the production process. In 6.2 the working environment before the introduction of institutional pressure on occupational identity is outlined. One of the essential issues for employees within the public sector (which includes UK public service broadcasting workers) was the struggle for control of the contested terrain of worker autonomy during the 1980s and beyond. Public sector workers fought against what they saw as increasingly aggressive management regimes rooted in private sector notions of efficiency. In noting the emergence of emotional labour and ‘wellness programmes’, researchers have traced the gradual encroachment of questions of ‘identity moulding’ through differing levels of employee seniority (Thompson & McHugh, 2004:293).

It is quite appropriate to study the impact of organizational restructuring upon individual occupational identities when attempting a comprehensive study of organizational change. This is particularly the case in an era where the intrusion of corporate cultures became so intense within the workplace. The question of whether an individual’s core identity was ever intrinsically linked to his/her occupational identity is a complicated philosophical debate. Perhaps, as some Foucault inspired research in this area has concluded, individuals became embedded within disciplinary mechanisms resulting from the surfacing of peer pressure (Puligano, 2002:13-14). While there is debate as to the longevity and depth of occupational identity within the BBC workplace – it is a fact that BBC employees developed a strong attachment to both their occupational community and institutional identity. Salaman (1974) noted that membership of an ‘occupational community’ represented a relationship between an individual’s work and life. An important element of such an occupational community is ‘self-image’ – the way individuals see themselves as broadcast workers, labourers, software developers, etc.. Critically, many of the values and points of reference which define the particular occupational community have their origins in relationships outside the workplace but are

inextricably linked to the social relationships of work (Baldry *et al*, 2005:7). For as Salaman (1974) contended, work is undertaken not just for the monetary reward but also for the satisfaction derived from its execution. One must be careful, however, if arguing that labour for BBC directorate employees was not simply an economic exchange – labour for financial reward. The point here is that BBC employees had a strong occupational identity which differed from the newer broadcast workers who carried no industrial relations legacy (Baldry, 2005:2).

Chapter 6 will address attempts by BBC managers to eliminate what they considered to be an uneconomic or excessive and restrictive attachment to occupational identity, membership of occupational communities and the provision of unnecessarily complex and expensive services to clients. BBC managers sought to maintain the quality of output without the attendant extras which, heretofore, technicians had simply proffered as part of their basic level of service. BBC employees tendered the view that they did not differentiate between supplying their services as highly skilled BBC operatives to private sector independent production companies' ('IPCs') clients and to internal producers and directors. In fact BBC employees retained a very strong commitment to an ideal of the Corporation as well as to their own occupational identity – thus the inclusion of the study of identity within a multidimensional LPT framework is important because a whole new realm of workplace practices is rendered visible (Fleming, 2001: 191). Issues of programme quality, for example, became inextricably linked to questions of identity and the consistent demand for increased quality control and self-regulation encouraged a break with the traditional service levels offered by broadcasters (Daymon, 1998). In many cases professional or occupational identity was seen as a hindrance to profit seeking production practices. As will be demonstrated (Chapter 6) a certain level of practical ability was demanded of technical workers within the BBC Resources directorate but anything beyond a basic competence was seen as having a cost implication for management.

The study of the identity of particular firms or organizations has tended to follow the same pattern as the study of occupational/individual identity – often positing institutional

identity as emergent, fluid or fractured (Scott & Lane, 2000). For the BBC, the restructuring of the Corporation during the 1980s saw it adapting to changes within the business environment – becoming a flexible, unstable and always provisional institution (Gioia & Chittipeddi, 1991). Contemporary debate surrounding the issue of identity may be understood, in part, from managerial efforts to mobilize employee commitment through new corporate culture and customer-centered initiatives. Managers were increasingly turning their attention to efforts to secure and control occupational identities which they believed threatened the long term stability of firms (Knights and Willmott, 1985; Weigert, 1975). It was a fact that new managerial strategies met employees' identities and interests on new contested terrain (Newsome & Thompson, 2004:150). Within the BBC these contested terrains became the two critical directorates of Production and Resources – the departments within the BBC concerned with the provision of programming and the supply of technical services to programme makers.

Inside the BBC personal identity had run in tandem for some employees with a form of occupational/community identity. For other broadcasting employees (particularly those within the independent production sector, see Chapter 7) the definition of self was as a technician or skilled operative standing alone – not the passive recipient of an organizational identity. While the empirical Chapters 4-7 provide evidence of a new flexible approach to the idea of a career in television – most broadcasting workers in the period until the 1990s were firmly entrenched in one firm. Thus organizational and occupational identity went hand-in-hand. This latter form of work or occupational identity had also been developed by skilled employees so as to differentiate themselves from other workers. Within the literature on the formation and activities of professions, it is suggested that they (professions) are different from other skilled or unskilled workers because of their ability to be partly or wholly self-governing (Ackroyd, 1996). While greater efforts were put into securing and managing worker identity, the threat that employees would attempt to develop informal work group cultures in order to retain a degree of autonomy remained a constant worry for BBC managers. The break up of the Corporation into a series of directorates was aimed at securing allegiance to particular directorates. For example, the decision to include all BBC Production directorate

employees below the rank of assistant producer in the Talent Pool (a collective of available labour who moved as directed between programmes to provide research and other services) was a deliberate attempt to attack occupational identity within Production – see 6.5.

The literature has provided two further alternative approaches to examine the relationship between work and identity formation (Halford & Leonard, 1999). Firstly, individuals are determined by work roles – the external imposition of identity. Secondly, identity formation is the result of the internal imposition of work/occupational identity – workers pursue a strategy of personal self-interest in order to maximize their economic returns. The initial approach suggests that individual employees take on certain identities in a conscious way but, over time, such identities become etched into their persona. An element of personal choice is relevant to the adoption of an occupation but, after that point, individuals develop their identity as a result of their structural location. This is a development of the occupational community theory – but this particular psychological perspective goes further, contending that employees require the umbrella of the organization in order to allow a particular identity to take root. An important part of an individual's identification is cognitive and depends upon the salience of organizational membership, but that membership can also be motivated by the desire for self enhancement (Wiesenfeld *et al*, 2001: 215). The empirical work detailed in Chapter 6 ultimately leads to a view that organizational identity was dependent upon the location of the employee within the Corporation. Thus, for Production directorate employees, being located within the Talent Pool reflected a particularly flexible approach to work. For those at a sufficiently senior level, the rules of membership of the Talent Pool (see 6.5) did not exist. Resources, which underwent a comprehensive restructuring process during the 1990s, aligned this decision with the need to maintain and uphold the tradition of public service broadcasting ('PSB'). As will be detailed in 6.3, managerialism – far from being the enemy of BBC/PSB culture – became critical to its survival.

Third wave LPT attempted to reclaim the role of identity for researchers – from a narrow reading which established the belief that occupational identity was not a source of

resistance to the intrusion of management prerogatives. Workers, it was contended, remained knowledgeable about their craft and retained the ability to resist management inspired change (McKinlay & Taylor, 1996). The critical element of this argument was the reassertion of the contested nature of identity formation in the workplace. The workplace is considered the primary arena where 'structured antagonism and divergent interests are reproduced, rather than merely one site in which more general processes of identity formation are located' (Newsome & Thompson, 2004:149). Any proper analysis of identity at work must consider the adoption of occupational identity as a defensive strategy by employees, while the articulation of a dominant corporate identity may also be recognized as a source of competitive advantage by management. Identity is certainly viewed as a socially complex resource and one which can accrue value to management if it is brought under control (Barney, 1998). However, organizations are willing to make room for the continued maintenance of occupational identity of workers in exceptional cases where there is a limited supply of skilled individuals (Thompson, 2002:340).

Identity can be properly explored in a minimum of three ways (Barney, 1998). Firstly, as a negative resource, a source of competitive disadvantage. Secondly, as a neutral resource, and, finally, as a source of competitive advantage, allowing firms to offer an enhanced service within the marketplace. This is of particular importance in the highly competitive marketplace for technical resources within the broadcasting industry – where extra services are recognized as a personal relationship which skilled technical staff have with their customers. Meyer & Allen (1997) in their study of commitment in the workplace noted that organizational commitment was based on three important elements. These are affirmative commitment (emotional linkage to the firm), normative commitment (a sense of obligation to the firm) and continuance commitment (knowledge of the high cost of ending one's relationship with the firm). Firms recognize the high costs for employees, both financially and emotionally, of exiting the firm. Thus, within the shipbuilding industry of the 1960s, for example, some employers remained supportive of the craft system of production – in order to maintain discretionary effort and identification or commitment to the firm – even if it resulted in an altered understanding of craftsmanship (Roberts, 1993). It was suggested that the meaning of craftsmanship had

changed from 'implying a mastery of technical mysteries to being a promise of competence in a variety of exacting conditions and circumstances' (Roberts, 1993:2). As the empirical work in Chapter 6 will show, modern broadcasting technology did not require a lengthy apprenticeship to attain a competent level of workmanship and craft controls have been largely eliminated (Stone, 1973:7:6). However, it will be seen that some levels of craft identification remained despite a countrywide commitment to cost based competition from the 1980s onwards.

As indicated in 1.3 this new economy centered on relatively standardised services together with Tayloristic forms of work organization which sought to make increasingly limited demands upon employees' skill levels (Payne & Ewart, 2005:146). Employers moved to isolate conservative or narrow conceptions of occupational identity with the result that the customer replaced the craft worker as the essential labour process actor (Harley *et al*, 2005:10). Accordingly BBC managers sought to imbue their employees with a loyalty, not just to their profession or occupational identity, but also to the organization's long-term strategic goals. For these managers such goals were concentrated around the issues of more rigorous accounting procedures and continued reduction in the amount of recorded downtime for staff. It has been argued that these new work systems inverted the Taylorist labour process based on deskilled work and rigid hierarchies (MacDuffie, 1995; Pil & MacDuffie, 1996). The difficulty with this thesis is that broadcasting labour was not based on de-skilling in the period up until the advent of new production technology. A replacement system would witness work organization based upon broadly skilled workers empowered through extensive involvement in shop-floor problem solving. The empirical evidence provides little or no support for this view on the part of employees within the Production directorate – in effect this was restructuring of identity by another name. For some workers within the Resources directorate this autonomy was creating discretionary gaps which required a new software of control (Townley, 1993). (Software attempts to define employees as empowered individuals who can devise their own creative and career paths, though by association, such individuals have the burden of skill development and education placed upon them). While possessors of a particular form of knowledge or skill can, if they form themselves

into a group, standardize and control the dissemination of knowledge regarding entry to their own skill area but this view is only supportable if entry of very highly skilled employees into the marketplace is traced (MacDonald, 1995).

For the majority of skilled employees within the UK broadcasting industry, retreat into established core skilled positions was impossible. The concept of the profession in relation, for example, to health professionals offers only a limited degree of relevance for broadcasting employees (Friedson, 1990). Is it possible to argue that in a pre digital era of regulation, broadcast technicians and producer/directors fitted comfortably into that definition? A more appropriate conception of the work and employment relations of the skilled broadcasting professional may be that they are in possession of discretion rather than pure autonomy (Evetts, 2002:345). Even that very limited involvement in the decision making process within the TV production environment continues to be threatened for a great many employees.

The central element of empowerment or positive identity change seems at odds with the current reality of work within the broadcasting industry. The advent of neo-Taylorism appears to offer a more convincing appraisal of change on the shop-floor, adopting as it does the two first principles of the Braverman thesis, namely to gather and systematize employees' 'tacit knowledge' and specifying each task in detail. The final principle (that of removing all intellectual tasks from the workplace) is replaced with a desire to enlist employees in idea generation in order to improve production quality. Workers are therefore no longer treated as physical labour to be controlled, but as sources of innovation – typically this brand of neo-Taylorism offers a form of consultative participation (Vallas & Beck, 1996). The application of organizational change within BBC Scotland is reflective of Braverman's first principle and the comprehensive restructuring of the Corporation in Scotland – with the imposition of the directorate system – reflected that view.

1.5.

Networks and Networking within the Independent Television Production sector.

Networking is a critical part of the labour process of two essential groups of workers within the contemporary UK broadcasting industry – it is a form of endeavour, which extends beyond the workplace and is rarely acknowledged by employers and results in no immediate additional remuneration to the individual. The two groups who undertake this process in the independent production sector are networks of Producer Owners [owner managers of some of the independent production companies (IPCs)] and, secondly, networks of Broadcast Professionals (freelance suppliers of technical and creative services and sometime employees of the IPCs). The theoretical contributions to networking and its relationship to current LPT will now be considered in some detail.

The restructuring of the UK broadcasting industry after 1979 saw the movement of many television employees outside of the traditionally highly regulated framework of television production (Dex, *et al*, 2000). This regulated structure had provided an easily understood and accessible labour market but with the loosening of the formal regulation of the industry in terms of the numbers of programming providers, networking could be seen as a form of replacement labour regulation for television workers. Networks may be defined as either ‘prescribed’ or ‘emergent’. A prescribed network is viewed as a set of formally specified relationships between superiors and subordinates and who interact to accomplish a particular task. In contrast, an emergent network displays informal discretionary patterns of interaction where the content of the social relationship may be work related, social or both. Emergent networks are not the result of a natural alignment of factors but, rather, are contrived by individuals to achieve a specific set of responses. Networks and networking are important factors in the success or otherwise of an individual’s strategies for advancement within the freelance broadcast labour market. Social networks are as complex and heterogeneous as the varied daily activities of any business venture (Johanisson & Paterson, 1984:4).

The networking literature has been likened to a ‘terminological jungle in which any newcomer may plant a tree’ (Nohira, 1992:43). Recent calls for research into the areas of regulatory, legislative and organizational change have included an emphasis upon interdisciplinary and ‘mixed-method’ research to explore the networks of trust and power relationships within television (Frith, 2000:49). Nohira & Eccles, (1992) suggested that the term network had lost its precision through over use and that it was an abstract concept which referred to a set of relationships and nodes which connect them (Fombrun, 1982:184). Networks may, on the surface, appear to be something that organizations adopt in the same way they develop corporate identity strategies. However, networks are more than that, and they are ‘the final arbiter of competitive success’ (Burt, 1992:58).

Networks play a fundamental role in the determination of how information is exchanged within the media industries and reflect a significant change in the regulative structure of UK broadcasting. Within the industry such developments are not new – there has been a history of employees responding to individualized and deregulated employment and this had traditionally been achieved by resorting to collective organization, specifically a reliance on membership of trade unions (Seglow, 1978). As 7.3 will explore, the diminution in the scale and power of trade unions within the broadcasting industry resulted in employees seeking representation through other means. The difference in contemporary broadcasting organizations is that while networking outwardly appears to be an individual, unregulated process, the psychological contract of networks replaced national collective industry bargaining for groups of Broadcast Professionals.

Psychological contracts for these individuals consist of relationships – through actual networks of information sharing – between individual broadcast workers. (Marsden, 1999:18). For Producer Owners, such psychological contracts had the effect (as will be seen in Chapter 7) of providing encouragement to develop networks of a substantial nature with the broadcasters’ commissioning departments and with trusted groups of freelance Broadcast Professionals. Further, for Broadcast Professionals psychological contracts manifested themselves through the desire of freelance workers to produce a portfolio of high-quality work on a continual basis in order to secure and enhance their

reputations (Sydow & Staber, 2002). It will be shown in Chapter 7 that economic restructuring within the UK economy since 1979 provoked a series of substantial changes in the labour process of broadcasting industry professionals resulting in a fundamental requirement for broadcasting employees to engage in networking (Baumann, 2002). The emergence of networking must be understood in two ways, firstly as a method for managers to explore the boundaries of flexibility within the workplace and secondly, as a new element of the labour process for employees in order to soften the impact of organizational restructuring (Amin & Hausner, 1997).

The literature on networks and networking is replete with inventories of specific firm-related network strategies and influencing tactics (Galskiewicz, 1979:178). Little attempt has been made to specify the conditions under which certain types of strategies may be more effective than others and scant consideration has been paid to the identification of interactions between strategies, context and action. Coordination is achieved not through contractual means but, rather, by patterns of communication between employees (Sobero & Schrader, 1998; Doz *et al* 1989). Networks play a fundamental role in the determination of how information is exchanged within the media industry. The information may be simple in nature, for example an invitation to a drinks party for the launch of a TV programme, or as important as specific information for media workers about job opportunities (Boorman, 1975; Montgomery, 1991). In a text aimed at those seeking entry to the competitive US media industries the importance of 'luck' in finding employment was emphasized and the adoption by a 'mentor' was also found to be an important strategy for success in securing paid employment (Tepper, 1999).

Within any contemporary organization many of its assets will be what some have termed intangible (Marsick & Watkins, 1999; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). These intangibles may include intellectual, structural and customer capital. For individual Producer Owners and Broadcast Professionals, networking is a form of intangible labour process which is extremely difficult to quantify – particularly in terms of its success. Individual employees of IPCs operate an informal and unstructured form of personal networking in order to achieve something as close as possible to continuous employment. Employment is often

on a fixed term contract basis and individuals are therefore responsible for their own career development and employment. They use personal contacts to develop their information 'bank' in order to protect themselves from prolonged periods of unemployment. In addition, the successful development of a new entrepreneurial venture is hugely dependent upon the accurate deployment of network strategy. Networks function as 'conduits for information' while providing access to resources without the high costs of developing complex internal and external communication strategies (Larson, 1992). An effective network strategy can make the difference between short-term failure and success for the nascent IPC and in the elimination of severe bouts of unemployment for individual Broadcast Professionals (Stier & Greenwood, 1995).

1.5.1

Networking and Producer Owners.

The information benefits – for Producer Owners – of membership of a network is defined through the awareness of industry specific information about, *inter alia*, forthcoming commissions Burt (1992:13). As 7.2 will show, the central aim of engaging in networking (by Producer Owners) is to gain access to elite or information bearing networks. Oliver & Ebers (1998:568) concluded that inter-organizational network research is confined to two issues, namely the 'social network perspective' and the 'governance perspective'. Those employing the social network perspective utilized the formal apparatus of social network analysis. The governance perspective comprises all theoretical approaches which are concerned with the institutional structures and through which inter-organizational relationships are developed. It differs from the 'social network approach' in that it focuses less on the structural properties of network relationships. The governance approach concentrates on individual entrepreneurs themselves and the style and depth of their relationships with each other. The governance approach offers an insight into the development of relationships between Producer Owners and the commissioning editors of the broadcasting companies.

Networking literature considers two possible directions for research – firstly studies concerned with what are termed ‘clusters of organizations’ and their interaction. (Saxenian, 1991:339; Gray, 1985) The networking effects of innovation were studied within six high tech industries and provided evidence that firms using networking practices were likely to have 20 per cent more product improvements than firms which did not network (Gemunden *et al*, 1996). Secondly – a focus on the firm itself as the centre of analysis is deemed worthy of attention. This technique is simply concerned with understanding how the firm creates and manages a network and this style of analysis seeks to track the outcome of such networking. But how are these networks developed and how successful have creative Producer Owners (cultural entrepreneurs) been in developing and expanding networks? (These questions are considered empirically in Chapter 7). What are the motivations behind both Producer Owners and Broadcast Professionals joining or sustaining networks? The literature is not overburdened with empirical studies of the symbiotic relationship between entrepreneurship and network strategy (Chu, 1996). In a study of the Hollywood film industry the question was posed as to how group ties and inter-group affiliations arose (Baker & Faulkner, 1991). Many forces within creative industries provide a poor basis for integration and a network organization may not arise spontaneously and may have to be deliberately created by use of integrating systems. Understandably the idea of entrepreneurs happily sharing information and strategies is at odds with the individualistic nature of the classic entrepreneur. However, entrepreneurs draw heavily on personal networks to extend their operations and, in turn, this helps to resolve operating problems by supplementing the organization’s internal resources.

For a network to develop the entrepreneur needs to continually create what Granovetter called ‘weak-ties’, i.e. ties between the individual employee/employers who do not know each other. Granovetter placed particular emphasis upon weak-ties which act as bridge-builders between individuals and other networks (Granovetter, 1973:1378). Employment and other networking information transfer is facilitated by weak-ties in contrast to the, perhaps, more obvious choice of ‘strong-ties’. He developed the theory of embeddedness in order to explain how networks influence society and the economy. Networks give

order to an individual's dealings within the market place and they can provide an entrepreneur with cheap and regular access and knowledge of the market. The existence of long-term relationships between networkers can provide a motive to maintain the bond because of the degree of emotional and economic investment involved. The empirical support work offered in Chapter 7, will contend that strong-ties and the development of trust within the independent television production sector were of particular importance to career progression within the industry. Within a market situation the notion of trust does not extend to providing unconditional support to programme providers irrespective of quality, profitability or competitiveness. Properly managed networks for Producer Owners and commissioning editors must, and do, allow for the option of exit and there are no implied assumptions of loyalty beyond that provided by a sense of self-interest. Strong-ties within the independent production sector are largely between the dependable IPC's with long track records and the safety conscious commissioning departments.

1.5.2

Broadcast Professionals and Networking.

Christopherson & Storper (1986:242) noted the increasing importance in developing active social networks for employees within the United States' broadcasting and film industries. Further, the more recent debates about 'flexible specialization' and the network firm have placed renewed emphasis on the centrality of human resources and skill to the production process (Brusco, 1982; Nohira & Eccles, 1992). Project production and small IPCs have flourished in media industries because of the unique or 'one-off' basis of the creation of programming and which is financially uncertain in terms of economic return for individual IPC's and broadcasters. Thus cultural entrepreneurs seek to lessen risk through the development of trusted teams of Broadcast Professionals who have developed a good reputation as technical or creative workers. This form of networking behaviour has been identified as significantly boosting the innovation output of firms in a range of industries (Ahuja, 2000; Powell *et al*, 1996). Industry professionals have tended to accept and even promote the reality of project-networks within the

industry. Networks it is suggested, are the most effective organizational structure in order to cope with the increasingly complex and competitive broadcast environment (Miles & Snow, 1986). Inherent within the maintenance of networks by entrepreneurs is the desire to continually create weak-ties to prevent the dominance of the industry by a few strong-ties. Critically, casualized employees are often only able to access weak-ties after an apprenticeship or a period of time in which they have been accepted informally into a network of broadcasting/media professionals. Membership of such elite or trusted groups, as outlined in 7.3, is a lengthy process which is not defined by any set period of time. The suggestion that membership of networks of weak-ties is something which can only be achieved after gaining experience within the industry may appear to contradict the established Granovetter (1973) position. But for Broadcast Professionals, a competent professional reputation will allow membership of networks based upon weak-ties which will allow for greater movement of information between Broadcast Professionals. Baumann (2002) resurrects the notion of reputation as a critical element in the development of networks within the British and German media production industries. The aspirational lifestyle element of the broadcasting industry (which many outside the industry attribute to media work and workers) means there are significant numbers of individuals therein who have no technical or industry experience and who do not have access to either strong or weak-ties. Coleman offers a neat contrast to the weak-ties paradigm by suggesting that the social capital emanating from a closed set of relationships allowed for norms to emerge that facilitate exchange (Coleman, 1990:320). He further developed the theory by suggesting that if a closed set of relationships was not available, then intermediaries could emerge to establish trustworthy ties. In 7.3 outlines the importance of online networks of Broadcast Professionals in securing work, developing information banks and in securing a semblance of a return to collectivity within the industry is emphasized although there is no suggestion that real evidence of collective bargaining within the freelance market is emerging.

Personal networks which linked firms and individual Broadcast Professionals through social contacts, were the starting points for social networking and these personal networks have a particular resonance for both Producer Owners and Broadcast

Professionals (Grandori & Soda, 1995:199). Such communication amounted to exploratory networks for the discreet exchange of industry specific information or data and which may have some, unspecified, future value (Scharder, 1991). This data may be industry sourced information or it may be vague rumour or conjecture about future industry changes. In reality, the actual information transfer itself is often unimportant and the simple agreement by Broadcast Professionals or Producer Owners to meet and exchange the most basic of information can be the key determinant for the development of social networks. Such personal networks, or the new information technology networks in which employees or single entrepreneurs are involved, are critical to the maintenance of a pool of potential partners which firms may use when searching for some form of strategic alliance or a 'more tightly-coupled, action-orientated networks' (Grandori & Soda, 1999). Broadcast Professionals or Producer Owners who do not cooperate and who do not formally/informally exchange knowledge are, in effect, limiting their knowledge base. Networks are not only critical for accessing knowledge to create in-house innovations but are equally important for firms to learn about innovative work practices (Erickson & Jacoby, 2003).

Networking can significantly boost innovation, competitiveness and the marketability of Producer Owners and Broadcast Professionals – those who choose not to network run the risk of losing access to industry knowledge over the medium term. The literature suggests that as a firm's output becomes increasingly similar to its competitors, so firms recognize the need to collaborate with other firms (Powell *et al*, 1996). Indeed, the crucial point of innovation is no longer the individual IPC itself but, rather, the network in which the IPC is embedded. What is clear is that there are substantial differences between the networking needs of those who identify themselves as either Producer Owners or Broadcast Professionals. For the entrepreneur, the process of networking may increase the level of success for entrepreneurial activities (Baum *et al*, 2000). Network relations provide emotional support for those involved in risk-taking entrepreneurial activities and enhance the level of persistence to remain in a highly competitive work environment (Hoang & Antoncic, 2003). Critically, it is not simply the activity of building a network which is important as it is perfectly possible to spend a lot of time

talking to other people and never learning anything of importance (Il & Mann, 1977:28). Indeed, information must be filtered and evaluated if individuals are not to be overburdened with irrelevant data. It is evident from 7.3 that the successful Broadcast Professionals were those who managed to network as part of elite groups of workers who were in constant demand by Producer Owners. They had successfully passed on a degree of risk to Producer Owners who had to work hard to maintain the services of elite Broadcast Professionals.

While much of the literature on networking is focused principally upon business-to-business networks, the role of informal/formal networking relationships of Broadcast Professionals and other third parties is also important. Third parties have an important role in promoting innovation and helping to share information on a whole range of employment related issues. They can act as very knowledgeable conduits for the development of relationships between IPCs and the skilled professionals seeking employment (Verspagen, 1999; Kaufmann & Todtling, 2001). For Galaskiewicz (1979:178) there are two types of network strategy – those which entail the formation of a personal network suited to functioning in a particular kind of environment or system, and strategies which involve the selective mobilization or adaptation of a personal network for a particular purpose. The central theme is a commitment to a high degree of flexibility in terms of the continued development of personal networking strategies.

Friendship is an important source of industry information and is a further important element in the securing of employment contracts for Broadcast Professionals. In Chapter 7 this elements of networking which can smooth the way for the acceptance of proposals or ideas in relation to networking strategies is explored (Gray, 1985:931). Most available research within this area has focussed on existing networks while the problems of organizing structures for individuals when there are no existing networks has received much less consideration. Larson (1992) suggested that researchers should concentrate their efforts on the development and evolution of personal network patterns within new entrepreneurial firms. For individual media workers it is reputation as competent professionals which constitutes their passport to continued operation within the industry

(Tolbert, 1996). Networks are neither uniform in structure nor wholly equal in terms of access for Broadcast Professionals. There are many types of network in operation – including an outer network in which individual workers send unsolicited requests for work, workers who learn of vacancies through mailing lists, etc. and the core of freelance professionals known to producers and production staff (Antclif *et al*, 2005:7).

(Reputation is a key entry requirements to this latter group). In the film industry the macrostructure (the patterns of interactions among industry participants) is characterized by core and peripheries (Faulkner & Anderson, 1987; Kadushin, 1976). Both core and peripheries are sustained over time where the opportunity to work with high-status professionals enhances an individual's standing and the notion of individual capital is linked to how others recognize and perceive abilities.

An individual has at least three types of capital, namely financial, human and social. While financial and human capital are owned by the individual, social capital in this context is the relationship an employee has with other employees, Broadcast Professionals and Producer Owners (Burt, 1992:11). The structure of the individual's network and his/her personal contacts can, if managed correctly, provide a modicum of competitive advantage. Freeman (1991:503) alluded to the notion of the increasing importance (both for entrepreneur/employer and for the individual employee) of the development of informal networks. He suggested that behind most formal networks are a variety of informal networks, e.g. personal relationships of trust and confidence. Because of the highly personal nature of some of these informal networks, cultural/social factors including, language, religion, educational background and shared experiences come to the fore. Indeed, much of the literature on social capital points to the positive elements accruing to professionals but one must acknowledge that such networks of workers can place restrictions on entry for those less favoured (Portes, 1998).

The literature relating to networking is predominantly concerned with, and emerges from, a distinctly managerialist framework (Kalinkos, 2003). However, within contemporary organizations the need for individuals to be both creative and adaptive and to engage in continuous learning is self-evident (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996). The creation and

nurturing of networks of career contacts – the *knowing-whom* career competences – are critical for creative workers (DeFillipi & Arthur, 1994). But are networks for the Broadcast Professional merely a set of contacts, (one’s ‘black book’) or can networks be a source of opportunity and renewal for trade unions within the industry? (Antclif *et al*, 2005:25) These issues will be addressed in Chapter 7 when the networking activities of two of the distinctive occupational groups within the independent production sector will be considered.

Conclusion.

This Chapter has explored four essential themes of contemporary LPT so that the case studies (Chapters 4–7) would have an appropriate set of theoretical underpinnings. Broadcast Professionals – in their previous manifestation as established, skilled employees within the ITV and BBC sectors – controlled the labour process throughout the 1970s and early 1980s by their dominance of technology. The absolute requirement for specialized learned knowledge on the part of skilled employees has declined in recent years and LPT does not merely note these changes but attempts to link workplace practices to disconnected capitalism, reflecting a trend to challenge institutional and craft distinctiveness (Thompson, 2003). In 1.1 the contribution of LPT to studies of workplace change was set out and its relevance to the case study or empirical method explained. In 1.2 the development of the UK broadcasting economy was traced from a position in which the structures of national collective bargaining dictated how labour was deployed to one where the de-regulatory impulses of something akin to post-Fordist strategies took hold. Within the ITV sector it was necessary to explain how top-down regulation had contributed to a relatively quiet industrial relations environment before the bottom-up re-regulation of the 1990s and beyond.

In 1.3 the themes of de-skilling and up-skilling within the area of creative labour were explored. New skills were continually required so that workers could operate ‘flexibly’ in order to satisfy both the demands of managers and of the technology which, as Chapter 5 will show, allowed for increased usage time as less attention and skill was required for set

up and maintenance. In a contemporary study of trade union representatives most felt that the greatest change to their labour process was one of task enlargement through a combination of multi-tasking and self-regulation (Danford *et al*, 2002:317). Task enlargement came in many forms including a move to regulation of emotional labour as a critical skill and productivity source. De-skilling emerged as a very real issue for employees and trade unions within the ITV sector but, critically, the research on labour process generated a rich vein of literature on issues of skill and managerial strategy (Knights & Willmott, 1990; Wardell *et al*, 1999).

The effect of the contemporary workplace upon occupational identity was outlined in 1.4. According to (Broekstra, 1998) within an ideal scenario, employers and employees would allow occupational identity to develop flexibly in order to respond to an ever-changing business environment. Further, the literature suggests that organizational identity – which is both adaptive and flexible – can contribute to the avoidance of organizational difficulties (Weick & Roberts, 1993). However, identity change can be a painful process for employees who recognize it as restructuring by another name and managers (e.g. within BBC Scotland and as detailed in Chapter 6), had to negotiate carefully in order to maintain a motivated and customer driven workforce. The role and identity of managers was also consistently placed under pressure by continual worker resistance (Thompson, 2002:350). Changing work culture, which was at the heart of management strategies, placed shop-floor managers in a buffer zone between senior management and worker resistance (McHugh, 1997:2).

The labour process of two groups of creative workers who are employed within the independent television sector was considered in 1.5. Individual television workers (Broadcast Professionals) and entrepreneurs (Producer Owners) use networks in different ways but with the same broad objective – to maintain, develop and alter established patterns of communication so as to facilitate the flow of beneficial information. For the IPC owners and managers the use of networks or, more accurately, the desire to be part of a network with access to the commissioning arms of broadcasters, is a very real and specific requirement. For the main participants in the IPC sector, the opportunity of

sharing sensitive programming ideas through a network of competitors is limited, but information regarding competitive threats and general industry information is usually available. While networks for entrepreneurs are complex, they remain important conduits for industry-wide developments and as indicators of forthcoming changes in the programming requirements for broadcasting commissioners.

The critical roles which networks and networking play in alerting Broadcast Professionals to the opportunities for employment will be addressed empirically in Chapter 7. As indicated in 1.5, individuals have had to develop ever more complicated and detailed strategies in order to maintain regular employment in an increasingly complex and difficult labour market. Networks provide opportunities for a tentative first step in the renewal of collective resistance to the managerial control over workplace autonomy. Opportunities which are available to Broadcast Professionals to increase their bargaining power tend to be centered on elite groups of workers who, understandably, have little interest in improving the collective pay and conditions of their colleagues (see, *inter alia*, Paterson, 2001; Ursell, 2000). However, the literature does not provide a definitive determination as to whether such elite workers believe that further opportunities for career advancement will best be made through collective networking arrangements or whether they are better off to network individually (Antclif *et al*, 2005: 4).

Chapter 2.

The Materials

and

Methods of Study.

This study adopted a case study design methodology and data was gathered by conducting in-depth, loosely structured, thematic interviews with employees, trade unionists and management staff across a range of UK broadcasting institutions. Interviews were the basis of the four empirical case studies undertaken. While the introduction to the thesis, (pages i-vii) sets out the structure of the work it proposed from a presentational perspective (and so as to not interrupt the natural flow of the thesis) to provide some detail as to the materials employed and methods used in garnering the empirical research in this Chapter. The data gathering methods for each of the four case studies is set out in order of their appearance in the thesis. For example, the process of interview formation and structuring which contributed to Chapter 4 is detailed first, followed in succession by Chapters 5 to 7 inclusive.

Two broadly structured research questions, noted below, establish the objectives of the study as originally planned at the outset of the research project.

2.2

Broad Research Questions of the Study.

1. How was organizational/firm change/restructuring experienced in terms of a series of industry case studies? Further, how was organizational restructuring experienced and understood by employees, managers and trade union representatives interviewed in the course of development of the four different case studies presented here? How does the experience and pattern of organizational change differ amongst individual firms within the UK industry?
2. How can the fracturing of LPT be understood and applied in order to provide

a theoretical underpinning to organizational change within the four case studies?

Two fundamental matters should be clarified at the outset of this brief description of the methods employed. Firstly, an explanation of the decision to employ a case study approach is desirable and, secondly, a clear expression of the issues behind the decision to choose the four case studies as outlined in Chapters 4-7 inclusive is desirable. The decision to use Labour Process Theory ('LPT') is explained in both the Introduction and in Chapter 1. In 2.2 the role case study research played in the analysis of organizational change is addressed together with its relevance to this thesis. In 2.3 the precise reasons why the particular case studies were chosen. Finally in 2.4 – the methods employed in gathering data for the cases are explained and an outline of the thematic interviews which formed the basis of the thesis cases is given with a simple statement of interviews carried out.

2.3

Rationale for the Multiple Case Study Research Approach.

This work has sought to address the lacuna in the literature with regard to studies of work-place change within the broadcasting industry in the period after 1979. As Yin (2003:4) notes, the case study method is the preferred research method when 'how' and 'why' questions are being asked. The decision concerning the selection of case studies, (which is explained in 2.3), was made in order to provide a comprehensive history of organizational restructuring throughout the industry. This ranged across the BBC and ITV sectors (including a franchise specific ITV case study and a history of ITV industrial relations) and culminates with the impact of the independent production sector during the 1990s on the established industry. The 'how' questions relate clearly to the implementation of strategies of organizational change – while the 'why' questions necessitated an inquiry into the motivations behind management decisions to respond to nationally inspired changes in industrial relations and labour process.

Arzt (1996) suggested that work processes and histories should be studied from a qualitative subjective perspective, involving a deep understanding of employee experiences. The work here was undertaken as a cross-sectional, case study method of analysis. It is important to explain why the case study method was chosen together with outlining the rationale for the decision to choose the particular set of case studies. Eisenhardt (1989:534) described the case study method as ‘a research strategy that focuses on understanding the dynamics present within single settings’. While there is a substantial degree of prejudice against this method of empirical inquiry, there is also much to recommend it as a form of analysis. As Yin (2003:10) noted, the case study approach has been subjected to a number of criticisms – notably that it is less desirable than other comparable forms of inquiry because of a concern over a lack of rigor and a suggestion that the case study investigator may be careless and may not always follow systematic procedures. It is true that the case study method of inquiry received less attention from researchers in terms of providing investigators with specific procedures to follow. However, this does not mean that by choosing the case study structure for analysis the researcher is forgoing methodological rigour. Rather, the case study is an ideal methodology when a holistic form of investigation is required (Feagrin *et al*, 1991).

Case studies are designed to bring out details from the perspective of participants by means of the use of multiple sources of data. (Voss *et al*, 2002) suggested that case studies contribute to theory-building research as ‘unconstrained by the rigid limits of questionnaires and models...[and]... can lead to new and creative insights and the development of new theory’ and further contended that theory-building research should be conducted with a few focused, in-depth case studies. Selection of cases must be done so as to maximize what can be learned in the period of time available for the study.

In this work, four case studies were considered appropriate to provide a significant and satisfactory appraisal of the degree of organizational change undertaken in the industry since the late 1970s. An important criticism of single case study work is that it provides little basis for ‘scientific generalization’ – the researcher cannot generalize from a single case (Yin, 2003:10-11). Further, the criticism of this particular methodology is that results obtained may not be widely applicable in real work

situations, is valid and contributed to the design of the thesis as a collection of individual cases. As Yin (2003:32-33) explains, a fatal flaw in undertaking case studies is to conceive of statistical generalization as the method of generalizing results – simply, the chosen cases are not ‘sampling units’ and should not be chosen for that reason. It has been established that it is incorrect to view a particular case study in the same way one might view a single respondent via an interview process. As multiple cases were chosen here these should, according to Yin (2004:32), be seen as ‘multiple experiments’. Levy (1988) used the single-case design method in his study for the University of Arizona – and which may be used to confirm or challenge an established theory or understanding of a particular situation, industry or firm.

Single-cases are particularly appropriate for revelatory cases, e.g. where a researcher may have access to a particular phenomenon which had previously been ignored or inaccessible. Some disciplines (including political science) have developed a set of methodologies for developing single and multiple case studies. Yin (2003:46) takes the view no clear distinction should be drawn between single and multiple case study work, thus the choice is considered one of research design. While the archival material employed in Chapter 4, for example, has been referred to in only the broadest terms within other literature in this field, it was felt that the multiple case studies methodology was particularly suitable to this study. Herriott & Firestone, (1983) (quoted in Yin, 2003:46) contend that evidence from multiple cases is more compelling and, consequently, the overall study is more robust than single casework. While any one of the four case studies detailed in this thesis would provide a basis for a partial account of organizational change in the UK broadcasting industry, the imperative of the single case study – that of the rare, critical or compelling example of organizational change – does not exist. Simply, it would not have been accurate or sustainable to contend that any one of the four cases was more important than any another.

The mode of analysis undertaken here replicates what Yin has referred to as ‘analytic generalization’ where a previously developed set of theories (in this case LPT) are employed as a structure upon which to compare the results of case studies. As outlined in both the introduction and Chapter 1, the structure of this thesis is quite clear in that regard. As Eisenhardt (1989) noted, theory development takes time and

can be difficult. It is important to be wary of simply ‘bolting-on’ a theoretical Chapter at the beginning and then simply ignoring its relevance to the empirical Chapters in the body of the work – this has been avoided here. The four themes of LPT developed in Chapter 1 are interwoven within the empirical work. Yin (2003:29) rightly noted that the case study researcher is not being asked to be ‘a masterful theoretician’, rather the clear goal is to have a blueprint for one’s work. Quoting Sutton & Staw, (1995:378) the suggestion is made that research design provides strong guidance in determining what data to collect and, further, that theory development prior to the collection of case study data is an essential step in undertaking case studies.

Kraut, *et al*, (1989) noted that organizational restructuring should be studied in different settings and work cultures. In choosing to use the case study method similar processes of organizational restructuring can be studied within various locations or settings. In applying the method it is possible to explore both the direction and pace of change within the industry and the individual experience of organizational change. The crucial reason for selecting the case study method of analysis was the notion that organizational change progressed at a different pace and in different ways throughout the four studies chosen. As will be set out, organizational restructuring within at least one of the case study firms was inspired by industry-based change occurring at another institution – also the subject of case study.

2.4

Data Selection Methods and Selection of Cases.

This work is a series of case studies preceded by a contextual piece setting out the political and economic environment in which the industry operated for the duration of the period examined. The case studies are preceded by two further contributions, Chapter 1 which sets out the theoretical basis for a detailing of the firm specific restructuring which occurred in the industry during the period c.1979-2002, and Chapter 3 which provides the reader with an entry into the political and regulatory environment which was broadly supportive of industry restructuring.

In case-study research, data is not sampled statistically but, rather, theoretically through the selection of interviews relevant to the research questions (Eisenhardt, 1989). The data selection of this study included selecting cases and interviews determined by two critical criteria. The first criterion was that the empirical research (through the choice of case study) should consider organizational change within the UK broadcasting industry in a period of intense flux. The second criterion was that interviewees be broadly representative of departments/sections or occupational groups within the particular case so that a minimum of obvious prejudice would be evident in the transcripts produced from the interviews.

The cases selected, (Chapters 4-7) offer an overview of the UK broadcasting industry, providing evidence of the very substantial changes to the way the industry was structured before and after the deregulatory impulses of the 1980s, together with empirical linkage to the heavily regulated industry. Until the explosion in satellite and cable broadcasting during the mid 1990s, the BBC, ITV and Channel 4 represented the preponderance of the UK broadcasting industry and in the subsequent period have witnessed the greatest reorganization. The cases chosen represent and reflect the importance of the two public sector broadcasters, (ITV and BBC) within the development of UK broadcasting. ITV provided two case studies in this thesis because of the complex history of industrial relations' policy and change and a desire to complement the choice of a case study of BBC Scotland with the central Scotland ITV franchise, STV. The most fundamental single development within the industry – in the aftermath of the emergence of commercial television in the 1950s – was the deregulation of the industry and the consequent emergence of independent production companies (IPCs). The industry development and labour process of the independent production sector is considered in Chapter 7. It is now proposed to move to outline the methods employed in gathering the data which formed the basis of the empirical Chapters.

2.5

Data Gathering Methods and Interviews Undertaken.

Data was gathered at four different 'sites', i.e. four different sets of interviews were undertaken. Interviews took place at a number of different locations and these are

noted in the statement of interviews which follows. The basic process of interview remained the same for the four cases and a set of broadly based interview themes (which was directed at securing agreement about the case concerns of respondents) formed the basis of the interviews undertaken throughout the research work and is provided. Through recorded interview, data gathering was conducted by the author. Written analysis began with the work required to set broad thematic questions and this was completed by reviewing literature concerning industry change in the UK broadcasting industry. The work required to transcribe the recorded interviews into text was undertaken and any repetition of language or inaudible or linguistic phenomenon – which contained no important information – was not documented. A total of 46 interviews were transcribed and used in the construction of case material. A further 6 interviews were recorded and partially transcribed, but these were not used because of poor sound recording or because the interviewee developed an anxiety in the course of interview.

Prior to the start of interview, a letter of introduction from the relevant academic supervisor was presented to the interviewee. In addition, the aims and objectives of the research and the methods to be employed were outlined. The general themes of the case were discussed in broad terms, prior to recording. The interviewee was again asked if he/she had any objections to the interview being recorded. The interviewee was told that a copy of the transcribed interview could be provided, if requested. Anonymity was promised for those who did not wish their name or precise technical, or administrative position to be stated within the body of the work.

It is a fact that most of the interviewees contributing to Chapter 4 (the first of four cases) were agreeable to their names being attached to the interview when using direct quotes in individual Chapters. Thus at the foot of the relevant pages (in Chapter 4) the names and roles/former roles of individuals interviewed are set down. Chapter 4 was the result of a set of interviews, (detailed here) with former senior representatives of the employers' association, the Independent Television Association, ('ITVA'), current and former senior trade union representatives, (ACTT & BETA) and former executives of ITV franchises. The employment of archive material concerning the development of strategies aimed at restructuring the employment relationship within the ITV Network is a crucial element of this work and references for all archive

materials are detailed at the bottom of the page in which the works are cited.

Documents which were retrieved and photocopied from the National Archives in December 1999 remain on file with the author.

Criteria for the selection of interviewees was based upon the work experience of the individuals. Interviewees had worked in the ITV sector or had very significant trade union experience in negotiating with ITV. In addition, current (at the time of interview) BECTU trade union negotiators were also interviewed. The interviews and the case studies were carried out consecutively over an eighteen-month period from December 1999. The main data was collected using 'thematic interviews' where the general themes of the interviews (outlined here) were prepared prior to recording. However, the unique experiences of individual interviewees directed some of the subsequent questioning and allowed the interviewees to add material which opened up new areas of interest. The suggestion that specific questions, and the order of questions, varied according to the success of the interaction between interviewer and interviewee is supported in the literature (Yin, 2003:89; Eisenhardt, 1989). Yin (2003:89) contended that interviews are essential sources of case study information – and most likely to be guided conversations rather than structured queries. Yin (2003:89) quoting Rubin & Rubin (1995) proposed that the actual sequence of questions is likely to be fluid rather than rigid. The benefits of a fluid process of thematic question setting allowed interviewees to relax in a situation which could be alien to some.

In Chapter 5 interviews conducted with Scottish Television ('STV') employees are employed. The interviews conducted at the beginning of this work were undertaken with serving and former employees of the ITV franchise. This process began in the summer of 1997 with a then self-employed, former STV 'stage-hand'. Interviews with serving STV employees were difficult to organize because of a ban on serving employees speaking about internal corporate affairs in the public arena. All interviews undertaken for Chapter 5, (again stated in the footnotes) identify the occupation/former occupation of those interviewed. Those interviewed were happy to accede to a request to provide some detail of their occupation and the footnotes are brief and to the point. All those interviewed requested that their names be excluded but this was easily accommodated by defining the person in terms of their occupation.

For example, the first interview reference in Chapter 5 is that stated as [Interview former STV engineer]. If at any time there was more than one reference to a person undertaking the same task, for example two camera operators, they are referred to in terms of the Chapter number, in this case 5, and a subsequent number beginning at 1, e.g. camera operator 5.1.

In addition to the interviews detailed below, the production of a STV children's show at a large covered venue in Glasgow, Scotland, was observed in May 2001.

Permission was also forthcoming to attend a set of BECTU/NUJ meetings at STV, Glasgow, April/May 2000 held in preparation for industrial action undertaken shortly afterwards and the industrial action which followed was monitored. Further, the results of an internal Scottish Media Group ('SMG') – the parent company of STV – survey of employees' attitudes which was provided to the author by an SMG employee, was utilized. A former STV and ACTT trade union activist provided the ACTT, Glasgow, archival records of the 'Way Ahead' negotiations and which were a critical part of the work on industrial relations change within STV in the late 1980s.

The interviews for the case study in Chapter 6 were undertaken – unlike the previous two cases – in an intensive 'block' period of interviewing. Access to BBC Scotland was organized via Professor Alan McKinlay, University of St Andrews, Department of Management, the author and the head of Human Resources at BBC Scotland. Interviews commenced in November 1999. The choice of occupations/departments to interview was driven by the (then) relatively recent introduction of Producer Choice and the breaking up of the Corporation into three basic directorates. The objective was to interview people from the three directorates, with particular emphasis upon the Resources and Production directorates which had undergone the most significant restructuring and this is reflected in the interviews. Interviews are referenced in the footnotes but because of a replication of some titles of those interviewed – and due in part by a demand for anonymity – interviews are described using a simple system of job description and numbering. For example, the two numbers used, e.g. (6.1) include the Chapter number (6) and the sequence of interview (in this case 1.).

The final case study (Chapter 7) was the result of a series of nine in-depth interviews carried out with independent producers, independent production companies ('IPCs')

and freelance employees. The firms, in question, ranged in size from the very small single-operators, who worked from their own private residence, to a handful of the largest Scottish IPCs who were significant suppliers of programming product to the UK market as a whole. The statement of interviews, offered below, lists the individuals interviewed. As it was the final case to be devised, researched and written, it benefited from the development of a previous set of questions and themes. Many of the interviewees from other cases made reference to the sector in their contributions, however the only empirical contributions employed in Chapter 7 result from the interviews outlined here later. The footnotes are employed to note the reference number for interview details of which may be found at the end of the appendix.

The theoretical basis of this case, outlined in Chapter 1,1.5, was developed in a review of literature regarding change in labour process within the industry. However the significant response by interviewees in articulating the critical role that networking played in developing a successful career was important in placing the theme of networking at the heart of this case. It was felt that it was appropriate to place two contrasting cases at the beginning and end of the empirical work. The clear contrast between the highly regulated history of the ITV sector, pre the mid 1980s, may be contrasted with the ultra-flexible management regulation of the independent sector.

An outline is provided below, of the broad thematic subjects which were covered at interview for the case studies contained within Chapters 4-7. The interview process always began with a request for personal information including age, name etc...

Employment Background.

Tell me a little about your background, how did you become involved in (insert applicable firm/organization)?

Technical/Job Description.

Describe your work responsibilities.

Organizational Change.

Tell me about how your personal working environment has changed over the course of your employment?

What are the main issues of organizational change facing this firm?

Changes in Skill Requirements.

Trace for me the change in skill requirements for employees within [insert firm] over the course of your employment here?

Skill and Work.

How have changes in technologies employed here affected the idea of skill and occupational identity?

Networking.

Trace for me your own experiences of networking?

2.6

Statement of Interviews, including Date and Location.

Chapter 4.

J. Calvert, former Director of Industrial Relations, ITVA. 5 December 2001. London.

M. Stevens, former Head of Industrial Relation, Thames TV. 5 December 2001. London.

R. Lockett, former ACTT official. 8 December 1999. London.

A. Sapper, former General Secretary ACTT. 13 January 2000. London.

M. Spence, BECTU representative. 9 December 1999. London.

T. Bell, BECTU activist (Thames). 18 November 1999. London.

S. Elliott, BECTU official. 9 December 1999. London.

R. Bolton, Media commentator. 13 January 2000.

D. Elstein, Former ITV employee (Thames). 12 April 2001.

Chapter 5.

Former STV Engineer, 26 July 1998. Glasgow.

Former STV Camera Operator (5.1) 2 July 1998. Glasgow.

Former STV Camera Operator (5.2) 2 July 1998. Glasgow.

Former STV Electrician (5.3) 17 August. Glasgow.

Former STV Stage-hand 4 July 1997. Edinburgh

STV Manager 16 June 1998. Edinburgh.

Former STV Director of Personnel. 7 December 1998. Glasgow.

Former STV Electrician (5.4). 16 August 1998. Glasgow.

Former STV Video-editor 25 August 1997. Glasgow.

Former STV ACTT Shop-Steward. 21 August 1997. Glasgow.

STV Director of Corporate Affairs. 1 June 1999. Glasgow.

Former STV Producer. 14 June. 1999. Glasgow.

Former STV Manager. 1 June 1999. Glasgow.

Former STV Senior Producer. 27 August. 1997.

STV Producer. 16 August. 1998. Glasgow.

Interviews with BECTU/NUJ representatives. 12 February 1998. McManus, P, April 2000.

Interview with 'Picket' at STV industrial dispute Cowcaddens Glasgow April 2000.

Chapter 6.

Senior Resources Manager 6.1. 24 January 2000. Glasgow.

Senior Broadcast Manager 6.2. 17 January 2000. Glasgow.

Senior Resources Manager 6.3. 10 November 1999. Glasgow.

Senior Production Manager 6.4. 10 January 2000. Glasgow.

Resources Manager 6.5. 10 November 1999. Glasgow.

Freelance Manager 6.6. 10 January 2000. Glasgow.

Resources Manager 6.7. 10 November 1999. Glasgow.

Senior Production Manager 6.8. 3 November 1999. Edinburgh.

Production Manager 6.9. 17 November 10 January 2000. Glasgow.

Broadcast Assistant, 6.10. 17 January 2000. Glasgow.

Human Resources Manager (not quoted) 3 November 1999.

Acting Human Resources Manager (not quoted) 3 November 1999.

Chapter 7.

Independent Producer 7.1. 4 January 2000. Glasgow.

Independent Producer 7.2. 7 January 2000. Glasgow.

Independent Producer 7.3. 21 February 2000. Glasgow.

Independent Producer 7.4. 24 February 2000. Glasgow. (Not quoted).

Independent Producer 7.5 20 March 2000. Glasgow.

Independent Producer 7.6. 21 March 2000. Glasgow.

Independent Producer 7.7 21 March 2000. Glasgow. (Not quoted).

Independent Producer 7.8. (freelance/part-time) 21 March. 2000. Glasgow.

Producer-Director Freelancer. 11 April, 2000. Glasgow.

Chapter 3.
The Political and Regulatory Context of the
UK Broadcasting Industry
1979-2002.

Introduction.

Four themes of labour process theory were outlined in the previous Chapter and which contributed to a very comprehensive restructuring in the organization of work and labour. Parallel to changes in the labour process during this period were a series of legislative developments and which contributed to a sea-change in the attitude of governments to broadcasting.

The television industry was significantly transformed in the period under review and, in particular, the market for skilled labour within the sector changed out of all recognition (Paterson, 2001:203). Changes in the regulative structure of the UK broadcasting industry resulted in the increasing fragmentation of employment and the emergence of a significant freelance labour market (Antcliff, 2005b:1). It is important to determine why a highly regulated market for labour which included controlled methods for entry into the broadcasting industry should have fragmented in this way. The very significant policy inputs by various governments which sought to direct the future of the industry, together with broader industrial relations legislation, were critical factors but many other influences were at play. Legislation which was designed to introduce competition to the industry would simultaneously contribute to a restructuring of the employment relationship (Antcliff *et al*, 2005b:5).

While the period of inquiry to this study of change within the UK broadcasting industry is predominantly between 1979 and 2002 – it is useful to briefly note (as an aid to understanding how the changes in the regulation of the UK industry evolved) one of the key conclusions of the recently published Burns Committee Report into the future of the BBC (DCMS, 2004 & 2005). This can help explain how the radical thrust of broadcasting policy which unfolded during the 1980s was largely adopted by

legislators and BBC/ITV management in the interim period. The central conclusion of the Burns Committee was that the BBC's governance was seriously flawed and that its institutional proposals to rectify these deficiencies were inadequate. The creation of a Public Service Broadcasting Commission ('PSBC') was considered appropriate in order to protect programming of a public service nature – the implication was clear, the BBC had largely deserted its public service remit in favour of an overt commercialism. While it would be misleading to reductively argue that the conceptual framework developed by legislators during the 1980s completely dominated UK broadcasting policy – the deregulatory impulses of, *inter alia*, the 1986 Peacock Committee Report, had moved the issue of how the industry should be regulated to the forefront of contemporary thinking (Collins, 2005:25). Legislative developments (it will be shown) were strongly influenced by the work of Peacock in the period since the 1980s.

3.1.

Context For Industry Change.

Television programming in 1946 was broadcast for approximately 28 hours per week (Seymour Ure, 1991:186). In contrast, British television viewers in 1999 could choose from over 40,000 hours of programming in any single week through the medium of five terrestrial and well in excess of 250 digital satellite stations (European Audiovisual Observatory, 1999). Since 1979 the television industry had been subjected to a form of marketization which fragmented the industry (Murdock, 2003). National policies across the world shifted from tight government control towards the privatisation and deregulation of the media and telecommunications industries – the UK was no exception (Goff, 2004:1). There was clearly now a real and tangible television industry as opposed to what was once conceived of as being a largely cultural experience and process.

In the post-war period, successive governments enacted legislation to direct expansion in the provision of broadcasting by regulating both the content and the method of delivery. This Chapter will outline and evaluate those critical pieces of broadcasting legislation which helped structure the way in which the industry was regulated and

shaped from the late 1970s. The year 1979 is symbolic in understanding organizational and regulatory change within the UK television industry. This year can be seen as the high water mark for both trade union control over the craft production process and the enactment of legislation which treated the broadcasting industry as a special case (i.e. insulated from market led regulation). After 1979, technological advances would increase the numbers of channels and satellite platforms currently available to what would have been unimaginable levels as recently as the mid 1980s.

By the mid 1980s profound and lasting changes had been made – not least the transformation of employment arrangements when many television jobs which had been permanent, became freelance or contract based (Platman, 2004: 578; Antcliff, 2005a,b.). Attitudes to careers, employment and craft within the broadcasting industry changed enormously during the 1980s (Murdock, 2003). The notion that there was something intrinsically unique about work within the industry or, indeed, about the output of broadcasters, was eroded during this period as broadcasters began to respond to accusations that the industry was the ‘last bastion of restrictive practices’.¹

The two employment Acts which were passed in 1980 and 1982 were not enacted specifically to regulate the broadcasting industry. Nevertheless they had a significant impact upon how the industry would come to be structured during the 1980s and 1990s. The thrust of broadcasting policy and legislation had traditionally been ‘illustrative of the evaluative ideas and terms encountered in national culture and politics’ and broadcasting legislation had largely reflected the cultural policy concerns of successive governments (Harrison, 2000:45). As far back as 1974 broadcasting had been categorised as a tradable service and *not* as a cultural activity in the European courts and the resulting legal definition of broadcasting (which effected copyright and employment law) meant that broadcasting was now legally considered as an industry for the first time (Hood & Peterssen, 1997:61). By the mid 1980s the view that the performance of broadcasting organizations could be substantially improved if market forces were allowed to play a prominent role became commonplace (Dyson & Humphreys, 1988; Pratten, 2001).

¹ Mrs Thatcher famously referred to the employment practices of ITV during the early 1980s as being ‘the last bastion of restrictive practices’.

One of the most significant contributors to change within the comfortable duopoly of UK broadcasting was the introduction in 1982 of Channel 4 – challenging the established positions of both the BBC and ITV and operating as a ‘publisher broadcaster’ (Tulloch, 1990). Channel 4 would soon test the longevity of the vertically integrated producer broadcaster system (Kustow, 1987). Ushered in under the directive of the Broadcasting Act, 1980 it was conceived and established so that it would not simply replicate the existing diet of commercial television. With its dependence and, indeed, its encouragement of the independent television production sector, Channel 4 would become one of the cornerstones of change within the UK broadcasting industry.

The period after 1979 began a revolution in the organization, production and distribution of television programming, together with an equally significant change in both the labour process and technical innovation (Dyson & Humphreys, 1988). The UK television industry was cited as an exemplar of the transition from a Fordist mass production system of broadcasting to one concerned with ‘flexible specialization’ (Cunningham & Jacka, 1996:126). This did not happen immediately, but the move from a highly regulated industry in the period up until the mid to late 1980s, and the subsequent emergence of a de-regulated production environment, requires a more detailed explanation. Legislative imperatives included a role for markets within broadcasting organizations which emerged as a critical organizational principle for broadcasting with its key policy preoccupations of finance and labour deregulation (Franklin, 2001:10).

Commercial (ITV) and public service (BBC) television in the UK had been operating in a highly regulated environment where neither party competed in terms of programming or work organization (Cave *et al*, 2004). In the period from the mid 1980s the ITV Network was exposed to severe competition for advertising revenue from satellite broadcasters. For its part, the BBC was facing ideological threats to the renewal of the statutory licence fee (Saundry & Nolan, 1998). Further, the development of a publisher-broadcaster model marked a shift from a vertically to a horizontally integrated model and helped to develop the independent production sector. By the mid 1990s the commercial sector moved irrevocably towards a

concentration of ownership in the hands of a few large ITV companies while the BBC experienced significant change in its organization – moving to a directorate system and internal market. After the Broadcasting Act, 1990 independent producers became a very important source of programming material for both BBC and ITV and contributed to the break up of the comfortable duopoly (Sparks, 1994). All of these factors are central to any comprehensive study of organizational and industry change during this period. (The following Section briefly details the regulation of the industry before its restructuring during the 1980s).

3.2.

U.K Television Broadcasting 1950-1979.

While this work does not address the contextual history of broadcasting in the period before the late 1970s – it is interesting to note that the first challenges to what was viewed as a comfortable monopoly/duopoly emerged, not during the 1980s but, rather, in the 1950s. In the 1940s and '50s television was perceived as an evolution of the existing radio service and, as a consequence, should be regulated using the established principles of public service broadcasting (Briggs, 1995). The first challenge to the BBC's monopoly came from a London School of Economics academic (Coase) in his work on British broadcasting and monopoly. He challenged the two arguments underpinning support for the BBC monopoly, namely, technical considerations (spectrum scarcity) and programming quality (Coase, 1950). The Beveridge Committee, while not explicitly acknowledging Coase's arguments, proceeded to critique the idea of monopoly broadcasting with a broad acceptance of the merits of the Coase position (Beveridge, 1951: para 185).

The passing of legislation establishing commercial broadcasting in Britain in 1954 can be seen now as a watershed in terms of a new and broadly commercial attitude to broadcasting. While the commercial network mirrored public service lines, the UK was one of the first countries in Europe to abandon the State monopoly in broadcasting (Van den Bulck & Van Pecke, 1996). The new ITV Network was to carry local news in an attempt to separate it from its competitor while, at the same time, complementing the public service ethos of the BBC. In reality, market forces

would later squeeze the Network into the hands of just a few large ITV franchise companies, thus negating the importance of the smaller regional voices (Seymour-Ure, 1991). The consolidation of the Network was of concern to the IBA well before the rush to concentration of ownership in the late 1990s. However for a brief period, real and sustained competition and choice seemed available to viewers and the BBC's monopoly was to be superseded by the arrival of 14 privately owned ITV companies. This latest addition to the UK broadcasting arena quickly developed a unique style and the formality of traditional BBC broadcasting was replaced by a new commitment to informality and the direction of programming moved towards a traditionally ignored segment of the marketplace, namely popular culture.

The Pilkington Report.

The history of the regulation of the broadcasting industry can be understood, in part, through the development of debates over issues of quality, populism, accountability and ownership. The conclusions of a succession of reports and inquiries into the industry inched towards an ever more critical analysis of established views of the available TV service. By the early 1960s the Pilkington Committee made a number of far reaching recommendations, with responsibility for the expansion of broadcasting being given to the BBC. The most important elements of the proposed expansion included a second BBC channel and a network of local radio stations. In addition, it was suggested that the regulatory body, the Independent Television Association ('ITA'), should begin to schedule programming for the ITV Network. The Report also proposed that the ITA should assume sole responsibility for dealing with advertisers so that such commercial transactions would not compromise the programme makers. With regard to what was seen as excessive (monopoly) profits, the Committee proposed the introduction of a levy (in addition to standard corporation tax) and it was suggested that this levy should apply to all advertising revenue in excess of GBP 1.5 million. The Report is now, however, best remembered for two conclusions – that television audiences were vulnerable and required protection from broadcasters and, further, that programming produced by ITV was of poor aesthetic quality (Collins, 2005:10).

The Annan Report.

By the time the Annan Report emerged in 1977, the difficulties surrounding the frequent changes in government during the early to mid 1970s had taken their toll. The Committee was formed during a period of intense criticism of the existing duopoly – critics were unhappy with an unaccountable BBC although it was still accepted that the Corporation remained the most important cultural organization in the nation (Annan, 1977: para 8.1). Annan was also careful to express the consideration that the BBC should remain as the national instrument of broadcasting in the country (Annan, 1977: 476). He did, however, deviate from the Pilkington position by recognising that spectrum scarcity led to a problem of broadcasting regulation. Broadcasting regulation in the UK had traditionally resolved the spectrum problem by providing a centralized service with a particularly heavy top-down regulatory approach. Annan provided evidence of a new system of thinking within broadcasting with the radical proposal that television audiences were sufficiently competent to make sophisticated decisions about their own viewing preferences.

Annan believed that only government regulation could remedy the inherent failures of the market. No real privatisation of the BBC could have been countenanced and the Report was largely satisfied with the use of resources by the Corporation. In addition, the Annan Committee was concerned that the establishment of a fourth channel should not replicate the existing broadcast offerings and their Report reflected a growing disenchantment with the regulatory arrangements for broadcasting. The Committee considered recommending breaking up the BBC but, ultimately, acknowledged that the breadth of its existing resources allowed the Corporation to produce programming of a particularly high quality. The critical difference between the Pilkington and Annan conclusions was the latter's concern, expressed in regulatory form for the first time, that viewers and listeners should be placed (at least) on a par with the interests of management and regulatory bodies. However, the extremely influential Peacock Report of 1986 would place these seemingly significant changes in an appropriate context.

3.3.

Pre-Peacock De-regulatory Manoeuvrings.

The first step taken by the incoming Conservative administration in 1979 to open the telecommunications and broadcasting industries to market forces emerged in the early 1980s. The Hunt Committee Report into the feasibility of securing benefits from emerging cable technology concluded (in its first Report) that high capacity cable systems could provide wide and expansive services – including television and business services (Home Office, 1983). Indeed, what was happening in the field of telecommunications in the early 1980s may now be seen as a forerunner in the evolution of methods directed at regulating the UK broadcasting industry. During their evidence to the Hunt Committee, both the Independent Broadcasting Authority ('IBA') [the ITV regulatory authority] and the BBC expressed serious reservations about an uneven playing field. In the first instance, the IBA was concerned that unregulated cable stations would have an advantage in the search for audiences over the heavily regulated ITV sector. Cable television policy was described in the 1983 White Paper as 'the cross roads at which broadcasting and telecommunications issues meet' (Home Office, 1983:5).

The first Broadcasting Act (1980) to be passed under the new administration included elements which attempted to ensure that the new channel would be different. Firstly, the IBA was duty bound to ensure that programmes contained a suitable proportion of programming designed to appeal to tastes not generally catered for by ITV. Secondly, the IBA had to ensure that a suitable proportion of the programmes were of an educational nature and, critically, that the encouragement of innovation and experiment in the form and content of programming was pre-eminent.

3.4.

The Move to Marketization: The Peacock Report.

For the Conservative administrations of the early 1980s the BBC, in particular, was seen as a prime example of inefficiency, excessive bureaucracy and waste in the public sector (Foster, 1992:46). The years after the introduction of colour television in

the early 1970s had seen substantial increases in revenue for the BBC because of the growth in the number of colour TV licenses. However, by the mid 1980s revenues were falling in real terms. The BBC's request for a substantial increase in the licence fee in December 1984 led to the establishment of the Peacock Committee and the recommendations which emerged from its deliberations on the case for renewal of the BBC's statutory licence fee were considered ground breaking (Elstein, 1999).

Peacock was the first parliamentary committee which was not required to have regard to the public service element of broadcasting as its primary consideration. The Committee (set up in 1985) to examine the financing of the BBC concluded that the franchise holders within the commercial ITV Network had demonstrated an impressive ability to structure their various businesses so as to minimize their liability to both tax and levy (Collins *et al*, 1988:125). The terms of reference included an obligation to assess the effects of the proposal to introduce advertising to the BBC as either an alternative or supplement to its income stream. Peacock immediately recognized that it would not be possible to fully adhere to the terms of reference laid out by the Home Secretary (i.e. the financing of the BBC) without considering the entire regulatory infrastructure of the UK broadcasting industry. The apparent goodwill felt by Peacock towards the organizational structures of the ITV Network was evident early on in meetings of the Committee. One Committee member (a former Controller of BBC Scotland) told the trade paper *Broadcast* that Professor Peacock remarked at an early meeting;

We are all agreed, aren't we, that we are going to have advertising on the BBC?
(Broadcast, 1986:25).

While Peacock's conclusions were quite complex, the central proposals therein were relatively clear and precise. It was considered that monopoly profits were being shared between the franchise holders and the trade unions, with the taxpayer being poorly remunerated for the provision of licenses to broadcast (Saundry, 2001). From the outset it was obvious that the Committee were quite expansionist in their terms of reference. Peacock indicated that;

Before we can devise guidelines for the financing of broadcasting, we have to specify its purposes (Peacock, 1986, Cmnd 9824).

There was concern in some quarters in the period up to the formation of the Committee that the government would simply pack it with members sympathetic to free market economics (O'Malley, 1994:94). The Home Secretary announcing the formation of the Peacock Committee provided the group with a broad canvas upon which to deliberate. Peacock implicitly acknowledged that any alteration of the established regulated television market would require a fundamental change in the way in which both governments and broadcasters conceived of the organization of cultural production and distribution (Ryan, 1991). The reputation the BBC had developed was based on its ability to attract 'extraordinary personalities and exceptional talent' (Barnett & Curry, 1994:46). The Corporation was a tightly regulated institution and had perfected a style and format for broadcasting and production which was seen as the industry standard. The fundamental challenge to the BBC from Peacock was the direct implication that changes would have to be made to the very core of the organization – i.e. how the BBC produced programming and financed itself. Peacock recommended a series of alterations to the licence-fee arrangements and proposed that it should be linked to the RPI (retail price index). This would, obviously, result in the Corporation achieving a level of independence from government while simultaneously providing an incentive to control costs.

Three areas were to be addressed in the Report, – firstly, an assessment of the effects of the introduction of advertising or sponsorship on the BBC's Home Services (either as a supplement or an alternative to the income received from the licence fee). In addition the Committee included a broad point of reference for consideration – namely, the effect that advertising would have on the financial structure of the Corporation, ITV, cable providers, the press and the advertising industry. It also considered the impact that advertising would have on the quality and breadth of programming and put forward proposals for securing income from the consumer other than directly through the licence fee.

The Peacock Report (published in July 1986) can most usefully be analysed under four headings (Goodwin, 1998:234). Firstly, its general attitude to broadcasting,

secondly, its consideration of the central question of the continued financing of the BBC, its more general approach to the longer term existence of the Corporation and, finally, its recommendations with regard to the entire UK broadcasting system. The Report was a complex mix of adherence to the ideals and realities of public service broadcasting with a commitment to an overhaul of the funding arrangement and organizational structure of the industry. Peacock devoted much space to the issues of cost reduction and the efficiency of resource allocation and highlighted the complexity of quality and cost of public service broadcasting (Peacock, 1986: para 598).

The Report concluded that in conditions of spectrum scarcity, public service broadcasting had provided viewers with a range of cost effective and high quality programming. This was achieved – Peacock contended – by a system of licence fee provision for broadcasting with the implication being that the quality of programming was superior to that which could have been provided by an advertising financed system. This was the central core of the Report – whereas, in contrast, consideration of the efficient use of resources had not been a significant element of either the Pilkington or Annan Reports. Peacock concluded that greater financial pressure on the BBC and the ITV Networks was the driving force necessary to deliver improved efficiency. Large-scale free market reforms for the Corporation were not favoured – Peacock argued in favour of a sophisticated market system with no direct introduction of advertising on the BBC (Peacock, 1986:para, 421/ 592).

The Report broadly accepted the argument that in a market where the number of television channels was severely limited (by spectrum scarcity) an unregulated advertising financed broadcasting system would not deliver an adequate response to the needs of a broad viewing public. Peacock took the view that both the BBC and ITV Networks had been more successful in providing a genuine consumer market than any truly laissez-faire system. In terms of the cost of programming, Peacock went further and suggested that broadcasting authorities had not only mimicked the market but had provided packages of programmes to audiences at remarkably low costs (Peacock, 1986, para 582).

Peacock did proceed to question the cost structure of UK television. The Report concluded that public service institutions suffered from an endemic weakness in their approach to cost control and efficiencies. It also suggested that no amount of prompting by accountants or consultants could replace the discipline of a fully competitive market for television programming. Peacock's objectives were seen by many as a combination of the political/ideological together with an effort to improve broadcasting competitiveness (Collins, 2005:13). The Report also noted that the significant increases in the cost of programming in the mid 1980s were due to industrial relations difficulties in the ITV sector – and not because of programme cost inflation in the BBC (Campling, 1997). The Report was insistent that there should be an early introduction of the available and significant new technologies in order to reduce the cost of programming (Murdock, 2000).

The reality of the broadcasting environment upon which Peacock reported was one where the cost of labour was the single greatest element. Traditionally the BBC had considered labour costs to be fixed and these were treated in the same way as, for example, a studio and rarely ever individualized. A set number of technicians would work on a particular type of programme, or on a particular day of the week (Jacobs, 1983:132). Peacock believed that technological change would make it possible for consumers to identify their programming preferences through price in a pay-per-view process and this would have the benefit of eliminating the need to employ wasteful levels of resources (Collins, 2005:14).

The BBC reacted quickly to the change in policy which ensued from the Peacock Committee findings. By 1986 the Corporation had begun to develop new managerial strategies to deal with the potential reduction in revenues, and including the proposal that all peripheral services (including cleaning) should be contracted out. By 1987 the BBC had implemented a new system for staff paid on a weekly basis and this reduced the original thirty pay bands to five while also removing some demarcation boundaries (Goodwin, 1997). The following year saw a further hollowing out of traditional BBC terms of employment and working conditions, and in 1988 an agreement with technicians working in News removed the crew minima (minimum crewing levels) which had, traditionally, greatly concerned management (McKinlay & Quinn, 1999). The removal of minimum crewing levels saved GBP 8 million pounds

annually according to newspaper reports of the time (Financial Times, 24/9/87) In the same year the then Director General (Michael Checkland) decreed that all restrictive practices should end before 1989.

Peacock recommended an indexation of the licence fee but with no advertising for the foreseeable future. Further, the Report suggested that the BBC should ultimately move to a system funded by subscription and supplemented by grants (Peacock, 1986: para 673). The finding that the BBC should consider the concept of subscription would later prove unworkable both for financial and ideological reasons. Research undertaken at the time suggested that the difficulties in terms of subscription were not technical but, rather, that the concept of subscribing or paying directly for television services would not be popular with audiences (Booz Allen, 1987). It will be seen that almost by accident, the most significant effect of Peacock upon the UK broadcasting industry would be felt within the ITV Network (Crissel, 2002:234). The 1990s would alter the reality of the UK broadcasting industry from what had been recognized as a comfortable duopoly – replaced by a ‘triadic oligopoly’ (Collins, 2005:16).

Peacock made a series of recommendations for commercial television – a critical proposal being that franchises for ITV contracts should be issued after a period of competitive tendering (Goodwin, 1997:109-122) It was argued that competition for tenders would have the merit of raising revenue for the ‘consolidated fund for broadcasting’ (Barnett & Curry, 1994). He further proposed that the IBA should establish what were termed minimum performance standards for ITV contractors and that all franchises should remain under the regulation of the IBA. The franchises were to be awarded on a rolling review basis so as to reward franchise holders who had fulfilled all promised contractual and programming details. On the other hand, it would also have the effect of penalising unsatisfactory performers. The commercial television industry’s franchise competition in 1991 broadly maintained the ITV Network with its characteristic split between three major and ten/twelve smaller/regional operators. The major changes in management objectives and processes were a sharpened cost awareness together with the introduction of procedural mechanisms in the specifics of the production process. The recommendations of the Peacock Report would act as one of the central motivating factors for the reform of industrial relations within the ITV Network (Ursell, 1998). It

can truly be said that Peacock signalled the beginning of the end to the old system of British broadcasting (Barnett & Curry, 1994).

3.5.

Broadcasting in the 1990s and Beyond.

The 1988 White Paper, *Broadcasting in the '90s* took its ideological inspiration from the conclusions of the Peacock Report (Home Office, 1988 Cm 517). The deregulatory nature of Peacock attempted to place the viewer at the centre of all future regulatory or policy making and sought to create, for the first time, an open and competitive market for the broadcast product (Peacock, 1986:592: 547). The White Paper proposed that the BBC should remain as the cornerstone of British broadcasting while noting that the government looked forward to the eventual replacement of the licence fee. It also included a reference to the important role that independent producers would play in the new and less regulated broadcasting environment of the 1990s (Home Office, 1988: 41).

The critical proposal in the White Paper was that there should be greater separation between the various functions which made up the broadcasting process. This was suggested in order to counter what the authors saw as the excessive vertical integration inherent within the UK television industry (Deakin & Pratten, 2000). Further, all television services (including the BBC) would be given freedom to raise additional finance through what it termed subscription and/or sponsorship. There was an almost immediate organizational response by BBC management to the White Paper (Born, 2004:50). Back in November 1988, senior BBC management had issued a warning that all 'Spanish or restrictive practices' must be eradicated by the end of that month as they were concerned that the inquiry by the Monopolies and Merger Commission ('MMC') would target such practices. Significantly in its report published in late 1988 the MMC admitted that it had been largely unsuccessful in its attempts to identify any blatant examples of restrictive practices currently in operation within the BBC (Franklin, 2001:60).

3.6.

The Broadcasting Act, 1990.

The best illustration of the influence of free market ideas on television policy was not what was included in the 1990 Act but, rather, what was omitted – cable and satellite technology were to be left to the market place (Smith, 1999:4). The legislation which emerged in 1990, while not endorsing all of the recommendations of the Peacock Report of 1986 (and the White Paper's proposals), provided for 25 per cent of programme production to be contracted out to the independent production sector. This was the single most important element of the Broadcasting Act, 1990 and it would have a radical impact on the entire structure of broadcasters – from the commissioning process through to the organization of production resources. This radical approach had its origins in the Peacock Report which considered that the vertically integrated structure of British broadcasting was a historical precedent which contributed to industrial relations problems. Reduced in-house production as a result of the introduction of independent quotas were to result in large-scale redundancies in the BBC and ITV (Antcliff *et al*, 2005b:5).

The 1990 legislation sought to develop the notion of competition within programme production while severing the essential link between programme production and broadcasting. In short, broadcasters could produce programming for other organizations and for the first time the trademark Granada and Thames Television logos were to be seen at the end of programming broadcast on the BBC. In addition, government supported the radical proposal that ITV franchise renewal should be subjected to a bidding system which, although subject to strict criteria on issues such as programme quality, centered upon the franchisee's ability to fund the cost of the franchise. The issue of cost control became the critical subject for management within existing and new franchise holders. In addition, ITV's regional monopoly over advertising revenue was to be removed thus allowing Channel 4 to sell its own advertising. Both the BBC and the ITV Networks had already begun the process of cost reduction and general restructuring before the Broadcasting Act, 1990 directed the government towards;

A blitzkrieg on UK broadcasting institutions, values, practices and employment which greatly accelerated and shaped the process of change (Ursell, 2000:152).

The hugely important changes in the organization of production, the concentration on cost reduction and the restructuring of industrial relations were not short-term measures. They were, in fact, a reflection of deep-seated change within the industry. The term 'efficiency' was translated, clearly, as cuts (in budgets) (Born, 2004:58). In the decade 1986-1997 the various ITV companies shed 44 per cent of their staff (Ursell, 1997). Between 1990 and 1995 total employment within the ITV companies which had retained their contracts to broadcast during the franchise auctions, fell by more than 28 per cent. These figures conceal an even more substantial fall in permanent employment and a significant rise in the number of short-term and freelance contracts (Saundry, 2001). The previous guarantees of employment in the BBC or the various ITV companies were replaced in the 1990s by increasing casualization of employment (estimated by 1996 to be about 60 % of the workforce). (Paterson, 1998)

By the mid 1990s the UK's broadcasting production workforce could count a total of some 50 per cent of its members as freelance (Woolf & Holly, 1994). Job insecurity had become a way of life for a whole new generation of production workers, and which was in stark contrast to the very formalized and rigid employment structures of their predecessors. The establishment (through the Broadcasting Act, 1990) of the Independent Television Network Centre ('ITNC') had the effect of consolidating the decision making process in relation to commissioning arrangements. ITV companies were forced, through the emergence of the ITNC, to cut costs in order to remain competitive in the search for additional commissions (Berkeley, 2003). The ACTT and The Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance, ('BETA') trade unions subsequently argued that the Broadcasting Act, 1990 was one of the factors contributing to the erosion of the highly regulated broadcasting environment which existed in the UK up until the 1980s (Campling, 1997). The provision of an independent scheduler was to be at the heart of the new-look ITV and this change would allow the emergent independent producers to compete with the ITV franchises. The independent sector had slowly emerged in the 1980s as a result of a small but significant loosening of the grip on production by ITV and BBC.

The period after the Broadcasting Act 1990, proved a difficult one for the successful ITV franchise holders. Advertising revenue was hit almost immediately by the cable and satellite competitors and by the change in the advertising status of Channel 4. In 1993 the franchise holders took 78 per cent of all TV advertising but within twelve months the ITV sector had lost 3 per cent of the market. Unsurprisingly consolidation followed quickly and Yorkshire and Tyne Tees were the first franchises to merge. In 1993 LWT purchased 14 per cent of Yorkshire Tyne Tees and in the same year Granada paid GBP 68 million for a 15 per cent stake holding in LWT. By the end of the decade a large proportion of ITV had been carved up by the three big franchise holders, Carlton, Granada and United News and Media. The government had made it clear that any future increases or, indeed, the continued existence of the licence fee depended upon the BBC delivering cost reductions and value for taxpayers equity. Within the ITV Network franchise renewal was largely predicated upon individual franchise holders reducing the cost base of programming. With the new independent production industry now flourishing, ITV and BBC managers (and even legislators) could begin to examine the cost base for production across three different types of broadcasters.

While the Broadcasting Act, 1990 was largely directed at improving efficiencies within the commercial television sector, the BBC had not escaped an examination by the then new Conservative administration. The Green Paper (published in 1992), *The Future of the BBC* had one clear imperative - what it termed 'value for money' (DNH, 1992: Cm 2098). The concept of Producer Choice was not new and had first appeared in 1990 when both the trade unions and producers were informed that in order to make cost savings of almost 5 per cent (in the financial year beginning April 1991) producers would be allowed to purchase essential services from external providers. Its introduction had begun to change the culture of production within the Corporation. While, traditionally, the programme makers were at the top of the organizational pyramid within the BBC, the introduction of managerial strategies altered the relationships between programme makers and managers and, in the process, created new relationships (Harrison, 2000:64). A culture of entrepreneurialism entered the Corporation for the first time signalling that the BBC was beginning to identify a role

for itself in terms of the broader television marketplace (unpublished BBC document, quoted in, Born, 2004:60);

The government has urged the BBC to improve its efficiency. The decision to hold licence fee increases below the levels of inflation, as measured by the Retail Price Index has encouraged the BBC to look for ways of reducing its costs (DNH, 1992:CM 2098).

The Corporation's own statement of intent outlined a new strategy driven by the need for labour and resource flexibility. The BBC committed itself to a radical change in its organizational structure and this would quickly result in an increase in the number of freelance and contract staff employed. Perhaps the most radical shift in strategic thinking was the decision to break the Corporation up into directorates or departments, and which were designed to function independently from one another. As will be detailed in Chapter 6 the three central directorates were, Production, (which dealt with programme making), Broadcast, (which was the commissioning arm of the Corporation), and Resources, (which was concerned with supplying essential production technology and skilled technicians on contract terms). Resources could tender both for internal production work or for external contracts from independent production companies.

The BBC moved to a position very quickly from 1993 onwards where all internal transactions were conducted on the basis of a costing system and by means of formal contracts. This was considered to be a valuable and cost saving initiative but the process started from the belief that 'there is no such thing as costless bargaining' (Williamson, 1975). Each individual transaction between one department and another, for example, involved a new expenditure of time and energy by either the individuals or departments involved. These were not cost free manoeuvres and necessitated substantial cost additions to an initiative which was designed to reduce cost (Ursell, 2000). However the principle behind such organizational change was clear and managers wanted to employ the language and logic of the marketplace within the BBC, even if it didn't always make commercial sense to do so. Breaking the culture of high cost programming was to be of critical importance to BBC managers. The implementation of regulatory changes which occurred within the broadcasting

industry ultimately reflected the significant organizational change which was being undertaken in other publicly funded institutions. Some noted the similarities between what was termed the introduction of a 'quasi-market' system within the BBC and those already in existence elsewhere in the public sector, most notably in the National Health Service and local government (Deakin & Pratten, 2000:322).

The Broadcasting Act, 1996.

Almost a decade on from the Peacock Report a White Paper on *Media Ownership and Broadcasting* was published in 1995, and in May 1995 the Department of National Heritage published a Green Paper (DNH, 1995). The proposals therein offered a two stage process for the proposed liberalization of media ownership in a way which sustained media diversity but allowed British companies to flourish in a period of rapid economic and political change. The Broadcasting Act, 1996 was the last major piece of broadcasting legislation passed by the successive Conservative administrations of the 1980s and 1990s. The aim of the legislation was to assist in the emergence of British commercial broadcasters so that they might compete successfully with international media organizations and, further, that the organizational restructuring undertaken and supported by government could continue. The Act emerged as a result of extensive consultation following the publication of the Media Ownership Green Paper. The primary concern of the 1996 legislation was digital terrestrial broadcasting and the questions of its ownership and control. The Act incorporated almost all of the government's proposals outlined in *Media Ownership and Broadcasting*. These included the decision to allow newspaper groups with less than 20 per cent of national newspaper circulation to apply to control television broadcasters constituting up to 15 per cent of the total television market (Doyle, 2002:2). In addition the Act gave the regulator power to disallow such control where it was deemed not to be in the public interest. To prevent the development of local media monopolies the legislation forbade control by any newspaper group of a regional ITV licence where that group had more than 30 per cent of regional or local newspaper circulation.

As noted, the main focus of the 1996 Act was to facilitate the introduction of the world's first digital terrestrial television service, ('DTT'). However the UK government's inability to control market entry across the digital television industry meant that the regulation and licensing of DTT was overshadowed by the launch of the British Sky Broadcasting ('BSB') platform in 1996 (Smith, 1999:17). The 1996 legislation placed responsibility for issuing satellite licences with the Independent Television Commission ('ITC'). Government policy as outlined in the Broadcasting Act, 1996 was concerned with ensuring that a number of distribution technologies and platforms would be available. Despite the reservations of BSB, in particular, all of the UK terrestrial broadcasters had indicated a willingness by 1997 to avail of the Multiplex licences.² The Broadcasting Act, 1996 had further given the power of deciding between rival bids for the remaining Multiplex licences to the ITC and criteria used to decide the fate of the licences included the following:

1. The extent of broadcast coverage.
2. The speed of rollout of the various services.
3. The ability to establish and maintain the proposed services.
4. The promotion of take up of digital decoders (Smith, 1999:21).

Two years later a Green Paper, *Regulating Communications; Approaching Convergence in the Digital Age* was concerned to examine the implications for the regulatory policy in place at the time, of expanding digital delivery technology (DTI and DCMS, 1998:Cm4022). There was a concern with the complex and sometimes overlapping system of broadcast regulation and where, traditionally, a number of bodies were conferred with a responsibility for content while others dealt with issues of competition. In essence the government believed that the expansion of digital services would stretch the ability of various regulatory bodies to adequately respond and meet their increasing obligations.

The government believed that in terms of the economic regulation of broadcasting further legislative steps should be taken relating to the issue of competition. The argument was made that there should be a withdrawal from excessive regulation and

² Multiplex, was the title given to the 'bundle' of band-width available to potential digital broadcasters.

any additional controls should only be concerned with ‘universal access’ and ‘bottleneck control’.³ The Green Paper had no definite proposals with regard to regulatory change or for a slimmed down regulatory structure. However it did suggest a number of preferred models for the future structure and these included, *inter alia*, separate regulators for both infrastructure and for the content-providing industry. Although the general thrust of the Green Paper was towards a ‘lighter touch regulation’, signalling a move towards a single regulator covering media and telecoms, the regulatory environment had become increasingly crowded in the period since 1990 (Teather, 2000:10). The proliferation of regulatory bodies during the 1990s (resulting from the Broadcasting Acts of 1990/1996) had prompted ‘contradictory judgements of the same issue among regulators’ and had resulted in calls from both broadcasters and politicians for a less complex system of regulation (Franklin, 2001:173). In a reference to the rapidly changing broadcasting industry it was noted that;

[Since] 1996, media markets have changed to a significant degree and the time is now right to review the Broadcasting Acts regime (DTI & DCMS, 2000: Cm 5010).

The White Paper, *A New Future For Communications*, provided for very significant changes to the arrangements for the provision of licenses, and for ITV in particular. It lifted the restriction prohibiting ownership of licenses which, when combined, would deliver 15 per cent or more of a total audience share. The White Paper also removed the restriction on a single company owning the two ITV London franchises. Finally, in an important development, the White Paper invited comments on possible changes to rules regarding cross-media ownership (DTI & DCMS, 2000:4.6.1)

The Communications Act, 2003.

As recently as 2003 further legislation continued to relax the controls on media ownership within the UK. The rules, originally signalled in the 1990 legislation, were altered to allow non-EU corporations and individuals to own UK

³ ‘Bottle neck control’ meaning the use of regulatory powers to remove obstruction to a well performing broadcasting industry.

broadcasting firms. The 15 per cent or one firm regulation was dropped together with the prohibition on joint ownership of the London ITV franchises, joint ownership of a national ITV franchise and Channel 5 (Goff, 2004:9). Cross media restrictions were reduced – however rules restricting any newspaper owner with 20 per cent of the national newspaper market to no more than 20 per cent of an ITV franchise did remain (Higham, 2003:35). The deregulatory essence of the Act was intended to promote competition and investment, while maintaining plurality and diversity (including a plurality test for proposed mergers, *inter alia*, the proposed purchase by a firm of an ITV franchise) (Allen & Overy, 2003). In preparation for the forthcoming switch from analogue to digital services, The Office of Communications (‘OFCOM’) was established by legislation passed in 2002 and among its areas of concern is the role of ensuring that the proliferation of TV services which have emerged over the last decade are of sufficiently high standard.

Conclusion.

The regulatory environment within which the UK broadcasting industry operates has been significantly transformed since the beginning of the 1980s. The following case study Chapters will address specific firm based approaches to organizational change within the industry. While there are subtle and significant differences in the methods employed by the various parties in engaging with the paradigm of organizational restructuring – some critical similarities can be identified. Legislation aimed at restructuring the organizational basis of the industry (and which gave ITV companies, the BBC and the independent production sector encouragement to re-regulate their respective workplaces) provided a basis for radical change in the organizational structure and labour process of contemporary television production.

The stable competitive environment and the tightly regulated labour market within the ITV sector in the period up until the mid 1980s may be contrasted with the situation pertaining in the late 1980s and 1990s. In the latter period, management successfully challenged the National Agreements, encouraged annualised hours schemes and demanded multi-skilling and multi-tasking (Ursell, 2000). For the ITV sector,

legislative freedoms provided in the period after 1990, gave additional encouragement to reclaim control over the labour process in the fight to remain profitable and redress the balance of power on the shop floor. In this period of legislative upheaval the BBC underwent a process of disaggregating its production, commissioning and technical resources and while ITV was busily 're-aggregating' (Born, 2004:132). Quite simply, by the middle of the 1990s the ITV companies were engaging in mergers or developing their production capacity in order to compete with the emerging and increasingly aggressive independent sector.

Within the BBC, the decision to formally separate the Corporation into directorates and, in particular, the separation of the BBC's internal production arm from the commissioning and resources directorates (in response to the implementation of Producer Choice), was the most significant reaction to the imperatives of Peacock and the Broadcasting Act, 1990. The traditional BBC organizational structure (with control over entry to both employment and programming supply) had been replaced by the legislatively driven move to a pluralized broadcasting environment (Collins, 2004). Broadcasting legislation in the period since 1990 – in particular through the introduction of the 25 per cent quota for independent production within the BBC – had resulted in a very serious erosion of 'in-house programme making' (Saundry, 1998:153). Deregulatory legislative changes were beginning to combine lower production costs (and the introduction of high quality and relatively cheap sound and recording equipment) with aggressive management techniques in order to force through a far-reaching restructuring of the industry. The effects were a variation on the virtuous circle for ITV/BBC/independent production company managers and entrepreneurs who left the established industry to form their own independent production companies. The legislation in place continued the emphasis for an opening up of broadcasting markets – putting further pressure on the production cost base. Management opportunities to demand flexibility of employees and trade unions increased and offered the possibilities of enhanced profit levels and a rejection of tightly regulated organizational structures (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994).

Having considered the critical role of legislative change in contributing to industry restructuring it is appropriate and informative to now move to consider the initial case study.

Chapter 4.
Management, Work and Industrial Relations:
British Commercial Television,
1979-2000.

Introduction.

When you are an electrician with a Gucci jumper and a pair of slip-on shoes and you are running around putting in a light bulb for GBP 30,000 per year and having trips abroad 'first class' you are not going to give that up. In 1989 we told the union what the pay settlement was, imagine that, only 5% this year but we also had to deal with the nonsense of demarcation and gross over-manning.⁴

As indicated previously the UK commercial television sector (ITV) has been much vaunted as an exemplar of the transition from a Fordist mass production system to one which took its inspiration from the 'flexible specialisation' thesis. Changes in the sector reflect movement from slothful, hierarchical bureaucracies to loose, dynamic networks of small production companies and from inflexible, electrical-mechanical technologies to the new possibilities of relatively inexpensive technologies. The metamorphosis from a Fordist political economy of broadcasting to one which adopts the flexible specialization model was triggered by external shocks to the broadcasting system (Blair & Rainnie, 1998). For the ITV sector during the 1980s and 1990s, examples of shock included the formation of new employer strategies in order to reign-in what were viewed as the excessive applications of trade union power and the emergence of new, lighter and cheaper broadcast technologies (Campling, 1992). The implementation of legislation pertaining to industrial relations and trade unions enacted between 1980 and 1992, allied to the remaking of industrial relations in the period after the end of national bargaining, had a profound impact. From the mid 1980s the ITV Network was exposed to increasingly significant competitive threats – most notably from the emergent satellite and cable industries which began to compete

⁴ Interview with John Calvert, former Director of Industrial Relations, Independent Television Association (ITVA).

for advertising revenues. This competitive shock triggered an assault by ITV employers upon the fundamental tenet of regulation, i.e. national collective bargaining.

The temptation to attribute the restructuring of collective bargaining and, by default, the remaking of the ITV Network solely to the political imperatives of neo-liberalism should be resisted. While the legislation which changed the industrial relations terrain was important, it was a fact that major shifts in ITV employers' strategy were already emerging in parallel with neo-liberalism. This case study explores the major differences in employer strategy at firm level together with a strengthening in the ITV employers' capacity for collective action through their association, ITVA. The development of the ITVA's strategy alongside a shift in theoretical readings of the move to a de-regulated economy is considered in Chapter 1 (1.2.). Industrial relations within the ITV Network were characterized by high levels of union involvement in formal collective bargaining frameworks. The ITV sector had typically exhibited all the usual characteristics of public sector national bargaining – i.e. recognition of trade unions together with the promotion of collective bargaining, a high proportion of trade union membership, comprehensive National Agreements and an implicit commitment to being a good employer. The formality of the industrial relations system was augmented by a highly developed system of union organization and job control at shop floor level (Danford, 2005:16). Broadcasting licenses were granted on the basis not just of programming plans but regard was also had of available capital equipment and labour. State regulation was paralleled by national collective bargaining. For the employers, any radical reshaping of the labour process and employment contracts necessarily involved breaking with national collective bargaining.

This case study begins with an outline of the commercial ITV sector in its heavily regulated state. Regulation of work within the commercial television industry was controlled in two ways. Top down regulation was the direct result of the implementation of the National Agreements negotiated between trade unions and ITV management and, secondly, bottom up regulation was based upon the vital craft skills of workers. Development and maintenance of craft skills was central to trade unions in gaining control over production and broadcast but the emerging production technologies during the late 1970s and 1980s were adopted, in part, by management to

counter union control. Technological advancement was identified by management as an important vehicle whereby capital could be used to help wrest control over the labour process from organized labour (Braverman, 1974). The newspaper industry provided a parallel and an exemplar (for the ITVA) where the aggressive introduction of new print technology was coupled with an adversarial approach to collective bargaining. Investment in specific shop-floor technologies was particularly attractive to management within the UK newspaper industry in the late 1980s because of the extent of union control over employment and production within the workplace. During the 1980s the change to photocomposition effectively rendered obsolete many of the craft skills of the compositor (Gennard & Dunn, 1983). Traditional relationships which existed between management and craft unions prior to the mid-1980s were based on the need to maintain production at all times and to devolve shop floor management to skilled employees. The critical importance of craft to the output of product within both the newspaper and broadcasting industries meant that management viewed the indulgence of union demands as a price worth paying in order to maintain a peaceful industrial relations' environment. It has been previously noted that while major shifts in employer strategy were emerging in parallel with industrial relations' strategies of the Thatcher administration from 1979-1983, major shifts were emerging at individual ITV firm level. 4.1 and 4.2 will outline the role of both the employers' associations and National Agreements in achieving a relatively quiet industrial relations environment.

4.1

'Tales of Corruption'.⁵

Nothing would please me more than to be able to turn the clock back some 25 years and start again.⁶

The role of employers' organizations was fundamental to the British system of industrial relations – over a protracted period – in traditional industries of the Victorian era and in a later time (and in a very different industry) when they would

⁵ Interview with David Elstein, former Thames Television, Director.

⁶ Towers, HTV to TSW, 9 November, 1983 (ITVA B53/Box 24).

contribute to the regulation of the ITV sector. The 1960s onwards witnessed employers designing bargaining procedures which had the effect of drawing conflict away from the workplace and into regional and national forums. The objective of such centripetal processes was to make the union official (and not the shop-steward) the focal point of collective bargaining. This inherently unstable arrangement opened a gap between formal, rule-driven bargaining procedures and informal workplace bargaining – usually regulated by custom and practice (Danford, 2005:169). In commercial television informal bargaining simply supplemented and improved upon national settlements. In the period before 1979, collective bargaining was highly adversarial but the two competing ideologues – the employers’ association and the main trade union – effectively marginalized each other’s effectiveness.

Employers’ associations played a critical role in shaping the development of British industrial relations. The internal politics of these bodies mirrored those of trade unions and the master plans of employers’ associations were inevitably compromised by regional, sectoral and firm-specific strategies (see, *inter alia*, Zeitlin, 1991; McIvor, 1996; Adams, 1997, 506-30). This tension between solidarity and schism was no less true of commercial television. The ITVA had two main functions – primarily as a clearing-house for commercial discussions about Network programming, and for financial transfers between member companies. The other prime function of the ITVA was as the commercial companies’ negotiating body with the trade unions at national level. The ITVA’s negotiating strategy was formulated by a committee composed of one representative each from the smaller ITV franchise holders. Organizationally the Association was relatively weak as it had a limited secretariat, no powerful central officers and did not attempt to develop a central strategy. Its core policy was diluted to the status of providing helpful guidelines for individual member companies and it simply provided the administrative mechanisms of formal collective bargaining. As shall be shown, the employers’ strategy in the period up until the mid 1980s was one of containment and bargaining over the national wage rates and crewing arrangements which set the industry’s minimum standards. The Association’s limited strategic ambitions were critical to maintaining employer allegiance (Seglow, 1978:252). For the ITVA’s lead negotiator, the ITV companies ‘were separate PLCs, they were in competition with one another although they were in the Association. I was lobbied like hell. For example, I would be told by one company that it wanted a very low

settlement this year because things are not so good and then you would get Richard Dunn or Brian Cowgill (Thames) saying for Christ's sake don't rock the boat'.⁷

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s television workers held on to the core belief of the importance of their craft. Management remained dependent upon the goodwill and cooperation of craft grades in order to introduce new technology on any significant scale. The difficulty inherent in operating much of the traditional technology required to produce programming during the period up until the mid 1980s meant that both trade union and worker control of the labour process was virtually total. The complexity of much of the machinery involved in maintaining normal programming schedules contributed to the achievement of demands from the unions for substantial increases in earnings in return for the (low) level flexibility that the industry (even in the late 1970s) was seeking. Since the advent of UK commercial television, ACTT members had regularly taken responsibility for a number of important production decisions. Indeed, ACTT leadership encouraged what some viewed as a policy of encroachment into the management arena. This largely guildist approach was wholeheartedly embraced by ACTT membership on the shop floor while management quietly acquiesced so that something resembling a normal working environment could be maintained. The collapse of the guild strategy occurred during the mid/late 1980s as the ITV unions failed to grapple successfully with an ITV management buoyed up by technical change, together with a changed political environment and most importantly of all, the dismantling of the National Agreements which had regulated the industry.

As early as 1983 management were beginning to articulate – through ITVA correspondence – their dissatisfaction with the way skilled technicians held the reins of power within the ITV franchises. In an internally generated document circulated to the board of directors of Thames Television, managers referred to the historical context of the monopoly 1970s and anticipated the competitive environment of the coming decade. Likening the shop floor technicians to whom they had to concede authority in order to maintain a quiet industrial relations environment, as 'shop floor Dick Turpins', ITV managers were in no doubt they were employing technicians on

⁷ Interview with John Calvert.

terms which were extremely favourable for the workers concerned. 4.2 (following) will outline the way in which the commercial television sector was regulated in the period when the National Agreements between employers and trade unions dominated the industry. The moves by ITV employers to radically restructure the employment relationship, hesitant at first but later determined and ruthless, will subsequently be considered.

4.2

National Agreements and Regulation; A Relatively Quiet Industrial Relations Environment.

*We are selling the labour of our members for the highest and best price, using any and every related reason to get it. That is what a trade union leader does. He is not a philosopher or a Socialist writer. I am a trade union negotiator and I am selling a product.*⁸

Up until the late 1980s questions relating to industrial relations within commercial broadcasting were dealt with through national collective bargaining involving seven trade unions.⁹ The process of negotiation was organized through the Labour Relations Committee of the ITVA. The committee consisted of a single representative from the five largest and most powerful ITV companies, together with two alternating individuals representing the smaller ITV franchises. National Agreements, brokered between trade union representatives and ITV managers for most of the 1970s and early 1980s, had (as noted) provided for a relatively quiet industrial relations environment. These National Agreements were comprehensive and included agreed positions on diverse issues including minimum rates of pay for full-time workers and the conditions of employment for contract employees.

⁸ Obituary of Alan Sapper, ACTT, Daily Telegraph 15 May, 2006.

⁹ Association of Cinematograph Television and Allied Trades ('ACTT'), Broadcasting and Entertainment Trades Alliance, ('BETA'), National Union of Journalists ('NUJ'), Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbing Union, ('EETPU'), The Writers Guild, Equity, Musicians Union ('MU').

The labour process within the ITV sector and the broadcasting industry as a whole was highly regulated. Television production was, as previously indicated, a craft industry where a number of different trades operated independently of one another. Similarly, individuals and groups of workers within the commercial television industry believed that their particular artistic and technical skills afforded them an elite position within the industry (Campling, 1992:234). The ACTT was the guild which ensured these workers sustained a critical role within the programme production. BETA, contained many members who had developed trades, essential to production e.g. carpentry or stage design, but which in the hierarchical structures of the commercial broadcasting industry were considered to be significantly less important than the various technically demanding production tasks. The difference in emphasis in the way the two unions were treated by management gives an insight into the ACTT's power base before the mid-1980s. The contrast between individuals who were employed in creative or highly technical roles, and workers who were seen as merely 'broadcasting labourers', mirrored in many respects the treatment received by the members of the printing union, National Society of Operative Printers, Graphical and Media Personnel ('NATSOPA').

Regulation (for management) centred upon a set of comprehensive working rules which specified quite inflexible conditions for individual tasks and for patterns of production crewing. However, workers and unions were not unhappy to maintain meticulous regulation of work within the industry. For most core workers, the strict arrangements for labour produced substantial benefits and the structure and career path was coherent and relatively transparent. Although the commercial broadcasting environment offered no guarantees in terms of individual career advancement, workers recognized that the structure guaranteed significant training and skill development. The multiplicity of grades, which so infuriated management in later years, offered workers the opportunity to gradually increase their skill base and salary levels through length-of-service agreements. In practice, seniority often only meant that a skilled worker had reached a particular age and thus qualified for advancement to another grade – frequently without any regard to the qualities of younger candidates.

The National Agreements in operation until the mid 1980s were a given for management and unions. Local conflict and negotiation could improve terms and conditions for labour, but the Agreements themselves were not subject to negotiation. Industrial conflicts, when they arose, were about the boundaries and content of National Agreements. From the unions' perspective these National Agreements had the effect of ensuring that no ITV company, being a signatory to the Agreement, could introduce or impose conditions and rates of pay which were lower than those agreed across the Network. Unions pressed hard at local level to improve and enhance the broad National Agreements, e.g. with special local overtime payments which kept average wage levels high, and management was often happy to acquiesce in order to maintain a stable industrial relations environment. ITV companies relied upon advertising revenue as a major source of finance and any 'blackouts' (resulting from even minor industrial unrest) caused immediate, substantial and often irretrievable loss. Throughout the 1970s small-scale conflicts between unions and managers placed the balance of power in the workplace firmly in favour of the unions' established positions.

Union bargaining power was strengthened by the fact that individual technicians or other production workers – from camera and sound operatives to post production employees – could disrupt programming. Unions could use the threat of blackout to resolve disputes in other related parts of the television labour process. The late 1970s and early 1980s saw an increase in the number of hours of television broadcast daily by ITV from approximately 11 hours to 12, 13 or 14 hours per day. Collective agreements which had been introduced to deal with a very regulated and relatively short broadcast day proved quite unsuitable for the new environment. Broadcasting developed into the late night and early morning and was coupled with an increased desire by producers to engage in location shooting. Management also began to require a greater flexibility in working hours and work practices. The strength of the unions' negotiating position still allowed them to extract a significant increase in pay, for often minimal additional flexibility. Technicians were in a very powerful position because ITV franchise revenue was dependent upon uninterrupted programme transmission. In order to maintain the *status quo* management simply went along with unrealistic, and often ludicrous, demands for special payments. So called 'golden hours' payments were introduced in 1972 to compensate for the anti-social hours

consequent on the new and extended broadcasting schedule. Before the 'golden hours' agreement, staff working after midnight were paid at three times the hourly rate. After 1972, a payments schedule was agreed which could result in employees being paid up to five or six times their basic hourly rate – a level which would, inevitably, become untenable for employers.

The existence of output restriction, demarcation lines, strict manning levels, the artificial creation of overtime and the employment of unproductive labour all resulted from informal local bargaining, rather than from an explicit exercise of power by the unions. That is not to suggest that unions had only a limited or insignificant role in regulating the shop floor, or, indeed, that management sought to marginalize unions in favour of dealing directly with workers. Broadcasting employees were insulated against any real form of market discipline. If a technical or creative issue emerged and required an agreement between unions and management, then the union officials and shop stewards employed well-rehearsed techniques in order to achieve the desired outcome.

For management, programming constituted the deployment of nationally negotiated crews rather than the movement of individuals to fulfil specific requirements. Station managers had no method of explaining the cost of individual programmes and accounting procedures systematically masked the substantial under-utilisation of production resources. Over-manning was frequently physically concealed by managers who sometimes employed unproductive technicians in discreet housekeeping functions so as to keep them hidden from senior management. The period up until the mid 1980s was characterized by collective National Agreements which formalized shop floor industrial relations. Indeed, the view that these Agreements may have been a potent mechanism for pursuing a form of order on the shop floor during a period of robust union power is a recurring theme in the industrial relations literature (Dunn & Wright, 1994).

National Agreements were important because you had very different companies -very large, very rich companies and small and medium companies...so it was important that you used the big companies to pull up the smaller ones since the larger

companies had a lot more resources. Shop stewards could go and erect a kind of superstructure on top in terms of local agreements.¹⁰

National Agreements were the original source of union bargaining power and the employers' reliance upon a national settlement of work organization reflected the centrality of skilled labour to television production. The technicians' most potent weapon was to work strictly to formal agreements while rejecting short-term lucrative inducements to alter agreed patterns of crewing or other work matters. National Agreements were supplemented at local level by intensive bargaining conducted by highly motivated local union representatives and the ACTT was particularly adept in this regard. ACTT negotiations with management offered;

A fairly unlimited opportunity to ask for money via claims for improved job grading or allowances of all kinds. To employees in a creative industry this offers a marvellous opportunity for thinking up imaginative and costly claims together with continual potential for disruption.¹¹

Throughout the ITV Network, ACTT shop stewards consciously used pattern bargaining in order to diffuse gains made in the largest and most profitable companies.¹² At station and industry level the established employer strategy was to 'buy peace'. One regional company's programme controller who had assumed responsibility for industrial relations believed that 'you dealt with any problem by opening the drinks cabinet. It was a big boy's game'. The ACTT clearly felt it had the upper hand in discussions with employers whose apparent 'informality' had reached new heights by the early 1980s. The strategy of 'buying peace' was occasionally aided by the unusual practice of managers consuming large quantities of alcohol prior to negotiations. It was alleged that the practice was widespread – although this was never corroborated by any other interviewees.

¹⁰ Interview with Roy Lockett, BECTU.

¹¹ Ramsey, ITVA to Fox, MD, Yorkshire TV, 18 December 1983 (ITVA: IR/B27/295)

¹² Interview with Roy Lockett.

*We dealt with drunk employers. In negotiations we would walk out with the crown jewels. I can deal with drunk managers any time. But that was the sort of real incompetence which was common ...as late as the early 1980s. Unthinkable now.*¹³

Operational flexibility was possible but always at a price. Managerial discretion to change and amend production schedules was constrained by tight union rules regulating working time. Minor delays would incur massive premium payments for an entire crew. A two-minute over-run would automatically trigger payment for two hours' overtime and crews might not necessarily even accept this payment. If the following day was a rest day then the crew could reject two hours' overtime in favour of working their day off at double time and, in addition, accrue a day's leave. The camera crew maintained a strict hierarchy and electricians gained enormous bargaining power because of complex, fragile and unreliable technologies. Camera cables were coupled by thirty-six fine pins and to damage only one pin risked an expensive halt to production, and essential components such as high voltage bulbs required frequent replacement. There were, in short, compelling production imperatives to maintain full crews of skilled and experienced technicians.

From the later 1970s protracted and piecemeal technical change, together with unreliable mechanical and unproven digital technologies, made for a difficult industrial relations' environment. Mechanical skills remained critical in broadcasting and new technologies were absorbed into craft job territories until the mid 1980s. Workgroups were always vigilant against any perceived incursions into established job controls. Electricians successfully defended their right to control every aspect of studio lighting – even where rigs could be operated from a mixing desk.¹⁴ Management's grudging collusion with a bewildering collection of job controls was an entirely rational response to skilled workgroups' bargaining power given the practical limitations of available mechanical technologies (Brown, 1972:42-61). Commercial television management was as much about maintaining stable (if fractious) industrial relations as it was about making programmes (Annan, 1977:27:19). At this time precisely the same strategic constraints limited

¹³ Interview with Roy Lockett.

¹⁴ Central Conference Proceedings, Thames and EEPTU, 9 June 1980 (ITVA: IR/A37/010A).

management's ability to either introduce new technologies or restructure the labour process so as to decisively shift the balance of power as was achieved in the newspaper industry (see, *inter alia*, Martin, 1983; Cook, 1996).

Major capital costs were fixed by the industry regulator who specified the precise mix of recording and transmission equipment necessary to obtain a regional licence. The complex system of transfer pricing across the Network, and cross-subsidisation of projects inside individual companies, focussed management on the total cost of output rather than the cost of any particular programme or manager (Lury, 1993:142-143). The ITV companies' lack of awareness and poor control of efficiencies and costs was an acute variant of British big business and limited 'Americanization' of their corporate structures and processes (McKinlay, 1999). Lockett said of the relationship between management and unions within ITV in the period up until the mid 1980s;

They were making so much money that nobody wanted to rock the boat. There was a very strong union at the bottom and powerful directors at the top doing deals...with middle management effectively stripped of any power. This was an incredibly powerful monopoly and everybody wanted his or her cut. ITV was a very badly managed system: on the ground it wasn't managed, the (union) shops ran it. The unions boxed management in and gave them nowhere to go.¹⁵

4.3

The Formation of Employers' Strategy

Parallel with the emergence of a new political environment after 1979, key figures inside the ITVA began to question employer compliance with a work organization in thrall to collective bargaining – rather than by managerial prerogative. Just as line managers had become indifferent to labour inefficiency, so also had employers (as a body) failed to use collective bargaining to reshape work organization. At station level, companies had begun to introduce business priorities into the line management role but only in the most tentative manner. A former ITV industrial relations director

¹⁵ Interview with Roy Lockett.

spoke of the beginnings of a process which would eventually lead to a very significant organizational and labour process change within ITV and the television industry as a whole;

I was faced with an industry which, disagreeable though they found it, was beginning [to] cotton on to the fact that change was in the air. New technology was there, a camera with a light on it...so you didn't need sixteen people to go to Downing Street to interview the Prime Minister.¹⁶

Front line management had actively sustained custom and practice in order to maintain production. Managerial authority on the studio floor was a blend of acknowledged professional competence and adherence to the norms of craft administration. The employers had to begin to think strategically about industrial relations and, in particular, identifying the thresholds at which the Network would accept conflict as a legitimate cost, 'an investment in a better IR future, just as we invest in new technology'.¹⁷ There was also a significant deepening of the employers' development of collective bargaining strategies to be pursued both nationally and locally. The Network's main coordinating industrial relations committee, for instance, began to meet quarterly rather than only on the eve of the annual wage round.

One of the things discussed in the ITV Association was how they were going to take on the trade unions, tearing up the National Agreement, etc.. There was a clear strategy in the late 1980s and after that there was a sense that we should derecognise across the board and deal with things individually.¹⁸

The companies now appointed senior personnel directors to this committee as they searched for a more cohesive approach at station level. Management within the various ITV companies increased their own particular brand of collectivism – to one based on the need to share information relating to the limits of union tolerance to organizational change. From being merely a clearing-house of industry opinion the ITVA became an important conduit for managers to share knowledge about the

¹⁶ Interview with John Calvert.

¹⁷ 'Looking Ahead', talk given at Yorkshire TV, 20 December 1984 (ITVA: IR/B27/296).

¹⁸ Interview with Roy Lockett.

potential of new technology and current industrial relations' strategies. From being solely a passive secretariat, the ITVA now recruited senior officials from manufacturing companies (including *Ford* and *Pilkingtons*) with extensive experience of adversarial industrial relations' change and modern management strategies. One of the issues which the ITV companies' were most anxious to address was the ongoing debate over the introduction of 'Network substitution'.

In fact Network substitution had been a preoccupation of commercial television employers since the 1979 national dispute. Historically, when an originating ITV company had been unable to transmit a programme to the Network – due, perhaps, to a local industrial dispute in that company – it had proved very difficult for an alternative programme from another ITV company to be transmitted to the Network in its place. Little progress had been made on this matter by 1980 because of the cross-cutting commercial priorities of all the ITV companies but, also, because of the formidable power of unions to block transmission.¹⁹ In such circumstances it had been union policy for some time to insist that a local programme should be transmitted within each region.

*To reiterate a point I have made many times, the Network itself must protect itself better in the future than it has done in the past from the possibility of the nominated contractor being involved in a local dispute. If 'Network substitution' is such a red rag to the union bull, then ITV management must collectively demonstrate its wit, willingness and ability to side-step the issue, while continuing to maintain the collective responsibility of public service aspects of the Network as a whole.*²⁰

The report of the sub-committee on Network substitution concluded that it was intolerable that the ACTT should be seen to dictate programming policy. It was determined that a coordinated industry approach should be formulated so as to cover a situation where an originating company was unable to transmit a programme to the Network because of an industrial dispute.

¹⁹ See ITCA Labour Relations Committee, 'Report of Sub-Committee on Network Substitution', 11 January 1980 (IR/A42/006)

²⁰ HTV to Calvert, ITCA, 1 November 1984 (ITVA: IR/B27/306).

The sub-committee's report set out three positions for companies to adopt when dealing with expected union resistance to the substitution strategy. Fundamentally, it sought to achieve an arrangement/ understanding that when one ITV company was unable to transmit programmes to the Network (due to industrial action) then the other franchise holders would be free to provide their viewers with a normal service. The companies were prepared to go as far as to agree with the union that the programme substituted to the Network would not originate from the company which was in dispute with the union. The sub-committee concluded that should this prove unacceptable to the union then a fall back position for the companies should include an agreement that no programmes produced by an individual company in dispute would be shown by any ITV franchise throughout the Network for the duration of the dispute. In addition, it considered the situation where guidelines with the union were agreed, and where the local branch of the union in a franchise not involved in the dispute refused to take a programme substituted to the Network. The consensus was that in order to ensure the effectiveness of the general policy, local substitution should not take place and screens should remain blank and disciplinary action should then be initiated against the individual workers involved. Even during the 1980 dispute (which removed the ITN news from the Network) the companies' were unable to muster an effective response because of internal divisions and fears that substitution would escalate the dispute.²¹ Plans to build a reserve stock of major programmes and alternative movies for broadcast were constantly bedevilled by divergent commercial priorities.

The internal politics of the ITVA, together with its historically limited organizational authority, made it an awkward vehicle for orchestrating a national campaign to redraw the landscape of collective bargaining. The ITVA sought to redress this strategic weakness by using the Employment Act, 1980 which made unions liable for any costs incurred by companies impacted by consequent secondary industrial action. The repeal of union immunities in this legislation exposed their funds to employer claims for compensation for losses incurred as a result of secondary industrial action and there were no upper limits for fines or sequestration orders. The Act was designed not just as a remedy but, also, as a deterrent. This represented both a significant mitigation

²¹ Minutes of Network IR Committee, 27 May 1980 (B53/B0075).

in legal obstacles to using the law as part of a bargaining arsenal and was an assault on the unions' capacity for effective mobilisation (Benedictus, 1985; Brown & Wadham, 1990; Fulcher, 1991:238). By staggering injunctions against any union involved with a member company, ITVA exposed the television trade unions to repeated court actions and massively increased their (trade unions') financial exposure.

The hesitant moves by ITV employers to develop a more cohesive national bargaining strategy and the first moves to examine production costs at station level were paralleled by (and greatly contrast with) radical technological change at this time. Electronic News Gathering ('ENG') became the fundamental new technology issue for both management and unions throughout the late 1970s and 1980s. The introduction of light, portable video cameras for news gathering held the promise that the flexibility and immediacy of radio would be transferred to television reporting (Bliss, 1991:232). The beginning of a technological evolution in the UK television industry was evident in 1973 when Southern Television installed two 'Ampflex' video machines and which were acquired for a twelve-week trial period. For six of those weeks, the technology was utilized under the working practices proposed by management, and for a further six weeks the new technology operated under union best practice. These were largely amicable local trials, but on a national level the ACTT blocked all video work and which prohibited similar trials in other Network companies. Later the ACTT gave permission for Southern to again proceed with ENG trials but using only union guidelines. In March 1976 the ITV companies met with the ACTT to agree guidelines for the introduction of new technology, and draft proposals were considered at a joint meeting in March 1977. These meetings were not originally geared towards a discussion of ENG, but following consultations with the ACTT, management at ITV succeeded in ensuring that the introduction of ENG would be included within the discussions.

The issue of pay was central to any union agreement on the introduction of new technology. At a meeting on 15th February 1978 the union stated that the use of automated and new equipment, including ENG, would be considered in return for

additional pay and the re-grading of the employees concerned.²² By January 1980 a draft agreement between the ACTT and Independent Television News had been prepared. However the optimism of senior ITV management that ENG could be introduced on a national basis and with little resistance was quite unfounded.

In a letter to the then committee secretary of the Independent Television Commission ('ITC'), a senior Independent Television News ('ITN') executive explained the essential difficulties the ACTT had with the draft agreement for the operation of ENG.²³ The union was disturbed with what it considered to be an excessive number of overseas freelance workers. It was also concerned at the provision of an ENG camera to a particular northern ITN freelance reporter – an individual to whom the 'shop' had developed a personal dislike. In addition the ACTT sought substantial payments to the technicians directly involved and an across-the-board pay increase of approximately six per cent for all employees. The ITV management were concerned with every increasing costs associated with programme making and were determined to reduce the core costs of production. The attractions of new technologies were based on evidence derived from the effectiveness of the American experiences of new camera and newsgathering technologies. ENG was first used in the US in the mid 1970s and arose from the development of small and relatively light cameras. The de-skilling benefits of ENG and other technologies were quite obvious to managers, and union negotiators were shocked by the speed and the extent to which management sought change. Sapper noted the ACTT position at the time in relation to the introduction of new technology;

When we had these meetings [regarding new technology] with the management at Thames, I was amazed. They were stupid, they just didn't realise that you can't bring somebody in off the street and after two weeks training put them in front of the camera. With new technology they thought you don't need skilled people...madness just madness.²⁴

²² Code of Practice on the Introduction of Automated and new Equipment. IR/A37/010B.

²³ IR/A42/006.

²⁴ Interview with Alan Sapper, ACTT.

Both Southern Television and Channel Television were at the forefront of the introduction of new technology. By 1980 under the general managership of Harry Urquhart, Southern Television agreed in principle to move towards the gradual introduction of ENG. The cost of this move was reported in January 1980 to be GBP 98,000 (for equipment purchase only) and Southern outlined the perceived benefits which the introduction of ENG would bring to the company in terms of operational advantages. One of the (admittedly minor) advantages of employing ENG was that the heavy trucks required by the film crews (for even the smallest of news or feature shoots) could be replaced with a medium sized estate car. The Southern document suggested that the introduction of ENG would not eliminate the need for film craft skills within the local news bulletin programme and other local feature style programming.²⁵ Southern management were particularly impressed by the potential savings which could be obtained through the employment of new flexible newsgathering techniques. ENG operated at lower light levels than traditional film and did not require processing time. Tapes lasted twenty minutes (compared with five minutes for film) while the storage of material was much easier and cheaper than the traditional method. By May 1980, there was clear agreement amongst almost all the ITV franchise holders that the implementation of ENG was much preferable (the exception was Border Television) to the continued domination of film recording. The prevailing ACTT view of the introduction of labour saving technologies was summed up in the union-rallying cry of 'no exploitation without compensation'.

Grampian Television represented one end of the spectrum in terms of franchise success in the implementation of ENG. By May 1980 agreement had been reached with all unions representing Grampian staff for the introduction of ENG under what was known as the 'Self Financing Productivity Agreement' (which gave a rate of increase in remuneration of in excess of 15 per cent)²⁶. That increased payment allowed the company to schedule ACTT staff on ENG tasks in line with actual company requirements. The records show that no additional payments other than those agreed were made. In addition the agreement stipulated that no electrician would be attached to an ENG activity unless the company decided that a particular

²⁵ Interview with Alan Sapper.

²⁶ Introduction to ENG 1979-1981 IR/A42/006

programme merited one. Yorkshire Television documentation suggested that agreement had been reached with the 'film shop' and that management were close to agreement with the 'live shop'. The same internal documentation included a strong caveat that 'across the board' payments had yet to be raised by unions.²⁷ In May 1980 Yorkshire was reported as having an agreement with both film and live shops, although an internal 1982 company document would appear to contradict this. These were tentative arrangements which masked ongoing difficulties for Yorkshire Television in reaching a final agreement on ENG – the relevant industrial relations document shows conclusively that no agreement had been reached;

After a prolonged period of negotiation it became clear that no operational agreement could be reached which would be acceptable to both shops (although the company had reached a draft operational agreement with the live shop).²⁸

In May 1982 Yorkshire entered into a trial period with the 'live' shop operating from Sheffield. By 1983 the company was strongly urging union representatives to conclude an ENG working agreement because funds had been allocated for the second phase of ENG and which was planned to replace the existing film news crews. The trial periods continued until 1984 when the ACTT stewards gave notice of termination, and in reality, the cost savings involved through the application of ENG remained elusive. Between 1980-1984 local bargaining either limited the introduction of ENG, or all but eliminated the cost savings that management knew were possible (Clarke, 1984; McLoughlin & Clark, 1988).²⁹ The documentation which accompanied the initial attempt to introduce ENG into Thames Television (and which included significant references to other ITV companies) can be contrasted with the Thames specific nature of some of the later records.³⁰ In the covering letter sent to Thames in 1981 accompanying the new franchise agreement the Chairman of the IBA wrote;

²⁷ IR/A42/006

²⁸ ENG: Yorkshire Television IR/1327/263.

²⁹ For ENG negotiations, 1974-84, see ITVA, IR/A42/006 and IR/137/010.

³⁰ ACTT/ Thames Television Ltd. Introduction of ENG Tribunal IR/A37/010.

We touched at interview on the question of the level of costs generally in ITV at the moment and on the inescapable fact that Thames practices affect the whole system (Bonner, 1998).

By 1983 Thames was attempting to find methods of improving the cost effectiveness of its core business. Internal memoranda suggested that management were torn between two divergent positions, namely simply contracting or downsizing the organization in order to only fulfil their commitments to ITV alone, or increasing programming output without increasing plant and staff. Contraction was not an attractive option and in 1983 it was argued that because of the relatively uncommon incidence of spare capacity, large-scale staff redundancies would entail greater amounts of overtime for the remaining staff. This would, in addition, lead to an increase in freelance workers in order to deal with production peaks. Thames suggested that such casualization would be 'an enormously emotive issue' and that any financial projections would have to take into account, not only the costs of redundancy, but also the likely complete loss of advertising revenue for a substantial period.

By 1984 the National Agreement was no longer accepted as a given where the employers could only pursue damage limitation – it was now regarded as terrain upon which the politics of production could be fought and changed. That is not to say that there was unanimity regarding objectives or the methods to achieve such objectives. Thames Television was a crucial voice in the employers' internal debates where it stressed the need to eliminate the ACTT's claim to exclusive access to its membership and where all but the most anodyne direct communication between company and workforce was prohibited. Increased flexibility over time and task was no less important to Thames. Domestically, Thames pursued 'a strategy of stealth and realistic bargaining rather than to promote a major confrontation'.³¹ This strategy aimed to improve production efficiency by pushing existing agreements to the limit and challenging custom and practice. Throughout 1983-4, Thames experienced a series of local disputes as management confronted contractual 'rackets' and moved to

³¹ Dunn to Thames Board, February 1983.

introduce new technologies based on operational requirements rather than precedent.³² For Thames management this was a managerialist project with a clear moral dimension. It was a struggle between management 'missionaries' with a desire to re-regulate employment relationships and union 'mercenaries' wedded to what were considered to be amoral bargaining and work practices.

This [idea] of missionaries and mercenaries...the mercenaries were those union representatives who saw television as an oil well, but it would be quite wrong to distinguish between the managers who were missionaries and the unions who were mercenaries. Large numbers of people who lived solely for their work were happy because the unions were so successful negotiating on their behalf.³³

By reshaping work organization and confronting restrictive practices these management missionaries also confronted a mercenary workforce that was seen to have corrupted both themselves and the very essence of television production. In mid-1984 Thames unilaterally issued new rostering schedules and which triggered a major strike. For the Thames board the dispute was a huge but necessary cost if the company was to expand its production operation profitably.³⁴ By 1985, local confrontations were becoming more numerous and more intense and a national dispute was all but inevitable. The Thames dispute had an enormous and far reaching impact on the Network's preparations for a major strike. The ability of Thames to sustain a management operated service through a three-week dispute was a defining moment in pushing the commercial companies toward a more aggressive bargaining strategy (Bonner, 1998:159-64).

Prompted by the ITVA, the Network companies held a series of meetings with their middle managers to discuss the future shape of work organization. However, the reports from those exercises made for gloomy reading. With the exception of Thames there was no real push to restructure the labour process at company level. The ITVA concluded that most local disputes were triggered by managerial opportunism rather than by a clear strategy designed to erode or challenge union job controls.

³² Dunn to Thames Board, July 1983.

³³ Interview with M. Stevens, Thames Director, December 2001.

³⁴ Dunn to Thames Board, July 1984.

Paradoxically, the initiative for reshaping work organization was thrown back to the ITVA and national bargaining. The ITVAs member companies remained sceptical as to whether they could muster the necessary unity to pursue an aggressive bargaining strategy.

Having 'been here before' I am determined not to be too depressed about the conflicting views being expressed around on this subject. It would be nice, however, if some colleagues would look beyond their noses and realise we have to devise a sensible approach for the rest of the decade, rather than worrying so much whether it costs us x% or y% this year. It seems as if we are back to our eternal response to the unions: 'If you expect us to pay you that, what are you prepared to give us back in return?': to which the answer is a lemon!³⁵

In private correspondence between the ITVA and Thames, the company confirmed that confrontation had come only after a series of forays across the 'frontier of control' over the previous three years. Thames Director of Television argued that the moment had arrived for the Association to coordinate a national challenge to the unions;

I do believe very strongly that we must disabuse the unions and their members (by strategic planning and tactical manoeuvres) of the notion that the industry's style of confrontational bargaining runs all in one direction. We face these perpetual pay demands mainly because there are worries 'on the other side' about reciprocal demands from the companies.... It is time to change attitudes, and the force for change must be management orientated.³⁶

The ITVAs 'Thames post-mortem' detailed the specific tactics to be employed in any subsequent dispute and also marked the emergence of a much harder line to be taken in future. New labour laws exposed the ACTT to punitive damages if a strike was called without a ballot. Even if only a single station was directly affected by industrial action called without 'due process', then all stations had a claim against the ACTT

³⁵ Lowes, Director of Operations, HTV to Robinson, Director of Industrial Relations, TVS, 5 April (ITVA B53/Box24).

³⁶ Valentine, Thames to Calvert, ITVA, 10 April 1985 (ITVA: IR/A37/013c).

because of Network arrangements for programme sharing. The ITVA proposed that each station seek injunctions individually, staggering the legal process. This strategy would both increase the total damages and stretch the union's legal resources further.³⁷ The agreement for an aggressive use of injunctions was to seek to stiffen the resolve of the companies. 'My wish is to put some fire in some bellies', commented the Association's industrial relations' adviser.³⁸ Internally the Network companies were conscious of, and accepted that their individual short-term commercial interests would have to be temporarily suspended.

Network substitution which allowed programming to continue despite the loss of even a major station was prioritised – the mechanics, and not the principles, were now under discussion. Irrespective of the certainty of concerted union opposition, the Network was now primed to adopt a more aggressive policy through national bargaining.³⁹ This was a key strategic move by the employers and which undercut the unions' most potent bargaining weapon. The nature and, indeed, the continued existence of national bargaining was under serious consideration for the first time. The debate with the unions was to take place on ground chosen by the unions, with the companies cast as defenders of the status quo.⁴⁰ The Network industrial relations secretariat (now led by a former *Pilkingtons* HR Director) was actively shaping the internal debate and drawing on the experience of change strategies in manufacturing, notably that of the *Ford Motor Company*. The central issue for Network strategists was how to use national negotiations (where fundamental change was highly unlikely to be achieved) in order to broker necessary work reorganisation at company level.

During 1986-88 all the commercial companies attempted to use local bargaining to remodel work organisation. This development was only partly triggered by State broadcasting policy. More importantly, the unravelling of national bargaining had gained an unstoppable momentum. In the event, the ultimate termination of national

³⁷ A. Leighton Davis, Solicitor to J. Calvert, Head of Labour Relations, ITCA, 31 May 1985 (ITVA: IR/B27/306).

³⁸ T. Valentine, ITCA IR Adviser, to K. Chadwick, KLC Advisory Services, 2 August 1985 (ITVA: IR/B27/306).

³⁹ ITCA, 'Contingency Planning', 15 January 1985 (ITVA: IR/B27/306).

⁴⁰ 'Woodstock - Strategy Conference for ITC Negotiators', 13 March 1987 (IR/B27/295).

bargaining was an extremely untidy process and the unilateral withdrawal of Tyne Tees from all National Agreements had a most significant impact. In a document circulated to all staff and executive directors, Tyne Tees indicated that the company had to make significant alterations to its annual budget and advised that annual savings of over GBP 3 million were required. It was suggested that savings of that order could only be made through a radical approach to matters such as flexibility, natural wastage and working practices.⁴¹ The formal withdrawal of Tyne Tees Television from the national ITV agreement was advised in a letter to the four unions concerned, ACTT, BETA, The Electrical, Electronic, Telecommunications and Plumbers Union, ('EETPU') and The National Union of Journalists ('NUJ').⁴² Tyne Tees argued that the National Agreements dated back to a time when the operational environment was considerably more transparent. The company did note, however, that until it had an opportunity to examine the details of the Agreement (which they felt were irrelevant) it would continue to be honoured. The decision not to participate in the National Agreement was deemed insensitive by the ITVA and John Calvert, the Director of Industrial Relations argued in a letter to the Chief Executive of Anglia Television that the decision was potentially damaging to the credibility and public standing of other ITV companies.⁴³ Crucially Calvert believed he could turn the Tyne Tees decision to the advantage of the remaining ITV companies.

Within Tyne Tees the National Agreement was now confined to matters of procedure, rather than to specifying substantive issues relating to terms of employment. The end of the National Agreement was a watershed in the remaking of the television labour process and by the close of 1989 working practices in commercial television had been transformed. All fourteen members of the ITV Association announced extensive moves towards flexibility and multi-skilling and which ignored restrictive practices. Tyne Tees reported that for a decade demarcation lines had been 'consistently eroded', a process significantly accelerated in 1988-89 and 'there are now no restraints other than those imposed by lack of knowledge or skill'.⁴⁴ The Monopolies and Mergers Commission reported that the national picture was broadly similar. Restrictive

⁴¹ IR/A37/028.

⁴² IR/A37028.

⁴³ IR/A37/028 Tyne Tees correspondence.

⁴⁴ ITVA, 'Labour Practices in TV and Film Making', 15 December 1989 (B53/Box 62).

practices had been eliminated, 'or...could be realistically expected to disappear as a result of current or extended negotiations, or management decisions' (MMC, 1989:41). This was the epitaph which marked the end of a system of industrial relations based on management acquiescence and the beginning of a negotiated regulation of the labour process – a form of negotiation that all but negated management prerogative on the studio floor. For the first time, managerial prerogative was decisive in shaping work organization and the employment relationship in commercial television.

The Network's preparations for the 1989 national negotiations were both cursory and self-congratulatory. National Agreements were on their way to becoming something of an historical curiosity, rather like 'In Place of Strife' (or clothing coupons), as companies introduced their own agreements to suit their own particular requirements. The union campaign to build a model local agreement at Television South (TVS) which could be rolled out throughout the Network had been rebuffed. Industrial relations which had been once the companies' Achilles heel, had now become one of its strengths – however, there was a note of caution. Breaking the straitjacket of restrictive agreements at both local and national level was the first step in the process of reshaping the face of employee relations within the companies. The breakthrough of the late 1980s had been achieved against the backdrop of crisis and political threat, a cathartic moment which had triggered major shifts in television employers' attitudes to collective bargaining and the nature of work. The uncertainty which television companies now confronted was whether their managers could achieve the transition from organisers of a successful war of position to the much more subtle demands of a war of manoeuvre on the studio floor. 'Do we have managers who are capable of switching from orderlies of retreat, to Attila the Hun, to team leaders?'⁴⁵

⁴⁵ ITVA, IR Committee, Minutes, 9 May, 1989 (B53/B0075).

4.4

The collapse of the guild strategy.

*'We were a solace, a reminder that things weren't always so bad.'*⁴⁶

By 1986 the ACTT was compelled to consider its internal organisation and the examination undertaken was considered to be symptomatic of the political and personal divisions within that union's leadership. Organisational issues reviewed included the union's highly centralised decision-making processes – a hangover from the era of an all-encompassing National Agreement – and the lack of engagement with the rapidly shifting sands of local negotiations. For the ACTT General Secretary (Alan Sapper) the 'Race Report' (prepared by London Labour politician Reg Race) was an attempted 'coup' rather than a dispassionate dissection of the union's organisation.

The Race Report recognized that the ACTTs remaining strength was its effectiveness in negotiating wages and conditions – its weak point was identified as the ineffective handling of new technology agreements. The insistence of the union in maintaining existing crewing regimes simply increased the potential benefits of new technology for aggressive managements. The ACTT had even failed to maintain a national census of new technology agreements and their impact on work organisation. What bargaining competence it had retained was, largely, because the television industry had been sheltered from the restructuring experienced by manufacturing and the public sector. Centralisation limited the union's ability to respond effectively to an increasingly diverse range of management initiatives across the ITV Network and intensified the perceived gap between the membership and wholly metropolitan based national officials. Strong workplace branches were also isolated and increasingly alienated from the union's internal democratic processes. The strength of the union's workplace organization was more apparent than real: few stewards' committees were operational, leaving the lay organisation with little strategic capability and vulnerable

⁴⁶ Interview with Sharon Elliott, BECTU.

to employer attack. In short, union organization at station level was fatally compromised and would survive only until management realized this vulnerability.

If the 1984 Thames conflict was critical in reshaping the employers' strategy then the 1987 TV-am dispute was a certain watershed for the ACTT. From the outset the dispute was seen as a stalking horse used by the Network companies to terminate the National Agreement.⁴⁷ The TV-am dispute quickly escalated from a minor skirmish over rosters and overtime payments to a full-scale confrontation where there were dissenting voices on the ACTT national executive who believed that this was a battle which the union simply could not win. It was also a watershed in terms of forcing the ACTT to rethink its established bargaining strategy, namely, 'a strategy of attrition'.⁴⁸ It was not just that a broadcaster could continue to operate during an industrial dispute but, rather, that TV-am had rejected outright the established employer bargaining strategy of buying-off the ACTT. During a plea to the ACTT executive to continue its financial support for the strike, a bemused TV-am activist conceded that the union had irrevocably lost its most potent bargaining weapon when, despite its profitability, the company refused to sue for peace.⁴⁹

With the benefit of almost sixteen years to ponder the defeat inflicted upon the trade union movement by the management at TV-am, former ACTT officials agreed with the assessment (provided, in part, by the ACTT minutes of the Thames dispute) that the union was badly prepared for such a critical engagement. The raft of recent legislative changes had transformed the industrial relations landscape and altered the content and scope of employment relationships including the role and importance of unions themselves;

My feeling now is that there was an extraordinary complacency on the part of the union. They really thought that the world wasn't really changing...TV-am came as a real blow to them...they had gone too far...we played into his hand...we did exactly

⁴⁷ ACTT, Executive Committee, Minutes, 25 February 1987.

⁴⁸ ACTT, Executive Committee, Minutes, 16 March 1988.

⁴⁹ ACTT, Executive Committee, Minutes, 6 July 1988.

*what he [Bruce Gyngell] wanted. The law was changing all the time...secondary action had been very important to us.*⁵⁰

The TV-am management opened up the prospect of the ACTT being marginalized or derecognised throughout the ITV Network. After three months there were dissenting voices on the ACTT national executive and who acknowledged this was a futile dispute – ‘this was unlike other ITV disputes in previous years, the union could not successfully conclude this dispute through industrial methods’.⁵¹ For the former ACTT General Secretary (Sapper) the erosion of the substance of the industry's National Agreement from 1986 had not eliminated substantive national bargaining – ‘some of the agreement was hollowed out but we still had power on the shop floor’.⁵² Sapper argued that from 1986 onwards the National Agreements were being ‘chipped away’, but hadn’t completely disappeared and the union was thus engaged in what was termed an orderly form of retreat. In truth, the National Agreement had been thoroughly eviscerated and the only national condition which remained uniform across all commercial companies was that specifying the normal working week. Local bargaining procedures had been transformed into, at best, forms of consultation with union representatives. The union leadership was struggling to maintain even a semblance of an orderly retreat. Without the National Agreement as a vehicle for a centralized bargaining strategy the ACTT leadership was increasingly marginal to the bargaining process. The only advice the union could offer its embattled grassroots activists was to pursue a ‘strategy of damage limitation’.⁵³

The ACTT leadership rejected any fundamental reappraisal or modification of its traditional strategy. The leadership was prepared to lose up to two-thirds of its members in order to maintain the integrity of its restricted membership. Sapper, in particular, was ready to ‘retreat to the core of the union’ in film and film development laboratories even if this meant the wholesale loss of the union's television membership. In commercial television, however, Sapper’s retrenchment strategy fast lost any credibility and the ACTT membership and lay infrastructure collapsed into

⁵⁰ Interview with, Martin Spence, BECTU.

⁵¹ ACTT, Executive Committee, 17 February 1988.

⁵² Interview with Alan Sapper.

⁵³ ACTT, Executive Council, Minutes, 19 July 1989.

disarray in a matter of weeks. In Scottish Television, ACTT membership plummeted by almost 50 per cent within two months. All the union's branch officers resigned and Sapper was booed by a mass meeting convened to bolster local organization.⁵⁴ Faced with incessant criticism and collapsing membership Sapper resigned and his resignation symbolised the end of the ACTT's bargaining strategy of 'a war position'. To counter growing financial weakness the ACTT merged with the BBC house union BETA to form BECTU (see, Blyton & Turnbull, 1994).

*We were unable to find a foothold as we slid down the mountain and we grabbed on to BETA on the way down.*⁵⁵

Throughout the 1990s BECTU proved unable to rebuild its bargaining strength in commercial television but it has managed to maintain a presence in all stations. To this day, BECTU's core of activists remain dominated by former ACTT stewards but these are overwhelmingly middle-aged, male technicians and not representative of the union's current and more diverse membership.

4.5

Industrial Relations in the 1990s.

The end of the closed shop (and attendant comprehensive task specifications of the White Book National Agreement in 1989) decimated BECTU's defences on the ground. For four years, the union's leadership attempted to stem the tide of lost members, to stabilise the union's finances and to maintain some semblance of shop steward organization in the commercial sector. Only two regional commercial companies took issue with union membership by stopping the check-off system which deducted union dues from salaries. Given the severity and novelty of the challenges to BECTU, the union concentrated on rebuilding its heartland and did not attempt to unionise in the independent sector.

⁵⁴ *Broadcast*, 19 August 1988; ACTT Executive Council, Minutes, 30 October 1988.

⁵⁵ Interview with Martin Spence.

In retrospect the termination of the closed shop within the broadcasting industry was, perhaps, a virtue in that it ended the degeneracy of the union and forced national officials to reach out to a membership which had been taken for granted since the advent of television itself. The bizarre separation between elite trade union officials and ordinary employees had been largely eliminated. The strategy employed by BECTU was inspired, not by an overnight conversion to the process of democracy within the union movement but, rather, by the need to retain membership levels. There was now a real sense in which even the remaining pockets of lay union organization did not betoken any real bargaining strength. A BECTU official noted;

*Where there were good relations we managed to salvage a little more from the wreckage, but it was about holding on to agreements, holding on to the relationship.*⁵⁶

Even where the substance of agreements was ignored the simple maintenance of the structures and personal relationships of collective bargaining was regarded as something of an achievement. For BECTU, maintaining procedural agreements was;

*A holding operation - trying to stop members, organization, conditions, just seeping away.*⁵⁷

Across the ITV Network, BECTU shop stewards retained only the most basic of facilities agreements. While most companies continued to pay shop stewards for lost time while on union duties this was, simply, a pragmatic recognition by management of the futility of quick responses to local disputes, rather than any commitment to collective bargaining. Shop steward facilities did not extend to the provision of time off for more extensive recruitment or representation activities. This, in turn, hampered union communication between national headquarters and the grassroots. Survival for BECTU was an achievement in itself. After 1989 basic organizational survival superseded representation and substantive bargaining as the union's strategic imperative. In the mid 1980s the ACTT and BETA had almost the same number of employees – just in excess of 30,000 each. By 1993 the membership of the new union

⁵⁶ Interview with Martin Spence.

⁵⁷ Interview with Sharon Elliot.

BECTU was only 27,000. A BECTU official contrasted the result of restructuring within the sector on the ACTT with the impact of the defeat of the miners' strike upon the NUM;

*I don't think we were ever wiped off the face of the earth in the same way that the miners were. We did keep a basic infrastructure in every company which retained a franchise.*⁵⁸

However, there was a real sense in which even the remaining pockets of lay organization did not represent any real bargaining strength. For BECTU, maintaining procedural agreements 'was a holding operation; trying to stop members, organization, conditions, just sweeping away'.⁵⁹ The ITV franchise competition in 1991 broadly maintained the ITV Network – resulting in a split between three major and ten to twelve smaller regional operators. The basic change in management objectives and processes was a sharpened cost awareness with the introduction of procedural mechanisms which reached into the details of the production process (Daymon, 1998). From 1989 onwards the insecurity of employment for technicians massively increased as companies shifted their labour strategy towards a core-periphery model (Dex *et al*, 2000). In 1991 Central Television, for example, introduced a new employment contract based on 'zero-crewing' for each project and budgets were now devolved to projects rather than functional departments. In turn, the transparency of this short-run contracting model placed enormous fiscal pressure on project management to reduce staffing to the absolute minimum. The contracting model transformed functional departments into cost centres with limited scope to improve their bargaining position by internal trading. In the regulated environment of commercial television before the mid 1980s, production costs were almost an irrelevance in a highly profitable industry. Management control systems were now radically extended in parallel with the dissolution of nationally regulated labour contracts and the labour process became critical to profitability. Individual employees were costed against specific projects and their downtime monitored, measured and

⁵⁸ Interview with Martin Spence.

⁵⁹ Interview with Sharon Elliott.

compared. The television studio was no longer a workplace regulated by collective bargaining but was now governed by the market.

The first move to rebuild lay organisation as a bargaining force was in 1997. BECTU systematically compared contracts across the Network in order to identify minimum terms and conditions as a base line for local negotiators. For the first time BECTU convened an informal national meeting of Network activists 'to compare notes, to start to regroup'.⁶⁰ It was clear that the high-water mark of union influence and control had long ago been reached and that, in future, trade union demands and their role in the workplace would be limited – nevertheless union negotiators and shop stewards did not capitulate. BECTUs Charter campaign fought for clear and 'irreducible minimum' working conditions – 'to be honest', commented one regional company's Director of Television;

*I think that this is a good sign. The unions ...are moving away from cash to terms and conditions. In the past they were always chasing the dollar and maximising payments until we had a reputation of excessive crews, overtime rates, etc.. I am quite encouraged by this sort of approach.*⁶¹

Conclusion.

In the course of the period since 1979 the landscape of commercial television was profoundly transformed. Before then commercial television was a benign, highly regulated environment where firms reaped rich profits and trade unionists bid up the price of labour without much difficulty or hindrance. After 1979, employers gradually shifted their labour and technology strategies away from a grudging acceptance of the limits placed upon their discretion by collective bargaining. Initially employers made cautious moves to reshape work organization and to introduce new technologies. However by the mid 1980s, commercial television employers had launched a full-scale assault on the industry's formal and informal structures of collective bargaining. Controlling the labour process moved from being a secondary concern for commercial

⁶⁰ Interview with Sharon Elliott.

⁶¹ Grampian to ITVA, 30 August 1991 (B53/Box 66/303).

television stations to being the essential element of the industry's labour process. Unreliable and awkward electro-mechanical equipment was displaced – initially by individual digital tools and, subsequently, by integrated systems which linked production through to editing. Technological change both increased the potential benefits of reshaping the labour process and reduced the employers' reliance upon skilled, experienced technical labour. This was the second phase of the employers' onslaught – both the nature of work and the internal labour markets were radically reconstituted without recourse to collective bargaining. Crucially, these shifts in management strategy and practices were underway before the Thatcher deregulation of the industry consequent of the 1989 Monopolies and Merger Commission Report on trade union restrictive practices. The Thatcher reforms did not initiate the management assault on the broadcast trade unions but, rather, accelerated processes already in progress within the commercial television companies.

This Chapter has traced the transition of the ITV sector from a highly regulated environment where collective bargaining and National Agreements were the dominant sources of regulation and organization of labour. In contrast, by the late 1980s the ITV companies could be said to significantly reflect the emerging deregulatory organizational structures of the independent television sector. The following Chapter will address the specific firm based experience of ITV restructuring in one particular franchise. For while STV was not in the first wave of organizational restructuring during the early 1980s it would emerge later as one of the most important exemplars of de-skilling, reshaping of labour process and re-regulation of workplace relationships.

Chapter 5.
Management – Technology and Industrial Relations Change:
Re-Regulating the Employment Relationship.
A Case Study of Scottish Television PLC. 1979-2001.

Introduction.

When I came into television it was demarcation between jobs. As a stagehand you would not dare look at a hammer or a paintbrush – it was the painters or the joiners for that, and electricians for that. Demarcation was very strong as everyone had their job whereas in the theatre everyone pulled together and got it done.⁶²

The intrusions of the Thatcher and Major governments into broadcasting during the 1980s and 1990s encouraged a new rhetoric of consumer sovereignty. Their legislative interventions were made in the belief that both the public interest and quality in broadcasting were better served by commercial competition than through public service regulation (Harrison, 2000:49-50). While such policy objectives provided an important backdrop to the wider changes in the broadcasting economy in the period since 1979, they did not initiate such change.

Throughout the UK broadcasting industry, organizational change was reflected in a number of ways. Within the BBC the acceptance of marketization was manifested by breaking up the Corporation into a series of nominally independent directorates together with the adoption of the restructuring project Producer Choice. This had a substantial impact upon the occupational identity of BBC craft workers (Wegg-Prosser, 1998). Within the independent production sector (arguably the main beneficiary of a relaxation in the regulatory guidelines, and which had up until the early 1980s ensured the continuation of a duopoly within UK broadcasting) deregulation gave a small number of entrepreneurial producers the flexibility to emerge from the vertically integrated television industry (Willis & Dex, 2003:23).

⁶² Interview former STV engineer.

The ITV sector, in particular, underwent a comprehensive restructuring process which became the template for industry change in the period from the mid 1980s onwards.

During the period of organizational upheaval within the ITV sector in the 1980s and 1990s (see Chapter 3) a contextual framework emerged from which it is possible to explore the archive jungle relating to profound industrial relations change. (Indeed, the breadth and detail of change within the sphere of commercial broadcasting would benefit from a specific ITV firm based approach.) It is proposed to undertake a detailed analysis of Scottish Television PLC (STV) – a specific station based approach to understanding the very significant changes undertaken since the 1990s.

Changes on the ground in the UK television industry over the past 25 years came about largely through a combination of legislative and technological applications which led to a radical reordering of the working lives of those employed within the industry (Paterson, 2001:212). Until quite recently, comparatively little had been written about the nature of work and employment in broadcasting (McRobbie, 1996). The emerging literature on management and labour has focused largely on the disintegration of internal labour markets and the rapid casualization of employment which has dominated the industry in the last decade (Dex *et al*, 2003).

The objective here is to explore the relationship between corporate strategy, the reshaping of labour processes (so as to incorporate the introduction of new technology), and the consequent issue of the re-regulation of workplace relationships within STV. By the mid 1990s, this regional ITV franchise had successfully transformed itself from a minor regional broadcaster into an aggressively acquisitive media conglomerate but which, subsequently, withdrew to its core business service after a series of disappointing acquisitions and diversifications. However its efforts from the mid 1980s onwards to restructure television production and broadcasting had not been straightforward. STV was engaged from the late 1970s onwards in complicated and long drawn out negotiations concerning, *inter alia*, the integration of new technology and the management of incremental labour process change on the shop floor. Drawing on interviews with STV production staff and managers (detailed in Chapter 2) and with the assistance of internal documents and ITVA archive papers, it is possible to trace the development of corporate strategy and work organisation as

STV shifted from being a cultural bureaucracy to something akin to the flexible firm (see Mangum & Mangum, 1986).

Critics of the radical changes achieved in the structure and management of the UK television industry point to the pervasive casualization of employment in the sector (Saundry, 1998). On the other hand, advocates depict an industry which is both flexible and specialised and populated by freewheeling and imaginative cultural entrepreneurs linking a vibrant archipelago of production and ancillary services to the broadcasters (Starkey & Barnatt, 1997). Both analyses are simplistic and fatally flawed and represent a myopic nostalgia for a lost 'golden age' of broadcasting free from commercial considerations or, indeed, from effective management. The alterations to employment patterns which gathered pace from the mid-1980s onwards were prefigured by the development of more rigorous programme budget controls and local skirmishes over new technology together with the consequence from the emerging independent television production sector. The rapid growth in production companies and facilities houses providing programming and specialist services did not, however, signify the emergence of a form of flexible specialisation (Piore, 1986). The broadcasting companies commissioning role was not synonymous with that of a brokerage agency and only a very limited number of production companies were vehicles for 'talent' or had a sufficiently large production base to give them substantial bargaining power. Neither can the micro-level categories of the 'flexible firm' be conflated with the meso-level terms of 'flexible specialisation' without a collapse of analytical rigour (Robins & Cornford, 1992). Indeed, the experience of broadcasting casts further doubt on the rigour of flexible specialisation as an analytical category. For the new entrepreneurial class of independent producers relations of power continued to be skewed in favour of the broadcasters' commissioning departments.

It is useful to begin by outlining the principal features of work organisation and collective bargaining in the period before the mid 1980s. The long dominance of complex and unreliable electrical mechanical technologies, and the slow introduction of digital alternatives made acceptance of a highly regulated labour process the only choice for television management. Satellite and cable technologies – and, increasingly, competitive franchise auctions – exposed the commercial Network (after

the introduction of the Broadcasting Act, 1990) to severe competition for the first time (Franklin, 2001). The following Section traces the collapse of national collective bargaining and the beginnings of a management assault on the regulated labour process. These dual forces were to release the potential of digital technologies and deliver significant efficiency gains so as to redraw the balance of power in the workplace. Management control of the labour process became an increasingly important competitive weapon. For STV it was considered that extending control over the labour process was both essential to profitability and to the legitimisation of a new managerial regime which developed from the mid-1980s.

5.1

Management and Labour in a Regulated Environment.

A stable competitive environment, together with incremental changes in production technology, meshed with a highly regulated form of labour process through to the mid-1980s (Crissell, 2002). Regulation centred on a comprehensive set of work rules which specified rigid conditions for individual tasks and patterns of production crewing. National work rules were inescapable for franchise holders and, while local negotiations and disputes could improve terms and conditions for labour at specific stations, industrial conflicts were about the boundaries and content of national contracts and not about their existence.

Labour contracts took production efficiency out of the competitive equation for station managements and work organisation was not a prime factor in competitiveness or profitability. Management acceptance – however rhetorically grudging – of a national settlement on work organisation also reflected their reliance on highly skilled labour. Just as cameras 'had to be heated up', a veteran of the first decade of commercial television recalled, the camera operator also 'had to heat up, to get his eye in'.

Each camera had three or four tubes depending on the standard you were working to. To register the images you had magnetic yokes and you had to be able to shift the image that was being scanned up, down and sideways to alter the intensity of it, to

*adjust the scanning beam, the focus, the intensity, the current within the read of beam. You had so many controls and perhaps fifty parameters to control to get pictures. It was a bit of a black art. Some people were better than others at lining (shots) up, and certain individuals had reputations as being very good at getting pictures out of cameras - there was an element of artistry involved.*⁶³

Camera rosters were predicated on the assumption that minor technical failures would inevitably disrupt production. ‘If you wanted to change tapes, it was ‘go and have a cup of tea while the assistant changes the tape’. Sound engineering, similarly, involved running adjustments to recording equipment with every change of tape spool. Downtime averaged one-third of production time and the complexity of individual tasks was overlaid by a need for collective improvisation based on shared experience. Camera crews were ordered in a strict hierarchy, primarily based on seniority, and regulated exclusively by the workgroup (Brown, 1972: 42-61).

*The main difference [between the studio twenty years ago compared with the recent past] is quality and reliability – the equipment now is better, sound quality is better, everything is better – but also if you were doing a six hour day in the studio then built into that schedule would be time for doing breakdowns.*⁶⁴

The individual dexterity and group coordination required in the operation of a pedestal camera was considerable. Although power-operated cranes were introduced from the early 1960s, fine movements required the senior camera operator to remain in focus while aligning shots through three dimensions, all while seated on a moving ‘dolly’. The senior operator gestured to the two assistants with a series of rapid, subtle finger signals guiding the ‘planing-handle’. One camera operator recalled that during such delicate operations the workgroup relied on an ‘almost telepathic’ understanding of the image sought by the senior operator;

The old dollies were heavy, bulky – awkward to move. But you had to glide them across the floor to avoid the slightest bump. All the time you were adjusting the dolly

⁶³ Interview former STV camera operator 5.1.

⁶⁴ Interview STV producer.

*you had to just know what shot the cameraman wanted then and what he wanted next.*⁶⁵

Production staff continued to define themselves in terms of their trade rather than as broadcasters or employees of a specific company. Occupational identity remained defined by generic competences, tools, and reference to a wider craft community which stretched beyond the studio floor;

*I was an electrician who happened to be working for a telly company. Even after twenty-five years with STV I still thought that I could have gone back to (electrical) contracting.*⁶⁶

The management attitude to programme production both accepted and confirmed the separation of the aesthetic and technical spheres of production. The camera operators' contribution to production was not aesthetic but, rather, a more restricted technical conformity. In common with other broadcasting technicians, the camera operators' primary identity was that of a member of a wider craft community. 'Of course we wanted the show to go well, but we had nothing to do with deciding what the shots were. The only time we volunteered a suggestion was if a shot was impractical'⁶⁷. The labour process was articulated around a sequence of tasks conducted by distinct craft groups augmented by a series of ancillary occupations such as stagehands and dressers.

*Only carpenters could wield saws and hammers, only painters could paint sets. Stagehands were restricted to fetching and carrying: as a stagehand you would not dare look at a hammer or paint brush.*⁶⁸

Equally, no tradesman would consider shifting a prop or delivering materials or spare parts. In many cases there was a technical basis to restrictive job allocations not

⁶⁵ Interview former STV camera operator 5.1.

⁶⁶ Interview former STV electrician 5.3.

⁶⁷ Interview former STV camera operator. 5.2.

⁶⁸ Interview former STV stage-hand.

derived solely from union job controls. An electrician would not touch a sound cable, a sound guy would not touch an electrician's cable or a camera cable, a cameraman would not touch a sound cable or an electrician's cable.

It got to the ridiculous stage. There is the story of a chap who bumped into a lamp stand and the lamp was falling over so he grabbed it before it fell and put it back up. That caused major problems with the electricians - not because he bumped into it, but because he grabbed it and put it back up.⁶⁹

Within this setting it was entirely rational for management to collude with the unions in the construction and maintenance of balkanised internal labour markets and to cede significant control over the labour process to skilled labour (Brown, 1972: 55-57). 'You always bought your way out of any problem – the bucks were there – it was a corrupt form of profit-sharing', recalled a former STV Director. In a time-sensitive setting, any small group could halt production instantly. The same individual recalled that 'every weekend the outside broadcast was in jeopardy because the riggers might be a problem, or the electricians, or whatever. The possibility of industrial relations problems was accepted as a fact of life'. Through the 1970s small-scale conflicts confirmed the balance of power in the workplace firmly in the unions' favour.

Management made a Faustian pact with the unions - we wouldn't push too hard. If we were threatened with blank screens we had no choice and we had to back down. It was all a big boys' game. We all knew what was going on - they had us over a barrel. Problems only arose by accident.⁷⁰

The management view was that programming was the deployment of nationally negotiated crews rather than the movement of individuals according to production priorities. Controlling labour costs was not vital either to the station's profitability or to the appraisal of management performance. Over-crewing was inherent in the regulated environment 'but at that time management liked that because they didn't

⁶⁹ Interview former STV stage-hand.

⁷⁰ Interview STV manager.

have to think about anything – the management building blocks were really big. It was a case of programme, crew, money, that’s fine, that’s that sorted out, dead easy’.⁷¹

Shop stewards inside STV (particularly electricians who had moved into broadcasting largely from shipbuilding or civil engineering) developed extensive job controls as their main bargaining weapon and this was broadly acceptable to management while the company was in profit. STV had evolved through a number of phases since its inception in 1957. A confidential report published in 1980 (after a visit to the company by the ITVA) found that the first ten years of the franchise existence were marked by high profits.⁷² By the early 1970s the company was suffering annual losses, and by 1975 a new board of directors had been appointed.⁷³ By the time of the publication of the ITVA report management at STV (and other franchise holders) had begun to radically rethink the way National Agreements were applied on a local basis. The ITVA report on STV identified a need to restructure local deals so that they would no longer be linked directly to a need to maintain transmission. Crucially, the ITVA report noted that while individual franchise holders did not share information with one another about industrial relations concerns, the trade unions (and the ACTT in particular) had developed very sophisticated networks for the sharing of information.⁷⁴ It was regularly noted by ex-STV interviewees that the company had a history of poor industrial relations. A former STV electrician said of the franchise;

*STV had always had bad management - always. Bad managers can be good for the workers if they [workers] are organised. Any time we had to wait (for materials or other trade groups) we claimed an allowance - the worse the manager, the better the allowances. Plus, we got the chance to work overtime. That’s what we tried to do: to build up the agreements so that the worker would not be punished for bad management.*⁷⁵

⁷¹ Interview STV manager.

⁷² IR/045/015

⁷³ IR/045/015

⁷⁴ IR/045/015

⁷⁵ Interview former STV electrician 5.4.

Throughout the late 1970s the growing divergence in the scale of operations of the Network companies began to shift management attention to the local level. Although the industry's National Agreements remained paramount they were increasingly augmented by locally negotiated appendices and such micro-agreements merely improved on the content of the National Agreements. The ACTT was at the apex of its powers within the ITV Network and vigorously policed its pre-entry closed shop. According to a former head of industrial relations at the ITVA, the period up until the early 1980s may be characterized as one of 'waste and poisonous industrial relations'.

Before the mid-1980s technical change in broadcasting had been dominated by a series of incremental innovations in specific technologies. Even as late as the early 1980s film had remained the dominant form of recording notwithstanding technical limitations and the difficulties surrounding employment of recording craft skills within the ITV. The piecemeal process of technical change required a marriage of temperamental mechanical technologies with unreliable and unproven digital technologies. The result of this complex and protracted transition (from mechanical to digital process technologies) was twofold. Firstly, mechanical skills remained of prime importance in broadcasting and, secondly, new technologies were absorbed into the existing craft-based division of labour and appropriated by established trade groups. The ACTT controlled the introduction of new technologies through its highly developed and rehearsed negotiating strategies. One former ACTT negotiator (turned commercial television executive) said of his colleagues during the period up until the mid 1980s;

I remember when I sat on the ACTT national negotiating committee in the 1970s and what was most evident was the poor quality of the ITV national negotiators. They were middle-level labour relations executives who engaged in local deal making and their ability to manage national negotiating was zero and it was quite educational.⁷⁶

There was, however, some flexibility on the highly regulated commercial television studio floor but any managerial discretion to reorder production schedules 'came with a price tag attached'. Minor changes to working time arrangements were possible but

⁷⁶ Interview with David Elstein.

attracted significant premium payments (see Campling, 1992: 207-211). Production imperatives for the various technical groups came second to the maintenance of the integrity of collective agreements and custom and practice. Network managers were compelled to accept their relative powerlessness to circumvent custom and practice locally or to confront the industry's National Agreement. Inside STV, producers did not attempt to take issue with custom and practice.

They were making so much money, it [ACTT] was a very strong union at the bottom and powerful directors at the top doing deals...with middle management effectively stripped of power, this was an incredibly profitable monopoly and everybody wanted their cut, it seems that ITV was a very badly managed system.⁷⁷

Work groups were treated as fixed costs for the station as a whole rather than attributed to specific programmes in any meaningful way. The National Agreements – because of their comprehensiveness in relation to issues such as manning and rates of pay – contrived to keep industrial relations issues to the margins in the context of issues which exercised station managers.

Up to the mid-eighties it was a combination of making programmes and making money. Towards the end of the eighties it was driven solely by the bottom-line: making programmes was a necessary evil – a cost, no more than that.⁷⁸

Front line management actively sustained custom and practice in order to maintain production and their limited discretion in work organisation issues. Managerial authority on the studio floor was, in practice, a blend of acknowledged professional competence and adherence to the norms of craft administration.

⁷⁷ Interview with Roy Lockett, BECTU.

⁷⁸ Interview former STV director of personnel.

5.2

The New Broadcasting Economy?

The move from a Regulated to a Flexible Workplace.

As is clear from interviews recounted and from the theory presented in Chapter 1 (1.3), the essential objective of the practice of industrial relations in the ITV Network (within STV) was 'to buy peace'. Of the regional television companies, STV was disadvantaged in terms of advertising revenues and, consequently, was forced to offer lower rates and heavy discounts for test products (Clarke & Bradford, 1991:24). This in turn placed real pressures on the balance between STVs cost and revenue structures. The company was placed very much as a follower (as opposed to a leader) in the process of restructuring relationships between the ITVA/ITV and the ACTT and, in particular, in the employment of new broadcasting technology. However internal ITVA documents provide evidence that as far back as 1977 STV (in the person of Industrial Relations Manager, Colin Waters) was actively involved in negotiations with shop stewards about these issues.⁷⁹ There is documentary evidence that from as early as December 1977, STV was ready to begin negotiations about self-financing productivity agreements. However the process was painstakingly slow (as the minutes of meetings reveal) over the grading of VTR editors under the umbrella of traditional ACTT guidelines.⁸⁰ In August 1977 the ACTT had successfully blocked the hiring of editing equipment for an O.B (outside broadcast) from the Edinburgh festival.⁸¹ From this point (in the late 1970s) it seems difficult to believe that, within a decade, such inflexibility would be rendered redundant by a revolution in the way individual franchise holders conducted negotiations with their employees. A former STV industrial relations manager spoke of the trivial nature of some industrial relations disputes;

Often crews if going abroad would refuse to go until they got what they wanted, you would find a reason for agreeing to their demands. I remember at Granada talking with a manager about an old dispute which was based upon the fact that the mustard

⁷⁹ IR/468/002.

⁸⁰ IR/468/002

⁸¹ IR/468/002

*pots had been changed in the canteen and the union rep had threatened to take them off-air because of the quality of the mustard. This guy subsequently became the manager.*⁸²

A defining feature of industrial relations within the ITV sector as a whole during the 1980s was the managerial drive to loosen, if not eliminate, job controls embodied in formal contracts and in custom and practice (Daniel, 1987:166). In fact the drive to reshape the labour process in manufacturing was paralleled in broadcasting. From the early 1980s, commercial television companies began to pursue a range of strategies to break down national collective bargaining and dislodge the national crew minima which restricted the wholesale introduction of new production technologies (Ursell, 1998:136). The industry's early experiences of video cameras for ENG were marked by extensive local negotiations and which limited the impact of new technology on working practices and earnings (Clarke *et al*, 1984). By the end of the decade, however, national bargaining had collapsed under pressure of company level bargaining (FTT 7 BETA News, Oct 1991). New technology was important – not just because of its own deskilling and de-manning potential – but also because it compelled management to review the technical necessity for conventional large crews. Network managers identified large crews as a consequence of union bargaining strength rather than technical necessity (Sparks, 1989:26). Even before concerted attacks on crew levels in the late 1980s, STV managers had made some limited efforts at removing the fixed crew regulation;

*I think there were always attempts to press the limits and you would see whether you could get away with a lower crew. But the ability to compromise was pretty narrow. STV were very late in coming to ENG so you could argue that STV were slow and not inclined to take many risks. You could almost put a date on when technology allowed managers to keep programmes on air. The unions realised that unless they sat down and negotiated they were going to lose.*⁸³

⁸² Interview former STV director of personnel.

⁸³ Interview former STV director of personnel.

The key to unlocking the potential of new technology was in challenging the sector's historic settlement with the technicians' trade unions. While a number of television companies (such as Tyne Tees and LWT) chose confrontation, STV's strategy was to dismantle, through negotiation, the agreements regulating working practices and working time. The company's choice of conventional bargaining channels was in keeping with the strategies of the majority of independent broadcasting companies and, indeed, of British management more generally (Daniel, 1987:177). The backdrop to the formal negotiation process was a difficult and protracted war of manoeuvres on the studio floor. Increasingly, management attempted to renegotiate local agreements and alter the terms of custom and practice – 'we were testing the limits all the time'.⁸⁴ As noted earlier, STV's use of external contractors was regulated by an agreement which restricted their choice to other Network companies. ITVA internal documents from 1981 reveal that in negotiations between STV and National Association of Theatrical Television and Kine Employees ('NATKE'), 'riggers'⁸⁵ claims for additional payments for handling portable cameras (as opposed to what was termed 'conventional' equipment) had resulted in the offer of a lump sum payment of GBP 600 in addition to a 10 per cent pay rise.⁸⁶ The riggers demanded more money and the parties failed to come to an agreement.⁸⁷

All rented equipment had to be operated by contractors supervised by an equal number of STV technicians and there was no economic incentive to outsource any aspect of production. This agreement was moderated so that STV staff worked the rented equipment under the guidance of contractors, but ACTT blocked any move toward hiring equipment without restriction. The technicians' most potent weapon was to work strictly to agreements, eschewing even the most lucrative exception and which was a tactic management regarded as 'worse than a strike'.

'The two minute rule' was a pertinent example of such a strategy and any short local feature on the local news bulletin could be shot by a small crew. However if the item went over two minutes in duration then the company had to pay for a full crew and a

⁸⁴ Interview former STV director of personnel.

⁸⁵ A term given to workers responsible for setting up camera and other heavy, awkward technologies.

⁸⁶ ITVA IR/A37/002A.

⁸⁷ ITVA IR/A37002A.

steward would then use a stopwatch to time features.⁸⁸ Further, if an actor had to re-shoot a scene for a drama production then technicians would not ask for an hour's overtime but would insist on coming in the next day which was a rest day;

*So it was eight hours of double-bubble!*⁸⁹

Such low cost and low risk industrial action proved highly effective in defending the boundaries of local agreements and custom and practice. STVs Watters wrote to the Industrial Relations Secretariat of the ITCA in March 1981 and warned of the consequences of a continued capitulation (through local deals in particular) to what were perceived to be the excessive demands of skilled craft workers;⁹⁰

*This industry has suffered too much in the past from doing local deals which could affect the whole industry, for example, ENG, productivity deals, etc., etc.. I do honestly believe we have got to take a long hard look at ourselves if this type of arrogant attitude is going to prevail.*⁹¹

In September 1986, STV – through the forum of its regular meeting with ACTT representatives in Glasgow – summarized the company's position in relation to the direction in which they wanted to proceed.⁹² Management were demanding, *inter alia*, that crews should operate as required to meet production needs and there should be no minimum crewing levels. In addition, the continued use of freelance personnel had to be agreed and a revision of the ENG agreement also be undertaken to give maximum flexibility to News and Current Affairs.⁹³ At a further ACTT branch meeting, Watters indicated the company's intention to deploy staff in a way which would allow the company to meet its objectives.⁹⁴ STV managers stated that they had identified bad practices and were determined to 'overcome them'.⁹⁵ The company now expected

⁸⁸ Interview former STV producer.

⁸⁹ Interview former STV senior producer.

⁹⁰ ITVA/A37/002A

⁹¹ ITVA/A37002A.

⁹² ACTT branch meeting 11, September 1986 Glasgow.

⁹³ ACTT branch meeting 19 September 1986 Glasgow.

⁹⁴ ACTT branch meeting 16 September 1986 Glasgow.

⁹⁵ ACTT branch meeting 16 September 1986 Glasgow.

studio hands to track camera cables where appropriate and to incorporate automatic line up facilities on cameras into programme production whenever possible.

STVs 'Way Ahead' negotiations began in 1986 by seeking greater flexibility and efficiency and with labour deployment stemming from operational requirements rather than National Agreements. Its objectives were not defined by front-line managers and producers and, indeed, National Agreements prohibited STV executives from discussing their bargaining agenda with section managers.⁹⁶ From the outset the ACTT shop stewards' strategy was geared toward damage limitation. One lay union negotiator accepted that changes in working practices were 'absolutely inevitable' and the objective was not resistance but 'to try to get it through with the least possible mayhem'.⁹⁷ STV managers insisted that reduced existing crewing levels would be exceptional and would be negotiated with shop stewards. However, the ACTT stewards were highly sceptical that the principle of mutuality in work organisation would survive a war of attrition between producers and shop-stewards. The latter recognised that they could not realistically defend the 'minimum' crew agreement and, instead, sought to install mutuality and contingency rules to govern adjustments to crewing. For STV management to accept the principle that changes in crewing levels should be decided through negotiation on the studio floor would be to jettison restrictive agreements only to become entangled in a cumbersome governance process where they could be 'ambushed on a daily basis'. STV, as noted earlier, refused to accept any restriction on management decision-making according to operational needs.

By 1987 internal STV documents showed attempts to reassure members of the ACTT over the application of 'certain procedures' (namely, disciplinary procedures) within the company.⁹⁸ Through 1987, STV continued to maximise management's room for manoeuvre in work reorganisation and carefully avoided specifying tasks, trades, or time budgets for specific operations. In time the ACTT stewards had no bargaining position left to defend. The only sop which STV management offered was that

⁹⁶ See 'Way Ahead' document 11 September 1987.

⁹⁷ Interview, former ACTT Shop Steward.

⁹⁸ Internal STV Memo from J. Hall to D. McKenzie (ACTT Glasgow) and J. Sheach (ACTT Edinburgh) 15 April 1987.

implementation of new working practices would be monitored by a joint working party, albeit one which had no power to negotiate, rescind, or even endorse specific changes.⁹⁹ Whatever the original intention, by mid-1987 STVs management were simply maintaining the façade of meaningful collective bargaining – while they waited to see just how far the balance of power was shifting to their advantage. In the minutes of a meeting between the ACTT and STV management in November 1987, the ACTT expressed its unhappiness with the use of (independent) facilities houses ‘as necessary’ and reminded the company that it would wish to be consulted before specialist facilities were introduced.¹⁰⁰ In addition the union had noted the company’s increased interest in the employment of independent productions as part of the weekly broadcast schedule.

‘The Way Ahead’ proposal document, (version two), published in December 1987, set out the challenges (as management saw them) facing, not just STV, but the commercial broadcasting environment as a whole.¹⁰¹ Inside the commercial television Network the major stations were increasingly endeavouring to terminate the National Agreement. It is essential to note the development of a more aggressive policy towards employment and organizational matters by franchise holders such as STV (and others) in the context of changes to the National Agreement. The STV document encouraged flexibility and cost effectiveness while emphasizing the parallel increases in investment which the ending of out-dated working practices would bring. As BBC Scotland would later turn to a form of internal market for both technical labour and production resources, so STV articulated its desire to change its labour process by the employment of, what was termed, the Production Concept.¹⁰² The similarities between the adoption of the Talent Pool at BBC Scotland and The Production Concept at STV are quite revealing. The central purpose of the STV document was to make the best use of all available staff skills so as to meet programme and transmission requirements. In addition, the scheduling of staff was to be flexible so as to react to changing programming needs while having regard to the loyalty of a core permanent staff and who were the franchisee’s primary concern.

⁹⁹ See ‘Way Ahead’ document, 9 October 1987, p1.

¹⁰⁰ STV PLC – ACTT ‘The Way Ahead’ 13 November 1987, p2.

¹⁰¹ STV PLC – ACTT, ‘The Way Ahead’ 8 December 1987 p1.

¹⁰² STV PLC – ACTT, ‘The Way Ahead’ 8 December 1987 p2.

*The spirit of this provision is to ensure that there are no hard and fast rules on the movement of people, and not that people should be allocated unreasonably.*¹⁰³

Major shifts in the landscape of collective bargaining were paralleled by changes in the strategy and structure of STV and where control over the labour process was the company's core short-term objective. 'Tight management of labour costs', Gus McDonald, STVs Managing Director, concluded, remained;

*The highest priority as the commissioning of programmes is increasingly decided by the ITV Network Centre on the basis of price.*¹⁰⁴

Reshaping the employment relationship and work organisation was crucial both to ensuring the company's independence in the short-term, and to the medium-term goal of emerging as a regional media conglomerate (embracing both print and broadcasting while constructing joint ventures with satellite broadcasters). The ITV Network was being remade as a deregulated and overtly commercial enterprise – in part by an increase in the hours broadcast. The proposals put forward by the Joint Management/ACTT Working Party in February 1988, noted that further flexibility was required if the company was to resource all its requirements with the minimum number of employees. There was an acceptance that further recruitment to the general area of engineering would be required – promotion through the grades would be available but strict processes of appraisal would be introduced and progression would be at the sole discretion of the company.

By February 1988 agreement had been reached between the ACTT and STV management that crewing would be operated 'as required' and not as previously structured by 'some artificial ruling'.¹⁰⁵ In the minutes of the Joint Working Party of April 1988 three areas of concern which would come to dominate union/ management thinking during the 1990s were evident.¹⁰⁶ These included the employment of

¹⁰³ STV PLC, Annual Report, 1993, p3.

¹⁰⁴ STV PLC, Annual Report, 1993, p3

¹⁰⁵ Memo, Re Night Working –Presentation Controllers, 10 February 1988.

¹⁰⁶ Joint Working Party, 27 April 1988.

“capital equipment, ‘stringers’¹⁰⁷ and the use of independent contractors”. There was real concern within the ACTT that the re-employment of former employees as independent producers within the company might cause difficulties. Interestingly, the notes of that meeting made reference to the uncertainty which was beginning to pervade the industry (staffing was a critical area of concern for union negotiators). ACTT representatives were anxious to avoid further recruitment to the company believing that a reorganization of current employees, together with the use of contract staff, would suffice. STV managers acknowledged that, while not having any formal policy in place, its position was that there should be ‘non-replacement of staff in virtually all cases’.¹⁰⁸ The ‘Way Ahead’ negotiations ceased abruptly in Spring 1988, as management concluded that collective bargaining was no longer effective – either in delivering radical change quickly or legitimising the demolition of the company’s internal labour market structures. Within STV, the fundamental move from a heavily regulated ITV franchise with intense negotiation required for even the smallest shop-floor change was characterized by a current senior STV manager as being the ‘pre Gus McDonald era and the post Gus McDonald era’;¹⁰⁹

He (McDonald) was here at a time when changes were taking place in Network television companies, [they] were taking stock of their cost bases which had been built up over many years – there were fifteen stable companies making TV programmes – those companies had established staff... earning wages negotiated around a table in London by unions reps.

By the late 1980s craft skills were unnecessary for the successful operation and maintenance of comparatively light and mobile ‘chimp cameras’. These produced high quality images by simple ‘point and press’ operation and opened up new possibilities for an aggressive management driven by the bottom-line (Gandy, 1991:1-2).

¹⁰⁷ ‘Stringers’, a term given to occasional or freelance labour.

¹⁰⁸ Joint Working Party, 16 June 1988.

¹⁰⁹ Interview former STV manager.

*That's fine, we could get any old monkey to do this, we could bring ten granders in straight from school, as long as they know what button to push ... we'll be all right.*¹¹⁰

There was now little need for the highly refined conceptual and manual skills of the camera operator and digitalisation had, over time, substantially expanded the range of aesthetic tasks performed by camera operators.

*Where you're trying to cover a multi-camera match the on-screen producer will ask for lots of graphics to be on-screen, video-tape run-ins, etc., so camera operators become more like system engineers than camera line-up people as they were. So the job has changed - they no longer concentrate on a narrow range of technology.*¹¹¹

The implementation of video technology, and the subsequent marginalization of film, shifted the focus of programme making from labour-intensive, highly choreographed and expensive production to post-production mixing rooms staffed by a producer and two or three assistants (Varlaam, 1990:44). From the late 1970s manual editing based on a lengthy process of cutting and splicing film was gradually displaced by the immediacy of videocassettes and, from the late 1980s, by digital tape. The producer of a syndicated children's show explained that 'the editing is the cheapest part of the process';

*If you are in a studio and are using seven cameras, a crane, four mini cameras, a couple of underwater cameras then the studio crew was probably in excess of forty people, plus the studio itself, and all the power and so on.*¹¹²

Even poor camerawork could be disguised during the editing process and conventional images refashioned: 'any dodgy object – no problem, we can paint it out'.¹¹³ Digitalisation permitted non-linear video editing, and the integration of a number of previously discrete skills and functions, e.g. editor, graphic designer and sound mixer. Successive innovations in materials now complemented the radical

¹¹⁰ Interview former STV video-editor.

¹¹¹ Interview former STV video-editor.

¹¹² Interview STV producer.

¹¹³ Interview former STV senior producer.

improvements in production technology. Digital tape was capable of achieving high-grade filmic quality at a fraction of the cost of conventional film stock and, most importantly, the expanded capabilities of digital editing significantly altered the division of labour on the studio floor. A STV producer spoke at length about how the creative aspect of production had moved from the 'shoot' to the post-production suite;

*The basic process is the same but you are shifting the emphasis into post-production. You shoot things differently because the editing is available to you and it's faster and cheaper and everything is budget led. Post-production equipment is so much more advanced. In the early days it was cut and mix and that was about it, but now you can do so many other things, electronically alter things frame by frame.*¹¹⁴

It is here where new technology had the greatest impact on the nature of the production process. Electrical-mechanical film crews had followed pre-ordained patterns while lighter and more robust digital cameras allowed much greater flexibility for operators and wider choices for post-production image mixing. Rehearsals with mechanical cameras had allowed operators to make their instructions more specific. Digital camera crews, on the other hand, used rehearsals, not to restrict their freedom of movement, but to become immediately engaged in the aesthetic production process. Less obvious changes to ancillary systems on the studio floor also had a significant cumulative effect on crewing and the labour process. For instance, major improvements in the reliability and performance of radio microphones since the mid-1980s eliminated the 'boom' sound-technician completely from some programmes and permitted the director to pin the microphone to interviewees.

By the late 1980s, against a background of successive franchise bids, individual station managements had turned decisively towards the labour process as an emerging competitive weapon. In essence, stations converged on a single model of organisation with a core of experienced staff drawing on freelance production labour. This new production regime is conventionally contrasted with the regulated past – with flexibility and casual employment having replaced rigidity and joint regulation. While this somewhat stark contrast is quite legitimate it does, in many respects, neglect two

¹¹⁴ Interview STV producer.

crucial elements. The transition from a creative bureaucracy to casualised production was a lengthy process which followed a quite contradictory trajectory in different television companies. In STV, management ruthlessly dismantled the old order only after it became clear that they were slipping behind other Network companies in terms of restructuring the labour process. Equally, STVs use of conventional collective bargaining – both to reinforce managerial prerogative and to legitimise new work regimes – was inadequate. The transition also involved the introduction of new managerial techniques in order to monitor the production process and the construction of something akin to the process of Producer Choice (and which had been introduced in the BBC as a new ideology to legitimise the destruction of the established internal labour market). In short, managers sought to take on the established craft identities of commercial broadcasting employees and to restructure the highly regulated supply of skilled trades (see Berkeley, 2003).

As noted earlier, the labour component of programme budgets was formerly derived from national crewing standards and wage rates. From the mid-1980s rudimentary rate-cards were developed to reflect the total costs of programmes rather than only the variable costs. By the early 1990s STV had finalised a total costing regime ‘where we measure everything in minute detail’.¹¹⁵ The ‘technical controller’ of STV said during interview, ‘budget drives everything, the budget defines what programme management is all about’. By designating discreet functions and programmes as cost centres the broadcasting companies (such as STV) transformed the social relationships of production from collegiality and collective bargaining to quasi-market transactions.

Producers were now under pressure – not just to remain within budgets – but to actively pursue ways of reducing production costs. Redundancies were aggressively pushed through by producers and who were redefined, in the process, as being unambiguously part of management. Employees were ‘tapped on the shoulder’ and shown their ‘own personalised packages’. Managers were like time-share salesmen. ‘*You’ve got to buy it now, because that’s the price today and only today*’.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Interview former STV director of personnel.

¹¹⁶ Interview former STV engineer.

Management control systems were radically extended in parallel with the attempt in the late 1980s to negotiate new working practices. In particular, Producer Choice allowed each employee's productive time to be charged to specific programmes and their downtime to be closely monitored and compared. Combined with Producer Choice, downtime measurement was a powerful ideological method of individualising the selection of individuals for redundancy.

'When it came to whose shoulder to tap on, the managers were looking at the individual downtime print-outs'.¹¹⁷ Ideologically, allocation to programmes and downtime were measures of producers' ratings of individual crew-members. Measurement of productive and unproductive time also contained an important ideological dimension and became a form of peer assessment and meritocracy. Before the restructuring of the employment relationship in the second half of the 1980s, skill appraisal had been an issue solely for the craft or workgroup. STVs attempt to impose a process not dissimilar to that of Producer Choice effectively appropriated this principle for managerial purposes. Redundancy was defined as an individual rather than a collective issue – to be mediated by seniority rules or collective bargaining. This, in turn, raised profound questions about the value of trade union membership, particularly given the redundancy of ACTTs executive-led bargaining strategy and the local unpopularity of merger with the non-skilled workers' union. On the studio floor, the union's enormous structural weakness was compounded by the resonance of management's ideological onslaught on established demarcation lines among production grades. The idea of a basic crew structure was replaced with that of individual rostering, and labour deployment was decided by operational needs rather than derived from national collective agreements. One indicator of the range and extent of these changes was that STV increased its proportion of freelance and contract staff from almost 13 per cent to in excess of 45 per cent between 1989 and 1994 (Saundry & Nolan, 1998:9).

The clear fact and consequence of large-scale casualization in British broadcasting is inescapable. But this sectoral judgement tells us little about the impact of employment insecurity and of the new managerial practices in specific firms. Inside STV,

¹¹⁷ Interview former STV sound engineer.

temporary staff were termed 'ten-granders' (their salary) or as 'nineteen-monthers', (the normal tenure with the company). The casualization of broadcasting employment placed programme producers as key figures in remaking work organisation, and as brokers straddling the boundary between internal and external labour markets. The producer now played an ambiguous role as both manager and creator, and was no longer bound by reciprocal ties of collegiality embedded in a common internal labour market. STV producers developed several new coping mechanisms intended to offset the conflict between tight budgetary control and effective production, and constructed what might be termed a black market on which they traded production services to lessen the effect of financial controls on production.

Producers were not impotent in the firm's internal markets, and resource management embraced the maximum utilisation of capital assets and established staff. The time accounting regimes initially installed to select candidates for redundancy became a powerful management tool to increase studio, equipment, and labour utilisation. Aided by production contracts with SKY Television, levels of labour utilisation had been raised to 85 per cent. The contrast between STV producers and those of the BBC (after the introduction of Producer Choice) is most revealing. STV producers were acutely aware that paid hours of their production staff had to be recovered. While the Production Directorate of BBC Scotland was prepared to consider the employment of non-BBC staff during independent productions, STV managers (during interview) made it quite clear that only in-house staff were to be employed and it would require quite exceptional production circumstances for external technical freelance staff to be engaged. The intensive negotiations which characterized the 'Way Ahead' noted a direct commitment by management that core staff would be its primary responsibility and that 'stringers' or freelance staff would be employed only where specific needs arise.¹¹⁸ A current STV production manager spoke of the importance of adhering to budgets for all those within the production and administrative areas of STV;

You have the programme makers looking after the cash costs and the budgets but you have the person that's in charge (Ferdie Coia) looking after his cost base which is the salaries, the management of those salaries, anything which was related to hardware

¹¹⁸ See STV PLC – ACTT 'Way Ahead' 8 December 1987.

*Ferdi would be responsible for. My measurement is an amalgam of all their costs to recover my costs – we have set our budget on a seventy or eighty per cent utilization of my people so we watch our utilization... we don't employ people outside our core unless we have to.*¹¹⁹

The employment of independent producers and technical resource staff within STV may be seen (in the ACTT/STV minutes) as a historically difficult and complex process.¹²⁰ By the late 1980s the employment of Harry Urquhart as General Manager signalled a change in the relatively restrained and non-confrontational style of management and which had characterized the 'Way Ahead' negotiations in the period up until 1988. Urquhart was concerned about high levels of downtime within STV, and initiated a radical reshaping of the relationship between management and the ACTT at individual franchise level. David Elstein said of the move by STV to restructure its approach to industrial relations;

*STV was by no means unique in what it went through. I think all of these labour relations were driven by the structure of the industry...and the collusion between trade unions and weak management – then the shock of Thatcherism, Wapping and independent productions.*¹²¹

In essence the business functions required to produce programming came to be seen as a separate rather than an integrated processes (Berkeley, 2003). Such departures from the traditional way of organizing television production led to a radical alteration in working lives and a concurrent change in the way in which relations between workers and managers were mediated. After the challenge to union control, (what, in effect, amounted to a form of managerial control over the studio floor including such areas as the construction of sets) the operation of studios and the outside broadcasting of sports events were not returned to management. Flexibility was the key demand of managerial control and became the watchword (Tunstall, 2001:194-202). Producers, as noted earlier, were the net beneficiaries and emerged as the new powerbrokers within the UK broadcasting industry. For as Mangum & Mangum (1986:12-20)

¹¹⁹ Interview STV manager.

¹²⁰ See STV PLC – ACTT 'Way Ahead'.

¹²¹ Interview with David Elstein.

contended in relation to the drive for flexibility – an end to rigid work rules and high fixed costs in terms of the movement of labour within individual franchises became a key requirement for managers.

As has already been established – the broadcasting trade unions were largely decimated by the rapid changes which occurred in the period 1985-95 (see Ursell, 2000:805-825). The job controls which had been established over almost three decades were obliterated. Process innovations were no longer ‘digital islands in a mechanical sea’ and by the mid-1980s represented a complete system. Whereas the broadcasting unions had used their control over the entire production process to appropriate specific new technologies, the modular nature of digitalisation rendered this kind of union control strategy obsolete. Similarly, the unions’ control of entry to and movement within technical grades was swept away by the floodtide of casualization. Broadcasting technicians were no longer insulated from change by National Agreements or able to exert control through occupation of strategic points of production. Senior management constantly reminded employees of the highly competitive operating environment in which they now operated.

Production people, like researchers for example, do not have their hours explained in advance and they have been totally shafted because they have contracts which specify to be on call at all time.¹²²

Coupled with the assault on internal labour markets it became apparent that the collapse of formal and informal bargaining power was complete. There was no collective regulation of redundancy nor were workgroups able to withstand the attack on job controls. Paradoxically, it is a fact that in STV aggressive management and the introduction of individual contracts unregulated by collective bargaining actually helped to reorganise the workforce.

Given the institutional vacuum which was collective bargaining in broadcasting after 1989, BECTUs local officials’ emergent strategy was to regain their credibility by representing their members during individual contract negotiations. Securing

¹²² Interview STV video editor.

significant, and sometimes dramatic, salary increases for both contract and permanent staff was critical in restoring the unions' presence in determining terms of employment. Individual representation was symptomatic of their new strategy of going with the grain of current employment practices and so installing union membership as a central feature of the emerging identity of broadcasting employees. Pragmatism, (and not principle), also dictated the unions' approach to the continuing introduction and synchronisation of digital technologies. For BECTU, resistance was simply unrealistic and inside STV the union pursued a strategy of constructive engagement, of insisting that core or contract employees could adapt existing patterns of work organisation to assimilate new technologies. In the emerging discourse of collective bargaining, maintaining programme quality was the unions' most powerful defence of job territories. This was both a tacit acknowledgement of their powerlessness and the continuing fluidity of the broadcasting division of labour. In contrast to the period before the 'Way Ahead' agreement, the technicians' unions could not use formal bargaining or custom and practice arguments to capture new technology. This profound powerlessness was expressed in a vote to strike against excessive hours and managerial autocracy in late 1996. For union members, this was a cathartic moment: 'the worms have turned', insisted one senior contractor.¹²³ However, the governance of collective bargaining remained virtually unchanged. STV made a tactical adjustment, encouraging individual employees and contractors or their union official to appeal directly to executives if the demands of front line managers were excessive.¹²⁴

5.3

Work and employment relations in the late 1990s and beyond.

Employment relations during the 1990s were transformed from highly regulated working environments – characteristic of both the public service broadcasting industry and the traditionally regulated commercial ITV sector. There was now a pervasive and general commitment to the principle of 'flexibility' (Baumann, 2002:28). This flexibility has been traced through the literature with a concentration

¹²³ Scotland on Sunday, 11 November 1996.

¹²⁴ Interview STV Director of Corporate Affairs.

on areas such as networks, outsourcing and the marginalization of the principle of the vertically integrated broadcaster model (Tempest, *et al*, 1997). Regulatory pressure, and the consequent changes in organizational structures and working practices, saw thousands of permanent employees leave the industry or withdraw to the freelance sector (Saundry, 2001:31). Flexibility was accompanied by significant changes in internal employment relations (Saundry & Nolan, 1998:422). Only by peering beneath the meso-level of the ITV sector and into the working lives of individual firms could the impact of corporate strategy on work processes be determined. The change in the way labour and managers interacted within the ITV sector (and STV in particular) may be understood more fully through a brief study of the manner in which an STV programme is produced to-day. During visits to the STV studios over a three day period and at an outside broadcast for the production of a children's television programme, the operation and management of a crew making television in the relatively new deregulated environment of ITV was seen and analysed.

5.4

Game Show 1.

During the recording of the children's 'Game Show 1' the Director worked from an OB truck parked outside the hall. Inside the darkened truck he faced a bank of eight monitors, each linked to one of the cameras on set. To the Director's right the vision mixer responded directly to his instructions to cut between cameras. On his left was the 'logger' who noted the time of shots for reference during the critical post-production period. All the basic shots were covered by four cameras. Two of these cameras were allocated close up's of the competitors, the other two camera operators were on dollies and instructed to work with the competitors' movement. Four other cameramen were given a 'roving' commission to move throughout the complicated set, to look for unusual angles which could be used to augment the basic four-camera structure. The logger recorded any possible 'character' shots to drop into the basic narrative of the game or to fill out the programme. This particular programme's central motif was a race on three-wheel motorbikes. The four key narrative cameramen followed clear repertoires with two remaining tightly focused on the competitors' faces and the other two panned across to give a sense of space. The

illusion of high speed was captured/ created by the four roving camera operators who moved around the racetrack. Inside the truck the atmosphere was frenetic and contrasted sharply with the pre- recording calm. After the sequence was completed there was a short pause – the Director said a polite ‘thank you’ to the camera operatives.

Prior to the re-regulation of the ITV sector in the late 1980s agreements between the respective franchise holders and the main trade union (ACTT) allowed for a relatively stable working environment but, as noted earlier, this stability was (partly) dependent upon a fixed supply of skilled employees entering the marketplace. The increase in freelance workers entering the market (from almost 40 per cent in 1989 to 60 per cent in 1996) encouraged very significant competition for skilled positions within television (Skillset, 1996). The increase in the numbers of such skilled personnel led to a subsequent reduction in training and as a consequence, an opportunity for the remaining skilled employees to re-regulate the employment relationship to their advantage (Saundry & Stuart, 1999). While one might endorse the views of those who contend that the late 1990s witnessed a qualified reversal in the employment fortunes of skilled technicians within the independent and commercial sectors, any suggestion that the process was a straightforward one is open to challenge (Blair, 1998).

Industrial relations remained fractious within SMG (Scottish Media Group) – the umbrella title for the group of media companies including STV. The new trade union BECTU – formed after the merger of the ACTT and BETA in January 1991 – began a fresh policy of attempting to challenge the status quo by giving equal parity to freelance workers (Campling, 1997:215). Saundry (2001) contended that substantial evidence of permanent employees’ abilities to resist management initiatives was growing – suggesting that the increasing number of strikes and general industrial unrest proved the point and, certainly, there was evidence of a ‘flexing of industrial muscle’ at SMG (STV) in the early part of 2000.

At two well-attended meetings held in the canteen at STV in Glasgow in April/May, 2000 the BECTU representatives informed the assembled gathering that a recent vote on strike action in the Aberdeen office of Grampian TV had returned a 100 per cent

vote (NUJ) in favour of strike action.¹²⁵ The figures in Glasgow (STV) were 80 per cent (NUJ). In STV the (BECTU) vote (on a 75 per cent turnout) was 51 per cent in favour and 20 per cent against industrial action. The local BECTU representative (P. McManus) proposed a detailed and wide ranging strategy to ‘take on’ management, and this included.

- I. 24-hour stoppages.
- II. Working time regulation, i.e. a form of ‘work to rule’.
- III. Identifying the critical dates which would cause management maximum difficulty.
- IV. Picketing everywhere STV was filming in one twenty-four hour period.

*We have to play hardball with management...honestly if we move (i.e. capitulate) on this one we have had it.*¹²⁶

It was agreed at the meeting that when the days of action were confirmed then both stations (Glasgow and Aberdeen) would act in harmony. Freelance workers who attended the meeting were encouraged to support the dispute and some of these voiced concerns that their future employment status would be jeopardized by involvement in industrial action. In response to a question from the floor of the meeting regarding the efforts being made to terminate the employment of ‘individual employees’ it was suggested by McManus that management was trying to;

*get rid of programme makers.*¹²⁷

The Scottish TUC (STUC) had urged the union to ‘get around the table with SMG’. This proposal contrasted with the entrenched position of management who sought seven redundancies within the SMG broadcasting division. SMG managed to meet

¹²⁵ Study completed April/May 2000, STV Glasgow by permission BECTU Scotland.

¹²⁶ McManus, P. April 2000, STV strike meeting.

¹²⁷ McManus, P. April 2000, STV strike meeting.

this target through negotiation, with two of those redundancies being compulsory. McManus argued that SMG management wanted to reduce salaries to include what they (management) termed ‘ an evolving pay structure’. Critically this meant that future salary agreements would be based on the median industry salaries and would also be dependent on the local market rate for technicians. During the meeting, a vote (by a show of hands) was taken and with two exceptions there was complete support for industrial action. Seven days notice was served on management and volunteers were asked to nominate themselves for organizing placards and the development of a rota system for picketing.

*All workers will have to take a pay cut or take to the road...it's a pay cut without choice...management will come back and demand more. Let's reinforce the message that it's not acceptable!*¹²⁸

Employees (on the picket line at the SMG building in Cowcaddens, Glasgow) spoke of their concerns that existing positions would not continue in the same format after two years if they did not ‘make a stand’. People spoke of concern for not just their own careers but also for the prospects for younger employees within the company.

*There is a sense here that we are the last of a breed – if we don't take a stand now no one will.*¹²⁹

The picketers spoke of their families and their worries for the future. One woman told of her husband, a former stage production worker, being tired of the constant struggle and what she termed the petty ‘nastiness’ of management and who had already decided to take the early redundancy package on offer. There was real evidence of bitterness directed towards particular individual managers who some employees termed ‘poachers turned gamekeepers’. However the clear evidence of a restructuring of the employment relationship was evident with huge numbers of administrative/ clerical and ancillary staff crossing the picket lines to work normally. While some employees crossing the picket line were clearly embarrassed, and muttered quiet but

¹²⁸ McManus, P. April 2000, STV strike meeting.

¹²⁹ Interview with picket at STV, Cowcaddens, Glasgow, April 2000.

genuine apologies at the pickets, many others did so in a very confident and belligerent manner.

Strike action was equally common at other ITV franchises in the late 1990s and industrial unrest broke out in LWT in November 1999 – as it had earlier in Granada in August of the same year (Saundry, 2001:32). Following the STV/Grampian TV disputes a moratorium was placed on the issue of compulsory redundancies and which had inflamed both unions and employees. A working party (not unlike the original ‘Way Ahead’ working parties of the mid to late 1980s) was set up to examine proposed changes in working practices. At the same time the SMG group, and in direct response to a perception of poor industrial relations throughout the group, launched an employee opinion survey.¹³⁰ Employee surveys are sometimes treated as a luxury (within the literature), designed both to encourage employees to display a positive attitude towards possible organizational change and to suggest that the organization is ‘people focused’ (Walters, 1994). Human resource strategies which encourage employee involvement are seen as providing opportunities for employees to have a form of input into decisions affecting individual workplace incentives to ‘expend discretionary effort and the means to acquire the appropriate skills’ (Perotin & Robinson, 1998:559). It is apposite, however, to question whether employee relations’ surveys are an important element of what have been termed ‘participation schemes’ or whether they are more a lightweight strategy – a simple cosmetic consultation process (Ben-Naer & Jones, 1995: 532-54).

5.5.

SMG Opinion Survey;

The results of the SMG survey are briefly considered below under four main headings, these are – work organization and quality, management effectiveness, leadership and direction and communications.

¹³⁰ Author obtained copy of the results of the SMG survey in the summer of 2001, unpublished document.

Work organization and quality.

The SMG opinion survey ('SMOS') was directed towards the entire range of SMG companies and the SMG Television group ('SMGTV'), which included the former independent production company 'Ginger Productions'. The survey suggested to potential respondents 'that the organization too often sacrifices the quality of our products/services in order to cut costs'. It transpired that 92 per cent of SMGTV employees agreed, while an impressive 100 per cent of Network Production staff agreed with the statement. 96 per cent of Network Production employees agreed that they had a very clear conception of their daily job responsibilities – 94 per cent of SMGTV employees were happy to endorse that view. These figures are hardly surprising as individual job specifications are very clearly defined within the SMG group. Downtime, which was a traditional problem of the broadcasting industry, had been replaced by a strict adherence to work routine. It was found that 58 per cent of Network Production and 42 per cent of SMGTV employees agreed that they felt excessive pressure in their jobs, a total of 77 per cent of Network Production employees believed their physical working conditions were satisfactory, while only 64 per cent of SMG people were in agreement.

Management Effectiveness.

In general, 76 per cent of Network Production employees and a substantially lower figure (52 per cent) of SMG employees considered that management was doing an effective job. The clear differential in levels of satisfaction with management performance between the two arms of SMG was significant. The results of the section of the questionnaire devoted to the question of management encouraging flexibility and creativity within the workplace gave an insight into the differences between the two directorates. 'The management style in my division encourages creativity and experimentation' was agreed by only 29 per cent of SMG and by 65 per cent of Network Production. The smaller Network Production sector, which employed few highly skilled workers with very specific job specifications, was satisfied to allow skilled and experienced technicians the flexibility to make decisions about workplace organization. 'My immediate manager supports people in developing their skills and

abilities' – this statement was agreed by 52 per cent of SMG and 80 per cent of Network Production. Critically, the figures relating to the ability of managers to communicate effectively with individual staff members varied between the two 'directorates'. A total of 80 per cent of Network Production staff agreed that their immediate manager communicated effectively while only 59 per cent of SMG employees agreed with the statement.

Leadership and Direction.

It was found that 6 per cent of Network Production and 49 per cent of SMG staff 'understand how the objectives of the division fit into SMG business goals'. Approval figures began to drop considerably in both directorates once the issues of corporate goals and direction/leadership emerged. The results would tend to point to either considerable confusion, or a reluctance on the part of employees to associate themselves with the corporate goals of the organization. Some 38 per cent of respondents of both directorates agreed that senior management of SMG provided a clear sense of direction for the organization as a whole – a very low figure. Employees appeared very concerned by a lack of clarity on issues of long-term strategic thinking. A total of 64 per cent of Network Production staff and 29 per cent of SMG staff agreed that the corporation provided leadership. Similarly, 60 per cent of Network Production and 32 per cent of SMG staff concurred that management were good at making decisions. The one variable which ran counter to the pattern set above is that of employee perceptions of adequately managing change (46 per cent of Network Productions and 32 per cent of SMG had a positive perception). Both sets of positive responses were low, as indeed were the figures for planning for the future – 58 per cent of Network Production and 35 per cent SMG being positive.

Communications.

The area of corporate communications is one which, again, provided disappointing results for both directorates. The statement 'the organization does an excellent job of keeping us informed about matters affecting us' received a low positive response of 35 per cent for Network Productions and 28 per cent for SMG employees

Conclusion.

Digital production technologies were fundamental to the remaking of the broadcasting labour process. Initially, when individual items of digital equipment were introduced, they were used to mimic, rather than displace, existing electromechanical techniques. The strength of National Agreements and local trade union bargaining permitted the introduction of new technologies so as to enhance programme quality but not to displace labour. From the mid-1980s, however, the management objective and intent behind the extension of digital technologies rapidly moved to reducing/eliminating labour. Controlling the labour process had moved from a marginal concern for commercial television stations to being the essential element in achieving competitiveness. This shift was marked by the articulation of increasingly fine-grained financial tracking of the individual constituents of programme costs. Crucially, these shifts in management strategy and practices were underway before the Thatcher administrations' deregulation of the industry and which was signalled by the 1989 Monopolies and Mergers Commission Report on trade union restrictive practices. These reforms did not initiate the management assault on the broadcast trade unions but, rather, accelerated processes already being played out inside the commercial television companies. The reduction of labour costs rapidly displaced programme improvement as the rationale of digital technologies.

The past fifteen years have seen a substantial reduction in the level of collective bargaining with a growth in individualized contracts and a very well documented increase in managerial discretion (see Evans & Hudson, 1994:305-314). Industrial relations within the ITV Network veered from the highly regulated environments of the period up until the mid 1980s to a deregulated era in which the basis of the National Agreements which controlled working conditions and salaries within the industry were hollowed out. While highly skilled and experienced technical labour took advantage of a skills gap in ITV franchises (such as STV) – new entrants to the ITV sector (with few if any marketable or unique skills) were vulnerable to the casualization process.

The poisonous industrial relations which had been the hallmark of STV have, unfortunately, remained largely intact.

Chapter 6.
Marketizing a Cultural Bureaucracy:
Negotiating Organizational Change in BBC Scotland
1982-2002.

Introduction.

Many BBC insiders believe that the cuts being piloted in Scotland will provide a template for downsizing news and current affairs across the Corporation.¹³¹

During the 1980s the UK's PSB industry became increasingly commercialised (McQuail, 1998:107-127). Historically, most national public service television providers were non-commercial and were organized to serve the public (and not private) interests. The UK broadcasting industry – in both the BBC and the ITV variant of public service broadcasting – was an inherently stable one. In terms of work organization and financing this stability led, not just to a role in the articulation of the UK's national identity, but also provided a lead in the manner labour and new technologies were employed. The BBC's influence on broadcasting extended well beyond its own programmes. Through its training schemes – in journalism, studio management, technical skills and programme production – it directed the nation's skill base (Barnett & Curry, 1994:9). As a result, BBC employees developed a very strong occupational identity which management were keen to encourage (up until the late 1980s) as it provided the basis for the maintenance of a strong skill base within the Corporation.

The BBC's approach to broadcasting – as considered in Chapter 3 – was highly regulated by government (and with a surfeit of White and Green papers) with a firm commitment to PSB. The major factor influencing this highly regulated approach to broadcasting was the maintenance of clearly articulated occupational identities (Burns, 1977:63). The BBC was regulated by shop-floor work rules and was similar to

¹³¹ P3, Media Guardian 25/9/06.

the labour process within the ITV Network with specified and precise conditions for individual tasks and strict patterns of crewing on particular programming. This highly regulated operating environment was to undergo organizational restructuring in the early 1990s through a combination of legislative change and intense competition from other terrestrial and satellite broadcasters. Ironically, the broadcasting industry (which had been caricatured as ‘the last bastion of restrictive practices’) was, by the mid 1990s, lauded as an exceptional exponent of organizational flexibility (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994:251-60). In short, the last quarter century presented the UK broadcasting industry with a series of regulatory shocks – with the BBC, in particular, enduring a series of challenges to the way it had historically conducted its operations. In the period after 1984, management in both the BBC and the ITV companies were on the offensive regarding staffing levels, conditions of employment and control over new appointments (Sparks, 1989).

Public sector broadcasters throughout Europe faced severe difficulties in terms of maintaining audiences and revenues (Traquina, 1998:167). Over the previous ten/fifteen years a debate had taken place over how to maintain public broadcasting in the face of increased competition from existing and new commercial and satellite/cable broadcasters. In the early 1990s it was believed that a critical factor in the future of public broadcasting in Europe would be the level of financial support offered by governments (Brants & Siune, 1992:101-115). The UK's Communications White Paper published in 2000 had proposed that, in the run up to Charter renewal in 2006, the BBC would need to demonstrate its commitment to delivering high quality and innovative programming in the digital era. However, the White Paper had indicated that the costs of moving towards digitalization should be covered by the Corporation itself (Papathanassopoulos, 2002:11). The debate on the future of the BBC had, in the space of a little over a decade, moved to a position where it was accepted by management that rationalization and restructuring of internal labour markets was essential if the Corporation was to uphold its commitment to the broad values of PSB. It is proposed to examine how internal restructuring of BBC Scotland impacted upon the labour process of those employed within two of its directorates, namely Production and Resources. [Directorates were the result of the restructuring of the vertically integrated production structures which historically defined how programming was produced (see Cofrey, 1997)]. In addition it is proposed to consider

whether this restructuring of the organizational culture of BBC Scotland had an impact upon the occupational identity of its employees. The relationship between occupational identity and work was explored in Chapter 1, 1.4.

As these interviews indicated, the 1990s were to see a large-scale rejection of the rigid and bureaucratic corporate structure of PSB (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994). Corporate restructuring resulted in a fashion for small production companies with networks of freelance agents and a limited core of permanent staff (Tempest, 1997). Staff who remained within the BBC were subject to a rigorous reappraisal of their roles and their contribution to the profitability of the various directorates. Until the emergence of Producer Choice (in the early part of the 1990s) the nature of BBC bureaucracy supported the growth in teams of employees working together. The BBC encouraged the development of networks of working relationships in contrast to a culture of individualism and pure bureaucracy (see Wegg-Prosser, 1998).

A broad cross section of BBC employees were interviewed – including individuals from the two central BBC directorates – and the study of BBC Scotland is split into three Sections. The first provides an organizational backdrop to Producer Choice (the creation of a form of internal market for services and labour). The second part considers the impact of the reorganization of the Resources directorate on a commercial basis, while the final Section addresses the development of the Talent Pool which saw the formation of an internal labour market for creative and production staff within the Production directorate. At the heart of this reorganization was an effort to quite deliberately restructure the occupational identity of BBC employees – an identity which some Resources managers, in particular, believed contributed to inefficiency and uncompetitiveness when contrasted with private resource providers.

6.1

The Organizational Context.

The implementation in 1993 within the BBC of the market led initiative, Producer Choice, led to the creation of a series of internal cost structures. The commercial rationale for Producer Choice was to provide a transparent account of the trading of

services between the two main directorates. Producer Choice was grounded on a conviction that the BBC lacked appropriate mechanisms for proving that it was financially rational (Born, 2004:107). The Corporation made a commitment to operate in a more efficient context because of its concerns regarding a flattening level of income. Producer Choice was intended to encourage producers to choose the best or cheapest service supplier available – irrespective of whether that supplier was a BBC internal service or an independent vendor. The effect would take the BBC from a hierarchical and vertically integrated bureaucratic organization, (in essence what might be described as a command economy), to one which separated out the various elements of programming production, distribution and commissioning (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:30).

The UK broadcasting industry had been insulated from the fashion for corporate restructuring common throughout the late 1970s and early 1980s. The deliberate strategy to exclude broadcasting from the debate over public sector reform was intended to protect the integrity of the BBC (Mulgan, 1996). It would be untrue to suggest, however, that Producer Choice was the first attempt in the BBC's history to reorganize its bureaucratic structure. The McKinsey reforms of the late 1960s and early 1970s were formulated in order to move power away from the centralised structure of BBC corporate centre. Articulating the need to refocus on the use of resources is, in retrospect, a clear pointer to further and deeper efforts at restructuring during the 1980s (See Burns, 1977). As indicated, the McKinsey reforms resulted in the movement of financial and practical management from the centre to the divisions of Television, Radio and External Services – overall financial responsibility was to be held by the managing directors of these divisions (Born, 2004:71).

Problems of over manning and remuneration were two fundamental difficulties which the BBC faced as it moved into the 1990s. The ITV companies, in particular, had decided to adopt a set of positions which inevitably set them on course to confrontation with the broadcasting unions. Although under pressure from successive administrations to tackle rising production and labour costs, the BBC found itself forced to take a different approach to industrial relations. Section '13' of the Corporation's charter required management to establish a suitable environment for the operation of arbitration and conciliation procedures and which meant that it had a

clearly defined (and constraining) process for dealing with potential industrial disputes. The basis for the Corporation's predictable working environment lay in a highly regulated internal labour market. While the prime motivation of BBC managers, from the early 1990s onwards, was to eliminate practices which inhibited flexibility, it was a consequence that the move to a directorate system placed new fiscal, creative and labour restraints upon programme makers. It also provided for a very significant set of effects upon the occupational identity of BBC workers (and this consequence will be a major preoccupation of this Chapter). Identification with skill, craft and the settings in which identities had been allowed to flourish are critical to the study of the UK television industry since the 1950s. While close attention will be paid to the development of craft status and employee identity formation within the BBC, an examination as to how these identities were deliberately managed and/or altered by senior management teams will also be undertaken.

The three central operating directorates, Resources, Production and Broadcast were established in order that the BBC, as it stated in the document 'Extending Choice', would;

have an obligation to focus on performing a set of clearly defined roles that best complement the enlarged commercial sector (BBC, 1993:24).

The decision, taken during the 1996 reorganization, to move from vertically divided directorates to horizontally divided structures is at the heart of the project of Producer Choice – the change in the way employees perceived both their occupational identity and their role within programme making. Proponents of the policy argued that the move to horizontal integration had been a relatively straightforward process with the effect of reducing levels of downtime (non-productive time) amongst Resources and Production staff in particular. Indeed it could be argued that what was happening was not horizontal integration at all, but rather a splitting up of the BBC into a distinct business chain incorporating commissioning, production and resource facilities across the entire network. Management would use the threat of competition from other programme providers to change the way in which their employees worked – in essence to alter the way in which they identified with their craft. Flexibility was rewarded by managers while the implied threat of a further incursion of a form of

marketization into the employment relationship between the Corporation and individual employees was ever present. The broadcasting industry as a whole had suffered in an extreme form what other British industries had already experienced (Willis & Dex, 2003). Managers had sought to explain away resentment and resistance against changes in the labour process as resulting from a lack of knowledge on the part of employees and which might be remedied through further training.

There was no ambiguity on the part of managers to this process of restructuring workplace relationships. For shop-floor managers within the Resources and Production directorates, the enemy of improved employment relationships was not unionisation (which lessened the sense of dedication of employees to the BBC) or, indeed, managerialism but, rather, a refusal to be party to multi-tasking (Burns, 2001). For one Resources manager (at least) the language of the re-branding of the BBC workplace was not encumbered by any consideration of a negotiated settlement with labour;

*I would say there is a great trend of people being taken out and shot at dawn (or downsizing as the Americans put it). Basically I would say most of us here would be doing at least three jobs – different layers of management have been collapsed down.*¹³²

In 6.3 the working environment of the Resources directorate under conditions of Producer Choice will be addressed – but what of the working environment within the Corporation before the introduction of Producer Choice? 6.2 will include empirical contributions from BBC managers – in essence, a description of the BBCs organizational structure before Producer Choice.

¹³² Interview with senior Resources manager, 6.1.

6.2

The Working Environment Before Producer Choice.

Where the BBC was coming from pre-Producer Choice was the factories (studios) determining what could be made and then handing it over to the scheduler and saying – ‘make the most of it.’¹³³

As previously noted, the late 1980s and 1990s saw a radical shift in the structure of employment and the nature of regulation within both the BBC and the commercial broadcasting industry. New technology had played a large part in the restructuring of the broadcasting industry (Hazelkorn, 2001:217). The BBC had, however, been under constant political pressure for almost thirty years to improve its operating efficiency (Burns, 1977). In this respect it can be argued that relatively recent changes in corporate organization and the acceptance of external contracting were part of a much longer historical process, and not simply driven by Conservative political priorities. The McKinsey reforms of the 1970s predated some of the key areas of concern of the Birtist period. Producers and editors were allowed to control budgets and were expected to develop tight cost control strategies. It is important to acknowledge that the reforms of programme production/ finance and resource allocation, which originated in the early ‘90s, were not the first changes since the reign of Lord Reith to the established protocols of BBC programme making (Barnett & Curry, 1994:100). Substantial change had been made to the organization of the Corporation during the 1960s – this period ushered in a new awareness of the cost basis of programming. However, the restructuring of the 1960s and 1970s largely reinforced the producer as the dominant force within the BBC. During this period personnel functions and technical staff (which included sound and camera operators) came under the control of producers.

The split at the heart of the Corporation, between those employed in creative programme making and those employed in administrative tasks, emerged as far back as Lord Reith’s first reorganization in 1933. By the late 1960s administrative

¹³³ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

departments and employees actively colluded in the process of subordination in relation to the creative directorates (Burns, 1977:217). Despite the shift in the way the Corporation was organized, programme makers (producers) remained largely insulated from managerial intervention and tight cost controls. Up until the mid 1980s the Corporation had retained its traditional gold plated attitude to resource planning and production. A senior BBC Scotland policy manager concluded that administrative and policy change over the course of the last twenty-five years had not diminished the ability of the BBC to make judgements about resource allocation, primarily in terms of programme quality;

*What is interesting about Public Service Broadcasting is that, unlike commercial broadcasting where in the end you can probably make decisions based on profit,...our dividend is the programmes we deliver to the audience...so one is dealing with a much more multi-dimensional set of benefits that one can deliver ...and not a single financial one.*¹³⁴

However the complexity and, indeed, uncertainty of the calculations involved in the BBC's resource allocation process left considerable scope for decisions to be taken on issues other than cost. Not only was it almost impossible to calculate the true cost of an individual programme, but economic decisions were balanced and/or clouded by judgements of public service and aesthetics (Lury, 1993). The benefits of accounting procedures which spread the cost of programming production across many different departments had the effect of keeping costs down amongst programming genres which did not attract significant viewing figures (Barnett & Curry, 1994:67). There was a distinctive view amongst creative BBC employees – producers in particular – that professionalism meant a dedication to craft alone and cost considerations were, at best, marginalized. Burns (1977:221) referred to the ‘unending game of prestige-poker’ which producers engaged in so as to be successful in the ‘gruelling competition to gain the edge over the others in technical qualifications, or in expertise, or in flair, or in artistic insight’.

¹³⁴ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

Initially the contradictions between the positions adopted by management and production staff (in relation to the structure of work organization) appeared to be irreconcilable. One senior manager referred to the 'Bertie Wooster' (i.e. unprofessional and indulgent) approach to programme making which had pervaded certain production departments;

*Yes, certainly we had problems with producers who said [well] I cannot make cheap television darling – I've never done it.*¹³⁵

However, it was a fact that the apparent dichotomy between managers and production staff was never quite as significant as it appeared. Traditionally, individual managers were not completely aloof from their production colleagues as they tended to be drawn from the ranks of production staff. Unofficial and complex internal markets had existed within the Corporation since its foundation and producers traded on, what amounted to, an undefined 'black-market'. The winners within this system were those people who could develop good working relationships with those who had the skills necessary to make programmes. Producers who had not developed particularly good interpersonal skills (e.g. an ability to barter with other departments when required) tended to suffer through the downgrading of their respective departmental managers during negotiations with controllers. One senior BBC Scotland manager, while noting that the introduction of Producer Choice had encouraged the development of rivalries between competing departments, argued that internal departmental conflicts had been an ever-present element of life within the BBC;

*The nature of the BBC is one of internal rivalry and perhaps it will always be like that but it is a sibling rivalry...it is possible that those rivalries have come out more under Producer Choice but I suspect they were always there and the stories that one hears about what things were like before the restructuring where producers had to charm the Resources people so that you got a technician who you could work with.*¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

¹³⁶ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

The old system of unofficial trading between different sections or departments within the Corporation was an expensive and cumbersome methods of structuring production. BBC managers argued that those resisting organizational change did so because they sometimes ran their own unofficial fiefdoms within the Corporation. They were the power brokers and the creation of directorates would, and did, challenge this nucleus of power. The directorate system did, however, replicate in structure the unofficial demarcations between the different skill centres within the BBC. The main reason for resistance by some producers to the formation of the directorate system was based upon the transfer of power from producers (or heads of departments) to Channel Controllers. There was a shift of creative and commissioning force within the BBC which resulted in a new centralisation of power around the controllers. This contrasted with the traditional system which placed the producer and other senior programme makers at the top of the programme power pyramid. This diminution in the power of producers within the Corporation provided for a renewed interest in the study of occupational identity and which gave the organization its transparent career and management structure.

The Channel Controller would sit down with the head of drama, documentaries ...and say we want 'x' number of series, 'y' number of single dramas. Heads would go back and deliver. The Channel Controller had much less say – they just had to schedule and transmit what was given and in-house producers had quite a lot of power. But when [Alan]Yentob became Controller of BBC1 power shifted to Controllers, a more traditional buyer-seller position. We'll tell you what we want. (Keighron, 1999, April 30, p6).

A senior strategy manager compared the planning of programme production prior to the implementation of new relationships (within BBC Scotland) as something akin to Marxist-Leninist State planning;

*In the past the BBC worked on a trust model whereby as a producer you were given a sum of money and you were trusted to go and make a programme. But actually you didn't have control over the resources – that was 'funny money.'*¹³⁷

The move to a more formally structured directorate system was based upon a desire to remove the element of 'fumbling in the dark' (as one manager put it) and the encouragement of a coherent use of all resources.¹³⁸ Experienced staff recognised another reason for the introduction of Producer Choice – employees who chose not to embrace the language of commercialism were jettisoned in favour of a more flexible workforce. For BBC managers, Producer Choice was clearly vindicated through the improvement in labour productivity. While such a development would be very significant to management, the set of interviews conducted here revealed that the central point of Producer Choice for managers was, in fact, a desire to break up the personal fiefdoms which permeated the Corporation.

*We have been very tough on our staff. We have had some real falling-outs and there was a shakeout in the newsroom – we have had fallouts of 100 or more. The attitude [of directorate staff] can be summed up.... If there is no wolf at the door why the bloody hell should we change.*¹³⁹

The introduction of the internal market had been paralleled by the injection of a new managerialism. Competition within the British terrestrial broadcasting market during the 1980s defined a new set of competitive pressures which broadcasters had to deal with regardless of their position within that market. As noted in Chapter 3 the Peacock Report was a watershed in the shift in power away from the broadcaster towards the consumer, and a further erosion of the traditional labour process which had also influenced the UK commercial broadcasting industry. Indeed the language of the Peacock Report helped to provide a policy platform for the BBCs move to a form of internal market. In other industries which also experienced radical change at this time, a critical part of the evolutionary process was the demonization of the past in order to legitimise the present (see, Towers, 1987; MacInnes, 1987). This ideological

¹³⁷ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

¹³⁸ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

¹³⁹ Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

dimension was a part of the shift towards the creation of an internal market. The highly regulated production environment in which trade unions had played an important role in planning television production was now viewed as an historical anachronism by many managers. A senior strategy planner at the BBC in Glasgow explored that demonization;

*It seems to me that the central failing of the trade unions is their essential conservatism (with a small 'c'), that it seems to put protection before or above adaptation. What I think is driving business at the moment is Moore's law, which states that every eighteen months the memory chips will double in capacity for the same price, therefore you need people doing ever more skilled tasks. We are in the eye of storm.*¹⁴⁰

Managers appeared to accept that the quality of programming produced in the period prior to the introduction of Producer Choice was of a high quality but they did question the level of resources required to produce such output. Questions of programme quality were considered amongst programme makers to be the only real consideration during the period up to the early 1980s. Programming budgets and the length of time provided for their completion were deemed to be extremely flexible. A BBC Scotland manager remarked of the traditional style of programme production;

*There are many stories of documentaries coming in at an hour or longer when they should have been 45 minutes. It was entirely supply driven. With the advent of a more competitive market this was not acceptable. One must move to a demand side model of production.*¹⁴¹

In moving to a demand side model of cultural production (an essential element of which was the reconstruction of the Resources directorate) the BBC began to reshape the way labour was organized. The Resources directorate was, by the late 1990s, staffed for production troughs and not production peaks, as was traditionally the case. Importantly, the redefinition of crewing levels had not been an exclusively top down

¹⁴⁰ Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

¹⁴¹ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

process. Rather, the reshaping of the BBCs internal labour market and of work organization was mediated by the allocative decisions of Resources and the accumulation of small-scale changes on the studio floor. BBC Resources was not the only directorate to have experienced radical change in its structure but because of its location and technical basis it had borne much of the consequences of the experimentation inevitably triggered by Producer Choice.

I guess Resources came first. It represents the technical infrastructure, cameras, sound, transmission equipment, buildings and vehicles etc.. They became a wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC on 1 January 1999, the idea was to release money, so John Birt set up Resources in terms of a stand alone division within the BBC which was allowed only to trade at the margins, so it could do a little bit of work...but under the Treaty of Rome it was only allowed to trade at a very low level.¹⁴²

It is the contention of this work that of the three main BBC directorates, Resources was the exemplar of restructuring of occupational identity within the Corporation. In Section 6.3 the consequences for the labour process of skilled Resources personnel are addressed – in many cases these people had spent their working lives simply as BBC employees and not Resources personnel.

6.3

Working Within G51, BBC Resources and Producer Choice.

I think what has happened in Resources is a cutting back of the supply base to meet demand [because] as long ago as when I joined the BBC the Resources base had not really adjusted to the amount of work which had gone to the independent sector.¹⁴³

The Birtian revolution within the Corporation was accomplished, in part, through an expansion in the numbers of senior and middle managers employed and which transformed the prevailing values of the Corporation (Born, 2004:227). The introduction of Producer Choice was central to that change – producers should have

¹⁴² Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

¹⁴³ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

the option of using in-house production resources or going outside the BBC to use freelance staff and equipment. Another consequence was that it would radically affect the way the Corporation was perceived as the trainer of craft skills for the industry (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:145). The concept of Producer Choice was predicated, to a degree, on the notion that producers were spendthrifts who used BBC assets extravagantly and who ignored the constraints of budgets. The result was a crackdown on the cost base of the BBC and, in particular, its Resources arm. In the period up until the mid 1980s the perception that BBC costs were higher than those of the independent sector remained unproven. This stemmed from the fact that the BBC – like some of its commercial competitors – separated out the direct cost of making programmes from the cost of resource provision (Barnett & Curry, 1994:67). BBC inputs were analysed during the period between 1990 to 1993 in a project entitled ‘Resources Review’ which measured inputs/outputs in an attempt to measure output efficiency (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:148). This particular review provided the basis for a wholesale shift in the management of technical and resource staff and in the way in which skilled resource staff (and other BBC employees) understood their rapidly changing occupational identity.

Resources Ltd was set up as a separate directorate in order to provide technical support and services for both BBC and independent production staff, and it was to become a wholly owned subsidiary of the BBC. This change was considered necessary if the Corporation was to position itself as a commercial enterprise and move away from the constraints imposed by its alignment with the traditional BBC high cost structures. One of these constraints was a view expressed by management that the occupational identity held by long standing technical employees, in particular, made competing with commercially structured service providers extremely difficult. Within the Corporation, occupational identity had taken on a form unique to itself and trade unions played a very limited role. Those seeking employment within the Corporation tended to do so for creative rather than commercial reasons (Barnett & Curry, 1994:7). By the late 1950s, the BBC had accepted four trade unions for the purpose of collective bargaining. Those trade unions had begun, by the late 1960s, to operate as a second tier of management and which was, de facto, running in parallel to the official system (Burns, 1977:187). Traditionally the loyalty of most BBC employees was divided between the Corporation itself and the particular occupational

sub-groups which had begun to form. Indeed, control over complicated production technology was critical to the development of a coherent occupational and group identity for both ITV and BBC employees.

Within both the public and private UK television economy, managers generally sought to shape, and in some cases alter, occupational identity. Critically, managers within ITV and BBC were beginning the process of altering occupational identity – from subtly different positions. ITV managers sought control over the labour process as an essential contributing factor to increased competitiveness, while simultaneously legitimating a new managerial regime from the mid 1980s. In contrast BBC managers were urging a complete shift and a reinvention of the organization from a resource-planned system, to one where labour and production flexibility was the central tenet (Paterson, 1993:19). At the heart of the restructuring of the BBC was an implicit threat of de-collectivization – that the traditional organizational identity of trade unions and occupational sub-groups would be fractured (Saundry & Stuart, 1999:2). The threat of de-collectivization was two-fold – it was present in management strategies seeking to individualize the employment relationship, and was also present through practices attempting to establish new organizational identities and a team driven organization. The dependence upon highly skilled workers who were required to make complicated technology operate smoothly contributed to a very powerful sense of occupational identity and camaraderie amongst technicians. Electricians and others – most notably camera operators – gained enormous occupational bargaining power because of the unreliable technologies with which they operated. Work groups were particularly cognisant of any incursions into established job controls, and developed intense loyalty to fellow members of those work groups. A Resources manager spoke of his personal experience of change within the area of resource technologies in BBC Scotland;

Technology has changed enormously and that has been quite well documented in the nature of the business units that I have worked in. I joined a department called 'television recording' and it did literally what it said, we recorded programmes and turned them around and now we are in post-production so the technology has

*changed so much that one is now creating programming from scratch, you are taking tiny little fragments and recreating large programmes.*¹⁴⁴

As noted earlier, the BBC had not been at the forefront of industrial relations confrontations, whereas the ITV Network had witnessed serious industrial unrest in the period before the great confrontations of the 1980s (Sparks, 1989:25). Producer Choice changed that situation and impacted greatly on the labour process within the BBC. Its introduction meant that the newly established business units such as Resources and Production would have to bear significant overheads (because of the public service remit of the Corporation) on a continuous basis. This resulted in profound competitive difficulties with the leaner, exclusively production service providers who emerged in the period after the Broadcasting Act, 1990. This constant overhead retrieval would make it difficult, if not impossible, for Resources to compete with independent producers on the basis of cost alone.

In every sense the formation of BBC Resources was a groundbreaking decision for the Corporation and its emergence was a response to the fragmentation of its share of the viewing and listening audience. At the time of its launch (in October 1991) Producer Choice was broadly welcomed at junior producer level and, in particular, amongst those who had experience of employment outside the BBC. Conversely the BBC resource supply departments were not enthusiastic because of the comparisons which would be made between their costs and those of independent suppliers. The Producer Choice guidelines encompassed a fundamental restructuring of the management system within the BBC. Organizationally it meant a decentralised structure with distinct business units which would trade with one another and also trade with other firms or independent producers. Financially, Producer Choice demanded transparency in terms of costs of its main activities and which meant that, operationally, it would have the effect of transforming the BBC into a mixed economy (BBC, 1993).

The Broadcasting Act, 1990 provided the political and regulatory basis for the splitting up of the Corporation into the directorate system. The legislation stipulated that a minimum of 25 per cent of all commercial and public television programming

¹⁴⁴ Interview with senior Resources manager, 6.3.

should be provided by independent production companies (See, *inter alia*, Campling, 1992; Campling, 1997). The effect of that element of the legislation was very significant for those involved in, what were later to become, the directorates – BBC Production and Broadcast. The legitimacy of the traditional way in which the process of television production was organized was brought into question and the large commercial and public broadcasters were no longer the only suppliers of programming for managers.

In addition, the Broadcasting Act, 1990 contributed to an alteration in the relationship between in-house producers and BBC production/technical resources. In this regard in-house producers were no longer restricted to employing internal resource suppliers and this represented a watershed in the deconstruction of old established relationships throughout the BBC. Producers were given the chance to use people whom they already knew and had worked with. The creative producers often chose to recruit staff from outside the BBC because they were aware that people from outside were usually cheaper. ‘Meanwhile, you had departments that had to be paid for, so the overhead had to be put somewhere’ (Berkeley, 2003:110). One senior manager elaborated on this theme – arguing that the 25 per cent quota for independent productions encouraged a debate to take place about manning levels within the Corporation’s different directorates;

[We] were not allowed by law to compel people who were outside to use internal BBC Resources. When Producer Choice was brought in and the Resources study was done prior to it, Resources had not reduced its capacity even to take account of the 25 per cent loss.... There were tremendous filibustering sessions between Resources and the Resources review committee – where the Resource people were saying, of course, we need as many o.b's as before.¹⁴⁵

It is evident from interviews with Resources staff and management that the implementation of Producer Choice within the Resources directorate provided the battleground for skirmishes to redefine work organization. Senior Broadcast manager 6.2, suggested that the key effect of Producer Choice was that it forced people to find

¹⁴⁵ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

out how much things cost. At one level this was simply a finessing of internal accounting procedures, but it also implied a certain public responsibility within the Corporation. Civic responsibility in the BBC was no longer solely about the range and content of programmes, but was also about efficiency and effective management. However, for many BBC employees this was a very significant departure from accepted practice and a current BBC Scotland strategist defended the implementation of Producer Choice during interview;

It was simply about good management/good husbandry – that if you take money from the license fee what do you give back? Well it ain't bloody studios, it's the programmesso every pound that you spend on a studio that ain't working is a pound less spent on programming.¹⁴⁶

Establishing and extending management controls was not solely about breaking with the Reithian past but was also about upholding public service broadcasting. Only tight resource control could deliver the space necessary to sustain high quality programming, and managerialism – far from being the enemy of the classic BBC culture – became necessary to its survival in however limited a sense. Resources was considered to be at the forefront of organizational change because of its significance in contributing to the high cost base of the Corporation (Born, 2004:306).

I'm not sure that Resources was [at] the leading edge of flexibility, it's rather that Resources was one of the most inflexible parts of the 'Beeb'.¹⁴⁷

Senior Broadcast manager 6.2 quoted above, provided a clear managerialist view of Producer Choice, but even this is tempered by concerns relating to programme quality and public service. What of the BBC staff who actually delivered resource contracts and maintained production schedules? In this connection it is useful to consider the people who worked in 'G51', the day-to day axis of Producer Choice. G51 (simply the room number in the Glasgow studios where BBC Resources is largely based) was at the coalface of the introduction of Producer Choice. On entering G51 it appears to

¹⁴⁶ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

¹⁴⁷ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

be something of an amalgam of a call centre and a job centre. Large, low desks which are equipped with computers predominate, with telephones and fax machines to facilitate several people simultaneously. Traditional office skirmishes over 'turf' (the ownership of desks and space) were made irrelevant by the employment of 'hot areas' and where workers can take possession of any area, desk, and phone or fax when dealing with clients or potential clients. Space was at a premium and in early 1999 BBC Scotland employed a freelance project manager to examine the use of space within their Glasgow base. The employment of 'hot-desking' was born of a desire to fundamentally change the working culture within the Resources directorate, but was also motivated by a more functional and basic requirement to utilize space to best advantage. A freelance consultant employed to manage the implementation of a policy for the use of space within the cramped confines of the BBC Scotland base explained his role;

*The problem with the BBC is that it is such a broad spectrum. You will have your accounting office and you will have a children's programme production office.... We would like to look at providing facilities for 'nomadic workers', e.g. engineering managers and those who show low utilization levels. We would look at trading off that space, e.g. providing them with better facilities out of the office.*¹⁴⁸

By no means all of the employees of G51 had followed conventional BBC career paths, e.g. clerical operatives were drawn from a range of external sales related organizations with no experience of programme making either in the BBC or other media companies. A BBC Scotland Resources manager acknowledged its unique position within the Corporation;

*The idea behind G51 was a good one in that all of the Resources people are there and the booking staff and the way that it keeps being reorganized. They change it almost monthly...although it still has the BBC name on it, Resources is in every sense an independent organization both in theory and in spirit with the problem of carrying BBC overheads.*¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Interview with freelance manager, 6.6.

¹⁴⁹ Interview with senior Resources manager, 6.3.

Resources was to play a critical role in directing organizational strategy within the Corporation. During visits to the BBC Scotland offices it was apparent that Resources staff processed what seemed to be interminable enquiries from independent production companies or potential external clients. The intensely busy office was quite unlike any other section of the BBC and the contrast with what can be termed, the traditional structure of BBC administration, was deeply revealing. In one critical way, however, the result of the formation of the directorate system – the emergence of Resources – reflected a continuation of organizational change within the Corporation. Over thirty years ago a former BBC producer said of the reality of negotiating programme making within the Corporation;

The only way to get effective programmes inside a structure like the BBC is to have lots of little kingdoms, even if there's a certain amount of duplicating and mutual antagonism (Blakewell & Garnham, 1970:207).

The anonymity of the physical environment, the type of personnel in situ and the frenetic pace of work were unprecedented for the BBC. However the term Producer Choice did not mean producer sovereignty for, as Checkland argued, it meant freedom and responsibility – freedom to purchase resources internally/ externally allied with a responsibility to be accountable for programme budgets (BBC, 1991:1). While the argument was made that savings were ploughed straight back into programme making the fact is that, in truth, the employees of the Resources directorate were being challenged to reflect on demands to alter their labour process and their identity as BBC employees. In part, attempts to separate Resources employees' occupational identity from those in other directorates was achieved by the physical separation of the Resources from the rest of the Corporation. The changes encouraged by Producer Choice were designed to challenge the bureaucratic structure of the BBC. Producer Choice introduced new methods of resource allocation which mirrored those within the private sector. Internal enquiries would often by-pass the newly formed Resources directorate and personal (not quasi-market) relations, formed through the experience of dealing with individual Resources staff, remained at the heart of the continuing relationship between Production and Resources. The commercial purpose and structure of Resources was offset for BBC insiders whose relations were mediated by

social rather than market exchanges. A senior manager (Production directorate) developed the notion of separation between Resources and the other two directorates when he noted that;

The main difference between the BBC of old is that people think of themselves as working in either Broadcast or Production, I would imagine that the situation has not changed substantially within Resources because they had separated themselves [off] anyway.¹⁵⁰

His contribution was revealing, emphasising as it did a belief in the inherent distinction between Resources and the other main directorates. It is important, however, not to think of the Resources directorate as being entirely distinct or divorced from Production and Broadcast. Internal producers in search of technical support staff tended to express a preference for BBC Resources staff over independent resource providers. Close personal relationships between experienced Resource and Production staff were expected to continue providing Resources with a loyal customer base. BBC Broadcast management pointed out during interview that when what they termed ‘old friends’ (i.e. experienced BBC producers) move on, the competition for the Resources directorate’s customers would become intense.

There were few competitors within Scotland who could offer the range of services which BBC Resources (Scotland) provided although it should be noted that it was only a medium size player in the provision of technical resource support to broadcasters within the UK as a whole. However in recent years Scotland has seen an expansion in small-scale independent companies involved in film and video post-production. These new micro-media entrepreneurs are well represented in at least two levels of the market, namely niche post-production services and inexpensive or basic editing tasks services and which often undercut BBC Resources. A manager spoke of the position of Resources Scotland within the local media services industry;

We clearly benefit from being in Scotland – there is not an enormous amount of competition and there is definitely an ethos within the BBC. Our customers want to

¹⁵⁰ Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

*support BBC Resources within BBC Scotland. There is a predisposition within the BBC to using Resources, that is great but I would not want to rely on it.*¹⁵¹

Following interviews with senior management an important element of the relationship between Resources and Production was identified – namely, the process by which contracts for servicing the technical requirements of BBC Production were agreed upon. Senior manager 6.2 suggested in relation to the level of networked programmes provided by BBC Scotland, that there were no firm guarantees to Production. In terms of the level (if any) of guaranteed contracts to Resources, managers tended to repeat the mantra that there were no guarantees to that directorate. A senior manager suggested, however, that 50 per cent of the income of the Resources directorate was largely ‘non-volatile’ (i.e. guaranteed income) – further, that this level was achieved through fair competition with the independent resource provision sector. Privately, however, BBC managers (even those who are forceful supporters of Producer Choice) conceded that the full rigour of market competition was mitigated in practice. Senior manager 6.2 argued that there were strategic production centered reasons why producers did not go outside the Resources directorate for technical assistance. The following argument to critique the effectiveness of Producer Choice was also put forward;

*In reality there were a lot of reasons internally why we were not given the power, [the power to engage in full commercial style contracts with independent resource suppliers]. If we had all gone outside we might not have a studio because we all could have got it cheaper. There were political in-house reasons for remaining in-house, that’s why in my opinion Producer Choice has not worked.*¹⁵²

Employment within the Resources directorate should not be caricatured as an overwhelmingly negative experience for all employees. Resources managers, while perhaps not unexpectedly, outlined the rapid career progression open to all employees irrespective of age or seniority. In 6.4 the impact of organizational change within the Resources directorate is detailed.

¹⁵¹ Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

¹⁵² Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

6.4

The Impact of Organizational Change – Resources.

The challenge which the BBC Resources directorate faced in the period after the Birtian revolution began was twofold. It had to structure itself along the lines of a commercially driven technical support company whilst at the same time maintaining the skills required to support the production programming, which varied from complex period drama to relatively straightforward news programming. This dual challenge was explained in the following terms by a senior BBC Scotland manager;

The BBC is not a commercial organization – it's essentially involved in a process of rationalization.[Our]job is to find ever more sophisticated means of making sensible investment decisions ...what's interesting about the BBC is that there is not a cash bottom line. Our dividend is the programme...[this job]...is an endless quest to divide up the cake.¹⁵³

As indicated earlier, managers had argued that the fundamental reason to pursue managerialism within the BBC was to protect the quality of programming. BBC management believed that it was up to employees and management of Resources to balance the demands of organizing the directorate along the lines of a stand-alone commercial enterprise while simultaneously respecting public service programming commitments. The argument was clearly made that the two objectives were not mutually exclusive. In reality, Resources managers were under pressure to cut costs, maintain quality and enhance training. Resources employees were strongly encouraged to maintain and develop excellent interpersonal bonds with existing internal BBC clients while also cultivating relationships with external customers. The language of the marketplace had been alien for some Resources staff who were not used to dealing with external customers. These were very significant changes for Resources staff to make and were acknowledged by one manager;

¹⁵³ Interview with senior Broadcast manager, 6.2.

The key issue for a lot of craft staff is that if you were a video tape editor fifteen years ago you are working with the same equipment in roughly the same area with the same sort of people, technology has provided you with new equipment and new techniques to consider but, by and large, there has not been a fundamental shift in what individuals have been doing. The big shift has been in how you are supposed to behave, the extra responsibilities and the level of business responsibilities that you are supposed to have.¹⁵⁴

The issue which attracted particular attention – in equal measure from both BBC Resources management and their employees (albeit for different reasons) – was the attempt to mould Resources workers into creative, flexible, customer driven and cost conscious technicians. The 1992 Green Paper commented on what was considered unnecessary bureaucracy within the Corporation with overly rigid structures for decision-making. It suggested that the BBC needed to be a much more flexible organization with better articulation between its limbs (DNI, 1992). It is a fact that the BBC, in common with many other public service broadcasters within Europe, faced considerable pressures during the late 1980s and early 1990s and which if not addressed, would have terminally damaged the UK PSB model.

Organizational restructuring undertaken within the BBC in the period since 1993 had been driven by a determination by management to move from a closed production environment in technical (and other) services – where providers were exclusively BBC personnel, to a situation where BBC staff became suppliers of services outside the confines of the Corporation itself. The changes in priorities for new teams of managers within the directorate system placed a new emphasis on altering and managing occupational identity. Resources managers moved through direct intervention with individual staff members to change both the way employees worked and the way they themselves understood their role as developers of new business. The language of Resources managers was couched in explicitly commercial language;

¹⁵⁴ Interview with senior Resources manager, 6.3.

*We are now in a commercial operation where we have absolutely zero sources of funding apart from what we sell and the key instruments for that are the people at the coalface. The truth is that a large number of them let us down on a regular basis.*¹⁵⁵

The then Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport said of the incorporation of Resources in 1998; ‘I want to make sure this (incorporation) cannot be used as a ramp for privatisation’ (Guardian, 20 February, 1998:12). While there was no implied desire on the part of government to privatise the provision of technical and studio services, Resources had to react to intense cost cutting of established resource tariffs in the market place. In a BECTU submission on the BBC to the Select Committee for Culture, Media and Sport, it was noted that Resources was the largest single craft and skills base in British broadcasting (BECTU:14). Resources managers were quite clear that they would compare the working practices of their directorate with more narrowly based commercial and ultra-lean resource suppliers and not with the traditional resources supply of the pre Producer Choice era. Managers spent a significant proportion of their time engaged in what they termed, ‘the softer issues of staff discipline’, so as to bridge the gap with private sector firms. A Resources manager spoke damningly of some past colleagues;

*Even some of the most talented engineers would be sitting there moaning at their conditions in front of their clients. Maybe they have to work some overtime during the week when they wanted time off.*¹⁵⁶

In stark contrast to the view expressed above, one other senior Resources manager indicated that much of the poor attitude which pervaded Resources (until relatively recently) had now disappeared. At the core of the dismissal by individual managers of the old culture of BBC production, was a view that it reflected a period of continuous conflict. The systems of production (pre the Directorate system) depended upon skilled, autonomous workers who were loathe to give up control of their various skills (Toliday & Zeitlin, 1985:270). A BBC Resources managers spoke of the effort to alter working practices;

¹⁵⁵ Interview with Resources manager, 6.7.

¹⁵⁶ Interview with Resources manager, 6.5.

A lot of poor attitudes have disappeared, partly because people have left the organization and communication strategies have improved to encourage people to change direction. But where I have a big problem with attitude is where people still think that they are working in traditional BBC conditions of service and every meal break must be accounted for with money. That is a huge challenge for me because the customer cannot afford to pay for traditional conditions.¹⁵⁷

Since its inception, Resources aimed to provide a middle level range of technical services to both private and internal BBC clients. Managers conceded that the level of investment required in new technologies in order to compete with some well funded private resource suppliers – in terms of the provision of high level skills – was not an option open to them. Internal BECTU documents back up this assertion and it is a fact that much of Resources’ equipment was older than the industry average.¹⁵⁸ In Scottish terms, BBC Resources was the largest supplier of a broad range of production services and was a crucial financial element in the restructuring of the entire Corporation. The cost savings accrued through the ongoing rationalisation of Resources enabled the Production directorate to significantly reduce the cost of programming provided for Broadcast. Managers argued that because the level of income flowing to Broadcast was relatively fixed, (i.e. through the licence fee), savings accrued through the employment of Producer Choice would be critical to the process of maintaining the programming quality which the BBC demanded. During interviews, Resources managers affirmed that targets set for maintaining and developing new business had to be met. In order to return minimum acceptable profit levels Resources managers demanded a more basic level of service from their staff. Managers made it clear that, as the confidence of the Resources directorate grew, they became more determined than ever to take on the established working practices of Resource employees. Publicly, managers were scathing of the input (both creatively and technically) of staff who felt they had earned the right – through seniority or simply because they had always worked in a particular way – to direct the way the Resources directorate operated. In addition managers were utterly dismissive of the

¹⁵⁷ Interview with Resources manager, 6.7.

¹⁵⁸ BECTU, Note number 12.

role of the producer as the alleged hub of employment and/ or creative processes within the BBC.

In the period immediately after the introduction of Producer Choice – in the early 1990s – efficiency savings grew at approximately 9 per cent per year (BECTU). Where budgets were being continually squeezed, the skills of Resources' employees in contributing to the production of cost-driven television (albeit with a substantially reduced workforce) became even more important. In 1990, for example, the Resources directorate was operating with 11,000 staff, but by 1996 (when Resources management announced plans to create a limited company) there were only 7,000 employed. The attack on established BBC working conditions and the very sensitive cost base of Resources had a significant effect on the career structure in place (before the directorate system was imposed). Promotion would now be determined on technical ability, together with a willingness to engage in the creative aspects of production and the development of interpersonal skills. While the established career structure had been effectively dismantled Resources managers did, however, stress the fluidity of the new career structure. Age, it was suggested, was no bar to promotion or career progression;

*If you are a senior cameraman it does not mean you are here twenty-five years, you can get a senior cameraman's job if you are here six months.*¹⁵⁹

Resources managers were at pains to always encourage their employees to offer their views to external clients on aesthetic and cost saving matters. Despite these developments one of the central difficulties facing staff was the commercialization of the relationship between themselves and their former colleagues within Production, allied to a need to provide a complete customer centered environment for new independent clients of BBC Resources. Indeed the birth of Resources could be explained in terms of a change in culture within the BBC itself. In contrast to the traditional BBC business structures, departments became business centres while those people who had been considered colleagues now became competitors. The consequential loss was, perhaps, intangible and unquantifiable but one could take

¹⁵⁹ Interview with Resources manager, 6.7.

issue with the finality implied. Producer Choice, in practice, was significantly different from a full-scale marketization of the BBC and the motives underlying the Corporation's managerialism were much more complex than a simple adoption of market values. It is this complex amalgam of a continued adherence to the concept of public service broadcasting and a new managerialism which now underpins BBC management thinking and practice on the ground. In a memorable turn of phrase one serving Resources manager said simply of the change in organizational culture wrought by Producer Choice;

*At the beginning of Producer Choice our staff were not used to thinking of people as customers and there was a lot of resentment.*¹⁶⁰

Working practices based on those of the freelance sector were drawn up by senior management but were considered by many in the newly formed Resources directorate to be unacceptable and barely tolerable. There was, in short, no transfer into the BBC of working practices developed in the freelance sector. Neither was this simply an exercise by the Resources directorate in the evaluation of the technical possibilities of new working practices. Equally important was Resources' judgement (largely implicit) about how far working practices could be altered without provoking passive resistance on the studio floor. The labour intensive nature of television production made it difficult to reduce costs without targeting labour (Sparks, 1989). The tension within the role of Resources (to radically remake work organization but, also, to maintain production) was overlaid by the introduction of strict appraisal systems for Resources personnel. The essential aspect of the appraisal process was the actual level of demand for the services of individual technicians. This was the sharp end of marketization with the individualisation of the technician's contract and his dependence, at least in part, on market selection rather than bureaucratic allocation. A senior Resources manager spoke of how the appraisal process worked in practice;

*Their hours are being recorded continually and that makes them feel vulnerable. We have also had some issues around the notion of socialization, we have client managers who are actively marketing our staff.*¹⁶¹

¹⁶⁰ Interview with senior Production manager, 6.4.

Despite what might appear as the rhetorical prioritisation of the producer as the critical internal customer of the Resources directorate, Producer Choice did not, somehow, magically convert those producers into knowing consumers – nor, indeed, were producers at the cutting edge of redefining work organization. It was the Resources directorate which was crucial in developing costing and financial monitoring techniques and in gradually altering crewing norms. A senior shop steward suggested that the term Producer Choice was, in fact, misleading. While Resources could offer its services to the private independent production sector, Production (the programming making arm) could only offer its programme ideas to Broadcast. Nevertheless the extension and deepening of the marketization of production services remained a powerful ideological motif and a real and interesting possibility. In 6.5 – following – the impact of a form of marketization on the Production directorate of BBC Scotland is addressed.

6.5

Producer Choice and BBC Production.

In a clue to the tension resulting from the suggestion offered by some Resources employees and managers that BBC Production should not be exempt from restructuring – a senior Production manager said;

*I have heard Resources people say that you could make efficiencies in Production because they want people to clock in and out. Some of the best programme makers just don't work like that – they may go missing. But they come back with new ideas.*¹⁶²

If the essential element within the restructuring of the Resources directorate was the introduction of something akin to the operation of a market mechanism, then the central vehicle for change within the Production directorate was the implementation of the Talent Pool initiative. A senior Production manager explained the rationale behind the formation of the Talent Pool;

¹⁶¹ Interview with Resources manager, 6.5.

¹⁶² Interview with senior Production manager, 6.8.

*The ethos of the talent pool is that everybody belongs to Production talent – they no longer belong to individual departments. What used to happen was that each department thought of their own staff requirements and didn't look to other departments to help during periods of staff shortages so what was happening was that somebody was going out the revolving door while somebody else was coming in.*¹⁶³

The Talent Pool initiative was an attempt to extend a variant of the market forces principle (previously adopted by Resources) to the Production directorate. The difficulties in applying methods of appraisal or output measurement within Production (but which were designed for the Resources directorate) were predictable and significant. Work undertaken by those employed in the Production directorate (i.e. those involved in producing, directing or in research) did not lend to a simple method for measuring output. As this Chapters opening quote makes clear, BBC Scotland was seen by some Production employees as being fertile ground for organizational experiments. The Talent Pool initiative was designed by a senior member of the Production directorate within BBC Scotland and quickly became a favourite management buzzword within the Corporation. It was also adopted by BBC Manchester, and Network Centre London (at the time of interview) was also considering adapting the scheme within its Production directorate. When Producer Choice was launched in 1991 it was understood to be a system which producers had demanded (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:511). The system encouraged, in theory at least, the process of buying resources internally or externally – including labour and technical/studio services. The intention was to benchmark the costs of internal resource provision against those of independent producers and others (Deakin & Pratten, 2000:332). Critically, BBC management accepted the difficulties inherent in simply comparing basic cost figures of Production and Resources staff, and the two groups differed considerably in their susceptibility to appraisal procedures as a business unit/directorate. Here again, the target of measurement was labour – it was recognized that, for example, Production's utilization levels of approximately 35 to 45 per cent were an obvious source of further efficiencies. Programme makers had, it was suggested, become complacent and lazy under the old dispensation and the

¹⁶³ Interview with Production manager, 6.9.

insecurities and realities of the marketplace would boost the creative process of BBC production departments (Born, 2004:181).

Irrespective of the practical difficulties involved in any managerial remaking of the internal labour market, the implications for labour were almost immediate. While participation in the Talent Pool was nominally voluntary for low ranking staff (e.g. research assistants) former staff positions and conditions of work were simply written out of programme schedules. Adhering to existing tasks and terms and conditions was not an option and to do so was to effectively render oneself unemployed. If production assistants wished to remain with the Corporation they had to be totally flexible with regard to their job descriptions and their schedule of work undertaken. The role of the broadcast assistant had changed from being a largely secretarial position to one which developed to a support role encompassing both technical and production elements. A broadcast assistant spoke angrily of the way her originally research based position had moved into a quasi-technical role;

I wanted my job to go more in the direction of research in order to go into production and now it's going into a mish-mash of pseudo technical jobs because I work on news. If I work on the weekly strands you have much more time so, yes, I am directly involved in the content of the programme. For example this morning I was working on 'Good Morning Scotland' and I have been doing morning studio shifts and I will have absolutely no involvement with the content of the programme.¹⁶⁴

This broadcast assistant developed her perspective by arguing that those of her peers who did not work in what she termed, the 'pigeonholed' environment of news, had a greater input into the creative aspects of production. She was quite pessimistic about the likelihood of transferring her skills to another part of the organization and when asked where she thought her career was going, said;

Nowhere! Most of the people have been doing the job for years and they are stuck in it and it annoys me that management refer to us as junior staff. We have often kept

¹⁶⁴ Interview with Broadcast Assistant, 6.10.

*programmes on the air when inexperienced staff could not cope, our career development has been ignored.*¹⁶⁵

The Talent Pool concept sought to avoid the duplication of staff within different departments throughout BBC Production. However, the possibility of the broadcast or research assistant within the realm of the news department, for example, being able to take advantage of other work opportunities within the Talent Pool was limited because of the unique nature of work within the news room. The high level of freelancing and the employment of short-term contracting within the Corporation's production staff had significant repercussions for individuals and for the organization itself – for BBC employees freelance status resulted in a restructuring of their working lives. The lack of incentive (on the part of those contracted to the BBC) to produce their best work for an organization in which they had only a passing relationship had a profound impact on the Corporation's attitude to training and support. The contrast can be made with those employed within the Talent Pool (mainly full time contracted workers) who worked at full capacity – intellectually and creatively – in order to encourage demand for the re-employment of their services by producers. If the resources reviews were inspired originally by the need to save money then they had been transformed, under the auspices of John Birt, into an accounting mechanism to shrink the resource base prior to the introduction of Producer Choice. The introduction of the Talent Pool may be seen as a further marketization of the relationship between managers and creative personnel. One former BBC employee suggested that;

Creativity has been managerialized. Amateurish, but enjoyable collegiate discussions no longer happen. An underclass of jobbing producers, or even totally casualized researchers, doing the hunting and gathering are hired at short notice to deliver to a brief using their own recording equipment – it's a new type of alienation in the production process (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:166).

Senior Production manager 6.9 agreed that the Talent Pool project had been less applicable to the news and current affairs departments where skills were less

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Broadcast Assistant, 6.10.

transferable but denied that, in any sense, the strategy was flawed. He argued strongly that these changes would not damage the career aspirations of Production employees;

I would suggest that the crossover is stronger in some sections – notably children’s and features while weaker in current affairs. The most transient individuals are production assistants, researchers and some directors.

It is disingenuous to include directors amongst task groups which were exposed to greater transience. There is a very significant difference between research assistants who often work long and unsocial hours and have little room for skill development, and highly prized creative directors who frequently move from one well-paid short-term contract to another. Production manager 6.9 tacitly acknowledged the gulf which separated the experience of routine and creative employees when he said;

We do have a lot of individuals who are core to one area, we cannot have everybody moving around the system, but we have people who are transient and who I need to be transient.¹⁶⁶

No effective collective bargaining took place over the introduction of the Talent Pool – either at the formal or informal level. There was, for example, no buy-out of existing contractual clauses for staff included in the Talent Pool. Despite the lauded transparency and equity of the centralised skills database, which regulated the new internal labour market, those with the greatest flexibility had the least valuable and least specialised skills. Even the staunchest managerial supporter of the Talent Pool offered only the most highly qualified praise;

They get greater skills, their contracts may be lengthened and some of them enjoy it. If you were to ask some of the people who have come into the BBC since the Talent Pool was established they will think it is a reasonably good thing. But I do not think we are totally there yet.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁶ Interview with Senior Production manager, 6.8.

¹⁶⁷ Interview with Senior Production manager, 6.8.

There was a significant divergence between some of the rhetoric employed by Production managers in an attempt to explain the implementation of the Talent Pool, and the views expressed by certain senior BBC policy managers. Managers on the ground were at pains to suggest that the Talent Pool was structured so that all production employees were given an opportunity to move across different departmental boundaries and to develop their expertise. However, one senior policy manager suggested a more sinister perspective;

*We have created the Talent Pool in order to establish why there are problems with certain individuals, why certain people are not used. Is it, for instance, a problem with perception or does it run deeper? Is it a social thing, or are people chosen purely on the basis of ability? We want to know who is popular and who are the miserable, the difficult ones.*¹⁶⁸

For part-time and contract staff seeking work it appeared that networking (i.e. in contrast to conventional methods) was only a realistic possibility for certain production staff operating at a relatively high level of desirability. Indeed, few producers could decide not to engage Production employees – even though many would have preferred to work with a small core of experienced staff chosen from the freelance market. With the utilization of staff within the Production directorate running at between 35 and 40 per cent it was not surprising that managers were keen to encourage external producers (working on programmes commissioned by Broadcast) to employ Production staff. Concerns were expressed (particularly from the position of those managing Resources) that any further erosion of the base of programming using technical resources supplied by Resources would have a detrimental effect on the Corporation as a whole. Comparisons were made, unfavourably, with UK commercial television;

*The BBC is in danger of going the Scottish Television route because Resources and Production are getting further away from each other and looking at each other, as they have to, as customer and supplier.*¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Interview with Senior Production manager, 6.8.

¹⁶⁹ Interview with Resources manager, 6.7.

The procedure for the measurement of performance within the Production directorate did not appear to vary from the senior creative individual to the most junior of researcher – output being the common link. It was clear that junior staff were expected to be highly flexible in their approach to the work environment while senior creative employees were given significant opportunities to develop ideas and programme suggestion. Those opportunities were simply not open or available to most Production employees. One can readily conclude as to the reason why external producers decided not to use internal Production employees when completing BBC commissions in-house;

During the commissioning cycle we get notification of the fact that we get a commission in week one and they expect delivery of it in week eight and in that period of time the producer needs somebody who can deliver.¹⁷⁰

The implication appears to be quite clear – external producers felt they could work quicker and more profitably by cultivating their own small team of experienced co-workers. Production managers could attempt to cajole independent producers into employing internal Production staff but for many external producers the use of internal staff was considered to be something that was done only as a last resort. Born provided a further interesting explanation for the reluctance on the part of some elite independents to use BBC Production personnel – suggesting that the standardised nature of many programming ideas (where programme ideas were fixed on to both Resources and Production templates) had resulted in a stultifying uniformity of contemporary programming (Born, 2004:311). To suggest, however, that the independent sector was a bastion of freewheeling programming expression in which creativity was given the opportunity to develop unhindered was an unrealistic and inaccurate description of the independent sector. It was not unrealistic to expect that Production managers would seek to maximize the output of its directorate employees, and to manage levels of downtime – the argument that such a strategy would damage the creative process of television production remained unproven.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Production manager, 6.9.

The commissioning process within BBC Scotland and organized under the directorate Broadcast played a crucial role in the actual performance of Production. Their corporate decisions about the type of programmes which got made and which production company made them (i.e. internal Production or external companies) were vital to the success (or failure) of the project of Producer Choice. Decisions were made on the joint basis of cost and quality but one should not minimize the importance which the Broadcast directorate attached to supporting Production.

Conclusion.

The basic infrastructure of Producer Choice and the Directorates (which distinguished client and provider) – in conjunction with accounting systems to track transactions costs and contracts – were successfully put in place within BBC Scotland. However there remained a significant gap between the market ideology of Producer Choice and the BBCs organisational capability to accurately monitor contracts and allocate resources. Within this gap lay the informal negotiation of resources allocation and the social networks which tied BBC staff to independent contractors. Neither market nor bureaucratic relations (both policed by G51) fully exhausted the process of negotiation. The fact was that employees constituting the Talent Pool were exposed to both sets of processes – formal and informal, both market and network. The process was triggered and dominated by programme makers and commissioners and to this extent, at least, Producer Choice became a reality within the BBC. This was tempered by the Corporation's need to maximise utilization of its internal resources while not destroying their intrinsic qualities. In the document 'Extending Choice', the Corporation contended that it would continue to focus on 'developing services of distinction and quality, rather than on attracting a large audience for its own sake' (BBC, 1993:84). Cotemporal with the commitment to maintain programming quality was an increased role for markets within the Corporation.

The role of G51 was the embodiment of such a marketization. It established and tracked contracts with external providers nominated by the programme maker and negotiated the extent to which producers drew on the BBC's Resources directorate. Resources managers engaged in negotiating on behalf of their staff in an attempt to

ensure that in-house and independent producers used BBC technicians. In theory no producer was obliged to use any of the BBC's technical staff. In practice, the unwritten rule was that only elite producers might insist on a contract technician in preference to a BBC nominee. Freedom to use external technical staff was extended only to independent producers making an unusual programme or those with an exceptional reputation. For workaday productions it was a fact that independent and BBC producers largely accepted and utilized BBC technical staff. Only the most experienced producers had the reputation, personal experience and standing to permit even a limited degree of choice. The choice (insofar as there was any real choice) between internal staff and external contractors was also contingent on work volume – during peak periods bringing in outside contractors was, obviously, a much less contentious issue.

Most programming required simple technical ability and which all resource suppliers – including BBC Resources and private sector firms – could provide. Price and quality were largely homogeneous throughout the industry for a range of standard services and, consequently, competition amongst resource suppliers was at the margins. A senior Resources manager endorsed this view;

I say to staff, you are doing really well on craft skills, but that is a given. If we are going to have any edge because of competitiveness we are going to have to bring something new to the task. Staff don't like the term 'customer service' because they say, 'we give great service'. They do, but they don't always charge for it.¹⁷¹

Within the Production directorate a barometer of change was the introduction of the Talent Pool directive and which instituted a market led attitude to the deployment of staff as a whole. Broadcasters required substantial internal staffing levels for large - scale investigative or complex drama programming. The managerial rationale for the Talent Pool was the desire to combine the aesthetic qualities of BBC productions with a managerial attraction to the fat-free strategies of independent production companies. However neither market, hierarchy or network governance systems were subject to effective collective regulation. The formal system of collective bargaining remained

¹⁷¹ Interview with Resources manager, 6.5.

largely intact at the corporate level but there was no effective formal bargaining at studio floor level. BECTU primarily negotiated with management teams assembled to deal with a specific issue and agreements were then passed to the directorate and line management. Just as the directorate did not have the decisive voice in collective bargaining, neither did production managers engage in local negotiations with BECTU lay officials. On the studio floor, BECTU shop stewards saw production management routinely side-stepping negotiated settlements over task or crewing, Changes in job title or job design were normally proposed by management as being voluntary but, in practice, neither individuals nor BECTU stewards had any real possibility to resist such offers - the choice was 'take it or leave it'.

Chapter 7.
Networking and the Independent Television Production Sector
in the United Kingdom
1982-2000.

Introduction.

I don't know who it was who coined the phrase 'independent producer' but it is a ludicrous way to describe what we do. Firstly, we are no more independent than a tick burying its head in a gorilla's arse. Basically, you go where it goes (Agran, 2003:7).

Employment patterns in the labour market within the broadcasting industry received increasing attention as a potential barometer of future trends in the organization of employment (Baumann, 2002). Industrial restructuring within the UK economy in the period since 1979 contributed to a series of substantial changes in the organization of television programme production and the labour process of broadcasting workers. New broadcasting technologies led to significant changes in media production techniques and practices and, most notably, to smaller crews and simplified post-production activities (Hazelkorn, 2001). As seen in the previous three case studies – a comprehensive restructuring of the television production environment occurred in the 1980s and 1990s. The development of the independent production sector within the UK brought these very substantial organizational changes into sharp focus.

Before the opening of Channel 4 in 1982, the UK broadcasting industry was vertically integrated with two main broadcasters and ITV and the BBC produced, financed, broadcast and marketed the majority of television programming (Willis & Dex, 2003:124). Employment in the UK television industry was available only in a very limited number of production companies and most of these were within a vertically integrated broadcaster structure (Paterson, 2001:204). The transformation of the market for television programmes in the period after the election of the Conservative government in 1979 – in particular through the legislative support for a fourth channel – contributed to an enlarged demand for programming outwith the two vertically

integrated producer broadcasters. There was a clear determination from the newly elected Conservative administration that the domination of the commercial broadcasting industry by ITV should not be replicated with the fourth channel (*The Listener*, 1979:23).

The political and economic context of the UK broadcasting industry and the legislative consequences upon the structure of the industry throughout the 1980s and 1990s were considered in Chapter 3. In short, a succession of government broadcasting policies had, over time, helped to shape and direct expansion in the provision of programming and technologies (Franklin, 2001). Many of the institutional and regulatory changes which impacted upon the UK broadcasting industry were justified on the grounds of extending market or market-like relations to the Fordist television economy (Deakin & Pratten, 2000:321). The critical piece of legislation which broke apart the rigidity of the television industry was the inclusion in the Broadcasting Act, 1990 of a requirement that the major terrestrial broadcasters purchase 25 per cent of their programming from the emergent independent production sector. This element of the 1990 legislation was critical – not just for the independent sector, but for the industry as a whole. An empirical examination can usefully be undertaken of this shift in the supremacy of programme production where power appeared to rest with a host of new entrepreneurial programme makers and small, loosely linked networks of television professionals. The thrust of government policy, expressed both through the quota system for independent productions and the auction of ITV franchises, broadly adopted the ‘flexible specialisation thesis’ – the term given to efforts that sought;

To convert the traditional highly integrated corporate structure into a more supple organizational form capable of responding quickly to shifting market conditions and product demand (Piore, 1986:146).

The government’s regulatory programme sought to increase competition, intensify pressure on costs and remove the certainty with which broadcasters had previously been able to plan programme production (Saundry, 1998). The flexibility offensive was wide-ranging and directed not just at the rigidities of the work rules of television production – e.g. fixed numbers of workers on location filming. Flexibility required a

complete reworking of the industry's internal and external boundaries and which included employment contracts and the labour process (Guest, 1987). One of the most revealing aspects of the shift to flexibility within the UK broadcasting industry in the period after the Broadcasting Act, 1990 was the emergence of significant numbers of Producer Owners who produced and sold programming to broadcasters from within their own structures, i.e. privately owned companies. For, as will be seen later, these producers had taken over many of the key functions within British television traditionally performed by the terrestrial broadcasters themselves. Flexibility manifested itself in a number of ways and the end of the closed shop contributed to a huge rise in the number of people seeking work within the industry. Entry to the industry was controlled prior to the 1980s and most available posts were, what might be termed, staff jobs. The emergence of many new independent production companies (IPCs) led to a huge increase in the number of inexperienced entrants content to work within the freelance industry (Paterson, 2001:203). This change alone contributed to a period of real uncertainty and reorganization within the industry.

It is important to consider how two distinct groups of individuals endeavoured to manage the impact of industrial restructuring upon their respective careers within the independent production sector. The fashion for referring to the period after the Broadcasting Act, 1990 as one where flexibility reigned supreme does not shed light on how the industry emerged from its regulated past. The emergence of individualization within the independent production sector will be examined by detailing the experiences of two different groups of broadcasting workers. The first group, termed Producer Owners, were self-styled cultural entrepreneurs encouraged by the legislative requirement for a quota of independently produced programming and who set up or expanded their production companies. The second group, designated Broadcasting Professionals, were largely freelance workers who sought employment on a contract basis from both established terrestrial broadcasters and the group of Producer Owners. In order to avoid glib assertions of occupational flexibility and organizational deregulation, it is important to trace the development of careers outwith the confines of the two main established broadcasters. The highly regulated nature of work and employment within both the BBC and the ITV Networks can be contrasted with the nature of work within independent production units. However, to simply contend that the regulated nature of work within terrestrial broadcasters was

replaced by a system whereby Broadcast Professionals/Producer Owners offered their technical and production services on a one-to-one basis without interference from any third party, is overly simplistic. This Chapter will conclude that regulation of work (previously a lifelong career within the terrestrial broadcasting system) was latterly provided by the existence of networks amongst groups of Broadcasting Professionals and Producer Owners. The central link between the two groups was the employment of a strategy of networking – by Producer Owners so as to procure commissions from broadcasters, and by Broadcasting Professionals seeking employment from Producer Owners. While it clear that LPT output is well stocked with a series ‘point-of-production’ studies of the workplace (see, *inter alia*, Reed, 1992), LPT has tended to ignore the activities of networking, one may go further and state that LPT has discounted, by and large, other kinds of work. As networking activities are essentially invisible forms of labour they have been ignored by many LPT theorists, thus much of the literature pertaining to networking comes outwith the LPT body of work. The further difficulty for LPT studies of networking processes is that networking is, if one is to be entirely accurate, outside the employment relationship as traditionally understood. However, it is because that networking practices are largely invisible that make them an attractive sources of study in an industry which demands very individualistic forms of labour process by both Producer Owners and Broadcast Professionals.

An examination of the available theoretical contributions to the area of networking was undertaken in Chapter 1 in order to provide a theoretical framework for the notion that the move to deregulation simply resulted in a completely individualized employment relationship for both Broadcast Professionals and Producer Owners. A number of questions now arise. Were broadcasting networks always open, dynamic and inclusive? How were networks constituted, sustained and altered? Did an acceptance of the role for networks (within the independent production sector) mean that broadcasting employees might enjoy a return to collective representation? In addressing these questions this Chapter is divided into three parts. 7.1 will trace the shift from a regulated TV production environment (in which programming production was almost exclusively the preserve of the two terrestrial networks) to where a plethora of small, medium and large scale IPCs sought to service the programming needs of all broadcasters. 7.2 will address the organizational realities of the IPC sector

from the 1990s onwards and, in particular, with how relationships or networks were constructed and operated in respect of the group of Producer Owners. Finally, an examination will be undertaken (7.3) of the role which networks played in providing essential access to employment opportunities for production/research/ and technical resource personnel (i.e. the group of workers previously described as Broadcast Professionals).

Within 1.5 (Chapter 1) networks were identified by media workers as a method of keeping up-to-date with industry information. Two essential phenomena now characterize the contemporary UK independent television labour market – workers organize and maintain their own personal labour market, while large numbers of those employed within the freelance production market operate within a very limited employment relationship (Ursell, 2000). Individuals who formed their own television production companies carved out a very significant market in the period since 1990 – but did so by engaging a completely different business model. Critically, the core groups of independent production companies (IPCs) in Scotland, who granted interviews, were at pains to disassociate themselves from any suggestion that the industry was dominated by any type of cosy relationship between the IPCs and the commissioning departments. One former employee of both BBC Scotland and STV offered the following view;

*I worked for the BBC for 10 years and also STV, I was well known and trusted and if at that time I had set up an independent production company I would have been running straight back to the controller and commissioning editors who I was very friendly with...so I could have done very nicely thank you, I would have brought a really nice team around me and its quite an interesting relationship, don't you think?*¹⁷²

¹⁷² Interview with independent producer 7.3.

7.1

The Move to open up the Regulated TV Market for Programming.

*If you didn't work for the BBC or ITV in whatever guise you simply didn't make television programmes – period.*¹⁷³

In describing the operation of the television production market in the period up until the mid 1980s – the senior IPC manager quoted above noted the difficult environment which existed for those outside the core production facilities of the BBC and ITV. The structure of programme making had been institutionalised within the two competing public service broadcasters and there were few opportunities for external programme makers to access the commissioning editors of BBC and ITV. Despite a loosening of the grip on the levers of commissioning within the BBC and ITV – through, *inter alia*, the emergence of competing new satellite, cable and digital channels – the opportunity to achieve significant commissions for those outside a few prominent IPCs remained very limited. Broadcasting Professionals were often forced to use networks in seeking employment opportunities and some Producer Owners viewed the proposed new channel (Channel 4) as an opportunity to challenge the hegemony of the BBC and ITV. The new channel would also be seen as providing a conduit which could give power and influence to individual programme makers or, at the very least, the opportunity to carve out a successful television career.

The independent sector began tentatively in the early 1970s due, in part, to an expanding market outside the UK. A growth in demand for industrial and commercial training videos and a clamour (not from viewers) for a substantially increased numbers of advertisements (due to the rise in the number of programming hours broadcast on ITV) had a very positive effect on growth within the sector. Channel 4 commissioned over 50 per cent of its first year transmissions from independent producers (Dex, *et al*, 2000:3). The view, which became almost immediately

¹⁷³ Interview with independent producer 7.6.

fashionable, that independents were a source of significantly cheaper productions – was given some support by the 1988 White Paper, *Broadcasting in the '90s: Competition, Choice and Quality*. This document noted that;

Independent producers constitute an important source of originality and talent which must be exploited and have brought new pressures for efficiency and flexibility in production procedures (1988:Cm 517).

As mentioned previously, the rise of the independent sector in the UK can be partly attributed to the development of new, lighter, more compact and sophisticated technology. There is also merit in the suggestion that independent Producer Managers sought freedom from the restrictions of expensive traditional broadcasters in order to produce more cost effective programming (Crissell, 1997:208). Although the desire to break free of the restrictions imposed upon traditional programme makers by managers within the BBC and ITV was real and tangible, the new independents were largely concerned with exploiting their newfound freedom to negotiate contracts and terms for themselves. Creative freedom, in terms of the ability to devise and structure the content of programming, was not a primary consideration for many in the rush to secure commissions. The chance to structure and edit a programme from start to finish would, ultimately, become less important to many nascent independent programme makers as they grappled with the realities of the private sector production market. Most were more than willing to accommodate the commissioning department's demands in order to maintain or develop a relationship with a broadcaster. Those who were not willing to accede to the demands of the commissioning editors were unlikely to be included in the small band of trusted companies receiving regular and repeat commissions. This was not a relationship of equals but, rather, for all but a small number of favoured IPCs, one in which networking skills were not an indulgent exercise, but an everyday and essential business practice.

The relationship between IPCs and commissioning editors was described as one involving a long-term network or contracting relationship between independent parties (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994). The longevity and depth of those relationships are examined later and it will be seen that networks were critical to the success of the independent sector – in at least two fundamental ways. Firstly, they (networks)

contributed to a narrowing of the marketplace and acted as controlling agents for those seeking entry to the programming market. Secondly, networks acted as a regulating mechanism on the labour market for television workers, while simultaneously encouraging and supporting broadcast professionals in their search for employment or information about possible future contracts. Networks which met regularly (or exchanged information through electronic form) and communicated effectively could build trust and allow for informal information exchange – the literature is quite adamant in this regard (see, Ahuja, 2000). The potential for the creation of evolutionary policy formation existed or, at a minimum, moved to reduce the risk of conflict between different jurisdictions [in this case, between IPCs and Broadcast Professionals and commissioning editors (Maher, 2000:117)].

Membership of a network was, and remains, critical for those whose livelihoods depend upon employment within the independent production sector. Informal networks – particularly for Broadcasting Professionals – can be viewed with a degree of scepticism because of an inherent inability to facilitate or guarantee regular employment or to impact in any meaningful way regarding the manner in which labour is employed. However, in the absence of direct influence in the regulation of the labour market for television workers by workers themselves, (except for a small number of sought after freelance workers), loose networks of skilled Broadcasting Professionals can influence the regulation of pay and conditions of employment. The culture of the network is critical and can provide a way of regulating the organization (for Producer Owners) and labour process (for Broadcasting Professionals). Informal networks can influence which ideas (i.e. labour regulation) are ‘in’ or ‘out’ and provide both an opportunity and a constraint for the various actors (Marsh & Smith, 2000). The informality of worker/entrepreneur networks is always driven by a desire for the next contract. Thus, the process of networking itself comes a distant second to the fundamental concern of attaining commissions. As will be detailed, it is difficult to imagine, for example, direct competitors for commissions or particular job vacancies sharing sensitive information about specific work opportunities.

For the group of cultural entrepreneurs, the Producer Owners, who made up a substantial proportion of the independent production sector (either in terms of a loose relationship with other Producer Owners or commissioning editors) networking was a

pre-condition for success in the UK broadcasting industry. Those outside such networks could struggle and were often embittered at their lack of access and increasing marginalization and, on occasion, very quick to blame a nascent ‘old boys culture’ for failure to receive commissions. Some of the larger companies who came to dominate the industry in the period after 1990, complained that smaller firms believed, somehow, that they had a right to be given commissions. The larger IPCs suggested that this was a perverse form of free marketism where the new independent production marketplace was only considered a fair and equitable system by smaller IPCs if broadcasters commissioned a significant number of all programmes pitched by the independents. Medium and large companies were particularly critical of what was described as ‘a level of inexplicable arrogance’ displayed by some of the smaller firms. Despite the unenviable position of being poorly financed, small IPCs regularly attempted to compete with larger and well-funded firms. Small IPCs believed that one successful programme or series would give them the opportunity to expand quickly. The corollary was that work which was unpopular with commissioners (perhaps for reasons of cost or failure to keep to the editorial brief) could irrevocably damage a company’s reputation. At the beginning of the boom in independent productions, after the Broadcasting Act, 1990, small firms were idealistic and strove to produce serious, important or challenging programming which would provide a bulwark against the rising tide of cheap and frivolous television. A senior IPC owner/manager in Scotland spoke damningly of the arrogant views and business practices of some independents;

It’s a funny sort of capitalism when the commissioning editors says... what we want is eight part comedy dramas and then the production companies say what you really need is factual programmes. So the market mechanism is completely out of kilter... your bread and butter has to be what the market wants... the Scottish independent industry complains when it doesn’t get commissions... it’s absolutely laughable.¹⁷⁴

The activities of what owner managers of large IPCs referred to as ‘lifestylers’, i.e. people attracted to the industry because of the perception that it can deliver an exciting working environment are reflected above, but the industry did begin to attract

¹⁷⁴ Interview with independent producer 7.3.

significant numbers of highly motivated and professional entrepreneurs who entered the industry simply to make profit. While creative motivations were given by many Producer Owners as an important reason for entering the industry, the economic realities of a difficult trading environment had begun to harden already disciplined attitudes;

I've long since stopped worrying about having my name attached to a great piece of investigative documentary, I simply don't care what I make as long as it makes money.

The individuals who left the employment of mainstream television in the 1990s to pursue an entrepreneurial career within the independent sector did so for three main reasons. Firstly, they left before they were made redundant by the restructuring of the UK television industry during the early 1990s and, consequently, the idea of forming an independent company was born of necessity. Secondly, they left by choice and were anxious to operate independently because they saw the opportunities which the new market offered in the period after the Broadcasting Act, 1990. Thirdly, they left the employment of the BBC and ITV because they were disillusioned with the market driven environment within the mainstream broadcasting industry. They felt that they were unable to dedicate themselves to aesthetic concerns and found that their identities as purely programme makers were being eroded.

If broadcasters were hubs of the cultural economy, then independent producers became the entrepreneurs who sought opportunities from them. The very existence of such firms altered the expectations of workers within the cultural economy. While life within these organizations was 'not nirvana' and was a constant search for the next commission, it provided choice, autonomy and satisfaction for the two categories of independent entrepreneurs. Independent production was about much more than just a new source of television programmes and it appealed to a new ethos in broadcasting (Robins & Cornford, 1992). It has been suggested that independent production was to be the third force in broadcasting – one which would bring with it new forms of expression along with gains in quality and creativity (Robins & Cornford, 1992:191). The suggestion was further made that TV production was being increasingly undertaken by networks of agents (i.e. skilled artists and technicians) and not by the

rigid bureaucratic corporations of the 1970s and 1980s (Barnatt & Starkey, 1994:253). The broadcast commissioners were the axis of this new arrangement and were determined to retain their dominant position – denying attempts to pigeonhole them as cruel and domineering individuals who sought to extract every conceivable ounce of cheap programming flesh from a weak and compliant independent sector. During interviews with a selection of small IPCs, it emerged that they believed that only a favoured few of their number were granted access to the hugely important informal networks and contacts which formed the relationship between broadcaster and independent. As noted previously, some small IPCs suggested that access should be structured in a more formal and democratic manner and this can be interpreted clearly as resentment at being excluded from particular networks. What is very clear is that at the beginning of a small IPCs working life, informal networking arrangements play a very important part in finding jobs or commissions within the production industry (Blair, 1999).

The importance of informal networking as a method of gaining access became clearer as the industry began to develop during the mid 1990s. Only a small number of IPCs had a track record of delivering the required programming within budget and on time. Most IPC managers recognized as far back as the early 1990s that very few commissioning editors would be willing to risk engaging an unknown and untried company to produce peak time programming. Small companies were thus given an opportunity to provide programming at the margins of scheduling and late night or very early morning slots were made available. This should not be seen as some sort of benevolent act on the part of commissioners – because to allow relatively insignificant organizations produce their best work as a form of advertisement for their programming abilities gave broadcasters access to cheap and, often, below cost product. One small Glasgow based independent producer spoke of a certain weariness with the competitive business environment in Scotland;

To be honest, with the fight on all sides for ratings and with the pressure to cut costs, it is a fact that few if any commissioning editors are likely to risk their record, and perhaps even their jobs, by choosing new talent over the same old faces. At this point,

*few if any genuine 'indies' have the resources to survive long enough to establish a sufficiently reassuring record for commissioning editors.*¹⁷⁵

If the continued existence of many small independent companies in the UK was dependent upon a significant amount of self-funding of programme ideas (and sometimes of the programmes themselves) then there could have been little room for optimism about the future sustainability of small and truly independent companies. The constant refrain from sole trader IPCs was that they were seen as exploitable individuals who lived at the bottom of the production chain with little chance of evolving into more substantial firms. From a point at the beginning of the 1980s where there were only a handful of IPCs, to the early part of the new century – the owner/manager of one of Scotland's premier IPCs could say of the market place which evolved;

*There are too many companies in the UK now. It's too fractured and they are mostly too small. Interestingly the companies are also far too hostile to each other...one company said about us ...[they] could put s**t in an envelope and it would get commissioned. Why do they think like that? If someone says we will take another 25 per cent of the company and it will take you into a whole new arena I would say great...the problem is our competitors don't like sharing but we think it's important.*¹⁷⁶

Some IPCs operated at the very margins of the industry and survived on as little as one commission per year, and sometimes less. These individuals came to be understood as life-stylers, i.e. people who enjoy the fragmented, short-term employment structure of their working lives. The corollary of those firms were the larger, well-resourced and highly professional independents dedicated to securing funding to allow themselves to grow their firms in order to compete internationally. The following Section will trace the growth of IPC's in the period since 1990.

¹⁷⁵ Interview with independent producer 7.5.

¹⁷⁶ Interview with independent producer 7.2.

7.2.

1990 – The Year of the Independents and the Development of Networking for Producer Owners.

I would feel sorry for anyone starting up a company now. I think it's interesting that when we started up, 'X' also started up ...I don't know of any companies in Scotland which have started up in the last five years.¹⁷⁷

The independent production sector led the way in terms of an attack on traditionally established rules of labour process within the television industry. As will be detailed later, these very significant onslaughts on work rules and were undertaken, for the most part, by the cultural entrepreneurs of the new television economy – the Producer Owners – and to a lesser degree by the skilled creative and technical resource workers who helped produce the independent programming, i.e. Broadcast Professionals. Thus any reading of the new broadcast economy as being one in which a generation of producers/directors/resource personnel were forced outside the mainstream or established terrestrial broadcasters is, at best, a very partial view of the history of the UK industry. Many of the Broadcast Professionals and Producer Owners were made redundant from the terrestrial broadcasters in the 1980s and 90s – however others choose to leave of their own accord (Paterson, 1993).

It is a fact that the broadcasting industries' workforce moved from a position where almost all professionals worked within the two established broadcasters, to a situation where 25 per cent of current industry employees are now freelance (Skillset, 2004). To argue, however, that all of these employees were forced out of the established mainstream ignores the very strong evidence available which suggests that a significant number choose to escape what, they perceived to be, the straightjacketing effect on creative endeavour. By 'creative endeavour' IPC owner/managers meant not just to the output of the established broadcasters, but also the way in which programming was produced – including the process of organizing and hiring labour. The growth of new flexible working practices and flexible organizations gave rise to a

¹⁷⁷ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

number of theoretical attempts to explain such change (Antcliff, *etal*, 2005a:6). As previously stated, networking was the single most significant process undertaken by Producer Owners in their search for programming commissions. What is less clear, however, is how this form of networking operated at firm level.

As noted in Chapter 1 (1.5.), networks play a fundamental role in the determination of how information is exchanged. The actual information exchanged may be quite simple and it may initially appear unimportant to the recipient. Conversely, it may be as important as specific and current information about job opportunities for television workers (Boorman, 1975). In terms of networking strategies for Producer Owners, it is clear that the successful development of a new entrepreneurial venture is dependent upon the accurate deployment of a network strategy. At the beginning of the life cycle of an IPC, (when funds are invariably in short supply), the employment of networking is critical in order to keep costs at a minimum. An effective network strategy can make the difference between short-term failure and success for the nascent IPC (Saxenian, 1991:424). However, the theory of between-firms networking within the IPC sector requires empirical research as there is little evidence of sharing of sensitive programming information with other firms. While the concept of ‘industrial clusters’ gives some support to the view that there is sharing of industry information within a small geographical area, there was little evidence available from interviews undertaken, that such inter-firm activity was other than superficial. Castells, (2000) also explored inter-firm networks or what he termed ‘communications based capitalism’ – the move from individual firms to business projects based around transitory networks, or alliances/partnerships.

Cultural entrepreneurs’ networks are primarily about searching for the next commission or keeping in communication with a loose band of trusted technicians so that that they will be contactable when required. Access to the commissioning process itself is complex, and to get to a position where one is formally rejected for a commission can, in itself, be considered an achievement. Access to the basic process of making comprehensive submissions to the broadcasters’ commissioning departments demanded considerable skills which the experienced practitioner could more readily deploy than the inexperienced newcomer (Cottle, 1997). Commissioners wanted to be able to hand over responsibility for programme production in its entirety

to IPCs and programme makers who were deemed troublesome and requiring constant management were universally unpopular.

From the initial explosion in the number of IPCs in the period after 1990, there was little evidence of any emotional investment in terms of relationships being formed between individual IPCs. Well-connected individuals and larger well funded firms were conscious of the need to maintain and develop those relationships while small firms, and those without access to social networks, remained on the margins of the industry. A small IPC owner/manager spoke of his cynicism about the role of Channel 4 – historically the largest purchaser of independent programming in the period since 1990;

*The broadcasters, including the supposedly ‘indie’ friendly C4, stick to the same short-lists [of IPCs] for serious funding and continue to offer chump change to the rest. They manage to offer insufficient funds to actually pay for projects whilst demanding all the rights. Your average ‘indie’ can’t afford a full-time legal rep, and can’t afford to go back time after time to clear new contract details.*¹⁷⁸

The main types of programming produced by independent producers may be split (for both simplicity and accuracy) into three categories. Low cost programmes which are produced for approximately GBP 10,000 to GBP 20,000 per slot, mid range programmes which cost on average GBP 120,000 (and where a substantial number of the Scottish firms interviewed derive their profits) and high end documentaries where costs begin at GBP 200,000 – these latter were of minimal importance to many of the firms interviewed. Producer Owners were fully aware of the implications of any cost overruns and there were very few opportunities to hide any financial miscalculations within the budget for an average production. For most Scottish IPCs, strict adherence to cost control was the most important tool commissioning departments employed in regulating the production of programming. One senior IPC owner said;

We know what we are doing. We have a lot of experience and I have a good team here and some of them have been with us for a number of years. But I’m under no illusion

¹⁷⁸ Interview with independent producer 7.5.

*[that] we are rigorously audited and they [the broadcasters] are acutely aware of how much these sorts of programmes cost so we can't in any sense pull the wool over their eyes.*¹⁷⁹

At costs running in the order of GBP 120,000 per hour, producers freely acknowledged that technically superior programming could only be produced profitably by using all their creative organizational and craft knowledge. A producer's ability to win commissions and to deliver the finished product on time and at, or below, budget depended on a mix of track record and personal contacts with experienced production and technical personnel (Saundry, 1998:156). The relationship between commissioner and IPC is almost universally without depth and commitment – with the exception of the very specific relationship enjoyed by the large and regularly employed IPC. The buyer/supplier relationship within the UK television industry was, and remains, characterized by an almost total dependence on the handful of large broadcasting corporations, with Channel 4 relying on approximately 30 major programme suppliers for in excess of 70 per cent of their output (Saundry, 1998:157). Thus, close relationships or networks between core IPC and commissioners reduce costs for broadcasters by externalising in-house production processes and guaranteeing minimum quality levels. IPCs are often given an implicit promise of repeat contracts upon reaching and maintaining a high quality threshold of production (Starkey, 2000:299). With the relatively limited number of outlets for their medium sector product IPCs depend upon networking in order to remain in the information loop.

As indicated, for the new and burgeoning IPCs the issue of costs was at the forefront of a strategy designed to carve out a role within the broadcasting marketplace. While IPCs were keen to articulate their commitment to the quality of programming, a constant refrain was that comparisons between themselves and the BBC and ITV resulted in programming which was cheaper to produce and, at least, as technically competent as that produced by the big two broadcasters. Despite claims of programme quality, Producer Owners acknowledged that the commissioning departments of both

¹⁷⁹ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

BBC and ITV devised very tight budgets for programme producers which allowed very little room for cost overruns;

*We do a number of series which are in their third and fourth series. You might think that by the time a programme gets to that level you would have worked out how to do it...you would have cut down all the experimental stuff...all the mistakes you make, you ought to make a big profit, but you can't.*¹⁸⁰

Some IPCs attempted to overcome the difficulties of low budgets and commissioners' high quality expectations by deciding to specialize in a particular genre of programming. This coincided with the abandoning of specific departments within some of the ITV franchises. STV, for example, closed down its religious programming department in the late 1990s and transferred almost all of its production requirements in this field to a large Glasgow based IPC. For many of the successful IPCs the starting point of their business plan was the view that the two terrestrial broadcasters (and the BBC in particular) were responsible for significant wastage in terms of numbers of skilled professionals employed and technical resources used. Repeat commissions from broadcasters, and the comfort for IPCs which came from having a block of programming work each year, provided some financial stability in an industry which had, by the mid 1990s, become increasingly cost based.

[Independent TV production is].. not very attractive – the margins are low and terms are dictated by the broadcasters (Guardian, 2000, August, 8:9).

Employment structure in the IPCs in the period up until the mid 1980s had provided an organizational template – this being, in essence, a skeleton workforce supplemented by flexible part-time staff. While the terrestrial broadcasters may have looked with envy at the cost base of production within the independent sector, the high fixed costs which the 'big two' broadcasters carried meant that competition on cost-based terms alone would never favour the established broadcasters.

Independents, it was suggested offered a unique opportunity to ITV companies, in particular, to pass the effects of cyclical advertising revenue down the line to

¹⁸⁰ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

production companies (Sparks, 1994:147). The suggestion put to one medium sized Scottish IPC was that in order to offer cheaper programming, per-hour salary costs should be cut and labour subjected to intensive measurement of performance. This proposition was firmly rebutted by the owner of the company who said;

*Our people are well paid but I expect results for that...people in here can come in when they want as long as they do what they have to ...nobody who has left [company X] has left voluntarily...people who have left have done so because I have moved them on, they have not performed.*¹⁸¹

Some Producer Owners interviewed were content to acknowledge that an ultra-flexible approach existed in relation to staffing issues. Significant demands made on Broadcast Professionals were conveniently hidden within references to a spontaneous working culture and which did away with unnecessary regulation – e.g. the length of the working day for contract staff. Producer Owners praised their working environment with its almost universally young workforce, contrasting it with the over regulated terrestrial broadcasting arena;

*It's a young workforce...which is beneficial in one sense...but it means that people cannot plan for the future, it's not all great. We have a core staff of nine but up to about thirty freelances.*¹⁸².

In a very explicit condemnation of the regulation of labour which preceded the Broadcasting Act, 1990 two Glasgow based Producer Owners were scathing in their comments on the suggestion that freelance Broadcast Professionals (including senior producer directors) could be active members of a trade union. They strongly defended the casual nature of employment within the IPC sector while simultaneously praising the individualistic nature of work within the industry. In contrast to the apparent disregard for ongoing collective networking activities by Broadcast Professionals, some Producer Owners were engaged in a process of deliberately ignoring the reality of fresh attempts by Broadcast Professionals to control their labour process. While

¹⁸¹ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

¹⁸² Interview with independent production company owner 7.6.

labour process theory produced a range of important ideas concerning the nature of management-labour relationships under capitalism, the fundamental tenet of the theory is a belief in the inevitability of conflicts of interest between management and labour (Brown, 1992). Contrary to the view expressed by Producer Owners – that the relationship between Broadcast Professionals and themselves bypasses conflict – Producer Owners defined the concept of flexibility as a process which provided few benefits to Broadcast Professionals;

None of the workers here are members of trade unions, I think they would consider it anachronistic, it's incredibly casual...the average wage of a producer is thirty thousand pounds. I was in the ACTT, which it was called then, I felt it was terribly anachronistic. There were all these things that I couldn't do and when it gets down to the people who work in this industry [they] don't think of themselves as working in a big group or sector. They [Broadcast Professionals] think of themselves as individuals.¹⁸³

Despite the rhetoric of networking, the theme of individualism ran through many of the responses given by owners of the larger IPCs. The view expressed above by two Producer Owners, that many Broadcast Professionals considered themselves part of a 'network of one', was revealing. As will be shown in the following Section, networking was, and is, a critical part of the daily working lives of many Broadcast Professionals. Whereas on the studio floor – within the old regulated environment of ITV – managerial authority was largely a blend of skill and adherence to craft, the deregulated environs of a late 1990s independent production company offered no such comforts. The development of the collective organization of which Seglow (1978) speaks, (Chapter 1, 1.5), was replaced by a requirement to use networking as the only respite against rigorous cost cutting and output measurement by IPC management.

Any networking undertaken by Producer Owners was on very particular terms which sought to maintain relationships formed with commissioners, together with a sharing of contextual industry information with small groups of peer firms. This kind of networking emerged as a development of personal or friendship networks which

¹⁸³ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

linked firms through social contacts and were the starting point for social networking. As was noted in 1.5, these networks often had a particular resonance for entrepreneurs (Grandori & Soda, 1995:184). The entrepreneurs of the IPC sector attempted to change the culture of older Broadcast Professionals in order to attune these loose network of freelance broadcast workers to the needs of the entrepreneurial class of IPC owners.

While pressure from broadcasters caused Producer Owners to demand a high degree of cost awareness from Broadcast Professionals, a further reason for good financial housekeeping was the inherent fragility of many of the IPCs themselves – in terms of their financial stability. Gutteridge (1995:7) noted that, even by the mid 1990s, most IPCs were unable to develop their businesses due to a chronic lack of capital. The amateurish employment of what little capital investment was available meant that ‘independent production in this country is nothing more than a cottage industry’ (Gutteridge, 1995:7). Managers and owners of IPCs were further organizationally constrained by the need to maintain a constant throughput of programming proposals with a very limited number of broadcaster outlets. By 1997, 84 per cent of UK IPCs did not produce for more than two channels and many IPCs had moved into the field of genre production, i.e. production of only one type of programming. From the late 1990s a growing contrast is evident between small, poorly funded IPCs and better-financed operators. Larger Producer Owners reserved their harshest criticism – not for the Broadcast Professionals who serviced the IPCs – but, rather, for the groups of small IPCs who permeated the industry. One senior Scottish IPC manager said of the very small companies;

*To be honest they [the smaller companies] aren't going to survive. I'm sorry about that but my sympathy is somewhat limited because it's not like they haven't been told, they have refused to get the message...I have sat through far too many PACT meetings where the reps from Channel 4 have explained that they are not getting the ideas they want. Get real! We work for our access.*¹⁸⁴

¹⁸⁴ Interview with independent producer 7.3.

Most IPCs had, by the late 1990s, institutionalised rigid control over programming budgets for two central reasons. Firstly, because budgets provided by the broadcasters were tightly controlled, and secondly because industry margins were at best an overall 10 to 15 per cent on an annual turnover of between GBP 3million and GBP 5million¹⁸⁵. Creativity and entrepreneurship were essential in sorting out the important issues of cost per task and fitting the appropriate individuals to particular tasks – and not always about originality of programming content. IPCs needed to find new ways of operating which would enable the entrepreneur to delegate responsibility for operational tasks and to focus more on planning the firms' development. Interview responses repeatedly mentioned the need for IPCs to recruit non-creative individuals to manage the daily business needs of the firm;

There is no doubt that we have to start looking beyond our own settled community for people to drive this business on and to make the harsh decisions when and if required. I think [we] are making progress in that direction – but I accept it's slow.

Some of the IPC managers suggested that they needed to become creative with the company itself – however the use of the term 'creativity' appeared to refer to a rigorous and underlying determination to continue to monitor costs while also keeping open the option of selling parts of the business to outside investors. The option of refusing to change the structure of the individual IPC was accepted by most Producer Owners as not being viable. While small or niche operators would remain they would compete in a very specialized segment of the marketplace.

*The future for the very small companies ... the analogy that I used when I wrote the business plan is that you either become Tesco or Sainsbury's, i.e. you become a one stop shop or you become the Italian centre in Glasgow i.e. a niche operator. If you are a specialist you will survive and if you are a superstore you will survive. The analogy, is of course, you could become the Co-Op carrying all of the overheads and none of the glamour!*¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Interview with independent producer 7.3.

¹⁸⁶ Interview with independent producer 7.3.

The cultural entrepreneurs of the IPC sector – i.e. the Producer Owners – may originally have had very individualistic values but they were increasingly required to engage in highly collaborative working practices or networking. As noted in Section 1.5, networking provided increased labour utilization and product improvement (Gemunden, *et al*, 1996). Partnership and team working became very important to business plans, despite the often essentially selfish nature of developing programme ideas. Once a programming idea had been transformed into a programme proposal (and then, perhaps, into a commission) teams of producers, directors and resource personnel could work together and pitch in so that the programme was completed in time and within budget. IPC managers demanded absolute commitment to the production process and employed the language of the team and/or the family when groups of disparate workers combined for a one-off project. The commitment demanded was often accompanied by a vague promise of further employment in the future for the Broadcast Professionals.

As noted previously, the independent production entrepreneurs interviewed were anxious to remain fully focused on developing programme ideas and to maintain a desire to develop the company and secure new investment. IPC managers strongly rejected any suggestion that the organizational structure of their firms simply replicated the structure of the newly slimmed-down terrestrial broadcasters. A recurring theme amongst the larger IPC Producer Owners interviewed was that of taking a back seat in terms of future creative direction and to focus on building the business. A generation of television producers had matured from simply being excited about programming itself to being exercised about the ownership of the rights to what they produced, even if the product was sold to the broadcasters.

We used to concentrate on making all the films and documentaries ourselves. But then we realized we could be creative with the company rather than the product. Instead of pursuing an ambition to be a big director I decided to focus on building the company. We want to be able to develop our own content and own the rights. We want to go

*from supplying a service to owning a product. However that is more complex, risky and time consuming.*¹⁸⁷

The market place for independents in the late 1990s, and in the early part of the new century, reflected these concerns. Three types of independent producers were operating in the UK marketplace – (a), broadcaster/producers – examples of which include Granada, Talkback, Bazal; (b), studio and production village projects (where some of the larger UK independents operated as partly or wholly owned subsidiaries of larger media organizations) and (c), what were previously termed ‘life-stylers’. Ownership of rights to programming – because of the costs involved – had by the early part of this century become a central point of debate amongst regulatory authorities, ITC, the broadcasters and the IPCs themselves. There were significant limits to the potential for growth – for even the largest of Scotland’s IPCs – without access to profits from distribution and ownership of programming.

By 2002, the ITC had reviewed programme supply and had decided to employ the ITV model of ‘terms and trade’ for IPCs. This was in direct contrast with the model employed by Channel 4 and the BBC. In essence, the ITV terms included a binding agreement to acquire only the UK rights for terrestrial broadcast, while the supplier would meet all production costs. As detailed in Chapter 4 the emergence of the ITV Network Centre – which had no funding arrangements to provide for acquiring rights to programming – meant that such terms of trade were appropriate for it alone. The model (of terms and trade) for Channel 4 allowed a significant degree of negotiation to take place between commissioner and IPC, while the BBC and Channels 4 and 5 retained some rights to programming. Format rights, namely the right to the programming idea and concept, were defined by Channel 4 as part of any deal for funding provision, this included remake and sequel rights, while the BBC allowed these rights to remain with the IPC. Such complicated and technical contract law increasingly demanded exceptional professionalism on the part of IPC’s – the days of the ‘enthusiastic amateur’ which had for so long been the cornerstone of the industry were coming to an end.

¹⁸⁷ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

You've got the 'Talkbacks' and 'Bazals' punching their weight around the world, then there are small operations also doing very well. The market is tougher, but it's healthy (Guardian, August 23, 2000:9)

In contrast, larger firms were constantly under pressure to maintain and increase the number of commissions obtained. If, for example, a larger independent failed to at least maintain the level of commissions attained in the previous twelve months then it could struggle to keep key staff who might be attracted to or poached by competitors. Failure to retain critical creative staff remained a constant worry for many IPCs – the most talented researchers and producers were continually being attracted to the larger companies where greater opportunities to obtain commissions existed. Broadcast Professionals – as will be seen shortly – were attracted to the most successful IPCs which could guarantee longer contracts at higher rates of remuneration. However, in Scotland the IPC arena was unique and larger IPCs were able to access very personal forms of networking which were not available to smaller IPC and/or individual suppliers of programming ideas. A senior Scottish IPC owner admitted that the process of networking for him was a very personal process;

Bob... of BBC 1/2 stayed with us over the weekend. In the forty-eight hours I didn't pitch a single thing to him and now that level of access means that if there is a meeting of two hundred independents it's a case of, 'hi Bob how are you?' Now how do you put that in a business plan...these guys (commissioners) have seen me in the line of battle and they have seen how I deal with pressure. They want to make sure that I won't arrive in his office on the day the programmes are due, half cut with a bottle of gin in one hand and no programmes in the other.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁸ Interview with independent producer 7.2.

7.3

Broadcasting Professionals and the Role of Networks.

Here, the labour process of the other core group of workers emerging in large numbers from the deregulation of the industry in the aftermath of the Broadcasting Act 1990, namely, freelance Broadcast Professionals, is addressed. Deregulation of the broadcasting industry had emerged in tandem with the redundancy of national collective bargaining within the ITV sector. Networks of rigid, nationally organized blocks of workers gave way to new flexibly organized technicians and production staff who would negotiate their own terms and conditions. This group of workers defined, in part, as post-Fordist artisans (who contested the discourse of Taylorist inspired labour control) have been described as ‘active, creative, reflexive, risk taking workers with a certain degree of autonomy in how they defined and achieved their work goals, engaging in practices of social entrepreneurship’ (Edwards, 1998:387). Describing Broadcast Professionals as creative workers is unlikely to give rise to significant debate and is largely accurate, but the issue of autonomy for Broadcast Professionals within the independent production arena is substantially more complex. State of the art technologies and a new culture of work have, it is suggested, moved from what has been termed ‘specialization of knowledge’ to what can only be described as a ‘multiplicity of roles’ – in essence specialization is giving way to flexibility (Casey, 1996:327). This flexibility is the central work ethic within the IPC sector and may be better understood through a description of the networking activity by IPC staff.

It is a fact that in the period since the late 1980s television workers experienced a change in the way labour is organized – namely, a change in the way work is secured. This has been overwhelmingly, and correctly, treated as an attack on the collective experience of broadcasting work. While one can accept the thesis that deregulation has impacted negatively on the traditional idea of a career in broadcasting and that individualization is pervasive, this does not fully describe what is happening in the area of the UK broadcasting labour markets(s). There is evidence that employees have made tentative attempts to act collectively and to restructure their employment relationship. However, to suggest that the employment of networks by Broadcast

Professionals will significantly alter the move to ever-increasing flexibility or will restructure the industry in a way which mirrored the way labour was organized is quite incorrect.

The broadcasting industry has undergone such a significant organizational restructuring that any hopes of collective action on the part of Broadcast Professionals is seen only at the margins of the industry. Freelance broadcasting workers who have made such an important contribution to the IPC sector, have seen a revolution in the operation of labour markets for television professionals. The fundamental change in the way broadcasting institutions within Germany and Britain were organized during the 1990s required individuals to gain membership of some sort of work group in order to soften the realities of the restructuring of the broadcast labour market (Baumann, 2002:30). Networking became the perfect antidote to the individualizing tendencies of the employment relationship within the independent production field. For the multitudes of technical and production staff who flooded into the industry after the transformation of the television labour market in the latter part of the twentieth century – after the removal of the closed shop in broadcasting – some method of accessing information about labour markets was essential (Paterson, 2001:203).

The recurring theme throughout the previous three Chapters has been the acceptance of a radical overhaul in the way careers were structured within the UK broadcasting industry. From an industry historically noted for its strong entry regulation – the past twenty-five years have seen an unprecedented growth in the number of freelance workers. By the mid 1990s – of the 28,000 people estimated to be working in the UK television industry – 60 per cent were employed on a freelance basis (Skillset, 2004). At a time when there was active deregulation of trade union power within the industry, the significant growth in non-traditional forms of labour entry had, necessarily, a profound effect upon methods of representation for individual media workers. As indicated in both Chapters 4 and 5, broadcasting trade unions during the 1990s had been subjected to falling rates of membership at a time of unprecedented growth in the numbers of those entering the industry (Paterson, 2001). Within the ITV sector, the significant fall in union membership had resulted partly from a failure of union management to engage with new freelance workers. Networking became an

offensive and defensive tool for broadcasting workers in the search for both contract employment opportunities and in negotiating the boundaries of existing employment. As a result of these new approaches to labour representation and organization, enormous changes were made to trade union attitudes in relation to recruitment within the casual freelance media environment. (These have been detailed in Chapter 4).

The importance of networks became clearer for Broadcast Professionals because of the structural limitations of the Scottish independent industry. The initial explosion in IPCs numbers after the 1990 legislation was not maintained. There was also consolidation within the Scottish industry with mergers between the two most important Scottish IPCs in 2004.¹⁸⁹ The concept of a risk-taking class of cultural entrepreneurs had succumbed to organizational pressures, and by the late 1990s many Producer Owners were forced to retreat to maintaining a core network of employees. The relationships that did endure between Producer Owner and Broadcast Professional were largely those based upon a mutual need and trust. Despite the individualistic nature of many Producer Owners, they were prepared to draw on personal networks to extend their strategic competences – the concept of the ‘address book’ format for recruitment and retention of key staff was continually referred to. In turn, this helped to resolve acute operating problems by supplementing the organization’s internal resources. For Broadcast Professionals who made up the bulk of the workforce within the independent sector, it was apparent that the rationale and experience of networking was significantly different to that practiced by Producer Owners.

As previously indicated, the absence of traditional collective organization – namely, the failure of trade unions to adequately react to the growth of non-traditional forms of employment – had left a vacuum for the collective representation of Broadcast Professionals. They required, at a minimum, involvement in networks of like-minded professionals or with those who could provide work opportunities (Deery & Walsh, 1999). In an attempt to link available theory on networks, and which are appropriate to the study of the nature of freelance media work to the everyday employment

¹⁸⁹ The merger between Wark Clements and Ideal World, the resultant new company is known as ‘Ideal Wark Clements’.

concerns of Broadcast Professionals, one could usefully refer to the concept of ‘social capital’ (Krackhardt & Hanson, 1993). Individual Broadcast Professionals were disposed to investing their ‘social capital’ in processes aimed at developing methods of gaining access (as a primary activity) to information networks while also tentatively employing networks as a basis for collective attempts to improve industry-wide employment terms.

Networking for Broadcast Professionals was, and is, centered upon what has been termed the ‘advice network’ and this process identified experienced Broadcast Professionals from whom others could seek assistance. The trust network can reveal patterns of sharing information about future vacancies and the communication network may identify patterns of employees who talk to each other on a regular basis. There is no expectation from literature sources that regular communication between prospective Broadcast Professionals and Producer Owners results in continuous (or almost continuous) employment contracts. As pointed out in Chapter 1, it is not simply the activity of building a network which is important for those seeking employment but, rather, that the individual is not excluded from labour market information (Il & Mann, 1977). It is essential to note, however, that the sense of collegiality – which by implication emerges from the usage of networks – can fail to reveal the competitive nature of the labour process within the broadcasting industry (See *inter alia*, Knights & Willmott, 1985; Antcliff, 2005b: 4). It remains a matter of conjecture as to what degree individual Broadcast Professionals adapt networking strategies in the collective interests of their peers.

Significantly, therefore, it appears that an apparent contradiction exists at the heart of the labour market for groups of Broadcast Professionals. The labour process of the Broadcast Professional is one based on an essentially selfish desire to achieve continuous employment in what has, and continues to be, a labour market which is not undersupplied with production and research staff and with those seeking entry into the industry. Therefore, the Broadcast Professional must develop a network of ties and network exchanges with other Broadcast Professionals in order to remain in the information loop. As indicated in Chapter 6 resource managers within BBC Scotland, for example, were most forthcoming about the importance of reputation as a contributing factor to continued employment and productivity levels. The work done

on the area of private labour markets (PLMs) is an important contribution to this subject matter (see, *inter alia*, Fevre, 1989). In essence, Fevre's treatise upon labour market segmentation provided an explanation as to how some workers fare better than others within labour markets in terms of the development of employment related networks (Antcliff, 2005b:7). The popularity and/or the professional reputation of the individual Broadcast Professional was, and remains, a critical part of both the theory of PLMs and the daily activities of those actively seeking work. One major consequence of the increasing uncertainty associated with an industry reliant on a casualized workforce has been the rise of multi-skilling (Paterson, 2001:204). The adoption of networking became another element of the increasingly broad multi-skilling thesis. Access to fully established and functioning networks of Broadcast Professionals who trade industry information amongst one another, both in a local or national context, is not automatic; indeed within the independent production sector in Scotland the ample supply of willing labour has provided opportunities for very selective groups of technical and creative labour to emerge.

As noted in Chapter 1 (1.5), Broadcast Professionals may be fortunate to access weak-ties after a form of apprenticeship or, rather, once a suitable period of time has elapsed (if they have been accepted informally into a network of broadcasting professionals) (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter's argument is that large networks of weak-ties are critical to the individual's opportunities to develop regular or continuous employment. In contrast, strong-ties will allow for little new information to disperse along the lines of communication and will contribute to the development of professional cliques which can hinder information flows. Empirical evidence from the series of interviews conducted confirms the importance of membership of networks for Broadcast Professionals. The difficulty for Broadcast Professionals remains the quality of the network to which they have been granted access and whether that network is properly collective in nature, or whether it is a simple collection of individuals who share common skills.

It is possible to sub-divide the (occasionally bland) term 'network' – and two different types of networks for Broadcast Professionals are considered here. One network type can be termed an occupational-identity network – horizontal networks of similarly skilled individuals who may have received a technical training at one of the large

broadcasters but who exited the industry after deregulation. Their experience with a broad range of equipment (both classic and contemporary) meant that their skills were in constant demand. The quote below, from the manager of a large Glasgow based IPC, reaffirms the point that for many IPCs the difficulty was not in attracting staff *per se*, but in maintaining the strong relationships built up between trusted individuals. Management within terrestrial broadcasting and the IPC sector were satisfied for these employees to define themselves as part of a core and elite network because without these social networks the process of recruitment would become lengthier and more expensive (Ursell, 1999:5);

*We can't advertise because we will get tons of replies...so I put the word around with people I know who put out the word around and pretty soon you hear who is available...who is appropriate, who you can afford and who you can work with...those are all incredibly important.*¹⁹⁰

For the groups of Broadcast Professionals outside the tight, trusted networks of occupational-skill networks which dominate the independent production sector (a second network type), their labour process was largely concerned with joining established networks and becoming trusted freelancers. Networking as a support mechanism for skilled professionals is recognized as a defensive strategy. The strong contention is that if possessors of knowledge form themselves into groups or networks then they may begin to be able to standardize and control that knowledge or skill (MacDonald, 1995). Unfortunately for many Broadcast Professionals (excluding the very sought after technicians and production personnel) this theoretical perspective does not correctly describe the reality of labour process within either the IPC sector or, indeed, the broadcasting industry as a whole. Those workers subjected to regular bouts of unemployment, or membership of what may be termed secondary networks (i.e. less favoured networks), are encouraged to define themselves as 'enterprising selves'. The premier networks of Broadcast Professionals who are in continuous demand because of reputation, or other reasons, do not need to subject themselves to a form of entrepreneurship (du Gay, 1996). The fashion and requirement for flexibility in the labour market for Broadcast Professionals has, in some cases, also engendered

¹⁹⁰ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

exploitation. There is now a common expectation that freelance work, particularly in the development phase, may be unremunerated (Paterson, 2001:210). The Broadcast Professionals' lifestyle is critiqued as requiring exceptional flexibility on his/her part – the realistic expectations of a professional worker are often foregone in the name of flexibility. The optimum employment and network scenario for these workers is membership of a specific project network which moves from project to project, but without any definite sense of when (or where) the next project will materialise. The difficulty for many Broadcast Professionals is that the specific project networks are not easily accessible. A senior Producer Owner dismissed the argument that the importance of occupational or project networking was critical to the success of a Broadcast Professional's career. He argued that such individuals enjoyed the flexibility which the industry offered;

*Ask anyone why they work in television and ask them if they have 'any more' than they had at University and they will probably say 'no'. So why do they do it? It's not about security...you trade your security for this sense of freedom and there are a lot of people who get to thirty-five and are very proud of their life...and although you might be scared of the lifestyle some people say I have just been to Thailand for six weeks, I don't want a 'f*****g' house, I'll just rent.¹⁹¹*

This Scottish independent owner believed that Broadcast Professionals are not concerned by their lack of rootedness in the industry. They relished the freedom to move from one IPC to another, and sometimes spending as little as one or two days working on a project. It is acknowledged that IPC employees must be able to use their qualifications across a range of different companies in order to secure employment over their careers (Baumann, 2002:30). Employees of IPCs are now promoted as freewheeling entrepreneurs who can dictate the path of their own careers and are no longer held back by the rigidity of the television industry which prevailed prior to the late 1980s. The current crop of Broadcast Professionals are encouraged to take responsibility for the development of their own career. Theoretical contributors to this area have suggested that new organizational forms (namely the decentering of traditional hierarchical structures and which reflect the organizational strategy of the

¹⁹¹ Interview with independent producer 7.1.

IPC sector) result in strong psychological contracts between employer and employee (Guest, 1998). The proposition that any deep or genuine relationship could exist on a significant scale between the freelance employee of an IPC and Producer Owners seems hopelessly optimistic. Further, the suggestion that managers can expect employees (freelance) to act in the best interests of the organization to which they are only loosely tied seems very unlikely (Guest, 1998). One Producer Owner said of the labour process of the class of Broadcast Professionals;

You are the CEO of your own life and you have got to work out what is attractive to people. It's about being able to present it [a programme proposal]. It's about having people skills...it's about pitch. People don't care what sort of shirt you have on but you have to be able to handle people.¹⁹²

Broadcast Professionals band together in a search for work through necessity and, whether contrived or not, networking is an important factor in the success of individual strategies for career advancement. Personal networks – if they are to develop into a major source of competitive advantage for Broadcast Professionals – must become as flexible as required by changing strategic demands of the major broadcasters or the IPCs themselves (see Johansson & Paterson, 1984:). During a number of interviews Broadcast Professionals expressed concern that membership of networks could place them at the heart of a conflictual relationship with Producer Owners. According to many Producer Owners, support was provided to Broadcast Professionals in a personal and individual way. The significant demands made of Broadcast Professionals were balanced (according to one significant Glasgow based Producer Owner) by the promise of a division of profits to those employees who helped devise the programme idea;

People come in and talk about what they want to do. In the future it will be more formal...a nominal working week is forty hours but nobody works less than fifty...we have a contract here where people get twenty per cent of the profits of any

¹⁹² Interview with independent producer 7.1.

programme which they develop...people are here because they are working here, there is not a culture of presentism'.¹⁹³

Broadcast Professionals use social networks to improve their position – with the tacit approval of IPC managers who reap the benefits of a highly motivated staff. Where, then, does the notion of collectivity emerge from these seemingly individualistic networks of skilled Broadcast Professionals? The fact is that it does not emerge from a vague or intangible network of individuals operating in isolation, but through the critical role which internet based networks of Broadcasting Professionals play in setting terms and conditions to apply within the UK freelance market. (The three main websites for freelance Broadcasting Professionals are 'Mandy.com', 'ProductionBase.com' and 'Broadcasterfreelancer.com'.) Freelance Broadcast Professionals, having paid a subscription fee, are able to advertise their skills to potential employers and to maintain a close relationship with their peers. Websites also help to provide information about work opportunities and allow the swapping of information regarding pay and conditions. It is the usage, and increasing importance, of these *E*-networks which is now the single most important forum for networking within the UK freelance sector. Despite claims that collective action is taking place within the primary broadcasters, (BBC, ITV and Channel 4) empirical evidence suggests this action is very limited in relation to remuneration and conditions of service issues. These *E*-networks are a variant of the previously outlined concept of the 'advice network', where Broadcast Professionals share concerns with colleagues and more senior freelance workers. Interviews with Broadcast Professionals provided evidence of the critical role which seniority and longevity play when offering advice to junior staff;

When I moved to producer/director level I spoke to several people at that level about what I could expect in terms of salary, but there were no hard and fast rules about salaries it was just really what you could negotiate for yourself...for me networking as you call it is really mainly just 'back-biting' and 'bitching', you are on your own I think.

¹⁹³ Interview 7.1.

Conclusion.

Networking is a fundamental, unavoidable and essential aspect of labour process for those working within the IPC sector. It is, further, an entirely appropriate element of a contemporary and full account of LPT. Both the Producer Owner and Broadcast Professional classes depend on networking, detailed case studies which show how managers and employees adapt to new situations, away from an exclusive concern with production are essential.

A Producer Owner spoke in damning terms of the attitude of smaller lifestyle IPCs failing to grasp the importance of networking. He offered this piece of advice for his competitors who bemoaned their lack of success in achieving commissions:

*Be nicer, lose the attitude – work harder, and for God’s sake, take advice when it’s offered or at least listen to people.*¹⁹⁴

The larger IPC managers interviewed were significantly more successful at managing their relationships with commissioning editors. Such relationships might be thought of as having been the simple outcome of networking but, in short, the critical element existing in a successful partnership between IPC and commissioner was that of mutual trust. However trust is a fragile concept, and the issue of budgets which are becoming increasingly tight and being scrutinized very closely, looms large. There was an acceptance on the part of some Producer Owners that, while they may currently be part of an elite industry network, their continued presence in that exalted position was not a given and would only be maintained by constant endeavour;

We are only one ‘cock up’ away from losing our reputation. When Michael Jackson joined Channel 4 he cancelled ‘Film Night’ and ‘Space Cadets’ [a million and a half pounds worth of business in one week]. We just sat there and said ‘oh-dear’...we did a lot of fire fighting and it’s only now you know, that we have got back to the same level [as] we were before that.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹⁴ Interview with independent producer 7.2.

¹⁹⁵ Interview with independent producer 7.2.

In a further critique of some of his less successful colleagues within the independent sector, a leading industry Producer Owner completely rejected the assertion (repeated occasionally during interview by smaller IPCs) that his firm had simply networked its way to domination of the Scottish marketplace;

*People say we can just walk straight into Channel 4 and speak to Stuart Cosgrove but when I was born in Stranraer thirty-eight years ago I wasn't issued with a passport for Channel 4. It is such a ridiculous suggestion...we work hard for our access.'*¹⁹⁶

In all interviews undertaken there was an outright rejection of any suggestion of a corrupt form of networking between commissioning editors and Producer Owners. However, there was an implied acceptance, both in the quotation above and in much of the empirical evidence gathered, that networking – developing ties of association both between Producer Owners and commissioning editors – was critical to the survival of the individual firm. A large network of weak-ties is, undoubtedly, of benefit to a firm's profitability or its access to contracts, but strong-ties are, in fact, the critical factor in the success of the group of Producer Owners (Granovetter's, 1973). Below the new premier league of 'super IPCs' remained a core of resolute small operators and, while these were sometimes responsible for innovative programming, they were often self-employed 'lifestylers' with no realistic plan to develop their business interests.

There is little doubt that the independent production sector offered, and continues to offer, certain creative freedoms to the class of workers entitled Broadcast Professionals. These freedoms do, however, come at a cost – namely, job insecurity, relatively low levels of remuneration and the requirement to continually engage in networking as an essential labour process with Producer Owners and other employment hubs. One Broadcast Professional spoke of her reputation as a hard worker, but also as somebody with a reputation as being 'difficult';

¹⁹⁶ Interview with independent producer 7.2.

I have to be careful, there are people in this city [Glasgow] who simply won't employ me anymore because I tell the truth. If I think it won't look good – I say so, but there are so many egos to stroke, it really gets on my wick.¹⁹⁷

The requirement of groups of Broadcast Professionals to network is the result of an employment lottery in which informal *E*-networks have replaced the more formal processes of recruitment and the role traditionally undertaken by trade unions. Freelance Broadcast Professionals are encouraged to be reflexive, creative and active – not just in their daily activities as freelance workers – and to utilize these qualities in the search for work (Edwards, 1998:387). Further, they are encouraged to disregard learned knowledge (i.e. knowledge appropriate to a more regulated broadcasting industry) in favour of being ultra-flexible workers who (if they are hard working and willing to work at times which suit the IPC managers) make faster career progress. At best, freelance Broadcast Professionals are reduced to attempting to soften the most extreme elements of a flexible workplace but on a very individualistic basis.

¹⁹⁷ Interview with Producer Director freelancer.

Chapter 8.

Summary and

Conclusions.

Introduction.

This work has sought to illustrate the significant changes in management, organizational restructuring and employment practices within the UK broadcasting industry in the period after 1979 and their consequences for individual groups of workers and specific broadcasting institutions. It is widely accepted that changes in the competitive and regulatory structure during the 1980s and '90s resulted in an increasingly uncertain environment for both individuals employed in television and those charged with operating and managing broadcasting and television production institutions (Dex, *et al*, 2002; Born, 2002). Less clear, however, was how those changes impacted at individual firm and employee level and it was this lacuna (in the study of the production of programming by broadcasting organizations) which offered the opportunity to undertake a case study examination of organizational change across the UK industry. Competition and industry restructuring within the broadcasting industry was intensified by two sets of parallel reforms, those instigated by government legislation (tracked through Chapter 3) and, secondly, by internal structural reform which included attacks on collectivity within the ITV sector, the impact of de-skilling within STV, the introduction of market led reforms within the BBC and the emergence of the independent sector.

The period since 1979 witnessed substantial organizational change within the broadcasting industry and which reflected, at least in part, the political and economic priorities of the time. Other national institutions (for example the National Health Service) underwent significant organizational restructuring during the 1980s and 1990s and the impact of such reforms has been well tracked (Dixon, *et al*, 2003). Before the mid 1980s the UK television industry was partly regulated through the domination of the industry by the two vertically integrated public service and commercial broadcasters, BBC and ITV (Deakin & Pratten, 2000). The independent television production sector, which emerged after 1982 amid the development of

Channel 4, did not, until the Broadcasting Act, 1990 make the breakthrough in terms of altering the industry duopoly. However, by the mid 1990s the substantial numbers of employees exiting the established broadcasters to set up IPCs or in becoming freelance employees, had the effect of altering the structure of the industry. The development of the concept of the vertically disintegrated production and broadcast environment was at the heart of the revolution within the industry (Christopherson, 1996). The labour process of broadcasting, industrial relations management and organizational strategy were, as a result, comprehensively redrawn during the 1980s and later. Indeed, it is possible to identify the establishment of the Peacock Committee Report as a critical factor in moving the industry towards vertical disintegration.

As has been outlined, the broadcasting industry was viewed as having an essential relationship with the national and cultural identity of the nation and was treated through legislation (up and until the late 1980s) as a special case. The Peacock Committee Report set the tone for the institutional, political and regulatory change which would radically restructure employment relationships within UK broadcasting and reformulate the media policy of all subsequent administrations (Foster, 1992:46). Peacock's findings were nothing short of a radical remaking or re-regulation of cultural/ broadcasting concerns in a language which adopted the fashion for market led reforms. The Report (as detailed in Chapter 3) sought to place consumer sovereignty at the centre of future broadcasting policy (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:25). While the concept of consumer sovereignty was central to the ideology of neo-Liberalism, the proposition that the Peacock Report would turn the established view of public service broadcasting on its head (and reformulate it along strictly commercial or market lines while completely marginalizing the role of skilled workers) is to misunderstand the evolution of organizational change within the UK terrestrial sector. There was certainly a planned and executed process of organizational change within both the terrestrial broadcasters and the independent industry, but these organizational changes impacted across the sector in a variety of manners and in degrees of intensity. While Peacock noted that the BBC and the regulated ITV system had done well in articulating and meeting the needs and desires of the broadcasting market at reasonable cost – the Report concluded that organizational improvements (at labour level) would significantly improve the cost base of broadcasting. This work has tracked those changes at firm level and in

exploring the differences in how ITV, BBC and the independent sector adapted to industrial restructuring has sought to explore the actuality of change within the UK broadcasting industry without recourse to unquantifiable assertions of flexibility. While a brief summary of the findings pertaining to the case study Chapters will be provided here, the four applied themes of LPT (as detailed in Chapter 1) will also be revisited so that the central empirical conclusions of the four case studies can be compared with the core theoretical elements of the four themes of LPT. (This is undertaken so as to explain why the UK broadcasting industry is a particularly interesting example of the core issues of LPT in action).

8.1

Case Studies.

In preparation for the four case studies, Chapter 3 detailed the organizational/political context of the industry, with particular reference to key pieces of broadcasting legislation in the period since 1979. The Broadcasting Act, 1990 was identified as the critical piece of deregulatory legislation – stipulating that 25% of BBC programming be sourced from the independent production sector. It was envisaged that this stipulation would significantly contribute to an enhanced independent sector – both organizationally and creatively. In short, the industry was being gently moved in the first instance by legislative actions from a highly regulated format to one in which partial de-regulation was clearly evident.

In Chapter 4 the restructuring of the ITV Network in the period after 1979 is set out. Evidence was provided that the setting up of the Independent Television Network Centre ('ITNC') as the central vehicle for commissioning ITV programming – which provided a more transparent costing policy for commercial programming – had the effect of driving down fixed costs for ITV companies. However, in a recent obituary of a former Chairman of Granada TV (David Plowright) it was noted that in the aftermath of the 1990 legislation, the demand from the incoming Granada Chairman

(Gerry Robinson) to slash costs continued and became overwhelming.¹⁹⁸ The battle to re-regulate the ITV Network was fought over the issue of control over the shop floor.

It will have been noted that the reduction of programming costs were a consistent theme throughout the four case studies undertaken. By employing archive materials Chapter 4 traced the remaking of industrial relations within the ITV sector – the formation of a strategy aimed at the institutionalisation of labour and production flexibility. This was achieved through industrial relations policy articulated by a newly confident ITVA. In the period up until the mid 1980s, high levels of union involvement in formal collective bargaining (or top-down regulation) had characterized ITVs industrial relations. The formality of the industrial relations system had been augmented by a highly developed system of union organization at shop floor level which improved conditions and salary levels on a firm-by-firm basis. Managements, as noted earlier, were satisfied to concede the control of labour to the shop floor in return for a (relatively) harmonious industrial relations environment. The most minor attempt to rework the relationship between trade unions and management, (even to make minute changes to production) involved painstaking negotiations. Archival documents pointed to the dissatisfaction of the ITVA with the system for managing work, but managers recognized it as a necessary condition for the continuation of production. The complexity of the production technology involved in programme production contributed to the maintenance of that highly regulated work environment. Up until the late 1980s issues of industrial relations within the ITV sector were dealt with through the well established procedures of national collective bargaining – involving the Labour Relations Committee of the ITVA and representatives of trade unions. The National Agreements were the ultimate source of union power and (as was noted) the ACTT's most potent weapon was to encourage its members to adhere strictly to these formal agreements – critically rejecting short-term inducements in favour of maintaining the entire fabric of agreements.

As Chapter 4 sets out, by the early 1980s various figures within the ITVA began to question employer compliance with the accepted norms of work organization and began a concerted policy of attacking the National Agreements. These were no longer

¹⁹⁸ Obituary of David Plowright, Daily Telegraph August 30, 2006 p25.

accepted as non-negotiable and were regarded as terrain upon which the politics of production could be altered. Employers gradually shifted their labour and technology strategies – from a grudging acceptance of the limits placed upon their discretion by collective bargaining – to recognizing few limitations. ITV franchises began to aggressively remake industrial relations within the ITV sector. The description in Chapter 4 of the collective assault during the 1980s by ITV employers (on established work organization) was not driven simply by the political imperatives of neo-Liberalism. In fact the ending of national collective bargaining within the ITV sector must be seen as being largely consequent on the commercial imperatives of the ITV franchises themselves. However government was not redundant in the process and provided a regulatory environment (through a series industrial relations Acts in the first Thatcher administration) by which the political and regulatory environment for the ending of the National Agreements within the ITV sector could be achieved.

By the mid 1980s, industrial relations archive documents pointed to a rigorous assault on the industry's formal and informal collective bargaining. From being of only marginal concern, the control of the labour process moved to being the central issue for ITV management. The importance of the supportive political environment should be acknowledged, but the Thatcher industrial relations reforms did not initiate the management assault on the broadcasting trade unions – rather they accelerated the change which began within the ITV franchises themselves. Collective bargaining – in giving way to what became known as a peculiarly British version of individualization – was the single greatest contributing factor to the re-regulation of work within the ITV sector (Brown *et al*, 1998). At the heart of the move to reshape the industry's formal and informal structures of collective bargaining was a desire to restore competitiveness. Franchise managers argued that there was a moral imperative involved and suggested that they were being held to ransom by aggressive union negotiators – such a situation (they contended) could not be allowed to continue. The paradox was that the restoration of managerial prerogative at firm level was predicated upon enhancing the strategic and operational role of the ITVA. Thus responsibility for the restructuring of industrial relations at ITV was, once again, removed from individual franchise holders.

In Chapter 5 the specific franchise based organizational changes within the Central Scotland ITV franchise, STV were identified. The long dominance of complex and unreliable electrical technologies and the very slow introduction (by comparable ITV firms) of digital technologies during the mid to late 1980s meant that STV was highly dependent on the skills and craft of production workers. This regulated environment made the organization and management of production a straightforward process, but it also made television production unnecessarily expensive, requiring detailed and painstaking planning and preparation. Programming concerns were as much about the cost of deploying nationally negotiated crew levels as they were about the creative aspects of production. The complexity of production procedures meant that it was entirely rational for management to collude with trade unions in the construction and maintenance of ‘balkanised’ internal labour markets. The policy at all times (as was established) contained a management directive to maintain a peaceful industrial relations environment in order to maintain uninterrupted broadcasting. What could not be countenanced was a ‘blank-screen’ and the essential management strategy was ‘peace at any price’. However by the mid 1970s, new technology advances in the US and Japan had given management hope that a challenge could be made to what they viewed as the ‘immoral hegemony’ of the ACTT’s role within commercial television.

The potential of new broadcasting technology could be realized only if the ITV sector’s historic settlement with the ACTT (based upon a requirement to satisfy the demands of the highly skilled workforce) could be undone. STVs (initial) strategy was to engage in highly detailed negotiations with shop stewards and union representatives and to steadily increase pressure as parallel ITV organizational change moved ever closer to an acute restructuring of the industry. Archive documents reflected an inert leadership within STV during the early 1980s – barely reacting to the power struggle taking place between some ITV franchise holders and the ACTT. STV was not engaged in an attempt to reserve its assault on organized labour until other franchises had started a policy of undermining the ACTT. STV used the strength of the sea change in the ITV sector as a tool in convincing the ACTT of the need for change, but *only* after other franchises had acted. (Archival documents relating to STVs contribution to the industrial relations strategies of the ITVA clearly make this point).

After the initial moves of the ITVA in altering the landscape of collective bargaining STV began its inevitable change in the strategy and structure of its industrial relations policy. By 1986 the defining feature of industrial relations within STV was the managerial emphasis on cost control, namely reshaping the employment relationship and work organization. A new deregulated and flexible production regime emerged with a strict management led commitment to production de-skilling. If STV had been slow to engage in radical corporate restructuring in the 1980s, it subsequently (by the early 1990s) readily embraced restructuring. The numbers employed at STV fell sharply between 1989 and 1994 and the piecemeal approach of STV management during the early 1980s to organizational and labour process change was replaced with a fresh determination to manage change. Empirical evidence for the depth of those organizational changes within STV during the 1990s was provided through an analysis of SMG (Scottish Media Group). The contrast between the regulated STV franchise of the early 1980s – with a management prepared to cede control over production to a skilled workforce (with highly tuned craft abilities) – and the deregulated production economy of the late 1990s was most revealing.

The impact of organizational restructuring within BBC Scotland was considered in Chapter 6. Noting the difficulties which national public service broadcasters faced in the period since the 1980s and the challenges confronting the BBC through direct regulatory pressure – an outline of the working environment within the Corporation in the period before the advent of Producer Choice was provided. Introduced in April 1993, Producer Choice ‘...consisted of a purchaser/provider split at the level of the relationship between programme makers and suppliers of production resources’ (Deakin & Pratten, 2000:9). The changes introduced at the BBC relating to the concept of Producer Choice were part of a trend directed at restructuring the public service (Wegg-Prosser, 1998:15). While the BBC remained part of the public sector, the decision to attempt to introduce a quasi-market into management processes (previously dominated by the principle of planning) had a very significant effect upon the Corporation – particularly in terms of the occupational identity of groups of skilled workers employed.

Attempts during the late 1960s and ‘70s (the 1968 McKinsey reforms) to restructure the organizational makeup of the Corporation (a precursor to the Birtian reforms) had

been seen as counterintuitive by many staff and managers alike (Born, 2004:221). During the 1970s, producers and editors had been given some control over budgets and the Corporation had also developed a new awareness of the issue of costs in order to develop tight managerial strategies (see, *inter alia*, Burns, 1977: Curry, 1994). Producers undertook – by the 1970s – a new quasi-managerial role in the production and managerial pyramid, but it was not until the 1990s that producers themselves were subjected to managerial intervention and tight cost control. In the period after the introduction of Producer Choice, the Corporation rejected the policy of having scheduling and programme production dominated by the inability of studios to make room for specific programming. Programming quotas were fixed annually and this highly regulated production environment becoming increasingly unattractive to a management class who noted change within the ITV and independent sector with increasing envy.

BBC managers whose interviews were recorded in Chapter 6 vigorously attacked what they saw a quasi-Stalinist approach to the regulation of Resources throughout the Corporation. They also argued that to recapture the right to manage work organization was a moral, and not just a production/managerial, imperative. Despite its size and prominent position within the industry, the BBC failed to undertake any substantial restructuring of programme production until the mid-to-late 1980s. The ITV and independent sectors were the industry leader in terms of attacking the organizational and employment status quo within UK broadcasting. Producer Choice was grounded on the notion that producers were spendthrifts with little regard for scarce resources and the Corporation had been largely content to trail behind the aggressive tactics of ITV management during the early 1980s (Born, 2004:227). The constant refrain of the reformers in the period since the 1970s (when Lord Hill had invited the McKinsey team into the BBC) had been a desire to separate out or decentralize the various product divisions. The ultimate objective of these organizational changes was not to completely reconstitute the identity of BBC employees as low-cost workers, but to erase the perception that some BBC staff saw themselves as ‘gold-plated’ providers of specialized technical services. This policy was intensified with the decision to divide the Corporation into three separate and distinct directorates, namely Resources, Production and Broadcast.

Producer Choice impacted in a very profound manner within Resources and Production. Despite protestations from at least one BBC Scotland (Broadcast) Manager, the Resources directorate provided the lead towards flexibility within the Corporation arguing, rather, that Resources had been one of the most inflexible parts of the Corporation and that restructuring efforts would, by definition, have a very significant impact upon the culture of work within the directorate. Evidence for these significant organizational changes were provided by a study of G51 (the relevant location in BBC Scotland Glasgow where Resources managed its operations) was undertaken. There was a marked contrast between G51 and the creative and other management/ commissioning departments throughout the Corporation. The role of G51 was the embodiment of the marketization within the BBC and its very existence set it apart from other directorates. Evidence was provided of the difficulties, which both Resources staff and managers faced in coming to terms with the ending of the highly regulated labour market which had existed within the Corporation since its inception.

Attempts to reorder the occupational identity of Production workers was particularly manifested in the development of the Talent Pool – this was the term given to all Production employees within BBC Scotland below the rank of producer. Managers contended that the Talent Pool could provide the necessary supply of specific personnel required by the Corporation. It was a mechanism for managing and controlling the movement and cost of creative labour. Interviews with Production managers provided evidence of the impact which the imposition of the Talent Pool had upon the modicum of remaining occupational identity of researchers and broadcast assistants in particular. The Talent Pool meant that those with highly generalist skills endured constant shifting from one administrative task to another and were rarely given the opportunity to learn new skills. The Talent Pool was a further attempt by Production managers to harmonize employees within the directorate and to mould them as a group of flexible workers. A contrast can usefully be made with the block of regulated labour within the ITV sector in the period up until the mid 1980s. The Talent Pool members were managed by the twin programmes of work intensification and increased flexibility (Hodson, 2001:172). Managers (in a process very similar to those within the ITV sector) began to actively monitor downtime amongst production staff in an effort to raise low productivity levels – this desire for

flexibility impacted in very different ways depending on the seniority of the staff in question. Highly specialised producer/directors were spared an intensive and complete marketization of their skills and professionalism, lower ranking staff were subjected to intensive measurement of their performance and usage levels, while significant pressures were applied to the remnants of their occupational identity as a contributing factor towards flexibility.

At the same time as these market-like relations were being introduced into the BBC, the IPC sector was growing in importance within the UK industry – both as a provider of programming and as an exemplar of organizational change within the broadcasting sector more generally. The emergence of the independent production sector and the labour process of two distinct groups of television workers were traced in Chapter 7. The move to de-regulate the television market in the early 1990s provided an opportunity for entrepreneurial programme makers to move outside the traditional boundaries of the BBC and ITV production centres. The examination of the sector in the UK was undertaken in tandem with consideration of the development of networking strategies in terms of both Broadcast Professionals and Producer Owners. Prior to the introduction of Channel 4 in 1982, programming was produced by two large and vertically integrated organizations, namely the BBC and ITV, but during the 1980s and '90s, legislation designed to introduce competition (by separating production from broadcasting) resulted in the emergence of significant numbers of small independent companies (Antcliff, *et al*, 2005b:2).

Chapter 7 traced the emergence of the IPC sector as a significant force in UK broadcasting, further, it also explored how networking became part of the daily activities of Producer Owners and Broadcast Professionals. The development of networking (as a strategy for Producer Owners) did not include the sharing of sensitive information, i.e. sharing creative ideas which could be easily adopted by competitors. However, in a small production environment where almost all of the IPC, Producer Owners were, at the very least, aware of one another, networking emerged as an essential day-to-day form of labour process. Channel 4 relied on approximately 30 suppliers to secure in excess of 70 per cent of its original programming and trust and reputation became a central element for commissioning editors when searching for IPCs with which they could do business. Commissioners consistently noted the

importance of IPCs having both a track-record with broadcasters and developing networks of trust in order to gain access to the tight or closed networks which dictated where many of the commissioning contracts went. Despite warnings regarding the potential of clique formation within the IPC sector, closed networks were synonymous with success within the sector (Coleman, 1990.).

It was established that networking played an important role in the success of Broadcast Professionals in search for regular employment. However, the success or otherwise of such a strategy was difficult to measure and evaluate. Broadcast Professionals continued to be subject to an employment lottery which made entry to the industry largely unstructured. Networking was not a short-term employment development which existed only in the burgeoning literature which the subject generated (Nohira, 1992). Rather, networking – in a period when collective labour power within the broadcasting industry had suffered a concerted attack by management – was seen by some commentators as a challenge to the withering of trade union representation (Millward *et al*, 2000; Antclif, *et al*, 2005b).

As a potential bulwark against issues of collectivisation reappearing as an industrial relations issue, IPC owners continually contrasted their working environment with the staid environment of the two main terrestrial broadcasters. Often employing very critical language, IPC owner managers contended that for production staff entering the industry, the absence of a rigid and formal career structure meant that opportunities for advancement were greater within the IPC structure than inside the traditional broadcasting institutions. The IPC Producer Owners (most of whom were self styled ‘refugees’ from the terrestrial broadcasters) held out the inducement of promotion to producer (in a shorter period) than with terrestrial broadcasters– often in lieu of standard industry remuneration. IPC managers strongly rejected any suggestion that their organizational structure replicated the structure of terrestrial broadcasters. They argued that they were able to obtain flexibility from employers without resorting to strict managerialism. Many Broadcast Professionals understood that their career development was intimately tied up with their company’s health and, consequently, were prepared to accept lesser remuneration in the short term. While the industry has been offered as a potential example of a return to partial collectivity for employees, no real evidence for this claim was found. It appears that with the exception of small

groups of elite workers, (with skills in great demand), IPC employees were exposed to very real difficulties in securing something akin to permanent employment.

8.2

Key Findings and Links to LPT.

An outline of four themes of LPT was undertaken in Chapter 1 in an attempt to place organizational restructuring in a theoretical context and to provide an appropriate vehicle to consider industry wide workplace change on a case-by-case basis. Thus LPT was employed in Chapter 1 to study workplace change because of its pre-eminent theoretical methodology and because of its positioning of case studies as a fundamental method of applying theoretical concerns to actual workplace issues (Newsome & Thompson, 2004). Four themes of LPT were adopted – each paralleling a core element of the restructuring of the UK broadcasting industry over the course of the previous 25 years. The theoretical development of the four themes of LPT was continued empirically in sequence between Chapters 4-7.

Smith & Thompson (1989) rightly stress that the systematic qualities of capitalism are not experienced in the same way across societies because of the diversity of nation states and firms. Certainly organizational restructuring within the UK broadcasting industry has varied in intensity and in the depth and breadth of that change. The difficulty for those seeking to explain work-place change is one of ‘connectivity’, in short, linkage between qualitative (or case study) treatments of organizational change and a necessary conceptual framework. It is a fact that LPT has no particular preference in terms of a suitable methodology. Nevertheless it has been at its most revealing through the employment of the case study approach – reaching downwards (towards micro-firm analysis) from debates concerning nation states and industry. Why then is the UK broadcasting industry an interesting example of LPT ‘in action’? Indeed it is a fact that attempts to employ market-like relations to assist in the promotion or delivery of services, which broadly fall under the remit of ‘public service’ are not new, and have as noted been well documented within, *inter alia*, the NHS (see Dixon, *et al*, 2003). The core reason is that the very substantial restructuring of the UK television industry in the period after 1979 provided the researcher with a

'ready-made' series of case studies detailing the effects of, *inter alia*, intensified competition, deregulation, de-skilling, pressures on occupational identities and the rise in importance of networking as a form of labour process. While it is tempting to adopt a partial trend for vague theoretical positions – regarding the effects of new strategies aimed at securing worker compliance or passivity in relation to the new reality of the employment relationship – such perspectives offer few clues as to the actual impact of such change on the shop-floor and to wider societal changes. The important examples of such theories are those which speak rhetorically of 'flexibility' and 'deregulation'. An attempt has been made here to provide an empirical development of four critical LPT theories which properly reflected and explained the change in the nature of work and the impact of deregulation within broadcasting.

Few would deny that the past 25 years have witnessed the development of more flexible employment relations and a decentralization of collective bargaining. Appelbaum & Batt (1994) rightly note that the accumulated body of case study work produced in recent years, provide ample evidence that fundamental changes have occurred in employment systems. It is also a fact that organizations have become more decentralized and flatter (Castells, 1996). In short, the period has witnessed a move away from a clearly structured employment relationship.

Chapter 4 detailed (in conjunction with LPT theme of regulation) the move from a highly regulated environment of production and employment concerns, to one in which flexible employment relations became the dominant form of regulation (Supiot, 2001). The work contained therein provided empirical evidence of a very substantial shift in the landscape of commercial television. In the period before 1979, commercial television was a benign environment where individual firms – made significant profits while trade unionists (as Sapper, quoted on page 95) – sold the labour of their members at the highest possible price. After 1979, employers began to shift labour strategies away from an acceptance of collective bargaining and National Agreements, in favour of a full-scale assault on the formal and informal processes of collective bargaining.

This case has provided evidence of the very real gutting of collective agreements between the then dominant broadcasting union, ACTT, and the ITV network. The top-

down regulative structure which had dominated UK broadcasting negotiations over the regulation of work was being rapidly replaced by bottom-up restructuring which varied in line with the number of franchises which collectively contributed to ITV. The firms, which disappeared into the early 1980s discussions aimed at an original piecemeal attempt to negotiate away some elements of the National Agreements, were to reappear in the late 1980s as fundamentally different organizations. For ITV, debates over National Agreements, collective agreements and demarcation lines were to dissolve – to be forever relegated to industrial relations textbooks.

Chapter 5 linked the key Bravermanian theme of de-skilling to the ambition of the STV franchise to disabuse itself of what it perceived to be an overwhelmingly expensive set of costs in relation to programme production. Chapter 1(1.3) has comprehensively detailed debates around the issue of skill, both in its up-skilling and de-skilling variants. The STV case study provided some interesting observations about the reality of de-skilling for a generation of employees who joined the company *after* the great deregulatory impulses of the late 1980s and beyond. De-skilling came alive as a very real process for these workers and the empirical material provides a real sense of the unchallenging nature of much contemporary work within the franchise.

Both theoretical and empirical contributions are employed to reinforce the view that the technology employed has removed the decision-making capabilities of workers (Agnew *et al*, 1997). However, the corollary of that view (namely, that responsibility for creative and productive decision making had been lost forever to creative workers) was partially rebuffed by the importance attached by management – to the critical role that post-production employees played in the creative process of television production.

Chapter 6 traced the comprehensive attack on established notions of occupational identity within BBC Scotland and a summary of these changes has already been detailed in this Chapter. As Chapter 1 (1.4) made clear, for most employees of the BBC any form of attempted retreat into core skilled positions which reflect strong occupational identities are no longer a valid form of defensive strategy. It was formerly the case that one could view BBC corporate identity through, at least, two

distinct layers. Firstly, a commitment to the firm itself – a form of loyalty to the Corporation and, secondly to the occupational community from which the employee had emerged. As detailed in Chapter 6 BBC managers have successfully managed the occupational identity of the greater number of BBC staff. The impact of the directorate system has had a hugely significant effect on the notion of occupational identity. Loyalty and identification is now made with the directorate in which the individual is employed and secondary loyalties are to the BBC itself, the occupational community from the worker has emerged (if any) and his/her relevant trade union. While LPT traditionally was concerned with opportunities for workers to adapt to particular regimes of control – developing strategies aimed at resistance including, *inter alia*, absence, sanctions etc. – the evidence produced throughout Chapter 6 provided little comfort for BBC Scotland Production employees (Thompson & Newsome, 2004:145). Labour control increased in more recent years within BBC Scotland and the twin directorates of Resources and Production provided substantial evidence of rigorous management attempts to restructure workplace identity so as to link that identity with management ambitions.

The final case, Chapter 7 – the independent production sector within the UK – employed an element of contemporary LPT and which has been little used within LPT literature. As noted in Chapter 1 (1.5) much of the literature pertaining to networks and networking does not emanate from the LPT tradition. LPT has tended to ignore, whether by accident or design, the importance of networking as a method whereby Producers Owners maintained or obtained a position as suppliers of programming to broadcasters. It has also paid little attention to the employment by Broadcast Professionals of strategies of networking to maintain and find employment opportunities. It is a fact, as noted in Chapter 7, that LPT tended to focus on ‘point of production’ studies. This has meant that many LPT theorists have ignored networking, or, rather, have refused to recognize it as a valid form of labour process. It is contended here that networking is now a fundamental and increasingly important subject for consideration by students of organizational change within the creative industries.

In defence of ‘traditional’ LPT most, if not all, networking is conducted discreetly and hidden from an overt examination by researchers. It has been viewed as an invisible

form of labour and thus, in contrast to the work of, *inter alia*, (Edwards & Scullion, 1982:151) is not suitable to illustrate 'matters at the point of production'. However, networking is now to a very significant extent, almost on a par with production amongst those studying the labour process of broadcasting work.

In the introduction to this thesis the point was made that those researchers who had tended to refer to only 'texts' (and by implication programming) in their study of the broadcasting industry, have begun to consider media institutions and labour process in a very detailed way (Oswell, 1998:93). It is appropriate now to end this contribution – having considered the final case study (that of IPCs and networking) – and which contrasts so profoundly with the rigorously regulated structure of the broadcasting industry in situ at the outset of the period considered by this work.

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