

The Department of Human Resource Management

Title of thesis: The Impact of Lean on the UK Civil Service and the Trade Union Response

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I write this thesis in the hope that it can make a contribution to the stock of human knowledge and, in some small way, be a source of good within society.

With all human knowledge and wisdom imperfect, the thesis will never be 'the last word' on the subject. Although I have strived to produce work to the greatest degree of accuracy, whatever omissions and errors are found in the PhD are mine.

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Abstract

The UK Civil Service has undergone significant organizational change. This thesis examines the use of lean systems of work within the Civil Service and the response of the PCS trade union and its membership. Through a case study approach, this research examines management's use of lean focussing on several large central government departments. The thesis argues that rather than view lean as a set of business improvement techniques lean must be seen within the context of the specific political-economic context of the UK. The thesis confirms the argument that lean systems are premised on management control of the labour process. The thesis contributes to the conceptual understanding of lean working by showing that it is manifested in four different ways each linked by Civil Service management's capacity to control the state labour process at a workplace level. The thesis also examines the impact of lean on the skills of civil servants including those engaged in quasi-legal decision making. The thesis demonstrates that Civil Service work has been subject to deskilling. Using a 'skill in the job' conceptualisation, the research finds that although elements of job complexity are retained, the levels of job autonomy exercised by civil servants have been significantly reduced. This deskilling is linked to management's attempts to control the state labour process. Finally, the thesis argues that the union's capacity to respond to lean is constrained by the employment compromise by which the union's response is often one of monitoring rather contesting organizational change. The thesis uses a 'productive model' approach to locate lean within the political-economic infrastructure of the UK and the state labour process. The research was undertaken using a qualitative approach utilising semi-structured interviews to collect data from trade union members and representatives working in the Civil Service.

“Let it not be imagined, however, that I consider myself competent to reform the errors and abuses of society, but only that I would fain contribute my humble quota towards so good an aim; and if I can gain the public ear at all, I would rather whisper a few wholesome truths therein than much soft nonsense” (Brontë, 1994)¹

Chapter 1 Introduction

The advent of lean working within the Civil Service in 2004 was a critical development for the organization of work for a large employer in the United Kingdom. With the implementation of lean working, a business improvement method commonly used elsewhere in the UK was introduced to an important part of the public sector. This thesis seeks to address the impact of changes in work organization in the UK Civil Service that arose through the use of lean working. The research into lean is appropriate as it comes at a time of significant political and economic change in the UK. The research will explore lean in terms of its application within the Civil Service in the context of the political economy of work in the early 21st century. The research will also examine the way that lean has impacted on the workforce. To this end, the research will examine civil servants’ work skills. Researching work skills will allow an examination of the ways in which lean has been used to restructure work in the Civil Service. With work restructuring integral to the management of the employment relationship, the research will finally examine the response of the Civil Service workforce to lean. The research will focus on the response of the main Civil Service trade union viewed from both the perspective of the union as the representative body for the workforce, but also examining the response of the trade union members at workplace level.

Lean is a contested area. On the one hand, there are those who argue that its benefits provide an opportunity to dispense with the inefficient working practices of the past through the utilisation of worker skills to generate organizational improvement. On the other hand, lean is viewed as a means of controlling the workforce in the interests of capital through the manipulation of worker skills against workers’ own interests. Understanding the nature of lean and its relationship to worker skills therefore becomes a critical factor in evaluating its impact on work

¹ From the preface to the second edition of *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, page 18

organization. An emphasis on the collective response of the workforce viewed from the perspective of its trade union is therefore also critical in evaluating lean. A study of the impact of lean can ultimately make a significant contribution to understanding the changing nature of work organization within one major part of the public sector.

The research is relevant and timely. It is relevant because the Civil Service is a major employer in Britain. The most recent statistics show that the Civil Service employs 448,835 people² (Office for National Statistics, 2013a) around 1.5% of the working population of the United Kingdom (Office for National Statistics, 2013b). The research is relevant in terms of the large number of people employed, but it is also significant in the way that its functions impact on every member of the population to some degree. The research is also timely in that it was undertaken during a period of significant organizational change within the Civil Service. Its significance lies not only in terms of the opportunity to research the use of an organizational improvement approach widely utilised by a variety of private and public sector employers, but its significance also lies in researching lean in the context of wider political and economic changes occurring within the UK. The first significant systematic application of the lean approach within the Civil Service was in 2004 (National Audit Office, 2011). Its use within HM Revenue and Customs followed in the wake of the Gershon Report (2004), a government sponsored report into organizational efficiency in the public sector. The Civil Service continued to use lean throughout the period of the global economic crisis of 2008 and following the election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in 2010.

The originality of this research stems from the fact that lean was studied in a major public sector employer during a period of political and economic upheaval. This allows the study of lean working to be located within the political economy of work in which the British state has a significant part both as employer of state employees, the civil servants, and as a government whose political and economic agendas shape that infrastructure.

The UK Civil Service is the organization that administers state and government policies within Britain. Its functions include the development and analysis of government policy. It also includes the administration and implementation of government policy and legislation in relation to the citizens of the

² March 31 2013 figures

country. The Civil Service fulfils these functions through its workforce, the civil servants who are state employees. Included within their administrative roles, civil servants may exercise certain judicial or quasi-judicial functions in determining the law (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992; Harlow and Rawlings, 2006). Civil servants in the UK are deemed to be politically neutral serving the government of the day (Civil Service, 2013a; Theakston, 1995; Page, 2010). The modern Civil Service has its origins in the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms of the mid-nineteenth century that sought to create a state administrative apparatus free from the influence of political patronage (Moses, 1966).

The Civil Service has typically been viewed as a bureaucratic organization operating through a hierarchical structure, a reliance on rules and precedents for its operation, an objectivity of approach with clear lines of managerial authority and delegated decision making power both in terms of its internal organization and in its interaction with the public. Historically, the assumption has been that the Civil Service has had sufficient expertise within its own organization to deal with matters over which it has jurisdiction (Pilkington, 1999; Campbell, 1965; Robson, 1956).

The UK Civil Service is currently organised into a number of departments each dealing with a specific area of policy or policy implementation. The current structure of central government administration is comprised of 24 ministerial departments each responsible for a number of executive agencies; 21 non-ministerial departments; 330 public bodies; and three devolved administrations for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (Gov.UK, 2013). Ministerial departments are primarily concerned with policy issues and are headed by a government minister. The executive agencies, under the control of the ministerial departments, are responsible for policy implementation and headed by senior civil servants. Non-ministerial departments are headed by senior civil servants and generally have a regulatory function. The public bodies are directly accountable to government ministers and deal with specific state or government functions. The three devolved administrations each have their own internal structures relating to the areas of work that are devolved to those bodies. The most recently published statistics show that as of March 31 2013 a total of 448,835 people were employed in the Civil Service in England, Scotland and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2013a). Northern Ireland has its own Civil Service (Page, 2010) and as such falls outwith the scope of this research.

Although the Civil Service has been subject to a significant number of organizational reviews and attempts at restructuring since the mid-nineteenth century reforms (Moses, 1966; Campbell, 1965), more radical attempts at restructuring followed the election of the Conservative government in 1979. The Thatcher government sought to reduce the influence of the state. To this end, the government, first, sought to reduce the number of civil servants (at that time totalling 725,000), secondly, cut public expenditure, and thirdly, improve the state bureaucratic system. The mantra of rolling back the “frontiers of the state”, manifested through these three policy aims, reflects the neo-liberal view that market mechanisms were the most efficient way to allocate resources within and to the public sector. Consequently in the belief that private sector organizations were inherently more efficient than public sector or state-run organizations, the public sector, including the Civil Service, was from 1979 increasingly subject to organizational change premised on the entrepreneurial ethos of value for money purportedly espoused by the private sector (Pilkington, 1999). It confirmed the view that the Civil Service needed to exist under a ‘marketised’ regime and operate under the types of organizational efficiency programmes found within the private sector. Governments of all political hues since 1979 have been committed to restructuring the Civil Service utilising the private sector as an exemplar of efficient practice. This has either, as it did in other parts of the public sector, led to direct privatisation moving areas of work from state control to private sector control, outsourcing, or by utilising private sector expertise in the public sector as a means of improving efficiency (Cunningham and James, 2009). The private sector, it was asserted, could replace or improve the inefficient pre-1979 Civil Service using techniques and processes drawn from the private sector as a means of increasing organizational efficiency (Gains, 2003).

Pilkington (1999) highlights that these attempts to restructure work organization reflected the attempts by the Thatcher government to curb the power and influence of the Civil Service trade unions. As such, it was entirely consistent with the neo-liberal agenda of controlling the collective power of the workforce by emasculating the influence of the trade unions (Clark, 1996; McIlroy, 1988).

Organizational restructuring in the Civil Service was witnessed in the separation of the policy creation arm of government from that part of the state apparatus that dealt with the administration and implementation of those policies.

The Conservative government in the 1980s under its 'Next Steps' programme created a variety of 'Next Steps agencies'. The aim was to retain a small core of civil servants engaged in policy development within the existing government departments and transfer around 95% of the workforce to the Next Steps agencies to undertake the administration of those policies (Theakston, 1995). This division between policy and implementation mirrored the historic functional division of labour within the Civil Service between those involved in the development of policy and those who implemented it. The creation of the Next Steps agencies sought to decentralise operational control over implementation matters to quasi-independent departments able to control the management of its employees freed from the centralised control of the parent departments. Bailey (1996) highlights that this decentralisation presented these agencies with the opportunity to restructure their organization and to amend their personnel policies to reflect operational needs. The assumption was that these agencies would be allowed to set their own internal efficiency programmes premised on priority based cost management; on using comparisons with private sector best practices; structured business improvement programmes; and on market testing existing services with a view to identifying which areas of the agencies' work could be transferred to the private sector (Pilkington, 1999). This approach, often labelled New Public Management (NPM), was premised on deliberate and purposive changes by Civil Service management to change organizational structures and work processes as a means of increasing efficiency (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004; Hood, 1991). This restructuring of the Civil Service was consistent with and integral to attempts to marketise the public sector. How this was manifested through the use of lean working, both in terms of techniques and tools, and crucially as a means of control over the state labour process will be explored in this thesis.

With the election of the New Labour government in 1997, there was a change in emphasis in the operation of these decentralised government bodies. Gains (2003) argues that the relabeling of Next Steps agencies as "executive" agencies could be read as a process of reaffirming the value of the state and its institutions in the achievement of government policy goals. Consequently this change could also be seen as a way of reversing the trend from the delivery of services solely based on economy and efficiency to one based on the achievement of effective outcomes for all stakeholders within society. As Gains (2003) also argues, although New Labour reversed the trend towards decentralisation in

departmental governance, this outcome was balanced by an increase in the level of monitoring and control of these agencies by the parent departments. Mooney and Law (2007) argue, however, that these changes did not lead to the demise of neo-liberalism at the heart of government: government maintained an inherent belief in the inefficiency of the public sector. Restructuring in the New Labour period arguably accelerated rather than slowed down the process of marketization.

One of the triggers for this research was the publication of the Gershon Report (2004). This report was one of a number of strands in the New Labour Modernising Government programme initiated in 1999. The Civil Service Reform Programme, a central part of the Modernising Government programme, sought to improve organisational performance and develop better business planning (Bovaird and Russell, 2007). The Gershon Report was commissioned by the New Labour government with the express aim of making efficiency savings within the Civil Service that 'release resources for front line delivery' (2004:5).

Gershon (2004) argued that the efficiencies would be achieved through the reform of work processes and resource utilisation. He (2004:6) described efficiency as "making the best use of the resources available for the provision of public services" by reducing costs and generating greater output from the workforce, whilst maintaining the same level of service provision for the public. As a means of more efficiently improving Civil Service work, Gershon recommended that the Civil Service make more efficient use of information technology (what the report described as "e-channels of communication") and also greater use of proven business efficiency techniques drawn from best practice in the private sector. The report, furthermore, recommended an increased use of 'back office' processing and standardisation of work processes. Moreover, it highlighted the need to more effectively manage staff in terms of, for example, sickness absence. Gershon stated his report had to be viewed in tandem with the Lyons review (National Archives, 2004) that had also been commissioned by the government to address the relocation of Civil Service work.

Whilst Lyons recommended moving employees away from London and the south east of England as a means of cutting costs, Gershon stated that staff relocation provided the opportunity to use new business processes, to utilise information technology in the processing of work and to change the culture of the Civil Service as an organization. McCafferty and Mooney (2007) highlight the impact

that the Gershon Report was intended to have in terms of the reduction of staff numbers³, and how information technology and private sector business practices could be used in achieving these savings. McCafferty and Mooney (2007) further argue these changes are fundamental to the neo-liberal restructuring of the state. The state has continued to display its commitment to an agenda that supports privatisation, decentralisation into individual cost units and, critically in view of the way civil servants are managed, an increasing emphasis on systems of performance management (Martínez Lucio, 2007). Government pronouncements issued consequent to Gershon and Lyons continued to promote an agenda that supported strategic alliances with the private sector; the need for the innovative use of existing processes and procedures; and the advantages that accrue from the use of information technology (Crown Communications, 2008).

Whilst Gershon (2004) was devoid of prescriptive attachment to any specific method or technique to achieve its aims, individual government departments developed structured programmes with the express aim of implementing these efficiency savings. The preferred business improvement strategy adopted by government departments was lean. HM Revenue and Customs in 2004 introduced lean working, first into tax processing centres and then in other parts of its organization with the stated aim of 95% roll-out of lean working by 2013 (Radnor and Bucci, 2007; National Audit Office, 2011). The Department for Work and Pensions promulgated its Lean Vision in 2007 with its aim of achieving a fully 'leaned' organization by 2017. Its use in these two government departments continued through the period of the research and into the period following the change of government in 2010. The lean approach remained consistent with the espoused aims of the new Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government whose "radical programme of public sector reform" is premised on "improving the transparency, efficiency and accountability of public services" (HM Treasury, 2010). A variety of other departments also introduced lean in terms of restructuring their logistics operations (e.g. Ministry of Defence (National Audit Office, 2002)) or as a

³ The Department for Work and Pensions was scheduled to lose 30,000 net posts between 2004 and 2008. HM Revenue and Customs, created from an amalgamation of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise in 2004, was scheduled to lose 10,500 posts net in the same period. The Department of Education and Science was scheduled to have a reduction of 31% in its headquarters staff.

means of organising work (e.g. Ministry of Justice (2009b)). Government sources justify lean on the basis of the considerable financial savings that have or will accrue from its use. It was, for example, reported to Parliament that lean had enabled civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions to develop new and innovative ways of working and thereby was a source of significant efficiency savings (House of Commons, 2010). It is beyond the scope or remit of this research to explore the legitimacy of these claims relating to financial savings. This research will however examine the use of lean at a unit or office level in terms of its impact on work organization upon which these savings are apparently based.

Civil servants currently work in a variety of different departments. The current organization of the Civil Service distinguishes five types of administrative bodies. Although ministerial departments, executive agencies, non-ministerial departments, public bodies and the devolved administrations are legally distinguishable in terms of Parliamentary accountability, the management of these bodies is effectively decentralised and run by boards of senior managers albeit under strict budgetary control exercised by the Treasury (Cabinet Office, 2007; Cabinet Office, 2012; Page, 2010). These management boards are largely composed of senior civil servants but also include external appointments made from the private sector (Page, 2010).

The data for this thesis is substantially drawn from HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)⁴. Additional material is drawn from a number of other government departments in providing a useful comparator upon which to potentially apply theory to the wider Civil Service. The size and complexity of the Civil Service prevented an examination of all its departments. The project required a targeted approach in view of the time and resources available to the researcher. Focusing on two large departments that contain 39% of the staff working in the Civil Service (Civil Service, 2013b)⁵, whilst balancing this against a number of comparators from other departments, provides robust empirical data from which to conceptualise the use of lean within the Civil Service, the impact of lean on skills and the trade union response. The two main departments from which data was collected, HMRC and DWP, are arguably representative of the administrative and decision making functions of the Civil

⁴ For ease of discussion, the term 'department' will be used for all central government bodies irrespective of exact status.

⁵ 2011 figures

Service. The data is drawn from civil servants, first, working in clerical or administrative grades and, secondly, from those working in the most junior managerial grades typifying two of the historic tiers of the Civil Service, clerical officer grades and executive officer grades that comprise the bulk of the workforce (Campbell, 1965). These grades comprise 70% of the staff working in the Civil Service (Civil Service, 2013b)⁶. The research data was collected from trade union members employed in the Civil Service. The initial impetus for the research came from the main Civil Service trade union, the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). The union's interest, and thus its willingness to support research in this area of lean working, arose due to its concerns over issues of deskilling and the intensification of work that the union attributed to lean working, initially within HMRC, but then more widely throughout the Civil Service. The PCS supported this research by providing access to its members and trade union officials at site level. Additional material, mostly at the initial stages of the research was gathered from senior PCS officials. Despite attempts by the researcher to gather data from Civil Service management, requests for cooperation were either declined or ignored. This lack of support was in part compensated by access to a limited amount of government documentary sources.

The extensive use of lean working within the Civil Service leads to three research questions that will be explored in this thesis. The overall aim of the research is to discover the impact of changes in work organization in the UK Civil Service. As lean working is currently the main approach by which government departments seek to organise work, the research seeks, first, to address the question: what is the nature of lean working within the context of the Civil Service? The main theoretical debate on lean derives, broadly speaking, from two contradictory positions. The first position asserts that lean is a means to improve organizational efficiency. Lean is a means to eradicate waste in the production process and to this end organizations, by using lean, can use workforce knowledge as a way of increasing organizational efficiency (Womack *et al.*, 1990). The contrary position broadly asserts that lean is a means to control the workforce and results in the intensification of work and deskilling. Notwithstanding a rhetoric of worker involvement, lean uses workers' knowledge against their own interests (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). This thesis broadly concurs with the second contention that lean is a

⁶ Figures from March 31 2013

system of workforce control. The thesis will link lean to the political economy of work manifested at national and organizational level within the specific context of the Civil Service. It will also seek to explain variations in the way that lean is applied across the Civil Service developing a four-fold typology of lean, all within the broader context of the UK's marketised public sector.

The second research question addresses the critical issue of employee skills. With lean purporting to be a means of increasing worker skills, a second research question is raised: what is the impact of lean working on the work skills of civil servants? The PCS was concerned over issues of deskilling. However, the issue of skills is also important as the direction of skill is organically linked to the ways in which the employer seeks to exercise control over the workforce. This control is arguably fundamental to the nature of lean and as such requires investigation. Skill is a multifaceted concept (Spenner, 1983) measurable through assessing substantive job complexity and autonomy control. This research will argue that the trend in the direction of worker skill, even within those parts of Civil Service work that require the exercise of legal or quasi-legal decision making (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992), tends towards a more deskilled workforce. It will address the tension that exists between those parts of Civil Service work that retain a level of job complexity and the more significant trends towards increased management control of the labour process and the reduction of worker autonomy. This general trend towards deskilling will be evaluated in the context of lean arguing that deskilling is integral to the restructuring of work.

The final research question asks: what was the response of the PCS union to lean? Braverman (1974) in his seminal work on the nature of deskilling in the labour process highlights the way that management seeks to control the labour force in the interests of capital. If, as it is asserted, Braverman's work on deskilling fails to adequately address the role of the response of labour (Littler, 1982), this thesis examines the collective response of the workforce expressed through the trade union. This thesis will address the contradictory nature of the trade union's response. On the one hand, the PCS maintained an oppositional stance to lean working. At other times, the union negotiated with Civil Service management to attempt to ameliorate, rather than oppose, aspects of lean working often in face of the views of the wider union membership. The final part of the thesis will address this contradiction arguing that the compromise over the use of lean at a local level

between management and PCS is linked to management-union relations at national level.

Through these three research questions, the thesis will argue that lean must be viewed not in isolation from the political economy of work. Its use at a workplace level is integrally linked to the state's attempts to marketise work at a national level. To this end, these three research questions will examine the extent to which a productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) can assist in theorising the link between changes in work organization at the local or workplace level (the micro level), at the Civil Service level (the meso level), and finally at the state or national level (the macro level). The political and economic structures and influences that impact on the organization of work can be examined as a means of understanding how lean links to, what Boyer (2005) describes as, the political-economic architecture of work. A productive model approach has the potential to place organizational change firmly within the context of the political economy of work and reject the contention that lean should only be viewed as simply a set of techniques or tools to aid business or organizational efficiency.

The second chapter will critically review the literature relating to lean working and organizational change. The chapter will also review the literature dealing with the issue of skills; and the nature of industrial relations in the context of the Civil Service.

The third chapter discusses the methodology used within the research. It will give particular attention to the background to the research and to the issues around access to data. It will discuss the nature of power in the research process arguing that the role of key players was instrumental in shaping the research in ways different to those originally envisaged. Issues of access, also discussed in this chapter, determined which workplace locations would be used to collect data. This chapter will address how a case study approach was used to theorise lean utilising a variety of different workplace locations without losing the rigour that might be obtained by focusing in detail on a small number of workplace sites. The way the case study approach was used in this study has merit as it provides a broader overview than one that focused on specific sites viewed in isolation. The case study method adopted in this research sought to use a number of locations each performing different roles as a means of theorising the nature of lean in the UK Civil

Service. The chapter also explains how semi-structured interviews and the use of documentary evidence were used as a means of analysing lean.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters constitute the analysis chapters. The fourth chapter discusses the first research question examining the nature of lean in the context of the Civil Service. The fifth chapter, in addressing the second research question, examines the issue of skills, both those used by the workforce in undertaking administrative and processing functions, but also examining the judicial and quasi-judicial functions exercised by civil servants in the performance of their work. The sixth chapter discusses the final research question relating to the response of the trade union. The seventh chapter forms the conclusion to the thesis.

Chapter 2 Lean and Changes in the Organization of Work

This chapter examines the literature relating to the changes in work organization, lean, and the trade union response in the context of the UK Civil Service.

To this end, the chapter begins by exploring several perspectives on the political economy of work focusing on what these mean in relation to the organization of work. The three key areas that form the basis of this analysis are, first, the historic development within capitalism that led to mass production and Fordism; secondly the restructuring of work and post-Fordism; and thirdly the debate around varieties of capitalism. The chapter explores the extent to which the political economy of work at a national level is linked to the way that work is organised at sectoral and at workplace levels. It is important to deal with the issue of political economy of work in some depth before examining issues around lean working.

As lean working is central to the thesis, this chapter will examine contrasting perspectives ranging from those who advocate lean working as a means of business improvement to critical approaches that challenge lean on technical and historical bases. The chapter will also examine lean as a system of management control over the workforce. As one of the main areas of contention surrounding lean is in relation to skills, the chapter at this point will discuss the issue of skills in some detail. As the introduction emphasises, on the one hand lean can be seen as a system of work organization whereby the skills of the workforce can be used to continuously improve the efficiency of a business. On the other hand, central to the critique of lean is the argument that lean is an approach to work organization that uses workers' knowledge against their own interests.

These sections of the literature review preface discussion of work restructuring within the UK Civil Service where lean has increasingly been used as a system of work organization. This discussion will examine changes in the organization of work within the context of the political economy of work and where lean fits within the state labour process. This discussion will contextualise the first research question that asks: what is the nature of lean working within the UK Civil Service? The second research question relates to the impact of lean on worker skills: the literature review will locate the discussion in the specific context of the UK

Civil Service. A final section of the literature review will examine industrial relations within the Civil Service. This will help in answering the third question: what is the response of the PCS trade union and its membership to lean working?

2:1 The Political Economy of Work

Beginning with a discussion of the political economy of work allows the impact of organizational changes at the workplace level to be framed within a broader context. This section of the literature review will examine models of political economy and relate them to organizational change at the workplace level. The discussion will frame the issue of lean in the context of the workplace and within the context of the Civil Service, but also within the context of the political-economic infrastructure of the UK. The chapter will examine the interrelationships between the three levels of analysis, in effect the national level, the sectoral level (that is the Civil Service) and the workplace level. The empirical data in this thesis is drawn from the workplace. However, the workplace level of analysis is arguably incomplete without being located within its sectoral and national contexts.

Political economy refers to the interrelationship between the 'structure of rule' and the system for producing goods and services' (Wamsley and Zald, 1973:64). It can also refer to the relationship between the state and the economy to produce a competitive market place, and to modern welfare economics insofar as it seeks to benefit most people within society at least cost. Walmsley and Zald further argue that within the concept of political economy the term 'politics' relates to the legitimacy of power and its distribution, the systems and sub-systems found at all levels of society and the means of task accomplishment, whilst "economy" refers to how the division of labour is organised, the allocation of resources needed to achieve this organization, the means to maximise productive efficiency and the factors affecting the cost of production and delivering a level of service or output. Caporaso and Levine define political economy as the application of "economic reasoning to political processes (1992:128). The relationship between polity and economy encompasses not only that relationship at a national or macro level, but also at other levels of analysis. Smith (1986:109) argued, for example, in considering the division of labour, a central theme in the organization of work, that the division is understood "by considering in what manner it operates in some particular manufactures". Marx (1973) in challenging earlier conceptions of political economy argued that the political and legal structure of society is based on its

economic structure. Thus, it can be argued the economy and polity of society are inextricably bound at all levels, both at the level of the state, the level of the sector and the level of the workplace. The classical view of economics that held that with the rise of capitalism economics would be depoliticised is largely discredited (Caporaso and Levine, 1992). The concept of political economy thus supports the view that there exists a link between the polity and the economy of individual societies at a variety of different levels of analysis from national to workplace. Holding to the view that politics and economy are linked, this literature review will analyse trends and models of political economy.

Whilst the main focus of the research is the UK, a discussion of models evident within the wider global economy can assist in contextualising the changes in work organizations occurring in Britain. Whether viewed as a 'cause of improvement' (Smith, 1986) or as a system that transformed 'mankind into a horde of ravenous beasts' (Engels, 2000) capitalism has from the nineteenth century, with the expansion of a business class able to exploit the wealth of society, been the dominant world economic order (Landes, 1969; Marx, 1976). Harvey (1989) argues that the political economy of work cannot be separated from an analysis of the development of capitalism.

Fundamental to the political economy of work are the ways in which economics and politics at all levels of analysis are integrally linked to the need by capital to generate wealth. Not all hold to the view that the essence of capitalism is rooted in the control or exploitation of labour (Becker, 1992). However, this link is a key factor in shaping the political economy of work at all levels of analysis. Despite the contention that within the world economy there is increasing convergence between national economies (Wolf, 2005), there remains significant divergence in these economies in terms of their interrelationships with their markets, forms of work organization and collective institutions (Hirst *et al.*, 2009; Crouch and Streeck, 1997). The impact of globalisation has created a degree of convergence in terms of the development of national economies, but an over-simplistic view of the 'globalisation' concept fails to capture the levels of divergence within global capitalism.

Even where convergence exists, it arguably occurs unevenly. There are degrees of unevenness at national, sectoral and organizational levels (Dicken, 2011). An examination of the interrelationship between the national political

economy and work organization that exists within the UK is important as a means of understanding why particular changes have occurred within the public sector and specifically within the Civil Service. This examination will help to frame the discussion of the political economy of work at the workplace level.

The following section will examine different perspectives on political economy and the relationship between national political-economic systems and their respective work organization systems. This section will examine approaches that deal with political-economic systems in terms of their developments over time. The section will also examine the divergence between different forms of political-economic systems as they are reflected primarily within nation states. This section will include discussion on 'varieties of capitalism' (Hall and Soskice, 2001) including an examination of the productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) and the way that this conceptual framework links national or macro level analysis to sectoral or meso levels of analysis and then to firm or micro level analysis. This approach will allow the discussion on lean systems to be located within a specific political and economic context.

The literature review will frame the debate on work organization in two ways. It will primarily seek to frame the structure of lean systems of work within a political-economic approach in its historical and national contexts. The discussion will also, however, have value in challenging the rhetoric of work organizational change that creates an a-historic and a-contextual analysis of lean systems of work.

2:2 The Development of Capitalism and its Impact on Work Organization

Coates (2000) argues that the predominant model of capitalism has become the neo-liberal model based on the belief that economic growth is created by the freeing of market forces. However, as Coates also argues, the development of capitalism has been uneven and differentiated across national boundaries. An examination of this sequential or linear development of capitalism and its impact on work organization will form the first part of the analysis of the political economy of work.

The origins of modern capitalism owe their development to the industrial revolution with its substitution of human labour with mechanical power, the replacement of human and animal power with forms of inanimate power and the improvement in the supply of raw materials (Landes, 1969). Smith (1986:109)

argued that fundamental to national economic improvement was the extent to which an economy could exploit the 'skill, dexterity, and judgement' of the workforce through utilising the division of labour as the defining means of improving the productive power of the labour force. The division of labour was premised, first, on reducing employees' work to the performance of single (and thereby simple) tasks as a means of increasing output; secondly on the advantages gained from locating different tasks in sufficient proximity to each other to minimise the loss of production time; and thirdly, by the appropriate and efficient use of machinery in the performance of work tasks. The development and facilitation of such machinery was often, even in this early period of industrialisation, said to be attributable to the initiative of workers themselves in response to the requirement to resolve problems in the productive or manufacturing process.

The exploitation of the division of labour was however also dependent on the extent of the market and availability of capital stock. Although the evidence upon which Smith drew was not without its qualifications and exceptions (Hutchison, 1976), the analysis in *The Wealth of Nations* was based on comparing the 'civilised and thriving nations' (Smith, 1986:105) with their poorer counterparts. While it is arguable that Smith's criticisms of the mercantilist system ignored the inherent economic advantages that the system provided and that the primacy of the division of labour was overestimated (Lazonick, 1991), modern political economy models have often relied on differentiating flourishing economies from their less successful counterparts. The need to compare success in one economy with failings in another is a motif found in much of the prescriptive literature dealing with organizational change as later discussion will show.

Marx (1973), however, argued that the development of capitalism was underpinned through the relations of production whereby the material productive forces of society conflict with the existing societal relations. Under capitalism the relations of production and, correspondingly, the system of work organization are inextricably bound to an economic-political system based on capital's appropriation and exploitation of labour. This exploitation is manifested through the labour process. Marx (1976) defines the elements of the labour process as the worker's personal activity (that is the work itself), the subjects of that work and the instruments of that work. Under capitalism the labour process is denoted, first, by the way that all work undertaken is done under the control of capital, and secondly

that the output of that work belongs not to the worker who creates the product, but to the capitalist who has purchased the worker's labour power. The key factors in the labour process are both objective and subjective. The means of production, the objective factor, are the artefacts or material by which the worker engages in the labour process, whilst labour power, the subjective factor, is the aggregate of the mental and physical capabilities exercised by the worker in his or her work. This labour process is premised on transforming as much labour as possible into surplus value and employing as little labour as possible relative to invested capital (Marx, 1972) leading inevitably to work intensification. However the development of capitalism from the late eighteenth century to the present has been uneven with consequent impact on work organization. This is seen both in relation to the work itself and to the instruments used to undertake that work.

Authors, often writing in the Marxist tradition, caution against neglecting the elements of continuity that are common throughout the history of industrial capitalism to the present day (Hyman, 1991; Pollert, 1991). Variations in different political-economic systems are explained by reference to the conditions under which the workforce are engaged in systems of exchange and production (Engels, 2000) that is itself determined by the historical stage of capitalist development of each society. What underpins the organization of work remains, by this token, unchanged. However other streams of thought highlight the changing nature of capitalism and the consequent impact on work organization.

Lazonick (1991) argues that industrial capitalism supplanted earlier forms of capitalism through reorganization of the ways that productive labour was utilised in agriculture and industry. The proprietary form of capitalism evident within the nineteenth century *laissez-faire* British economy based on single plant operations failed to compete financially against US managerial capitalism with its control over organizational structures and its coordination over a specialised division of labour. In its turn with the organizational strength of one era becoming the weakness in another when confronted by a new phase of economic development, managerial capitalism was supplanted by a later incarnation, collective capitalism. Collective capitalism, typified by the Japanese economy, is denoted by the cooperation of the state in shaping the social environment, the integration of a number of firms to a common investment strategy and at firm level the integration of all parts of the organization to a common goal. The persistence of managerial capitalism in some

countries in the face of collective capitalism is due to business institutions adapting traditional technologies or organizational structures as a means of resisting the process of change. The development of capitalism over time and its impact on the organization of work underlies much of the debate around the issues of lean that will be explored later in the thesis.

The debate around the development of capitalism is critical on account of the ways that these systems of political-economy viewed at a national level or macro level impact on the organization of work and the labour process at the micro level. Authors writing in the early industrial period concentrated on the financial advantages that accrued from systems of work that brought manufacture together into one place and the increased skills that had resulted from the new means of working (Guest, 1823). From the earliest stages of the Industrial Revolution, industrialists used systematic approaches to management in the production of goods (Cossins, 2008). These attempts to systematise work at the workplace level during the period of proprietary capitalism were thus integral to the political-economic infrastructure of its time. Analyses of the political economy of work and its impact on work organization at the workplace level often rely on theorising the infrastructure of work organization through periodising any changes. In other words, analyses of the political economy of work are premised on the basis that there are periods of time during which distinct political-economic architectures exist that are markedly different from the phases that preceded it. These models of political economy derive from the observed behaviour of participants that generate theoretical constructs; analysis of those reflecting on changes within previous models; and unintentional changes that have a degree of coherence that unite variant strands of work organization (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002). Critically a model may also be an ideal to be attained that may be subject to imprecise periodisation neglecting or ignoring features of earlier models, either through inexact handling of the evidence or, for ideological reasons, to justify a position held (Williams *et al.*, 1992a).

2:2:1 The Impact of Mass Production

Central to much of the debate around the development of capitalism and its impact on the political economy of work is the development of systems of mass production. For some authors, the importance of the automobile industry is critical in setting the context of the debate around mass production. On one level, Womack *et al.* (1990)

argue that the early twentieth century witnessed the need for employers to shift the basis of manufacturing production from systems that had been formerly based around craft production to one based on mass production. Womack *et al.* argue that craft production was suited to the manufacture of custom made goods for a limited market. With the rise of a market demanding the production of affordable goods, craft production was no longer a viable economic model. Craft production relied on highly skilled craftspeople working in decentralised factory units. These authors argue in their analysis of the automobile industry that craft production restricted output capacity. Womack *et al.* (1990) further argue that the Ford Motor Company was the pioneer in the use of mass production that established the foundations for a new economic model based on high volume production for a mass market. Ford's ability to use interchangeable parts and to standardise the work processes to their most basic level were the keys to the success of mass production. By controlling production processes through the systematisation of work and the use of technology, Ford increased control over the company's capacity to make products in volume. With the use of the mechanised production assembly line, Ford could use standardised procedures and control the pace of work (Hounshell, 1984). This organizational model of mass production that Ford precipitated became popularly known as Fordism.

Despite the contention that these changes created a paradigmatic shift in the political economy of work, the move towards mass production was arguably a reflection of a particular phase of capitalist development rather than a catalyst. Murray (1988) describes Fordism in terms of four features: standardisation of products; the capacity of identical tasks to be performed on purpose build machinery; the capacity of the remaining tasks to be broken into constituent parts and redesigned; and the creation of assembly line production. Fordism can, however, be used as an epithet not for a set of techniques for systematising work exemplified through the efforts of one influential company in one industrial sector, but a form of organizational infrastructure located within the political economy of work in a specific period within the development of capitalism (Gramsci, 1971). Central to Fordism is the control of the labour process within the context of a particular historical and economic system (Harvey, 1989). The Fordist system sat comfortably with the populist and democratic nature of society within the USA in the early twentieth century. The compromise between the workforce and management over higher wages in return for a system of work premised on heightened

management control of the labour process supported a structure of society based on economic individualism (Gramsci, 1971). Its viability as a political-economic system, built on high wages and management control, was manifested through both coercion and persuasion. Gramsci highlighted that whilst the mechanisation inherent within Fordist systems of manufacturing were invariably built on producing items in quantity rather than in quality, Fordism created a dichotomy between a cohort of permanently higher-waged workers with specific skills and a cohort of casual workers denied access to these benefits. However Fordism was not hegemonic within national borders. Even within car manufacturing plants, the exemplars of Fordism, productive systems were subject to variation and fluctuation as a means of controlling the labour process in relation to direct competitors (Williams *et al.*, 1993; Schwartz and Fish, 1998). An over-emphasis on the techniques of the manufacturing process places too great a focus on work organization at the expense of the way that the automobile industry purposively attempted to exploit divisions within the labour force. This exploitation was by control over the workforce and its trade unions through either direct confrontation or through incorporation by management into its objectives (Cohen, 1990). Whilst Fordism might link a particular form of work organization structure to a specific form of worker-management compromise, viewing the development of modern capitalism solely through the lens of Fordism is not without its problems.

The early part of the twentieth century saw an increased interest among employers on how they might manage the workforce. Fordism was located in a particular historical period and in a specific geographical location. Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) highlight the risk of assuming that Fordism was a universal approach to work organization. They contend that whilst Ford was concerned with large scale manufacturing enterprises, for example Taylor (1998) writing in the early twentieth century, was concerned with managing the workforce in small to medium enterprises. Fordism is indicative of a productive system that understood the need to exploit the mass market (Harvey, 1989) and created a more sophisticated means of labour control through exploitation of the assembly line (Littler, 1982; Braverman, 1974). Pruijt (1997) argues that the Taylor system was primarily concerned with issues around direct control of the workforce in contrast to Fordist approaches that related to the way that the production line was a means of workforce control. In view of the relationship between the deskilling that occurred under Taylorism, a discussion of Taylor will have value at this point.

Taylor's system encompassed four principles. First, it was possible to develop a science of management that could be used for every element of any job of work eliminating the wastage from inefficient self-taught methods, what Taylor described as the 'old rule-of-thumb' method (1998:15). Secondly, Taylor believed that managers alone must select, train and teach their workforce using these scientific methods: he held that workers were unable to determine the most efficient way to undertake a job of work. Thirdly, there was a need for co-operation between management and workforce to ensure a rigorous application of the principles of scientific management. Finally, Taylor held to the absolute segregation of the conception of work from its execution. In effect, the Taylor system of management, as it was then known, held to the view that the managers should decide how the work was done and the workers did the work. These elements were largely, if not wholly, due to his explicitly stated beliefs that, first, employees in general lacked the wit to comprehend work processes, and secondly, the workers left to their own devices lacked the willingness to exert themselves to their full extent. This was a system that required management to have absolute control over every aspect of the work process. Taylor's system had application not only to industry, but also to such areas as office work (Galloway, 1919).

Taking Taylor's 'scientific management' at face value is problematic on a number of fronts: it was not wholly original; it was rigorously challenged by its contemporaries; and its effectiveness as a system in the way Taylor presented it was highly questionable. The Taylor system was arguably a refinement of systematic management. Systematic management was a response to the increasingly complex industrial arena of late nineteenth century USA where there was a perceived need by factory owners to regain control of the administrative processes of management: in effect Taylor popularised and systematised work organization systems that already existed (Litterer, 1961; Braverman, 1974). It was against this background that Taylor developed his ideas (Nelson, 1974). Systematic management shared with Taylor concerns that a lack of standardisation was tantamount to inadequate work organization. Although Taylor clearly had his advocates, support was far from universal. Apart from objections received on moral and ethical grounds, the belief espoused by Taylor that industrial workers had freedom to work autonomously was called into question (Stevens Institute Archive, Various). Company owners had in reality, exercised a degree of control over the labour process significantly greater than the inadequate levels that Taylor asserted

were then commonplace in industry. Scientific management was furthermore, as Nelson (1974) highlights, never successfully implemented by his disciples exactly as Taylor had envisaged it. While there was evidence of increased attention to systemization of work processes and time studies, Taylor's ideas around the use of functional foremen as a means of training the workforce were shown to be inadequately conceived and were never effectively put into practice. Littler (1982) argues that in the UK context Taylorist approaches to employee management were never commonplace until after the First World War emphasising the fact that management strategies of organizational control are rooted in specific historical and social contexts.

Braverman (1974) argues that fundamental to Taylor's approach was the attempt to decouple workers' skills from the labour process as a means of asserting management control over work. Taylor's attempt to systematise management was premised on separating the conception of work from its execution, and that decision making in an organization should be reserved to management. Decisions on the systematisation of work need to be made by management, who not only have the ability or capacity to make those decisions, but to prevent workers from making decisions in their own interest (Pruijt, 2000). For Braverman, the systematisation of work applied to the office as much as to the factory with clerical workers equally subject to attempts at control of the labour process as workers in manufacturing. Braverman's argument was that this form of systematisation is premised on deskilling the workforce as a means of control.

However Braverman arguably fails to take into account earlier declines in skills in craft work and incorrectly equates the advent of technology with deskilling (Adler, 2004). Braverman may also have created an idealised version of the craft worker against which to evaluate deskilling (Thompson, 1989). There is an assumption within Braverman, as Thompson argues, that deskilling equates to increased management control. A lack of emphasis on the capacity of the workforce to resist the systematisation of work neglects the diversity of the ways in which management control over the workforce is exercised. The way that management attempts to systematise organizational control is, to a significant degree, a reflection of the interaction between workers and employers in a specific job context (Littler, 1982). In any analysis of an organizational model, there is a risk in believing that the aims or intentions of management are fully realised in practice. The risk is either viewing Taylorism as a failed ideology, never achieved in practice, or as a system

that underlies all forms of work organization. There is also a presumption that Taylorism equates to a system of work organization that is coterminous with mass production when its use may fit more closely to a heterogeneous market and a more diverse range of job functions (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002).

2:2:2 The Restructuring of Work

If the advent of mass production is significant in understanding the restructuring of work, the reasons for its demise are equally crucial in assessing the development of the political economy of work. Arguably the period during which mass production held greatest sway was the post-World War Two period. The post 1945 period saw a boom in the economies of advanced industrial counties (Schonfield, 1965) based on the pursuit of full employment and technological innovation. It also reflected state intervention as a means of maximising the potential of the Fordist systems of production (Coates, 2000). The problems that national states had in sustaining the Fordist-Keynesian system within the industrialised nations reflected pressure from the 1960s onwards that led to inflation and worker discontent (Harvey, 1989) and may reflect that its sustainability as an political-economic system may only have been maintained as long as the post-World War Two boom lasted (Hirst and Zeitlin, 1991).

What appeared to be another paradigmatic shift was subject to a variety of interpretations. This apparent shift in the political-economic architecture had impact on the organization of work at all levels of analysis from national level to firm level to workplace level. With models of workplace organization capable of being considered an ideal to be obtained, a construct based on the observation of participants or a response to changes borne of the historical phase of development (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002), this allows changes in work organization to be examined across a number of fronts. The ideological perspectives of those involved in implementing work change are accordingly as significant as the outcomes from work change attempted by the various actors at national, sectoral and workplace levels.

2:2:2:1 Neo-Liberalism

Coates (2000) argues that the dominant model of capitalism is the neo-liberal model. Neo-liberalism is “a theory of political-economic practices that argues that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade’ (Harvey, 2005:2). Its origins are based

on an amalgam of neo-classical economics and a libertarian ideology that premises the value of the individual's rights above all collective rights (Chang, 2002). Renewed interest in neo-liberalism arose in the wake of the Second World War as a means of developing a free society and remedying what its advocates identified as the defects in the post-war economic settlement (Mont Pelerin Society, n.d.).

In its current form, neo-liberalism is a reaction both against the classical economics of Smith, Ricardo and Marx and the Keynesian economics that dominated the post Second World War period (Harvey, 2005). Keynesianism supported full employment, economic growth and welfare citizenry. The Keynesian economic system, that Harvey describes as embedded liberalism, assumed two important features, first the desirability of class compromise, and secondly the legitimacy of state intervention. Both were sustainable within the capitalist system in the boom period post-1945. However neo-liberalism challenged the tenets of Keynesian economics. Its advocates sought to justify the 'delegitimation' of collective action when it threatened the ability of the market to regulate itself (Amable, 2011:4-5). It holds to the view that economic competition should always outweigh political interests. It is predicated on freeing capital of any constraints, whether exerted by the state, or by collective or organised labour (Wolf, 2005; Becker, 2009). The state's role should be limited to providing a modicum of services (defence, law and order, basic economic infrastructure), ensuring that the mechanisms for market competition operate in the interests of capital, and creating markets where none previously existed (Amable, 2011; Chang, 2002; Harvey, 2005). Neo-liberalism rejects the legitimacy of labour acting as a collective body: it holds that collective labour acts to support its vested interests and as such prevents market forces from generating economic growth. Neo-liberal assumptions are based on a universal principle that economic success is derived from the extent to which markets forces are allowed to operate without interference (Wolf, 2005). Wolf argues that countries which have enjoyed economic success are all marked by replacing state ownership, planning and protection with a market economy based on free enterprise, property rights and competition. Monopolies created by the state or through the actions of collective groups are inherently inefficient lacking the capacity to act effectively that can only be generated through market competition (Leibenstein, 1966).

Neo-liberalism is subject, nonetheless, to significant critique. It fails to address the influence of the political and vested interests that underpin economic policies, specifically the political bias towards economic rights within society (Caporaso and Levine, 1992). Furthermore certain allegedly neutral facets of the market (wages, interest rates) are politically driven (Chang, 2002). There is significantly greater interference in the market through the political process than advocates of neo-liberalism would like to admit (Amable, 2011). In attempting to ignore all but market factors, neo-liberalism leads to a form of crude technological determinism. The diffusion of capitalism across different countries has been uneven and an approach that assumes convergence around one global political economy of work neglects the influence of national and social-economic systems upon different countries (Elger and Smith, 1994; Hirst *et al.*, 2009). Neo-liberal economic analysis is based on a theory relating to the way that economic actors would behave in a world where perfect markets exist never realised in practice (Crouch, 2005). Its impact on work organization is therefore found in attempts to denigrate the collective role of organised labour and emphasise the importance of the individuals' relationship to their employers.

At organizational level, the neo-liberal conception of work organization would fit comfortably with the ideology of human resource management. Human resource management with its emphasis on the primacy of the individual's relationship to the employer and its treatment of individual workers as forms of human capital are both implicitly and explicitly linked to a neo-liberal agenda (Keenoy and Anthony, 1992). With human resource management premised on attempting to remove the power of collective labour, trade unions are often either removed or compromised by incorporation into a management agenda (Legge, 2005). The exact form of work organization under human resource management may be less significant than the effort expounded by management to remove collective voice from the workforce, often disguised through systems of team work. The issue of team work is one to which the literature will return, but the 'team' epithet used within human resource management disguises what is paradoxically an individualistic form of work organization (Sisson, 1992).

Assessing the impact of neo-liberalism is critical. Its advocates challenge the basis on which the political-economic systems found primarily in the Anglophone world have maintained a form of state-labour compromise at national level that

ultimately is manifested in the way that work is organised at firm and workplace level. The elections of the Thatcher and Reagan governments in 1979 and 1980 in the UK and the USA respectively provided the advocates of neo-liberalism with the opportunity to implement their policies as a panacea for the rising inflation, unemployment and the industrial unrest of the 1960s and 1970s (Harvey, 1989). The political changes provided the impetus for attempts by the state to restructure the way that public sector services were delivered and to challenge the collective power of the public sector trade unions such as those operating within the Civil Service (Pilkington, 1999). There is thus a direct link between the neo-liberal agenda and attempts to restructure work organization within the public sector, hence arguably the increasing popularity of human resource management in this work area (Ironsides and Seifert, 2002). However, before dealing with the specific impact on work organization in the Civil Service, it is important to return to the issue of the decline of the Keynesian-Fordist compromise as other perspectives and interpretations require discussion.

2:2:2:2 New Paradigms of Work

Although as Hyman (1991) cautions, there are risks in assuming that changes in work organization at the workplace level are indicators of the changing nature of capitalism, there are also several streams of thought that argue that the decline in the Keynesian-Fordist compromise marks a paradigmatic change in the nature of work organization. These include the conceptualisations of work around post-Fordism.

Many of the conceptions of the post-Fordist political economy of work are based around the idea that particularly within the industrialised world there is a fundamental shift from production based around the manufacture of tangible goods to an economy based on the service sector where knowledge becomes the commodity (Thompson and McHugh, 2002; Nonaka *et al.*, 2001). Even beyond those industries where knowledge work is the main source of economic advantage for the organization, the transformation of the way that workers use knowledge within what have traditionally been manual jobs is transformed. The rift between the conception and the execution of work created by Taylorist systems of management is arguably healed by using workers' intellectual abilities. Central to this is the use of computerisation and information technology (Zuboff, 1988; Blauner, 1964). These new developments whilst not altogether eliminating certain of the features of

Taylorism place more emphasis on work diversity and quality of products (Peaucelle, 2000). These conceptions of the post-Fordist world vary between more optimistic perspectives around the development of capitalism seeing post-Fordism as an opportunity to shift from the stagnation of the Fordist period and other more pessimistic views that view the change from Fordism to post-Fordism as paradigmatic but no more benevolent than its predecessors.

Authors writing in the *régulation* school tradition argue that the nature of the exploitation of the workforce by capital has not fundamentally changed in the shift to post-Fordism. However capitalism is subject to periodization whereby what Aglietta (1979) describes as regimes of accumulation collapse and reassemble in new forms. Fordism, unable to deal with weak growth in productivity and rising inflation, led to the decline in the worker-management compromise that had been based around higher wages for job stability (Boyer and Juillard, 2002). In terms of work organization, the new social organization of capital led to increased work intensification, attempts by management to reduce the role of the state in regulating the labour process and very specifically to create a larger service sector where the wage-labour nexus relied much less on the Fordist model of higher wages in return for job stability. The shift may also reflect that Fordism was fundamentally hierarchical with individual managers given little scope to amend standardised procedures leaving the political-economic system vulnerable to pressures from consumer demand based on the demand for niche products and variable rather than mass products (Murray, 1988). Boyer (2011) argues that there is a constant need within capitalism to change forms of technology, products, work organization and institutions as a means of addressing the crisis of accumulation. This view accords with a conceptualisation of work organization that seeks to locate it within a system of productive models.

The productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) is a means to examine national economies that seeks to explain how work is organised at a firm level. It links the national political economy to that at a sectoral level, and the political economy of work at sectoral level to that at firm level. Using data drawn extensively from the automobile manufacturing sector, Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) argue that productive models are shaped by a political-economic infrastructure based around profit strategies. The differentiation between countries will be explored below in more detail, but in terms of assessing the development of capitalism from a

historical framework, the transition from one stage of capitalism into another reflects the instability of the capitalist system. The 'productive model' consists of product policy, productive organization and the employment relationship and these three elements working in tandem require coherence with the overall national profit strategy. National profit strategy relates to the investments, domestic consumption and exports specific to each country. The product policy consists of the target market, the design and range of products, the diversity, novelty and quality of the products in addition to the financial margins achieved in the making of the product. The productive organization consists of the methods needed to attain the product policy. This includes how management organises work; how management integrates different parts of work organization in relation to other parts; commercialisation; management techniques; and the criteria by which management evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of its objectives. Finally, the employment relationship includes the systems of recruitment, pay, employee voice and representation, and reflects the nature of the workforce-management compromise. With the productive model a means to link the political-economic structure at a national level with the political-economy of work organization at both the level of the work sector and at the level of the workplace, the productive model approach integrates the three levels of analysis. Provided there is coherence based on the national profit strategy, management can use different forms of work organization within the same national economy and within the same sector. This approach derived from *régulation* theory seeks to locate the changes in work organization in the context of the crisis of Fordism. Changes in the political economy of work derive from the long term development of capitalism whereby the full employment of the post-World War Two period is the exception within capitalism. Work organisation at the micro level is thereby a reflection of the conflict between social groups mediated through legal and political processes (Boyer, 2002). The productive model approach is under-researched beyond the context of the private sector. It has potential to frame discussion regarding work restructuring in the public sector explaining how the organization of work is linked to the employment relations found at site level, but also how site level restructuring is linked to changes at sector and state levels.

Changes in work organization viewed through the prism of the political economy of work are however subject to more optimistic interpretations. Kenney and Florida (1993) argue that the influence of the Japanese model of capitalism is indicative of the shift from the mass production model of organization to more

collective and collaborative work organizational forms. Their model of innovation-mediated production is marked by five dimensions: the transition from physical and manual labour to intellectual labour; the increasing importance of social and collective knowledge as opposed to individual knowledge skill; the acceleration of pace in technological innovation; continuous improvement amongst the workforce; and the blurring of the distinction between research and development and the work undertaken on the factory floor. They argue that these trends are indicative of a shift from a model of production that was previously based on wresting physical labour from the workforce. The significant degree of integration among the workforce, both horizontally in systems of team working, and vertically through the interaction of the factory floor with all other parts of the organization, is a major factor in this new model of organization. Their contentions around the improvement wrought through the use of technology as a means of enhancing worker skill mirror the argument that the shift towards more sophisticated technology has the potential to engage the intellectual capacity of the workforce in the performance of their jobs (Blauner, 1964; Zuboff, 1988). Piore and Sabel (1984) also highlight the limitations of mass production: its inability to respond to a changing world economy; the skill devaluation borne out of the production of standardised goods; labour relations that necessitated the imposition of narrow job classifications; and the company specific job skills that prevent the movement of labour and the subsequent diffusion of work knowledge and skills throughout the economy. Piore and Sabel argue that not only will a return to the use of craft skills be a means to economic recovery they also state that this system of flexible specialisation is predicated on the advantages from employee-employer collaboration in the workplace and the workers' intellectual contribution to the success of their organization.

Approaches to the restructuring of work, both optimistic and pessimistic, raise another critical issue. Significant emphasis is placed on the way that different national political-economic infrastructures have an impact on the way that work organization is restructured at the organizational level. By this token, specific national political-economic 'architectures' have impact on work at macro, meso and micro levels.

2:3 Varieties of Capitalism

If the shift from mass production to new paradigms of work is one perspective of the political-economy of work, then another is the national variation in the political-

economic infrastructures between different countries. As the previous section highlighted, mass production and the application of Fordism came within a very specific national economic context. Gramsci (1971) linked Fordism to what he describes as Americanism. Fordism operated successfully to the extent that only certain national economies could support its key features: the way in which intensive mechanisation was used to support a particular capitalist regime of accumulation; a capital-labour compromise around higher wages for greater job security; and a “circuit of accumulation” located within national boundaries (Boyer, 2005:9).

The significance of examining different models of capitalism lies, first, in addressing the ways in which national political-economic architectures impact on the organization of work at sectoral and workplace level. Within the UK neo-liberal model of capitalism (Coates, 2000), at the organizational level it is likely management will attempt to individualise the employment relationship and negate the collective power of the workforce. The form of work organization found within the UK will be different to forms of work organization found in other countries. This is important not only in terms of understanding work practices in the context of the UK, but also in understanding the ways in which British management seek to transfer models of work practice from other countries into the UK. What are seen as exemplars of good management practice from other countries are arguably idealised versions of models which may not exist in reality. Accordingly the second major reason for examining the national political-economies of work is to contextualise the rhetoric of changes in work organization. Using what is an idealised version of lean (taken from Japan for example) has value for management as it attempts to change the organization of work. The perceived benefits of Japanese organization with its more collective and collaborative forms of capitalism (Lazonick, 1991) becomes a means of addressing ostensibly inefficient UK management. The Japanese capitalist system has the capacity to use the workforce’s intellectual abilities to redress the under-utilisation of skills found within mass production systems typically found in the USA and UK (Kenney and Florida, 1993; Dore, 1973). The rhetoric of Japanese efficiency is most typically found in accounts of lean production systems (Womack *et al.*, 1990; Hines *et al.*, 2004; Holweg, 2007) and as such is critical in evaluating the use of lean within the Civil Service that will be discussed later in the thesis.

Before exploring lean in more detail, the next section will explore the ways in which national political-economic infrastructures are subject to variation and the ways in which this is manifested at work organization level.

Crouch (2005) argues that under any approach that seeks to evaluate national models of capitalism at least two models must be held in comparison. Comparisons are based on grouping together countries that share political-economic characteristics through which one group of countries are compared against another as a means of evaluating changes in capitalism. Albert (1993) argues that there are two distinct models of capitalism. There is an Anglo-American model based on the primacy of the market and the individualisation of the employment relationship, and there is a Rhine-Japanese model that treats its workforce less as units of production and promotes the importance of training and job security. The former is premised on short-term gains for capital, whilst the latter emphasises the need to establish the collective wealth of the country achieving this through the “participative faculties” of individual workers (Albert, 1993:139). The Rhenish model emphasises the need for high worker skill and collaboration between all parts of society in promoting economic advancement. The role of the state as an arbiter against the excesses of capitalism is emphasised.

In similar vein, but emphasising the importance of the company or firm in the national political economy is the Varieties of Capitalism approach. Hall and Soskice (2001) contend that models of capitalism are divided between liberal market economies and coordinated market economies. Liberal market economies, typified by the USA and UK, are denoted by the way that firms operate through arms-length relationships. The economic market governs these relationships. In contrast, within coordinated market economies firms operate more collaboratively and work more strategically one with another. At the level of work organization, the distinction between liberal and coordinated market economies is seen in industrial relations and cross-sector employer-employee bargaining over skills and training. Whilst placing emphasis on the role of institutions in mediating the factors that affect work organization, the Varieties of Capitalism approach does downplay the role of the state in comparison to the impact that firms have on the political-economic infrastructure (Hancké *et al.*, 2007).

Under the Varieties of Capitalism approach, that seeks to divide economies into liberal and coordinated market economies, work organization differs as a direct

result of the form of capitalism. Liberal market economies place greater emphasis on generic work skills and as such are likely to witness the growth of service sector jobs where such skills can be beneficial to companies, whilst in coordinated market economies, such as Germany or Japan, the emphasis is on high company-specific skills. Within the coordinated market economy, the employer-employee relationship is likely to be more collaborative and less subject to unilateral management action, whilst in the liberal market economy the opposite holds true with more conflict between employer and labour with government pressured by employers into deregulating employment relations. The Varieties of Capitalism approach coheres with other analyses of political economy to the extent that it identifies the pre-eminence of the liberal market economy in current models of capitalism. Coates (2000) also highlights the deregulation of the labour market and the individualising of the employment relationship within what he describes as market-led capitalism. Where the dichotomy between liberal and coordinated market economies is arguably problematic is in the way in which it underplays the role of collective labour and neglects the political dimensions found within organizations (Hancké *et al.*, 2007; Crouch, 2005). The direction of skills formation and development, even within a market led economy, may vary within individual countries (Tåhlin, 2007).

Whilst the Varieties of Capitalism approach provides a clear division between two forms of capitalism and their likely impact on work organization, it does however neglect the role of institutions other than the firm and tends to conflate potential variations within its two categories. The organization of collective labour, for example, varies across countries even within one variety of capitalism (Crouch, 2005). In expanding the varieties to capitalism to six distinct types, Amable (2003) contends that national political-economic systems are shaped by social systems of innovation and production whereby the capitalist systems are shaped by scientific and technological development, industry, systems of education and training, labour markets and finance systems. He holds that a two model approach fails to capture the complexity of modern capitalism. Socio-economic compromises are manifested throughout national economies shaping work organization at firm level. This approach links the socio-economic model of development at the macro level with that at company level in a form of double-interaction whereby both economic and political influences interact to shape the national political-economic architecture (Amable and Lung, 2005).

Firms adapt to the models to the extent that their profit strategy must cohere with the institutional and economic environment in which they operate and must be acceptable to the participants operating within those environments. Institutions operating within these environments reflect not only the economic, but the political influences of the participants. Using car manufacturing as an exemplar, critical insofar as it was previously a barometer of work organization under Fordism, Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) argue that work organization can vary within national economies even within the same industry. Even within Japan popularly seen as homogenous in terms of industrial strategy and corresponding systems of work organization, Toyota and Honda followed different profit strategies resulting in different forms of work organization. The former pursued a profit strategy of constant cost reduction exercising a degree of caution before investing in a product area which resulted in systems that are predicated on the minimisation of waste in the production process. It used its sub-contracting relationships as a means of relocating its excess workforce in periods when production contracted. Honda, on the other hand, had a strategy based more on innovation. Focusing on employee expertise and innovation, and lacking the sub-contracting relationships that Toyota had with its subsidiaries, Honda developed the skill and career development of its workforce.

What is arguably problematic regarding these models of capitalism is that they neglect a number of cross-national influences. The approach is, first, subject to the criticism that it tends to seal discussions of national varieties of capitalism and their impact on work organization within the borders of the nation state (Hancké *et al.*, 2007). Analytically it tends towards description rather than analysis and the temptation to fit the empirical evidence to the model (Crouch, 2005).

Secondly, a focus on national states underplays the nature of international capital and the cross-border impact on work organization. Whether seen as fundamentally disorganised (Lash and Urry, 1987) or highly structured, national political-economic architectures are not immune from those factors able to influence across national borders. The increasing financialisation of capitalism has impact across national borders. Thompson (2013) argues that the financialisation of capitalism with its emphasis on the importance of financial products relative to the importance of labour leads to work intensification. The financialisation of capitalism is manifested through the social and technical division of labour. This 'disconnected

capitalism' approach highlights what is described as 'structural disaggregation': information technology is used by management to monitor organizational performance in production systems that are separated both geographically and spatially from other parts of the production process. It also strengthens managerial control and reduces the capacity of managers at a unit level to act in an autonomous manner with their workforce. The tendency is towards the standardisation of work as a means of controlling work processes.

The third critique of national variants in capitalism approach is the capacity of global capital to transcend borders. Global capital operates through supply chain systems across national borders (Gereffi *et al.*, 2005) albeit mitigated by national institutional effects (Sorge, 2004). The debates on the extent of Japanisation in the UK in late 1980s and early 1990s (Ackroyd *et al.*, 1988; Beale, 1994; Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Elger and Smith, 1994) suggest that work organization systems are rarely transferred wholesale from one country to another. The attempts to transfer new work organisational forms are done partly to mirror effective practices in another country, but are also used to change work systems as mean of controlling the labour process either in reality or by using idealised versions of these forms to disguise management's intentions.

These discussions on the political economy of work are critical for placing lean in context. The literature review has thus far analysed the political economy of work from two perspectives, one examining the chronological development of capitalism and its impact on work organization, and the other across national boundaries. At the same time, important caveats were mooted regarding the continuities within capitalism and the limitations of neglecting influences across boundaries. The basic nature of capitalism remains rooted in systems of workforce control and what arguably appear to be paradigmatic changes may be more superficial than real (Gough, 1992), whilst analysis of the political economy of work based solely on the national state may be insufficiently dynamic to capture cross-national influences (Hancké *et al.*, 2007). As Hancké *et al.* also argue the debate on the political economy of work draws too much of its inspiration from the manufacturing sector and not enough from the service sector.

An analysis of the shifts in the political economy of work over time helps to frame the extent to which lean has changed the organization of work. Equally important is the need to locate lean within a specific national political and economic

context. It is important to discuss how lean may have characteristics that differentiate it from how lean systems have developed elsewhere, particularly in those national economies from which management in the UK seek their inspiration.

2:4 Lean Production - Myth and Reality

At the heart of the debate is the contention that lean is a fundamentally new approach to the delivery of work. Womack *et al.* (1990) argue in their influential work on automobile manufacturing that lean systems of work represent a paradigmatic change from existing systems of work based on mass production. Their argument is that lean systems of work are advantageous for firms as companies can avoid the high costs of craft production and the rigidity of mass production. Lean has the potential to multi-skill the workforce at all levels of the organization. Lean through its exploitation of automated systems can create products not only in volume, but also in enormous variety. Womack *et al.*'s analysis of the automobile manufacturing sector begins by setting out the argument that the systems of craft production used in the early twentieth century to produce motor vehicles were replaced by systems of mass production. Craft production lacked the financial resources needed to create new products whilst mass production systems had the capacity to freely interchange the parts needed to manufacture motor vehicles. This interchangeability crucially was allied to the use of an assembly line that reduced human effort. Whilst mass production was a simple system and allowed for goods to be manufactured in an organised sequence, it created a division of labour whereby workers on an assembly line were divorced from the conception of the product. Womack *et al.* argue that mass production led to deskilling. Using inspiration from what they argued were the effective production processes of Japanese car manufacturing, they argue that what they describe as 'lean production'⁷ in effect transferred a significant element of responsibility for work organization to the workforce as a means of adding value to the organization. Ohno (1988a) argued that the Toyota Production System upon which Womack *et al.* (1990) based their argument was founded on two principles or 'pillars'. The first was the "just in time" principle that Ohno described as "a flow process [where] the right parts needed in the assembly reach the assembly line at the time they are needed and only in the amount needed" (1988a:4). The second principle was 'autonomation', automation with a human touch

⁷ Originally the term 'lean' was coined in 1988 in relation to studies on the efficiency of Japanese automobile manufacturing (Krafcik cited in Holweg, 2007; Williams *et al.*, 1992).

whereby human operators used machinery in a way that allowed them to use their skills in the production process. The aim of these two 'pillars' is the elimination of waste in the production process as a means of maximising productive efficiency. Lean thereby addressed one of the central deficiencies in mass production that it failed to use the workforce in the most productive way.

This populist view, as Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) argue, presents lean as a system of work organization that used Japanese automobile manufacturing methods in the post Second World War period as a means for manufacturing to become diversified, high quality and competitively priced reflecting changes in global consumer taste. This new phase was denoted by the utilisation of employees' skills as a means of continuously improving economic performance. Lean production replaced existing models of work. An old model of work founded on a division of labour that used limited skills was replaced by one with the potential to create a multi-skilled workforce. Workers' skills under mass production were devalued: workers were expected to perform a series of narrowly conceived standardised and repetitive tasks. Under lean production employees have their work skills enhanced in broadly speaking three areas. There is, first, an increase in skill variety with the ability to perform a broad range of production tasks. Secondly, there is an emphasis on skills that address the quality of the product reflecting the need to meet increasingly high consumer expectations (Womack and Jones, 1998). Thirdly, lean production is a system that enables workers to use their skills in problem solving. Workers' lack of identification with their company under mass production is replaced by a system, where employees whose work objectives now mirror those of their company, will use their intellectual skills for the benefit of their employer.

Whilst originally based in the car manufacturing sector, advocates of lean working have asserted that its emphasis on the removal of waste in the production process and its emphasis on the development of quality through the enhancement of employee skills make it suited for transfer into other sectors. Lean has been used in other manufacturing sectors (e.g. Delbridge (1998)), service sectors such as retail (e.g. van Klaveren and Voss-Dahm (2011)) and critically in terms of this thesis the public sector (Radnor, 2010; Jones and Mitchell, 2006). The successful use of lean is applied in terms of what its advocates describe as its five principles. In more practical terms lean is manifested in a number of tools and techniques. Lean is therefore viewed on two levels, one strategic and the other operational (Hines *et al.*,

2004). Its transfer from its base in car manufacturing and manufacturing more widely to sectors that deal with the provision of services reflects the view that there exists what is described as 'lean thinking' (Womack and Jones, 1998), the proposition that there exists a mental attitude to the elimination of waste that transcends the techniques used to implement lean at a workplace level. On that basis as the idea of 'lean thinking' became more prominent, its application was spread into other work sectors as a form of universal panacea appropriate to tackling inefficiency in every work sector.

For advocates of lean, the strategic or lean thinking approach is manifested in very specific ways. It is promoted through the attempts to create a form of internal supply chain as a means of eliminating waste in the production process. Womack and Jones (1998) argue that this internal supply chain consists of five interconnected actions: the first is to precisely specify the value of each product; secondly to identify the value stream for each product; thirdly to allow that value flow without interruption; fourthly to let the customer pull the value for the producer; and finally to pursue perfection. These steps allow any enterprise, whether in manufacturing or in service sectors, to identify what is of value to its customers; to identify all actions needed to create or produce the 'product'; to remove all actions that do not add value to the productive process; and then allow the organization to evaluate the effectiveness of its processes before undertaking a fresh cycle of activity. To what degree lean is different to other business improvement approaches is a moot point. Business process re-engineering, Total Quality Management or systems thinking (Hammer and Champy, 2001; Oakland, 2000; Seddon and Brand, 2008) appear similar insofar as these business improvement techniques constantly allude to the success of Japanese production techniques, the need to develop 'flow' to facilitate more efficient production systems, and the importance of developing worker skills in the production process. The popularity of a particular approach may be due to faddism where one approach gains a temporary kudos (Näslund, 2008). It may also connote a marketing device promoted by advocates of one specific approach where they identify some purportedly unique feature by which an organization using their method might obtain some advantage over those who use a different approach (Seddon, 2009; Womack and Jones, 2005).

In terms of techniques and tools, lean seeks to provide a range of activities by which the value flow is made more efficient and waste in the production process

is eliminated. This 'waste' is conceptualised as defects in the products produced, unnecessary overproduction of goods, unnecessary processing actions, unnecessary movement of people, unnecessary movement of goods, waiting times, and excessive inventories of stock, and goods and services that fail to meet users' needs (Womack and Jones, 1998; Ohno, 1988a). The main benefit accruing from the reduction of waste is not presented as primarily cost reduction, but a more efficient and, for employees, more fulfilling working conditions making better use of their skills (Hines *et al.*, 2004; Seddon and Brand, 2008). The specific techniques or tools originating from the Toyota Production System are those associated with 'just in time' whereby what is produced is created precisely at the point when it is required rather than through holding or maintaining a repository of stock in anticipation of future usage (Ohno, 1988a). Systems should be designed in such a way that the technological systems fool-proof the work. To that degree the work requires a high degree of standardisation changed only to the extent that it reflects identified failures in production (Ohno, 1988b). It uses forms of visual management to maintain control over the production process. Visual management would typically use signboards to monitor production and be a means to show workers the extent to which production targets are being achieved. Ohno (1988a) argues that it was never Ford's intention to dehumanise work through the production system, but that the value of labour was degraded over time as the company failed to respond to changes within the industry and as organised labour hindered the flexibility that would have added value for the workforce.

Lean working also emphasises the importance of team working. This is manifested in one sense in creating specialist teams to create the conditions necessary for the implementation of lean (Jones, 2011). This approach places significant emphasis on the leadership role of the organization in facilitating a culture in which lean can thrive (Oakland, 2000) and to that extent matches the emphasis within human resource management of the importance of changing organizational culture (Legge, 2005). Also prominent within lean is the role of team work within the productive process (Womack *et al.*, 1990) both as a means of providing a focal point for the creation of workforce-inspired ideas that will improve the efficiency of the organization and as a means of eliminating the 'silos' into which mass production systems of work were prone. Whilst the use of focus groups and quality circles have been long established tools within business improvement approaches, lean has re-emphasised the use of team-based approaches to generate new idea development

as a means of continuous improvement. Womack and Jones (1998) argue that team working allows the workforce the opportunity to utilise their work skills to develop new ways of working. Lean remains reliant on standardisation, but unlike mass production, this arises from the creative input of the workforce. The creative input of the workforce provides the ideas upon which new standardised procedures are introduced into the workplace. This team working is operated through a structured programme of team-based approaches to productive improvement, such as the creation of lean groups established to deal with particular production problems or short daily meetings utilising forms of visual management to identify production priorities or discuss problems in the productive process. The importance of the social role found in team working “stands Taylorism on its head” (MacDuffie, 1995:56): whereas Taylorism neglected the importance of the group as a means of productive efficiency, lean emphasises the social value of employees working collaboratively as a group. Lean working retains elements of Taylorism insofar as the work retains its intensity and adherence to standardised work processes, but where it arguably differs from Taylorism is that the conception and execution of work are reunited through forms of collaborative working. Team working is prominent in lean through the attempts to use these forms of collaborative working to align the workforce’s objectives more closely to those of their management (MacDuffie, 1995; Womack *et al.*, 1990).

This discussion of lean suggests that this model of work organization is one that can be applied universally to all types of organizations. The following section will, however, address criticisms of lean.

2:4:1 The Critique of Lean

Although its advocates attempt to present a coherent narrative whereby lean provides the opportunity for organizations to use workforce skills in more efficient ways as a means of eliminating the waste inherent within earlier production systems, lean’s critics challenge it on a number of fronts. The critique of lean consists of three broad elements. The first critiques lean in terms of its claims of creating more efficient practices. The second objection is that assessments of lean working are used in an a-contextual or a-historical manner to attempt to present a narrative of lean that fails to match its reality. The third is that rather than being a business process designed to improve working efficiency through the use of workforce skills, it is, in reality, a form of managerial control that seeks to gain

control over the labour process using employee knowledge against workers' own interests. With the locus of debate on lean originally found within car manufacturing, the literature will initially focus on this industry. A more detailed discussion of changes in the organization of work in the Civil Service will follow, but with much of the justification for the use of lean hinging on its 'success' in the car industry, the critique of lean must address key questions arising from the use of lean in this work sector.

2:4:2 Technical Critique of Lean

The first strand of critique of lean is what might be termed as technical. It challenges the contention that lean is inherently a more efficient form of working. The evidence for the reliability of lean derives from studies into automobile manufacturing in the 1970s and 1980s that sought to address why workers in US car factories were ostensibly less efficient than their Japanese counterparts (Holweg, 2007). US workers were arguably less efficient due to inefficient systems of work organization. Whereas US companies relied on large batch runs, large stocks and inventories leading to high defect rates in car production, Japanese companies achieved greater efficiencies through lean production. Albeit some advocates of lean now argue that the development of lean was a continuum rather than a single point process (Hines *et al.*, 2004; Holweg, 2007), the way that data has been used to validate lean is subject to criticism. Williams *et al.* (1992b) argue that the criteria by which the comparisons between Japanese and US companies were made were flawed failing to compare "like for like" and neglecting the impact of distinct supply chain relationships that exist within Japan. Lean's application in a UK car manufacturing setting has paradoxically created greater efficiency problems. Its use, even within Japan, has shown signs of productive inefficiency (Coffey, 2006).

Lean, furthermore, even within car production systems does not operate in terms of the often prescriptive models described by its advocates. Rather than producing fulfilling (yet challenging) work, lean is premised on repetitive work cycles, achievement of work targets often only through extending the working day and the use of overtime in addition to increasing disharmony in employment relations (Coffey, 2006). Williams *et al.* (1992b) argue that beyond the increasing sophistication of the automation there was little distinct about lean systems of work, including the much vaunted 'flow' that provides the means to eliminate waste in the production process. As it gained popularity elsewhere, lean was subject to scrutiny

in Toyota itself as it was failing to deliver the efficiencies required (Coffey and Thornley, 2006). Single assembly line production systems critical to 'flow' were replaced (Benders and Morita, 2004). Due to failures with 'flow', segmented assembly lines were introduced to relieve pressures that occurred due to stoppages on a single tier assembly line. Pardi (2007) highlights the fragility of the lean system arguing inefficiencies in lean not only resulted in the abandonment of single assembly line production in favour of segmented lines, but also increased work intensification. This intensification of work was in part manifested in pressure on the workforce to generate significantly large numbers of suggestions as a means of improving productive processes (Benders and Morita, 2004; Pardi, 2007). However these attempts to generate worker ideas were a management driven process. The management initiatives to create productive improvement had significantly greater weight and impact than those ideas suggested by the workforce. Its fragility as a work system had weaknesses, furthermore, reliant as it was, on attempting to balance output through its use of a contingent labour force.

2:4:3 History and Context of Lean

The second main strand of critique relates to the way in which the interpretation and evaluation of lean are undertaken without regard to context or history leading to a-contextual and a-historical analyses.

On one level, there are problems with assuming that organizational models even within the context of Japanese car manufacturing forms a unitary or unified approach. Boyer and Fresseyne (2002) highlight that equating lean working with only one organizational model neglects that a firm such as Toyota will follow a different strategy or productive model to other Japanese firms operating in the same manufacturing sector. Berggren (1992) argues that what is often viewed as a fundamental advantage for a company such as Toyota, the capacity to move from mass production to production geared to a market seeking diversified products is in reality only the capacity to move to mass batch production. There also exists the critique that the Toyota Production System is an abstraction never fully realised in practice (Benders and Morita, 2004). Attempts to equate a model of work organization based on an ideal never realised in practice is problematic. Lean, used a-historically or a-contextually to present a narrative or fiction that supports its utilisation elsewhere, often on tenuous grounds, requires further exploration.

The presentation of lean as an ideal type relies on the assertion that lean systems present a fundamental break with a past rooted in mass production and with Taylorist forms of work that fail to use worker skills to best effect (Hines *et al.*, 2004). The attempts to present lean as a panacea neglect, first, continuities within work organization, and secondly, create a narrative of lean purposively presented by its advocates in a favourable light negatively portraying other models of work organization.

In terms of the continuities within work organization, Wood (1991) argues that Japanese car manufacturing companies maintained a neo-Fordist approach to work organization. The implementation of what are seemingly new forms of work organization is applied into a specific context. Japanese work practices are rarely replicated in a UK context. These attempts to translate what are deemed Japanese lean practices neglect the economic and political history and infrastructure of Japan, but also critically the political and economic drivers within the UK to change work organization as a means to securing greater management control over the labour process (Ackroyd *et al.*, 1988; Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Beale, 1994). The advent of what are seemingly novel practices thus neglects continuities around the attempts to control the labour process. At a workplace level, the precursors to lean have significantly more in common with lean than its advocates claim.

Positing an inefficient 'past' with an efficient lean 'present' acts as a rhetorical device for debunking mass production in comparison with what are supposedly new forms of work organization. Williams *et al.* (1993) highlight that criticism levelled at Fordist systems of mass production neglect that lean systems are subject to similar criticisms. The creation of assembly line production was significant for Ford, but an over-emphasis on the technical aspect of developing a piece of equipment neglects the underlying political-economic architecture of work that supported this (as it was then) new technology. Continuities in work organization are also neglected insofar that what is presented as unique or distinct with lean systems are often a re-utilisation of systems that appeared in an earlier period: major motor car manufacturers, for example, used a system akin to 'just-in-time' in the 1930s and 1940s (Schwartz and Fish, 1998).

Analyses of lean tend towards forms of historical revisionism leading to a partial and imbalanced view of current systems of work organization. On one level, it neglects the antecedents to the current interest in lean working. Prentice (1979)

highlights that in the 1970s it was not primarily Japanese organizational methods that concerned British business. Unlike current advocates for lean, UK companies then believed that Japanese companies were gaining economic advantages over their British counterparts through their technological advancements and their specific economic-political infrastructure which at that time was seen as having limited applicability in a UK context. On another level, historical revisionism is manifested through a false periodization where terms such 'Fordism' and 'mass production' are used as a means of discouraging researchers from examining both the antecedents to lean production systems and the continuities between manufacturing systems (Williams *et al.*, 1992a). Utilising terms such 'lean production' and 'mass production' not only neglects antecedent factors, but it also creates the risk that a specific epithet becomes in a sense axiomatic requiring no explanation other than in terms of the epithet itself. This imprecision creates an ideal or caricature that disguises the reality of lean.

A further strand to this discussion relates to the way that lean is promoted as a solution to organizational problems without peer. Advocates of lean address the deficiencies in lean production by attributing failures in implementation to management failing to fully understand or "embrace" lean (Radnor and Bucci, 2008). There is also arguably a tendency to compare empirical data from one location where there is poor organizational practice with an ideal of lean production found in other locations (Delbridge, 1998). Any criticisms of lean are refuted through assertions that more recent uses of lean have addressed any previous deficiencies. Hines *et al.* (2004) argue that current critiques of lean have been erroneously based on "older" versions of lean that newer versions have corrected. It is, however, never cogently explained of what these earlier versions of lean consist. Successive re-framing of lean (Womack *et al.*, 1990; Womack and Jones, 1998; Womack and Jones, 2005) gives no indication that anything fundamental has changed in terms of practice: attempts to justify lean appear motivated by the need to counteract poor publicity. This is in part arguably another attempt to decontextualize lean. Advocates utilise idealised versions of lean to support the contention that lean can recreate the value of work. In effect, lean has the potential to do give work real meaning doing this through utilising employees skills whilst also being a means of creating economic value (Womack and Jones, 2005).

However, Coffey (2006) argues that lean is being used to create a fiction that seeks to explain changes in the global economy in an era where there are widespread public concerns over reduced resources while at the same time creating the impression that customer needs remain paramount. The fiction of lean is thus maintained at a societal level. At a workplace level, the fiction of lean is maintained through the use of team working and attempts to eliminate forms of dissent (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992). Under lean, team working, with its connotations of collective cooperation, is presented by management as a means to improve worker skills whilst simultaneously promoting self-evidently meritorious terms such as quality and flexibility.

2:4:4 Lean as a System of Control

In addition to those critiques of lean that address its efficiency as a productive system and its use as an a-historical narrative, there is one further significant critique. Such critique is based on the grounds that lean is not inherently a set of tools or techniques, but is a system of work that seeks to exercise managerial control over the workforce rooted in a specific economic and political context. Rather than a productive system based on utilising employee skills in the mutual interests of organizations and employees alike, lean is a system premised on using workers' skills against their own interests. Even within the context of Japanese car production, the forms of work organization adopted by such companies as Toyota originate in attempts by Japanese management to control the labour process and reduce the power of collective labour in the post Second World War period (Price, 1995). Rather than create a distinct form of work organization, Japanese management systems were an extension of Fordist regimes of work organization based on the mass production of goods and the standardised and routinized division of labour. The opportunities for workers to contribute ideas for work improvement were within tightly controlled management-led parameters. The collective voice of labour manifested in the trade union movement was subsumed into a management agenda through the creation of company unions. What is arguably distinct about Japanese management derives from the national political-economic architecture and the Japanese supply chain system (Elger and Smith, 1994)

The use of lean production reflects what Stewart and Martínez Lucio (1998:66) describe as the “new politics of production” whereby lean increasingly creates conflicts around “sites of control” as management seeks to link all aspects of

work as a means of increased control of the labour process. The consequent individualisation of the employment relationship results in work intensification and standardised and routinized jobs for each worker. Control over the labour process in this Taylorised environment is sought by identifying what lean would be described as 'waste' in the system. Management seek to impose control over individual workers through close monitoring of work tasks legitimised through forms of visual management (Carter *et al.*, 2011a). The contribution of individual workers is evaluated through their efficiency and is measured in terms of output by unit of time (Durand, 2007). Standardisation of work processes contributes to management's ability to control the labour process (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992). What arguably distinguishes lean production systems from previous forms of work organization relates not specifically to work intensification *per se*: what is significant is the social organization of labour initiated by management that seeks to prevent the workforce acting as a collective body to resist management attempts at control. Lean uses team working as a means of subordinating the individual worker to the interests of management (Danford, 2000). Through a rhetoric of involvement, team work is used at a workplace level to link workers to management's interests (Beale, 1994). Such techniques as quality circles and similar apparently collaborative team activities are used not primarily by management to generate innovative ideas that will create benefit to the workforce and economic advantage to the firm, but are present to use workers' knowledge against their own interests (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). In other words, these techniques are implemented with a view to reducing costs by getting the workers to provide management with the information on their work practices that will enable management to cut costs by efficiency savings. Ultimately, it results in the intensification of work as spaces within the working day are removed through workers effectively undertaking forms of time and motion studies on themselves (Beale, 1994). As work tasks are routinized, certain parts of the job eliminated or "unwanted workers" removed from the firm, intensification of work is the outcome (Stewart *et al.*, 2009:207). This debate on the politics of production is a critical one in helping to address the nature of lean working, the first research question.

This discussion around the new politics of production brings into focus three areas. The first issue is that of work skills and the impact that lean has on those skills. The second area is that of team working, and the third is the collective response of the labour force to lean working.

2:4:4:1 Skill in Lean Systems

Skill can conceptually be seen from three perspectives. Skill in the person derives its conceptual basis from human capital theory (Becker, 1968) whereby skills are evaluated on the basis of the 'capabilities, knowledge and experience [held by people] that translate into productivity in the work place and yield reward' (Spenner, 1983:827). Skills are a form of human baggage that individuals carry with them. The second perspective is based on the concept of skill in the job. Skill in this conceptualisation relates to the characteristics of work and its place in the social structure (Spenner, 1983). Spenner argues that the structure of work speaks more to the nature of skill than the impact of personal characteristics. Because of its origins in labour process theory, Attewell (1990) holds that with 'skill in the job' more weight is given to intellectual rather than manual dexterity. The third conception of skill is skill in the setting. The social construction of skill is in part derived from workers attempting to defend their labour power against management encroachment, but also in relation to the labour power of other workers (Cockburn, 1991; Attewell, 1990). This conceptualisation of skill may also reflect management attempts to re-configure definitions of skill as a means of aligning those definitions to accord with managerial conceptions of skills (Spenner, 1990). Much of this reconceptualization of skill has resonance within debates on skills within a knowledge economy (Korczynski, 2005).

If skill is defined in terms of these three conceptualisations, the second major consideration is that related to the direction of skill. Braverman (1974) argued that fundamental to capitalism were the attempts manifested through Taylorist systems of management to deskill the workforce as a means of increasing control of the labour process. He argues that historically management attempted to control the labour process through the standardisation and routinisation of work. This was integral to Taylor's system of scientific management where the employer separated the conception of work from the execution of work as a means of control. Through the standardisation of work, the labour process is dissociated from the skills of the worker. Braverman further contends that by cooperating with management workers will increasingly lose control over work processes. Employers will seek to monopolise to themselves knowledge of work processes as they attempt to increase control over the organization of work.

This perspective contrasts with those more optimistic approaches (Blauner, 1964). Technological developments can be used to replace systems of manufacturing where a division of labour, premised on standardised and routinized work, is replaced with forms of work processing that reconnects workers with their jobs. In addition to increasing task variety, the technology becomes the means to link the physical completion of tasks with intellectual understanding of the processes that underpin that technology. The increased use of information technology in effect provides employees the opportunity to reconceptualise their work activities thus reversing the Taylor's belief that the conception of work and the execution of work should remain separate and distinct. Zuboff (1988:75-76) argues that the use of information technology allows workers to use their "intellective" abilities thus creating the potential for worker re-skilling.

What is critical however for this thesis is the likely direction of skills within the UK. Rather than see the direction of skill only being in one direction, it is argued that the direction of skill is moving in two directions. There is evidence to support the contention that work in all work sectors, including the service sector, is subject to both upskilling and deskilling. Changes in the direction of skill relate primarily to occupational changes (Gallie, 1994). This bifurcation in the direction of skill also supports the view that the increased use of computerisation has given rise to upskilling (Felstead *et al.*, 2004).

However within the 'skills in the job' perspective there are two significant criteria by which the direction of skill may be judged. The first is substantive job complexity and the second autonomy control (Spenner, 1990).

Substantive job complexity can be defined in terms of the level, scope and integration of mental, manipulative and interpersonal skills found within a job (Spenner, 1990). Felstead *et al.* (2004) add to the definition of complexity the following dimensions: the qualifications needed to undertake the job; the length of training workers receive from their employers; the length of time it takes to do the job well or acquire proficiency; and the importance of particular activities to the work. Their definition of skill largely reflects what individual workers state are important factors in relation to the conduct of their work. Field (1980) also argues that substantive job complexity needs to be evaluated against any judgements and modifications that workers need to make in response to the external environment. What might be significant in this context is the degree to which tasks are repeated

sequentially or undertaken in response to unpredictable situations. The amount of task variety may be a significant indicator of substantive job complexity although as Field (1980) highlights task repetition has to be seen in the context of the capacity of the job holder to respond to the external environment. Felstead *et al.* (2004) indicate that the increased use of computerisation over the previous 30 years⁸ has significantly increased the level of substantive job complexity. Increases in qualifications required, the length of training provided and the amount of time to acquire proficiency in a job would be indicators of rising skill levels. What Felstead *et al.* also argue is that although skill has risen in relation to job complexity, what has not increased is the level of job autonomy control, the second dimension of measuring skill in the job. The second dimension of skill in the job presents a contradictory picture.

Autonomy control is measured in terms of task discretion, the pace of the job and the level of supervision (Spenner, 1990). Task discretion is the degree to which employees have the capacity or latitude to undertake their work tasks, both the capacity to exercise discretion on the individual decisions that workers could make and the order in which tasks are carried out. It relates to the capacity that workers have to exercise judgement in their work (Felstead *et al.*, 2004). Autonomy control is also significant in the measurement of skill to the degree that it reflects the pace with which work needs be undertaken (Spenner, 1990). A reduction in the level of discretion that workers can exercise in addition to, or in tandem with, an increase in work pace would indicate a degree of deskilling. What is also critically important is the degree to which workers are supervised in their work. It may not necessarily only relate to the way that formal authority structures are used within an organization to limit or reduce control, but may relate to the way that jobs are designed in relation to each other or the way in which technology is used to control work processes (Spenner, 1990). Webster (1990) highlights the contradiction between the ways technology might increase job complexity with the ways that management exploits that technology to decrease the amount of control that employees have over their work. The correlation between formal authority structures is nonetheless likely to have considerable sway in the way that workers exercise job autonomy.

⁸ The first Workplace Skills survey took place in 1986 and as a large scale survey this provides a useful means of evaluating long terms trends within the UK.

The emphasis on autonomy control is not without its critics: Adler (2004) argues that whilst job complexity is an accurate measure of skill, a reliance on autonomy control as a measure of skill fails to capture the ways in which capital will not necessarily use deskilling as a means of control. However the importance of autonomy control as a measure of skill is, first, critical as discretion is the pre-condition for complexity (Thompson, 2007) and as such autonomy control and substantive job complexity are organically connected. Secondly, however, disregarding autonomy control as a measure of skill neglects the contradictory nature of work where even though work might be potentially more interesting there is an increasing shift towards work intensification (Thompson, 2013). Autonomy control does not necessarily connote the utilisation of a particular organizational work system. It does, however, speak more clearly to issues of work intensification that originate from management control of the labour process in a way that job complexity does not.

If, therefore the direction of skill is integrally related to the control of the labour process, then the way in which lean systems are used comes into sharper focus. In contrast to the view that lean is a means to enhance worker skills through using employee knowledge, the critique is that lean systems are premised on using employee knowledge against workers' own interests (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). There is therefore a fundamental contradiction at the heart of lean systems. On the one hand, for its advocates, lean is the agent of increasing skills in the interests of the organisation, whilst on the other the contention is that lean is fundamentally premised on utilising workforce skills in such a way that it has the opposite effect. Between these two polar positions, there is also the contention that an inappropriate focus on the standardising aspects of lean at the expense of genuine attempts to elicit worker knowledge or where the context, as in car manufacturing, has mitigated against consensual employment relations, has failed to capture lean's capacity to effectively use worker knowledge (MacDuffie, 1995; Vidal, 2007). However, notwithstanding that lean techniques will be applied in different work contexts in different ways, Stewart *et al.* (2009) argue worker-inspired reform is anathema to lean systems. The capacity of workers to gain or retain autonomous control over their jobs is antithetical to the objectives of management under lean systems. Lean uses worker skills to solve management problems (Beale, 1994). As such, attempts by management to apparently develop greater job complexity are disguised wherein the rhetoric of multiskilling disguises what is in effect an increase in the number of

simplified tasks. Beale (1994) also highlights that the rhetoric of lean disguises the way that what are apparently devices to increase job autonomy have in effect the opposite outcome.

Lean is also subject to critique that rather than create a more collaborative form of working that it actually seeks to break down forms of collective labour.

2:4:4:2 Team Working under Lean

Under lean systems, management will either attempt to nullify forms of collective organization or subsume collective organization within the objectives of the organization. With team working appearing to assume a unity of purpose between management and workers (Beale, 1994), under lean the role of a body such as a trade union has no legitimacy (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). Team working becomes an alternative locus for employee concerns (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998) intended to deprive the trade union of its capacity to represent the workforce. The ability of the trade union to protect the work conditions and skills of their members is threatened by management's use of team working. Team working is used to increase job flexibility and reduce work demarcation (Danford, 2000). Team working, as it is conceived by advocates of lean, is not only the locus for organizational learning (Womack and Jones, 1998), but is in effect the creator of value for an organization (Ishida, 1997). The sharing of work knowledge within team working provides the means to resolve problems in the productive process. Within manufacturing systems, team working might rely on the use of semi-autonomous work groups headed by a team leader. The team becomes responsible for discrete blocks of work utilising a degree of decentralised decision making power, albeit that the work is standardised, and is still based around the need to adhere to production targets (Delbridge, 1998; Womack *et al.*, 1990). There are, however, two strands of critique that challenge lean team working.

The critique of team working stresses first that the sort of team working envisaged by lean is more significantly impacted by the intensity of the work than any collaborative benefits that accrue from working with others (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992). There is a paradox at the heart of team working whereby management's stated desire for flexibility of the type purportedly generated from team working is in direct contradiction to management's need for control over the labour process. Team working is used to generate flexibility, but it is flexibility wholly on management's terms rather than provide genuine freedom for workers to set their

own parameters or contribute ideas for work improvement borne of collaborative discussion (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Richardson *et al.*, 2010). The intensification of work created by standardisation of work processes reflects the creation of an internal market by which the justification for using team working is its capacity to achieve production targets. Berggren (1992), in addition to questioning the validity of the concept of team working under Japanese management, places emphasis on the contribution of the individual worker. Team working is in effect a regime of subordination of the individual worker: a collective epithet, team working, is used to generate competitive rivalry between individuals as a means of control (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992).

The second strand of critique is that team working is used as a means to break down collective forms of opposition to changes in the organization of work. Team working is intended as an alternative locus for the vocalisation of complaints such that even expressions of discontent are voiced in terms controlled by management (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992). Team working under lean becomes a mean to both set up an alternative forum for collective voice, albeit within narrow parameters, and to minimise or reduce trade union influence. Attempts to exercise control over the labour process hitherto conducted often within formal bargaining structures between management and trade union are reformulated through lean working. Bargaining mechanisms for certain aspects, for example pay, remain under formal structures and are negotiated indirectly by the trade union on behalf of its membership. However under lean, management attempts to side-line those aspects of bargaining between trade union and management that impinge directly on the organization of work at a workplace level. Team working becomes a mechanism to reduce or nullify trade union influence on the labour process (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998). The degree to which these attempts to side-line collective influence are successful is related to the context of the organisation, the bargaining strength of the union in terms of that context and how specific parts of the production process fit within the overall work organization. Management attempts to wrest control through team working therefore meets within varying levels of success (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998; Garrahan and Stewart, 1992). However the degree of resistance does not nullify the argument that, in the context of lean, team working is used as a mechanism through which management can attempt to by-pass the trade union and through which workers are encouraged, (or forced) to provide, under the

guise of participation, suggestions for continuous improvement against their own interests (Pardi, 2007).

2:4:4:3 The Collective Response to Lean

One of the criticisms of Braverman (1974) is that he fails to give adequate treatment to the workforce's resistance to management attempts to control the labour process (Littler, 1982; Webster, 1990). If the conceptualisation of production systems, be they Fordism or lean production, relates not simply to work processes, but to systems of control of the labour process (Gramsci, 1971; Littler, 1982), then the workforce response under lean cannot be ignored.

What Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) highlight in their assessment of work organization is that central to models of work organization is the employment relationship. Integral to that employment relationship is the form of employment compromise that relates to the interaction between the employer and employees at firm level. Part of that employment compromise is manifested in the relationship between employer and trade union. The post-1945 employment compromise was one of the central features of Fordism (Boyer and Juillard, 2002).

The compromise under lean systems is rooted in the ways that management attempts to subvert the collective voice of the workforce. This is typically done by management both creating unwritten or social rules to which the collective body of the workforce is expected to adhere, whilst at the same time consistently undermining those rules in their own interests (Durand, 2007). The compromise is often based on incorporating the trade union into the management agenda as a means to gaining control over the workforce through linking lean systems of work into productivity agreements (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998). The degree to which the collective strength of the workforce can resist management within the context of the employment compromise may in part reflect the degree to which the trade union has the ability to identify management's agenda and the willingness and capacity to resist that agenda. Durand (2007) highlights the paradox of conflict and alignment that trade unions face. Furthermore the employment compromise is linked to the wider political-economic architecture existing at the sectoral (meso) level and national (macro) level.

At a sectoral level, the increasing reliance on tightly managed supply chains of production and distribution increasingly integrates forms of work organization

across industries based around tighter control of workers' time and autonomy and the increasing use of team work. Control through the supply chain effectively generates new forms of management. The use of information technology creates the capacity to maintain a sequence of activity through the various levels of the supply chain. Durand (2007), however, argues that without the use of team work information technology would lack the capacity to work effectively: team working is effectively a form of social control that binds each part of the supply chain together. The two aspects in tandem force workers in all parts of the supply chain to work more intensively. Durand (2007) argues that this tight-flow creates a form of lean work organization at the sectoral level. Fordist systems of management retained forms of collective organization intact at the firm level. Tight-flow systems of control across industrial sectors and those that link discrete work areas to the wider supply chains create their own rationale of control. These systems have the capacity to create new loci of control at the organizational level created by downward pressures to the work unit level in the supply chain under the guise of decentralisation (Carter *et al.*, 2011a). At a macro level, lean production systems are consistent with the neo-liberal agenda of work intensification and cost cutting as means of marketising the economic-political infrastructure in the interests of capital (Carter *et al.*, 2011a) particularly during a period of economic retrenchment (Stewart *et al.*, 2009).

Questions arise as to how lean systems are applied within the Civil Service. The Civil Service can be viewed in three ways in terms of lean systems of work. It can be viewed from the perspective of the way that work is organised at a workplace or micro level. It can be examined from the meso level or at the level of Civil Service departmental management. It can also be seen from a macro level in which the role of the state is critical. What makes the Civil Service arguably distinct in the interrelationship between each of these three levels is what Fairbrother (1994) describes as the state labour process. The Civil Service in terms of the labour process is unique in that its employees are both employed by the state and also subject to the state's agenda to marketise the apparatus of government. The final section of the literature review will examine the way that the British state has tried to restructure the public sector. It will then examine how that restructuring has impacted on work organization within the Civil Service. The focus will primarily be on how lean systems have been implemented and critically the way in which the trade union has responded in terms of the employment compromise.

2:5 Work Restructuring and Lean in the Civil Service

As the introductory chapter highlighted, the Civil Service has been subject to significant restructuring in the period since the election of the Thatcher government in 1979 as part of the wider restructuring of the public sector. This was based on the belief that market mechanisms were the most effective way to regulate the allocation of resources to and within the public sector (Pilkington, 1999). Consequently there existed within government the belief that private sector organizations were inherently run more efficiently than public sector or state-run organizations. The public sector, including the Civil Service, was from 1979 increasingly subject to organizational change premised on the entrepreneurial ethos of value for money purportedly espoused by the private sector. It confirmed the view that all parts of the public sector, including the Civil Service, needed to exist under a marketised regime and operate under the types of organizational efficiency programmes found within the private sector. Governments of all political hues since 1979 have been committed to restructuring the Civil Service utilising the private sector as an exemplar of efficient practice. The outcome, as it was in other parts of the public sector, has been in direct privatisation moving areas of work from state control to private sector control, outsourcing, or by the utilisation of private sector expertise in the public sector as a means of improving efficiency (Cunningham and James, 2009). The private sector, it was asserted, could replace or improve the inefficient pre-1979 Civil Service management organization using techniques and processes drawn from the private sector as a means of increasing organizational efficiency (Gains, 2003). The role of the state is subject to attempts to change it from a provider of services to an enabler of services (McCafferty and Mooney, 2007). Pilkington (1999) also highlights that these attempts to restructure work organization reflected the attempts by the Thatcher government to curb the power and influence of the Civil Service trade unions. As such, it was entirely consistent with the neo-liberal attempts to control the collective power of the workforce by emasculating the influence of the trade unions (Clark, 1996; McIlroy, 1988).

These attempts to restructure the public sector were largely coterminous with what was titled 'New Public Management'. Osborne and Gaebler (1992), writing in the context of US government administration reforms, argued that existing models of public sector organization were inherently inefficient. The state sector's reliance on bureaucratic forms of governance was wasteful and had failed to adapt to new forms of work found elsewhere in society. These authors argued that there was a need to

use more entrepreneurial forms of organisation matching the organizational forms and ethos of the private sector as a means of generating organizational efficiency. Interestingly, lean was identified as an exemplar of this new type of work organization. Osborne and McLaughlin (2002) further highlight the move to challenge the public sector trade unions whose role was seen to be one of defending their members' conditions against the public good. The origins of what was later titled New Public Management came from an attempt by the state to dismantle what was seen to be an inefficient and bureaucratic public sector and replace it with purportedly more efficient private sector models of work (Hood, 1991). Hood also argued that the implementation of New Public Management was coterminous with the increased use of human resource management approaches to people management, increased use of managerialism that he equated to scientific management, and the development of information technology in the administration of the public sector. The widespread use of New Public Management arguably reflects the desire for more efficient public services ostensibly driven by public demand, but driven in reality by a political agenda and reflecting the need to reduce public spending costs (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004). Advocates of this approach present it as politically neutral imbued with an inherent logic requiring no justification (Hood, 1991). In reality its form is "imitative" (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004:10) of private sector models of work organization and significantly influenced by the 'excellence' literature of the early 1980s (e.g. Peters and Waterman (1982)) with its prescriptive approach to work restructuring. To this degree, to adopt lean working in the public sector coheres with the New Public Management approach with its imitation of private sector models, its inherent logic, its prescriptive approach to work restructuring and, not least, its emphasis on the reduction of waste and inefficiency.

The Civil Service has both common and distinct features in relation to the restructuring of work in the public sector. The Civil Service is subject to similar trends elsewhere in the public sector where the delivery of public sector services are increasingly subject to commodification in the interests of capital (Moody, 2011). To that degree, lean working has been widely used across a variety of public sector organizations such as the health sector (Esain *et al.*, 2008; Proudlove *et al.*, 2008). What is arguably distinct about the Civil Service is that its work organization is subject to a distinct state labour process (Fairbrother, 1994). The state is, on one hand, the agent by which capital accumulation is legitimated and supported, but on the other hand it also has a function as an employer of those working for the state,

namely civil servants. Civil servants are thus uniquely tied to the state labour process. Civil servants are both employees and direct agents of the state in a way that other public sector employees are not. Cunningham *et al.* (2006) argue that employees working for the local authority are also affected by changes in the labour process. However, they distinguish between changes arising from central government policies that seek to force local authorities to make efficiency cuts and the local authority as employer who may seek to mitigate the impact of these changes. The Civil Service labour process is distinct to the extent that, unlike other parts of the public sector, there is no buffer between the state and the workforce. The way that lean affects these employees may not necessarily be significantly different at a workplace level, but at the macro and meso levels of analysis the drivers for using lean will be manifested in different ways to other parts of the public sector.

As the introductory chapter indicated, work restructuring to create greater efficiency has been a common theme throughout the period of the modern Civil Service. From the Northcote-Trevelyan reforms on the Civil Service of the mid nineteenth century onwards, creating a more efficient state apparatus has been a recurrent theme (Moses, 1966). However with the election of the Thatcher government in 1979, this drive towards efficiency was overtly linked to a neo-liberal agenda around dismantling the state apparatus and attempts to reduce the power of the Civil Service trade unions often epitomised in the mantra “[rolling] back the frontiers of the state” (Pilkington, 1999:66-67). The unions were viewed under this neo-liberal agenda as both creating inefficiency and as a bulwark to government attempts to dismantle the state apparatus (Theakston, 1995).

The Conservative governments (1979 to 1997) had as one of their main policy aims the decentralisation of the Civil Service and the marketization of Civil Service functions. Marketization included direct privatisation. It also included the market testing of Civil Service functions either to force departments to drive down costs with the concomitant worsening of work conditions or to facilitate the transfer of work to the private sector (Theakston, 1995; Bovaird and Russell, 2007). Fairbrother (1994:32) describes this as a “quasi-market” model of delivery. Allied to the quasi-market model was the attempt to decentralise the Civil Service by attempting to separate the delivery of services from the policy arm of government. The creation of the Next Steps agencies in the late 1980s was part of this move to

divide the Civil Service into a small core of civil servants involved in the creation of policy and the significantly larger remainder who undertake service delivery. The policy aim was to have 95% of civil servants assigned to service delivery (Theakston, 1995). This matched the ethos of New Public Management whereby the policy and implementation parts of government are separated (Barzelay, 2002). These Next Steps agencies gave the appearance of autonomy under the guise of decentralisation, but in reality were subject to strict budgetary controls imposed by the Treasury that impacted on the conditions under which civil servants worked (Fairbrother, 1994; Bailey, 1996). As Bailey (1996) highlights, decentralisation was the opportunity for departmental management to restructure work organization and introduce new systems of human resource management.

With the election of the New Labour government in 1997, Gains (2003) argues the rebranding of the Next Steps agencies into executive agencies reflected a move by the state to regain greater political control over the apparatus of government. However, as Mooney and Law (2007) argue, the state's underlying belief in the inefficiency of the public sector and the neo-liberal agenda at the heart of government was not significantly changed. The more conciliatory line taken by New Labour with its emphasis on social partnership provided a degree of cognizance of the role of organised labour insofar as it coincided with New Labour's Modernisation agenda (Giddens, 1998). The impact on the workforce in terms of work restructuring and work conditions was arguably one of degree rather than reversing the impact of the previous Conservative administrations. In any event, as Gains (2003) argues, while New Labour reversed the degree of decentralisation, it was matched by increasing the level of monitoring that government exercised over individual departments.

The Civil Service Reform Programme, a central plank of the Modernising Government Programme originally initiated in 1999, was established to improve organizational performance and better business planning (Bovaird and Russell, 2007). As part of this programme, the government commissioned the Gershon Report (2004). With the government seeking to make increased cost savings, the Gershon Report was therefore commissioned by the New Labour government from an external consultant with the express aim of making efficiency savings within the Civil Service that would 'release resources for front line delivery' (2004:5). Efficiencies would be achieved through the reform of work processes and resource

utilisation. Gershon (2004:6) argued that 'efficiency' within the Civil Service should be viewed as "making the best use of the resources available for the provision of public services" by reducing costs and generating greater output from the workforce, whilst maintaining the same level of service provision for the public. As a means of improving Civil Service work efficiency, the report recommended that the Civil Service make more efficient use of information technology (what it described as "e-channels of communication") and also greater use of proven business efficiency techniques drawn from best practice in the private sector. The report recommended the increased use of 'back office' processing, a recommendation that would reduce the number of government offices where the public had face to face access to civil servants. The Report referred to the 'back office' in two ways, first related to support services such as IT and Human Resources, but also to 'transactional' services, in effect the processing of work such as social security benefits and tax. Gershon argued that considerable savings could be accrued within these transactional services by the increased use of information technology, standardisation of procedures to allow different parts of government to share data and service provision, and to utilise cheaper means of service delivery. The use of telephone call centres was specifically highlighted. The report, moreover, stated government departments needed to manage its staff more effectively focusing on the need to reduce sickness absence as a means of reducing operating costs.

McCafferty and Mooney (2007) highlight the significant staffing losses envisaged as a result of Gershon⁹, but also the extensive use of information technology in the achievement of these targets and the use of private sector business methods as exemplars of supposedly effective practice. Gershon (2004:41) refers to consultation meetings with *inter alia* the Confederation of British Industry and eight companies¹⁰, many of which specialised in providing consultancy services in organizational restructuring. What is absent from the report is any

⁹ The figures from the Introductory chapter are reproduced for completeness: the Department for Work and Pensions was scheduled to lose 30,000 net posts between 2004 and 2008. HM Revenue and Customs was scheduled to lose 10,500 net posts in the same period. The Department of Education and Science was scheduled to have a reduction of 31% in its headquarters staff.

¹⁰ Accenture, Capita, McKinsey, PA Consulting, HP, IBM, Oracle, and Computer Science Corporation are the eight companies specifically identified in the report.

specific recommendation on the business improvement approach that could be used. To that extent, lean does not appear within the Gershon report.

The Civil Service has been subject to further changes in the period following the Gershon Report. The global financial crisis of 2008 had significant impact on public finances (Greener, 2013). The election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition government in 2010 was also significant as the espoused aims of this administration included a “radical programme of public sector reform” premised on “improving the transparency, efficiency and accountability of public services” (HM Treasury, 2010). Despite the financial impact of recent political-economic events, the Civil Service continues to operate as a series of decentralised departments run by boards of senior managers albeit under strict budgetary control exercised by the Treasury (Cabinet Office, 2007; Page, 2010; Cabinet Office, 2012). It is within this context that lean is used within the Civil Service.

Although Gershon (2004) declined to make any recommendation regarding a specific business process, lean working appeared within the Civil Service very speedily in the period following his report. The appearance of lean within the Civil Service is unsurprising in that three of the companies, PA Consulting, Unipart and McKinsey, which contributed evidence to the Gershon Report, were all advocates of lean as a business improvement approach and ultimately used it when employed by the Civil Service in a consulting capacity (Carter *et al.*, 2011b). Its continued use within the Civil Service is viewed as an exemplar of efficient practice. It was, for example, reported to Parliament that lean had enabled civil servants in the Department for Work and Pensions to develop new and innovative ways of working and thereby was a source of significant efficiency savings (House of Commons, 2010). The next part of this chapter will examine the use of lean in the Civil Service.

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) was the first government department to introduce lean working in a systematic fashion. This department was formed in 2004 as an amalgamation of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise (Gershon, 2004). Proposed staff losses in this department were directly connected to the amalgamation of these two bodies. Staff losses were also proposed in view of the relocation of staff from more expensive parts of the country to cheaper areas (Carter *et al.*, 2011b) in the wake of the Lyons Review. The first attempt to introduce lean into HMRC was through its use in income tax processing with the aim of rolling out

lean to 95% of HMRC operations by 2013 (Radnor and Bucci, 2007; National Audit Office, 2011).

On one level, the techniques and tools used to implement and develop lean within HMRC were similar to other industrial sectors. There were three strategic aims: the redesign of service delivery to eliminate waste and variability as a means to improve productivity and quality; the restructuring of management organization to sustain work changes; and the development of a culture of change to allow all staff to support new work systems and deliver continuous improvement (Radnor, 2010). The achievement of these aims would be underpinned by the strategic dimension to lean (Hines *et al.*, 2004) where the processing of work was viewed as a form of value stream. Various tools were used by HMRC management (Radnor and Bucci, 2007). HMRC used business diagnostics to identify the most effective use of processes and locations to deliver the work. It also used work standardisation, forms of visual management (for example, lean 'boards' on which performance activity was recorded to show staff the progress towards their performance targets) and 'line balancing' to control the flow of work. Structured problem solving was also used. This approach included work systems to systematically monitor the timing of work, problem solving groups often in tandem with the lean 'boards' and '5S', a structured approach to identify different forms of waste in the productive process. HMRC also used Lean Academies, initially staffed by external consultants, but latterly by local staff, as a training resource to advise on the most effective way to develop lean. Radnor and Bucci (2007) argue that where HMRC failed to use lean appropriately was in relation to its failure to specify the customer to whom HMRC provided a service. Radnor (2010:424) further argues that in common with many public sector bodies, HMRC have only "adapted" rather than "adopted" lean working. By these tokens, organizational failures in HMRC related to the way lean was implemented rather than any underlying flaws lean had as a model of work organization.

However, in contrast, others argue that the use of lean neglects its real impact. Approaches that hold that lean only requires modification for it to work effectively neglects the impact of lean working on the workforce and fails to address how lean is used by management to restructure the employment relationship. Carter *et al.* (2011b) argue that the use of lean working led directly to work intensification. The achievement of targets was prioritised over any other aspects of work done within HMRC to the detriment to the employees whose tacit skills, developed

through experience, were lost. Although there was a rhetoric of continuous improvement, there were few gains in the way that the work was processed, often as these processes were constrained by the requirement that management had to vet and approve workforce suggestions. The developments introduced through lean working were a logical progression from earlier attempts by Inland Revenue management to restructure the organization of work (Currie and Proctor, 2003) to reflect the delayering and restructuring of management roles. The use of lean working within HMRC tax processing sites led to deterioration in the quality of working life through increases in work pace, work intensity and greater management control over work processes (Carter *et al.*, 2009). Paradoxically the increased emphasis on the achievement of targets resulted in poorer productivity and a reduction of quality. Team working took on new characteristics. Whilst the organizational structures retained some of the earlier features of group working, team work was integrally linked to lean systems of work. Staff members were required on a daily basis to attend lean meetings to discuss the achievement of work targets. The intention that these meetings would allow staff to contribute suggestions as a means of improving how work was performed was rarely realised in practice. Carter *et al.* (2009) also highlight that what advocates of lean view as a benefit, systems of work flow, were directly responsible for intensifying the work. Individual targets, increased management monitoring of the staff and work standardisation were identified as critical factors in the intensification of work.

Whilst in-depth studies of HMRC provide detailed information on the application of lean to one specific department, others studies have examined changes in the organization of work in other areas of the Civil Service. Where differences arguably occur is in relation to the speed and degree to which other departments have utilised lean as a management system. The Department for Work and Pensions issued the Lean Vision in 2007 with the aim of introducing lean working across all parts of its organization within a ten year period. The antecedents to the use of lean working are arguably as important as the techniques used within that department. DWP increasingly standardised the way work was undertaken, often using what it called Standard Operating Models (SOM) (Aylen *et al.*, 2007). These SOMs set out in precise details each of the steps that needed to be taken in relation to the completion of each work process, both in terms of the procedural steps and how these steps related to other individuals' roles in the process. The assumption is that these models are based on tried and tested procedures that can

be transferred from one work area to another (LaPorte and Cosolini, 1991). The approach was, on one level, little different from the conventional bureaucratic nature of the Civil Service that required the codification of procedures for reasons of objectivity and impartiality in the public interest (Robson, 1956). Whilst Lane (2000) suggests that the standard operating model fits more closely with the traditional model of public sector management, the adoption of the SOM approach is intrinsic to lean as it seeks to eliminate variability in work processes in the interests of efficiency (Radnor, 2010).

2:6 The Trade Union Response

The third research question seeks to evaluate the response of the trade union to lean. This section will examine the context of industrial relations within the Civil Service looking at both the nature of trade unionism within this area of the public sector and the structures within which the union and management bargain and negotiate. This section also examines the nature of the state labour process and this allows the response of the union to be located within the context of the workplace.

The main Civil Service trade union representing non-industrial civil servants is the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) formed in 1998 from a merger of the Public Services Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) and the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) (Fairbrother, 2000). The PCS also represents members working in the private sector usually in those areas that have been privatised¹¹. The PCS currently has 262 819 members and is the seventh largest trade union in Britain (TUC, 2014). Trade union membership density in the Civil Service remains higher than the UK average and is also higher than the public sector average¹²: the most recent density figure for trade union membership in the Civil Service is 67% (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011a; Department for Business Innovation and Skills, 2013; Mathieson and Corby, 1999).

The history of the trade unions in the Civil Service reflects the history of the Civil Service. The current structure and organization of the PCS reflects both its

¹¹ Other trade unions representing members in the Civil Service are the FDA, Prospect, the Prison Officers' Association and the Northern Ireland Public Services Alliance. None of these unions' members worked in areas directly covered by the data collection.

¹² Current UK trade union density is 14.4% and the public sector has a trade union density of 56.3% (2012 figures).

historical antecedents, but is also rooted in the social relations of production (Fairbrother, 2000). Unions in the Civil Service from their inception in the early twentieth century were divided along functional lines. This meant that there were separate unions for different grades and separate unions for different Civil Service departments. Over the twentieth century, there were a series of amalgamations that dissolved the boundaries based on function, grade and department. In 1996, the Inland Revenue Staff Federation amalgamated with the National Union of Civil and Public Servants, itself a 1988 amalgamation between the Society of Civil and Public Servants and the Civil Service Union¹³. With formation of PCS in 1998, a union was created in effect that represented members across government departments and across all grades, both managerial and clerical, up to and including principal grade¹⁴. At a national level, Civil Service unions were often divided between a more moderate leadership and a more militant activist cohort witnessed in the decisions of the annual conference. The election of Mark Serwotka, as General Secretary of PCS in 2001, however, indicated a leftward move in the leadership of the largest Civil Service union (Charlwood, 2004).

In terms of bargaining and negotiating mechanisms, the Civil Service has had an extensive history of undertaking its industrial relations on a formal or structured basis defined by agreed rules and procedures. A variety of fora have been used upon which collective bargaining between management and trade unions have been undertaken. These fora had regulated and institutionalised collective bargaining procedures and were the basis on which the substantive negotiating issues were discussed (Flanders, 1970). These fora were the locus for consultation between management and trade union and also the mechanism whereby disputes from lower tiers of the organization were addressed at more senior levels.

The principal mechanism used within the Civil Service in the post-World War One period was the Whitley Council system (Corby and White, 1999; Houghton, 1933). Its original *raison d'être* was to allow the state apparatus to secure the cooperation of its civil servants maintaining the efficiency of the organization in tandem with ensuring the well-being of the workforce. As it did elsewhere in the public sector, the Whitley Council system provided a means within the Civil Service

¹³ SCPS and the CSU brought together a union of those of managerial grades with a union of support grades (e.g. typists, messengers).

¹⁴ More senior civil servants are represented by the FDA.

to allow representatives of management and the trade unions to meet in a structured bargaining forum. Whitley councils operated at national, departmental and local levels and provided a regulated means of arbitration over disputes. Its use reflected what had historically been consensual industrial relations within the Civil Service (Fairbrother, 1994). With bargaining largely conducted at a national level by the union leadership on behalf of the union membership, the Whitley system placed the locus of negotiation at national rather than workplace level.

With the first Civil Service strike in 1973 and the subsequent election of the Thatcher government, industrial relations in the Civil Service became significantly more confrontational. With the decentralisation of organizational structures through the Next Steps agencies, the locus of industrial relations shifted. This drive towards organizational decentralisation resulted in the decentralisation of bargaining to departmental units. Not only were the procedural mechanisms changed, but decentralisation was the catalyst for the various departmental managements to vary conditions of service for their employees rather than retain national conditions of service that applied to all civil servants (Corby and White, 1999; Bailey, 1996). Civil Service pay, for example, albeit within strict Treasury control, now varied between departments and was subject to negotiation between departmental management and the appropriate departmental trade union representatives (Kessler *et al.*, 2006). The mechanisms by which these negotiations were undertaken also changed: with the advent of decentralisation, management began to disband the existing Whitley Council structure (Corby, 1998). This meant, for example in DWP, that formal negotiation structures from 2002 effectively existed at national departmental level with the lower tiers existing primarily as consultation fora where local management imparted information rather than engaged in any attempt to meaningfully negotiate (Martin, 2010).

Despite opposition from the trade union, in DWP for example, management imposed an Employee Relations Framework (ERF) (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2003). There was still what was described as a Whitley Council meeting at departmental level to be held once a year chaired by the Permanent Secretary or a deputy, but the ERF made no further provision for the use of Whitley Council at lower levels of negotiation. DWP imposed a structure that did provide for limited negotiation at national and regional tiers, but lacking the more collaborative

features of Whitleyism. Management designated these national and regional tiers 'formal'.

However for all lower tiers of management, at district or workplace level, any meetings between management and trade union were designated as 'informal'. 'Informal' negotiation specified that in the interests of reducing bureaucracy and better efficiency that there was no requirement for minutes of meetings to be taken and consultation should be done by whatever means would most effectively achieve its aims rather than holding meetings for their own sake. Disputes should only exceptionally be taken beyond the tier at which these were raised and then only taken to one tier above. The ERF contained an explicit statement to the effect that decisions "taken at national level should not be re-opened for discussion at any other level" other than as a way of addressing the implementation of those issues at local level.

These structures describe the regulated and institutionalised perspective on the employment relationship (Flanders, 1970). This perspective is important as it assists in understanding ways that management has used the mechanisms of industrial relations and the associated collective bargaining to restructure work within the Civil Service. Blyton and Turnbull (2004) argue that collective bargaining between trade union and management is manifested in terms of six dimensions. These dimensions are first seen in relation to the processes that make up the bargaining arrangements. The second relates to the formality, flexibility and bureaucracy of the collective bargaining arrangements. The third is the level of management at which negotiation is conducted, whilst the fourth reflects coverage of the individual bargaining unit. The fifth strand is the range or scope of issues that fall within bargaining arrangements and the sixth is the depth of influence that management and trade union have over bargaining. However there is a risk that too great an emphasis on the formal structures of industrial relations neglects the power relations found within the state labour process.

As Fairbrother (1994) argues, the state labour process is distinctive due to the nature of the work undertaken by civil servants and by their relationship to the state. Civil servants are both agents of the state as well as its direct employees. Unlike other parts of the public sector, although funded through the public purse civil servants are directly employed and managed by the apparatus of central

government¹⁵. Civil servants' changing roles and functions impacted on the nature of industrial relations in the Civil Service and the way that the unions responded to those changes. Up to the late 1960s, trade union-management relations in the Civil Service were largely consensual due to the comparatively high degree of shared interest between management and workforce in achieving organizational efficiency. The first industrial action in the non-industrial Civil Service in 1973 over pay, in a period of rising inflation, indicated more conflictual employment relations (Fairbrother, 2000). These more conflictual relationships were also seen in terms of the attempts by the Thatcher government to reduce the power of the Civil Service trade unions (Theakston, 1995). Fairbrother (1994) also argues that decentralisation of work to executive agencies was symptomatic of management's attempts to recast civil servants as workers. This restructuring of Civil Service work coheres moreover with the argument that the bureaucratisation of office work in rationalising the labour process has increasingly alienated white collar workers from their management and changed the social relations of production (Lockwood, 1966; Hyman, 1983). The recasting of the state labour process through work restructuring and the related marketization of the Civil Service (Theakston, 1995) has refashioned trade unionism in the Civil Service.

The response of the trade union is derived in part from the historical antecedents described above, but also from the ethos of white collar work in the context of the Civil Service. Kelly (1996) holds that trade unions can be viewed in a continuum ranging from militant to moderate, both in terms of leadership but also in terms of membership. The PCS and its predecessor unions have historically adopted a militant stance in terms of its public pronouncements through, for example, its member conferences and its current General Secretary (Charlwood, 2004; Serwotka, 2011; Fairbrother, 2000). At a national level, PCS maintained an oppositional stance on lean working commissioning work that challenged management's use of lean (Gall, 2007). However as Kelly (1996) also highlights, different parts of the union organization may espouse different degrees of militancy

¹⁵ Civil servants as Crown employees in terms of the law do not have 'contracts of employment' albeit that their 'terms of employment' equate to what ordinarily employers in the private sector and other parts of the public sector are required to provide to their employees (sections 191ff., Employment Right Act 1996). There is also therefore a legal distinction to the status of civil servants that differentiates them from other workers in the public sector.

or moderation. Furthermore a militant ideology may co-exist with moderate bargaining demands. Rooted in a white collar occupation, Civil Service trade unionism is likely to have a distinct hue. In common with other white collar workers, civil servants work more closely in tandem with their immediate managers than those in blue collar occupations (Lockwood, 1966). Price (1983) also emphasised that white collar unionism in the public sector reflected that the sense of collectivism among the workforce was often borne of a belief in the value of public or civic service rather than an antipathy towards the employer. Because office employees' interests are often related to personal career advancement, there is likely to be less of a sense of conflict between management and workforce. Price argues that collective action within white collar unions in the public sector is more likely to concern the legitimacy of public servanthood rather than a means of attempting to impose sanctions on the employer.

The refashioning of the labour process at a workplace level is manifested in a number of ways reflecting the nature of trade unionism within the Civil Service. Fairbrother (2000) argues that the early 1990s witnessed a rise in member activism at local office level. Ironically, this was in part as a result of the decentralising of management structures. In those workplaces with active local union organization, trade union stewards became increasingly involved in bargaining over local office work issues. He further argues that in the face of attempts by management to restrict the facility time of union stewards and the heightened emphasis on performance management, in the 1990s local union representatives were provided with the opportunity to act collectively to resist management attempts to individualise employment relations. This trend reflected a shift in trade unionism within the Civil Service. The locus of collective bargaining between management and trade unions on work organization issues in effect shifted from national level to local level. More recently Upchurch *et al.* (2008) highlight the continued capacity of PCS to mobilise its members to take industrial action and to maintain levels of participation among its activists. (Appendix 1 lists the industrial action taken during the currency of the data collection period.)

However as Hyman (1989:42) argues there remains the contradiction within trade unions between leading "frontal opposition" to the employer but also in the ways that unions form an institutional block on their membership expressing discontent. Union leadership will attempt to reduce conflict within the employment

relationship and reach compromise with management in effect counteracting the interests of its own membership. The organizational and representational structure of the trade union may influence the way that this compromise is reached. Critical to this is arguably the respective roles of the full time officials of the union and those of the lay representatives, and the degree of power that each group has in relation to the other (Lumley, 1973). In terms of dealing with lean working and the associated work reorganization, the PCS response needs to be examined in the context of the union structure and its interaction with Civil Service management.

There are three broad themes that come to the fore in terms of the PCS response. First, with the increasing attempts by management to decentralise the organization of work to departmental level, the union is effectively dealing with issues of work organization in a more piecemeal fashion. The locus of negotiation has shifted to the level of individual government departments rather than being based around national bargaining for the Civil Service as a single unit. While for Fairbrother (2000) this had the potential to shift the power in the union to the workplace level, it also meant that issues around working conditions to which union representatives have to respond become isolated from broader issues of the state labour process. Secondly, the increased weight placed on union representatives at workplace level is both a strength and a weakness. Darlington (2010) emphasises the pressures on individual stewards to negotiate with management on personal cases at the expense of bargaining with the employer over collective workplace issues. Carter *et al.* (2009) argue that at a local level PCS stewards continue to be highly effective in representing the membership: PCS membership expressed high levels of confidence in the capacity of the local lay stewards to deal with personal cases, often arising directly from the impact of lean working. Where the PCS is less effective is in terms of its ability to deal with the implementation of lean working imposed by senior levels of management. PCS has, at a national leadership level, arguably in the face of increasingly macho forms of management failed to deal with the ways that management has attempted to exploit the state labour process at a workplace level (Carter *et al.*, 2011a). The increasing use of information technology has in effect removed the capacity of the local trade union representatives to bargain directly on issues relating to its local members: with the flow of work between office locations controlled by electronic systems. Although paradoxically offices are remote in distance one from another, there is increasingly less autonomy for individual local managers to act independently in organising the work for which

they are responsible. This highlights the third key issue that while the union can maintain frontal opposition manifested through the use of industrial action, management can increasingly manage the state labour process. The degree to which the state labour process is managed is influenced in two ways.

The two main issues are, first that with the increasing sophistication of the available information technology, management has increasing capacity to minimise the impact of the union response, and secondly, there continues at the heart of the management-union response an employment compromise. Fisher (2007) highlights the importance of the control that management can exercise over the labour process through information technology systems. As management increases the degree of sophistication of computerised systems, the greater the degree of control that management can exercise. Management can also thereby increase its capacity to exclude the trade unions from the collective bargaining process. However Fisher (2004) also argues this level of control has to be viewed against the employment compromise between management and union. Fisher (2004:173) describes this as an 'informal productivity coalition' whereby PCS attempts to maintain a broadly consensual set of relationships the employer. In return for a promise of a degree of job security for its membership, PCS consequently collaborated with management over work conditions particularly over the introduction of new technology. Furthermore, despite a militant ideological stance over management's use of lean working (Gall, 2007), there has also been an element on compromise over workplace organization issues relating to lean working tantamount to a form of partnership. In this respect, Carter *et al.* (2011c) highlight the impact of the Pacesetter Agreement signed between the national union and HRMC management whereby the PCS agreed a concordat with management over the introduction of lean in return for certain safeguards for staff. As Kelly (1996) argues, forms of partnership with management can weaken the trade union as it can erode the capacity of the union to resist management's attempts to restructure work. It also critically suggests that, as in other industrial sectors, there remains an employment compromise at the heart of the employment relationship (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002).

This chapter has provided the opportunity to discuss the literature on the nature of lean working in the context of the political economy of work and the extent to which management may implement organizational change in different ways in a

specific context derived from historical and national circumstances. By examining changes in the organization of work in the context of the UK Civil Service, the research examines the nature of lean. The chapter has also examined the issue of skills allowing an investigation into the impact that lean has on civil servants' work skills. Finally the literature has discussed the trade union response to organizational change to assist with an evaluation of PCS's response to the implementation of lean working. Before considering the evidence in detail, the next chapter will discuss how the research was undertaken.

Chapter 3 Methodology and the Politics of Research

Fundamental to any rigorous research is the employment of a systematic approach to the collection and interpretation of data with a clear view around the purposes of the research process (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Not that this in any way suggests that the research process should always be straightforward, linear and 'set in stone' from the outset, but simply that there should be a logical rationale to the process responsive to the circumstances as these emerge. This researcher's experience has been that the research process from the outset has never been straightforward or linear and it has certainly been subject to the need for change.

This chapter will deal with the following aspects of the research process: (1) the initiatives that led to the research; (2) the aims and objectives of the research; (3) the initial research design and its rationale; (4) the politics of research as these relate to this project; (5) the ethics of the research project; and (6) the research design as it developed over time.

3:1 Background to the Research

The inspiration for the research came from two inter-related sources, the first being the personal interest of the researcher and the second the concerns of the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) Union over the introduction of lean working within the Civil Service.

The researcher's interest arises from his period working in the Civil Service 1985 to 2006, with successively the Department of Health and Social Security, the Department of Social Security and the Department for Work and Pensions. The interest in the subject of organizational change and the working conditions was derived, both from involvement in the PCS and its predecessor unions as a union member and steward, but also from experience as a social security benefits decision maker in each of the above departments and the changes observed in the adjudication and decision making process over time.

As the introductory chapter highlights, one of the union's major concerns over work restructuring related to the introduction of lean working in HMRC from 2004 onwards (Carter *et al.*, 2009) and its expansion into other parts of Civil Service work. Although trivialised to a certain degree in the news media with accounts of

'active and inactive bananas'¹⁶ (BBC, 2007b; BBC, 2007a), the piloting of lean resulted in strike action by union members in the Lothians tax processing centre. Local union stewards and members had raised issues with the national union relating to how lean was impacting on work ergonomics and job de-skilling (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2006; Carter *et al.*, 2012). The national union, following the introduction of lean in HMRC, commissioned a number of independent studies seeking to address its concerns over the loss of worker skills, changes in job design and deterioration in public service not only in HMRC but in a variety of other Civil Service departments and in privatised areas undertaking jobs formerly done within the public sector (Carter *et al.*, 2009; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2007; Gall, 2007). Gall's pamphlet issued by the union encouraged the PCS membership to take an oppositional stance to lean and consider forms of industrial action as a means of defending jobs and conditions. Motions at the PCS Annual Conference of 2008 called on the union to garner additional information on the deleterious effects of lean and to maintain a strong oppositional stance to any forms of lean working¹⁷(Public and Commercial Services Union, 2008d; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2008c).

Following a series of discussions over the period November 2007 to July 2008 between the researcher, his academic supervisor and a senior officer of the PCS (Full Time Officer ①¹⁸), the National Executive Committee (NEC) of the union agreed in July 2008 to sponsor and support research on the impact of lean on PCS members working in the Civil Service. An initial meeting to discuss the research project in detail was held in August 2008 between the researcher, his academic supervisor and Full Time Officer ①. As the union's designated supervisor for the project, Full Time Officer ① identified seven potential areas of interest for the union: (1) an examination of the spread of lean techniques across the Civil Service; (2) an examination of the type and nature of these techniques identifying common strands; (3) a longitudinal study of these techniques' effectiveness and durability over time;

¹⁶ A BBC news programme highlighted how in the course of a lean exercise undertaken by an external consultant each object on an employee's work station was deemed either "active" and thus required to undertake work tasks, or "inactive" and therefore not essential to undertake work. An issue had been raised over whether an employee needed to have a banana on the desk.

¹⁷ A copy of the motion is printed in Appendix 7.

¹⁸ Appendix 2 provides a detailed list of participants in the research process.

(4) the impact on PCS members with particular reference to potential skills loss; (5) the PCS response to lean and the effectiveness of that response; (6) Civil Service management strategies, specifically whether there were any coordinated efforts by Civil Service management at national level to introduce lean techniques across departments; and (7) to compare and analyse the application of lean within the Civil Service in relation to its use in other parts of the public sector. PCS wanted a report from the researcher based on his findings covering these seven areas. Within these broad terms of reference, the initial discussion suggested to the researcher that considerable latitude would be afforded to him in terms of the precise academic research questions that he could address. Equally encouraging to the researcher at this stage was the endorsement of the NEC suggesting that two of the primary problems associated with research, lack of physical access and a lack of clarity around aims for the project had been successfully overcome (Saunders *et al.*, 2007; Fisher *et al.*, 2010). These early discussions allowed the researcher to construct more specific research aims and objectives.

3:2 Aims and Objectives of the Research

The aims and objectives of the research are derived from a number of sources. The literature review, crucial in terms of assembling existing theoretical work and in determining what gaps in knowledge exist (Saunders *et al.*, 2007), formed one strand in deciding the aims and objectives of this research. The second main strand originated from preliminary discussions with senior PCS union officials and the issues arising from the introduction of lean working into the UK Civil Service. The overarching aim of the research was therefore to examine the impact of lean on the UK Civil Service. Alvesson (2011) argues that precise research objectives can often be the result of reflection resulting from consideration of the research topic from different perspectives. The academic literature and reflection on the preliminary discussions with PCS suggested that the objectives of the research should be based on answering three questions:

- what is the nature of lean working within the UK Civil Service?
- what is the impact of lean working on the work skills of civil servants?
- what was the response of the PCS to lean?

The second question relating to the skills of civil servants would have a particular focus on those skills used in their legal and quasi-legal decision making function,

whilst the third question would pay particular attention to the response to the response of the union at a workplace level. The researcher nonetheless recognised that the study would be an iterative process, particularly insofar as the research design was concerned and this is reflected in the discussion that follows.

3:3 Initial Research Design and Rationale

The researcher adopted the premise that a case study approach would hold significant advantages in that it had sufficient flexibility to undertake explanatory research studying the Civil Service in its real life context of flux (Hartley, 2004; Yin, 2009). The Civil Service was subject to change generated by the organizational restructuring as a result of the Gershon Report (2004), and moves towards greater public sector efficiency by government in the wake of the global economic downturn (Greener, 2013; O'Donnell, 2009). The election of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition during the research project was likely to contribute to this flux.

The case study approach is also consistent with explanatory research in view of the need to make clear why changes in work organization were happening rather than simply provide descriptions. Yin (2009) argues there exists a rationale for utilising a single case in that it can respectively be a critical case, a unique case, a typical case, a revelatory case or a longitudinal case. In terms of using the Civil Service as a single case, several of these rationales are relevant. Its uniqueness as a case study is demonstrated in that no other body fulfils the same function as the Civil Service. Conversely the case study might also be typical of developments elsewhere within the public sector. It may be both critical and revelatory of developments in the public sector in a period of economic recession and in the aftermath of the election of the new government in May 2010 with its public sector reform agenda and its demand for significant cuts in government budgets and staffing (HM Treasury, 2010; BBC, 2010a; BBC, 2010b).

With the Civil Service consisting of a number of separate government departments, the researcher considered that each of these departments could be treated as sub-units within or 'embedded cases' of the whole case (Yin, 2009:50) and that he could base the research around an appropriate number of these embedded cases chosen from within the larger whole. At the beginning of the research process in 2008, the Civil Service consisted of 26 departments each

comprised of between one and eleven executive agencies¹⁹ (Office for National Statistics, 2009b). Each of these departments had within them PCS members organised in Groups each with their own full time and lay officials. The 39 Groups in existence at the outset of the research were predominantly organised to mirror the organization of the Civil Service. Some Groups include sections for cross-departmental specialist staff and staff members working in areas of work formerly done by civil servants, but subsequently privatised (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2012). In view of the constraints on time and the likely volume of work engendered, it was not feasible to undertake research in every Civil Service department. The researcher held that his selection of departments should mirror the principles of case study research, discussed above, namely that the study should attempt to capture what might be typical of the wider Civil Service, but without neglecting any critical or unique trends that may exist.

Full Time Officer ① indicated at the inaugural meeting in August 2008 that the activities within specific Civil Service departments were of particular interest to him, notably those occurring within DWP and HMRC, principally as these departments were known, both from information shared by PCS with the researcher or by published material (Radnor and Bucci, 2007), to be operating lean systems of work. The Cabinet Office was also suggested as the organizational change in this area would likely be significantly different to the other two departments and might provide a useful comparison. However these suggestions were by no means prescriptive. The researcher consequently decided to hold preliminary discussions with PCS representatives in DWP and HMRC, but also with full time officers working at the Scottish PCS offices as means of accessing PCS members working within Scottish Government, another area where lean had earlier been considered as a management approach (Radnor *et al.*, 2006). The researcher on his own initiative contacted a full time PCS official within the Ministry of Defence (MOD) Group as a work area that might present a further contrast. Lacking contact details for the Cabinet Office, the researcher decided to initially concentrate on those areas for which he had the greatest potential for access. Within a decentralised Civil Service (Gains, 2003; Kessler *et al.*, 2006), it cannot be assumed that findings from any one department would be replicated in any other departments. However with research

¹⁹ Figures taken as of March 31 2008 – the introductory chapter provides the most recent information on the number and types of departments.

being undertaken in three of the four departments, which at the time the study commenced, comprised over just over half of all civil servants (Office for National Statistics, 2009a), this strategy had the potential to develop a theoretical understanding of changes throughout the organization drawn from several parts of the whole as a means of analytical generalisation (Hartley, 2004) to explain changes across the entire Civil Service.

In terms of the specific methods used to examine the work changes within the Civil Service, the researcher initially decided to use both quantitative and qualitative methods. Considerable latitude of approach was offered by the PCS insofar as the union was not prescriptive in terms of how the research should be handled. Therefore there were, broadly speaking, two methods that the researcher suggested to the PCS. The first of these, the quantitative approach, was to undertake the collection of data through the use of a survey of PCS members. The second strategy following a qualitative approach was to undertake a number of research interviews with PCS members. These interviews would be conducted primarily with civil servants in non-managerial grades, the administrative²⁰ or clerical grades, and those working in junior managerial grades, known in Civil Service parlance as the executive officer grades.

Utilising a quantitative approach was useful in a number of respects. From a purely pragmatic perspective, should the union wish to publicise the research findings in the media or use them as a vehicle for negotiation with Civil Service management, large scale survey data may have a greater credibility in the public domain than those based on other types of data (Bryman, 2008). However, utility aside, survey research has the flexibility that it can be used for both exploratory, descriptive and theory development purposes (Forza, 2002; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010; Saunders *et al.*, 2007). It is important that a survey instrument, for example in the form of a questionnaire, is constructed in such a fashion that it reflects a careful study of the concepts that it seeks to examine and is robust both in terms of validity, reliability and generalizability (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Much survey research presupposes that the concepts under investigation are capable of explanation in terms of establishing causal links between variables (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010), although it may also be legitimate to hold to the view that examining variables in

²⁰ This is not to be confused with the Administrative Class, historically the most senior grade in the Civil Service – the distinction is described later in the chapter.

isolation may deny the complexity of the matter under study (Byrne, 2002). The survey instrument should have the capacity to capture discrete strands of information. Adhering to the assertion that concepts such as skill are multi-dimensional, it should also reflect the complexity of the subject under investigation. With extensive previous work in the area of work skills undertaken through survey data (Rose, 1994; Gallie *et al.*, 2004; Littler and Innes, 2003), a quantitative approach has the potential to garner information from a specific work sector using an established and widely recognised conceptual framework. This approach has significant potential to address the second research question examining the impact of lean on work skills. A number of other features would not be so easily captured through a purely quantitative study. Consequently a mixed methods approach was deemed appropriate to address issues related to the first and third research questions that discuss the nature of lean and the trade union response to lean.

The second strategy was to undertake a series of semi-structured or non-standardised interviews among PCS members in administrative or clerical and junior managerial grades. Interviews are recognised as a 'time consuming and labour intensive method of collecting information' (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994:125). However undertaking this style of interview, premised on using key themes and questions but with the flexibility to respond to individual circumstances as they arise during the course of the interview (Saunders *et al.*, 2007), has the capacity to address issues of complexity or conflicting logic, sensitive or emotive issues, respondents' varied experiences and focus on causality. Semi-structured interviews are also better suited to research that seeks to explain rather than describe or explore phenomena. Interviews allow the perspectives of the individuals to emerge through the research process (Hannabuss, 1996). The researcher anticipated that issues around significant work changes and respondents' relationship to PCS would be potentially emotive; be reflective of different experiences such as the degree of union involvement, grade, work history and the degree to which lean, had been introduced to a particular working environment; and would allow respondents to reflect on why they thought changes had occurred. The interviews completed over a period of ongoing structural change, likely accelerated in the wake of the 2010 UK general election and the Comprehensive Spending Review (HM Treasury, 2010), had the capacity to allow PCS members to reflect on their experiences during a period of upheaval.

The risks, however, associated with semi-structured interviews reflect that considerable time and effort may be involved in organising dates, venues and meeting times and the problems related to dealing with issues of confidentiality which are arguably heightened in this more intimate research environment (King, 2004). There are also issues around the extent to which a relatively small number of interviews, compared to data gleaned from a survey taken from a significantly larger group of people may be subject to problems of reliability, bias and validity (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The issues are, first, to what extent is the data found in a small number of non-standardised interviews generalisable across the entire Civil Service. Although, as Bryman (2008) argues, the individual interviewees were not intended to be representative of all civil servants and the data should be used to generalise to theory rather than to population, it may not necessarily follow (or even be desirable) that what is found could be repeated elsewhere. What is arguably more crucial is that the number of interviews conducted ensures the achievement of the aims and objectives of the project (Kvale, 1996). In other words, the greater the number the interviews conducted the greater the likelihood that the overall findings will be reliable. Secondly, there are also concerns around interviewer bias and respondent bias. In terms of interviewer bias, with the researcher having been a former serving civil servant there is, apart from a potential for sympathy (or antipathy), a risk of making assumptions on the basis of knowledge at the time of data collection around five years out of date. In terms of respondent bias, interviewees who are PCS members may consider providing socially desirable responses to what they consider as 'PCS research' rather than view it as independent academic research. Respondents may also act defensively borne of dissatisfaction with work (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002; Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). Ybema's (2004) suggestion that participants may hold an unrealistic view of the present to reflect a nostalgic view of the past may also be relevant in this context. Thirdly, in terms of validity, there are issues to be considered in terms of whether the constructs expressed in spoken form with the respondents are sufficiently robust to reach sustainable conclusions (Bryman, 2008). There are also more practical challenges related to interviews, not least the challenge of identifying appropriate respondents (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). Moreover, there are significant challenges in arranging and conducting interviews, often relating to identifying the people best able to facilitate access to the organization being studied (Hannabuss, 1996). Sheer busyness in a period of work restructuring and intensification only adds to the restrictions placed on a researcher.

These caveats aside, the researcher held that the strategy of using semi-structured interviews would be of considerable value in answering the research questions as it would allow respondents to reflect on their understanding of lean, lean's impact on work skills and the trade union response.

The proposed study design presented the researcher with two different and complementary approaches. Meshing the two approaches together would be advantageous in that it would provide a useful means of triangulation utilising data gathered from a significantly larger number of people than would be possible from interviews alone. The interview data would potentially have explanatory power. The two approaches would, however, dovetail and complement the other (Bryman, 2008). Preparatory to and coterminous with the surveys and the research interviews, archival material produced by PCS, government and media sources would also be collated in order to understand the extent to which respondents, in what has been a contested area, may be adopting personas to accommodate or influence the research process (Webb *et al.*, 1966). Consideration of archival or documentary material would be a valuable means to frame any surveys or interviews undertaken with PCS members, particularly if respondents had received information on lean from their management or the union.

The PCS, in broad terms, endorsed the mixed methods research design as an appropriate way to take the research forward and provided the researcher with the names of PCS officials, both lay and full time, who would act as links or 'gatekeepers' into various parts of the organization for which they had responsibility and who would assist in identifying which parts of their organization could provide data.

Identifying particular locations for the field work within each of the different government departments is in a sense an extension of choosing one department over another as a unit of analysis. Although a selection of sites may be illustrative of what may be typical throughout the rest of the department (Saunders *et al.*, 2007), one office site selected from each of the four departments represents only a tiny fraction of the total number of offices that currently exist. For reasons of practicality and access, Full Time Officer ① in the course of the initial discussion suggested that the offices could be located in Scotland. Three of the departments, HMRC, DWP and MOD, are directly accountable to the UK Parliament, whereas civil servants working for the Scottish Government, while sharing terms and conditions with their

counterparts in other government departments, are managed in line with the responsibilities of the devolved Scottish government administration (Cabinet Office and Scottish Administration, 1999). Although an approach that encompassed selecting fieldwork sites from one area of the UK contains the risk that there may be specific national or regional biases (Fairbrother, 2000), constraints of time, access and travel and the concomitant expenses were relevant issues. However the potential afforded by being able to interview national officers with their UK oversight would potentially redress basing the fieldwork within one part of the UK (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). Although assumptions would need to be made that the fieldwork sites would be typical of the departments of which they formed a part, the intention to hold preliminary discussions with PCS Group officers with oversight of their respective departments would assist in finding appropriate locations. Appropriateness would be judged in terms of time needed to access the locations and identifying contacts at site level willing to assist with the research.

The initial approach was to base the research in larger offices. Using data from larger offices would be useful in two respects. First, larger workplaces continue in the UK to have greater levels of trade union membership density than smaller workplaces and greater likelihood of an active union presence (Achur, 2010; Barrett, 2009). A larger location would potentially provide the researcher with, where survey data was concerned, a sufficient number of respondents to provide an 'illustrative profile using a representative case' (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:232). Secondly, as the intention was to issue survey forms to all PCS members within a given location, collecting data in a larger office was likely to be more representative of the PCS membership in terms of, for example, working hour patterns and gender. These initial choices were, nonetheless, refashioned by detailed considerations around access issues that needed to be examined under two related areas, the politics of research and the ethics of research.

3:4 The Politics of Research

The politics of research relates to what Hammersley (1995) describes as, first, the exercise of power in the research process and, secondly, the making of value judgements and the actions arising therefrom. This raises three issues in relation to the conduct of the research. First, there is the question of the value judgements held by the organization being studied. Secondly, there is an issue around the exercise of power. Thirdly, there is the impact that the holding of value judgements and the

power exercised by the members of the organization at various levels have on the way they respond to the researcher, primarily in relation to questions of access to information.

The issue of value judgements in the research process is critical as it influences the environment in which any study is conducted. The role of value has been widely debated. For those, mainly within conventional business fields, research has a pragmatic quality intended to solve or resolve particular organizational problems (Sekaran, 1999; Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). However Stavenhagen (1993) argues for a three-fold typology of research: that it can be produced without regard for its ultimate use; that it can be produced to give credence to the *status quo* within society; or that it can challenge the existing societal norms.

From the perspective of the PCS, the earlier discussion around the rationale for initiating the research would suggest that there was undoubtedly a problem to be resolved. However the research would not have been commissioned had there not been a desire within the union to challenge the Civil Service's use of lean. From the perspective of an organization commissioning the research in such a fashion, it would be critical that there was a degree of congruence between the likely view of the researcher and that of the organization (Sekaran, 1999) in order that there is a reasonable commonality of understanding. The researcher's background within PCS and his previous research work on its behalf (Martin, 2010) would be the type of approach that the PCS would likely wish to endorse. Having sympathy for the aims of the union and a desire for societal change does not preclude academic rigour. It is both possible to maintain objectivity by distinguishing between the direct aim of the research, the production of knowledge, and any indirect aims of societal change that may arise therefrom (Hammersley, 1995; Haskell, 1990). The personal perspectives of the researcher must also be considered against the two bodies under examination, each of which will have their own perspectives.

3:4:1 Trade Unions

It has long been recognised that trade unions are composed of 'a variety of fragmented employee groups' (Hyman, 1975:41) both divided and unified to different degree. Unions may also espouse a militant ideology while supporting moderate bargaining demands and are likely to reflect a spectrum of views that may not be wholly consistent with those held by the union leadership (Kelly, 1996). PCS, formed

in 1998 by a merger between the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) and the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC), was an amalgamation of two unions each with their own recognised political and ideological factions (Corby, 1998). Despite the election of current General Secretary, Mark Serwotka, in 2001, indicative of a left-ward shift in ideology at national leadership level (Charlwood, 2004), the ideological beliefs of PCS members and officials are likely to be very wide-ranging.

The PCS in public forum has expressed an oppositional stance on lean, but this may not necessarily be reflected in the views of the membership nor may it indicate to what extent the union in its bargaining strategy may be prepared to endorse certain aspects of lean working as a *modus operandi* in its relationship with Civil Service management. As Price (1983) suggests, white collar unions have a distinct form of collectivism that is less likely to manifest itself in confrontation with the employer. Beynon (1988) suggests that equally problematic is an approach among some trade unions who hold that research should be used to confirm pre-existing views.

In relation to the issue of the exercise of power several points are relevant. In common with most other trade unions, the activities of the union are undertaken by a combination of full time officials employed by PCS based in a number of union offices throughout the UK and by lay officials, elected by the membership, but also employed by the departments in which they operate as union stewards. The amount of time spent on union duties by lay officials varied considerably between different PCS representatives depending on areas of responsibility. It has been long been acknowledged that the power dynamics between and among these groups of officials are complex and subject to debate. The considerable power exercised by full time officials does not preclude that lay stewards may have influence at a shop floor level over other issues (Lumley, 1973). The structure of union and shop steward organization will affect the degree to which power is exercised at national or local level, and to what end. Fairbrother (2000) suggests that the formation of PCS promoted greater workplace activism which may have a bearing on the way that this research was supported at a local level. The power exercised by union officials at both national and local levels is therefore critical in terms of research access issues.

Much of the literature on access focuses on the idea of 'gatekeepers', individuals who 'control the research access' (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:164). Trade

unions are no different to any other organization in that respect. Issues of perceived value, sensitivity and the researcher's credibility all hinge around the relationship between the researcher and the gatekeepers. There are, in addition, issues around the need to identify those with expert knowledge (Hartley, 2004); the potential to constantly negotiate and re-negotiate access at various levels of the organization (Bryman, 2008); the need to work with both gatekeepers sanctioned by the union for that purpose and more informal contacts as a means of gaining access (Reeves, 2010); and the possibility that gatekeepers despite the public face of the organization may be capable (by design or otherwise) of obstructing the research process (Reeves, 2010; Punch, 1986). Among the full time and lay officials, there will be differing levels of expert knowledge and responsibility on the question of lean. Identifying the correct people to provide some basic introductory information was clearly critical. Each stage of access, furthermore, from national union down to local workplace level requires separate negotiation each in its turn. The formal structure of the union may be a strength insofar as each stage of the hierarchy can validate the legitimacy of the research for the tier below. The formal structure may also a source of weakness in the process of gaining access. Negotiating successively with numerous layers of union hierarchy could be a barrier to access preventing direct and more informal contact with people working in local offices. Finally, a study commissioned from outwith the union may be seen as presenting a threat to the reputation of the organization. In a contested area, such as lean, the political or ideological ethos that underlay the initial sanctioning of the research may not be shared by those asked to assist in the 'gate-keeping' process.

3:4:2 The Civil Service

The research data is being drawn from people who, as well as being members of PCS, are also civil servants. The issue is the extent to which it is likely that Civil Service management would wish its employees to contribute to research it has not commissioned. With the increased use of systems of human resource management (Greener, 2013) within the Civil Service, it would be less likely that departmental management would welcome any attempts by an outside agency to question issues of work organization. Research into a contested area such as lean would not sit comfortably within the unitarist ethos promoted by human resource management with its emphasis on mutual work goals and objectives shared between management and employees (Legge, 2005). However, research into the Civil Service is subject to specific challenges. The traditional bureaucratic nature of the

Civil Service, based on rationality, hierarchy and order is ill-matched with research from an independent outside source (Robson, 1956; Du Gay, 2000). There is furthermore the ethos of British government that has traditionally restricted information to the public on issues surrounding the processes of central government and administration, either because British government has conventionally believed that it is the 'sole arbiter of the national interest/public good' or because a more liberal approach to the availability of information would render it more liable to being held to account for actions taken on its behalf (Tant, 1990:481). Despite liberalisation of the legislative framework through measures such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, access to information related to the administration of central government is still highly restricted. Extensive legal exemptions and ongoing fears over the inadvertent or deliberate release of personal data, highlighted through several highly publicised breaches of security, indicate that the Civil Service remains essentially conservative and defensive in terms of what information it intends to share with the public (Birkenshaw, 2000; Ceeney, 2009; Cabinet Office, 2008) even to the extent that staff falling foul of the rules are likely to find themselves penalised and disciplined for breaches of procedure that include unauthorised disclosure of information. Gregorczyk (2005:9) argues that the culture of central government is one where 'the idea that information needs to be kept secret is very ingrained'.

The issue of the power that the Civil Service exercises over the research process adds to the complexity. First and foremost, the research is being conducted among civil servants who are not only trade unionists but also state employees. Leaving aside the question of the extent to which the research participants are able to maintain a "dual allegiance" (Noon and Blyton, 2002:299), the ways in which the power exercised by Civil Service management over its staff will have an effect on the research being proposed. The increased attempts, particularly through human resource management regimes, to increase organizational control of staff behaviour and values (Legge, 2005) would suggest a management hostile or antipathetic to the research would have significantly greater leverage in obstructing the research than the trade union would have in promoting it. The increased hostility experienced by the trade union movement since the late 1970s in the UK (including hostility to trade unions within the public sector) (McIlroy, 1988; Theakston, 1995) and the statistical evidence over time of declining union membership density and coverage of representation (Millward *et al.*, 2000) may suggest that the PCS's ability to support research is to some degree conditional on the Civil Service management's

approval, tacit or otherwise. Whilst employer attempts at control never arguably succeed in suppressing all employee dissent even in highly regulated workplace environments (Thompson, 1989; Taylor and Bain, 2003), in terms of the power imbalance in the employment relationship an employer will have an array of resources with which to restrict or block the ability of people to participate in any research supported by a trade union. These restrictions range from formal injunctions found in personnel policies to informal management pressures on individuals. Access to PCS members in the particular environment of the Civil Service was likely at best to be highly prescribed and subject to considerable negotiation.

There are two main facets to the issue of access. First, there are the legal restrictions that affect access to civil servants and their work. Since the passing of the Official Secrets Act 1911, civil servants have been subject to legal restrictions on the information that they are able to disclose (Hunt and Chapman, 2006). While civil servants are subject to an increasing array of data protection legislation in like fashion to the rest of the UK population, Civil Service management have also been particularly sensitive to the legal requirements to protect publicly held data (Ceeney, 2009; Cabinet Office, 2008). Civil servants continue to be subject to codes of practice that restrict the volume and level of information that can be made available to the public (House of Commons, 2006; Civil Service, 2010). Several high profile cases have arguably made the release of access of information into the public domain an increasingly sensitive issue (Chapman, 2006; Hunt and Chapman, 2006). The legal restrictions on release of data, however, only constitute part of the issue. Access issues in research involving two sides of the employment relationship are problematic on a number of fronts particularly where the trade union has commissioned the work (Beynon, 1988). Second, whilst identification with the trade union makes the research less ambiguous to participants from that side of the relationship, it can also raise suspicions among the management side in relation to the motives for and outcomes of the research. Beynon suggests that gathering data from both sides has the potential to provide significant insights. However management opposition has often resulted in researchers having to limit their sources of data from union officials rather than from the wider union membership (for example, Smith (2008)). Although there has been significant research using data from PCS union members (Danford *et al.*, 2009; Carter *et al.*, 2010; Fisher, 2004), the more the research appears to be aligned with the weaker side in the

employment relationship, the more suspicious the employer will be and the greater the difficulties in securing access.

As the politics of the research create a degree of complexity to the study, equally the ethics of the research process also require careful consideration. In this particular study the two topics are closely related as the following section makes clear.

3:5 The Ethics of Research

The second area to be considered is that of research ethics. The relationship between ethics and the politics of research is close principally because of the risks attendant from the likely restrictions that arise from attempting to research within a sensitive area that involves PCS members and their state employers.

There are a number of important aspects to the ethics of research that underpin academic study and which have application to this study. Ethics as the study of moral questions and morality is undoubtedly a critical issue. There is the question around balancing the intrinsic good of the research with the instrumental good of the research in achieving certain aims (Oliver, 2010). In other words, there is, on the one hand, a requirement to weigh up the inherent qualities of the research with, on the other hand, the research's capacity to achieve a particular goal or aim.

A tension exists between whether the acquisition of knowledge through the research process can legitimately be restricted to an end in itself or whether ethically research must "enhance the conditions of life" (Oliver, 2010:12). There is furthermore, as Homan (1991) argues, a tension between the moral standards of the researcher derived from personal belief or societal norms and the ethics developed in line with the perspectives of the professional groups that oversee standards within academic research. From the perspective of these professional groups, 'ethics' may equate to the exigencies of the research process rather than in terms of underlying moral issues. These tensions are undoubtedly fluid as personal and societal moralities and professional group expectations vary over time. Consideration of this issue is in many cases treated as an instrumental exercise where the underlying ethos of the standard setting bodies is barely questioned. (For example, Fisher *et al.* (2010) deal with the issue in terms of the avoidance of harm to research subjects and the role of ethics committee as a type of impartial neutral arbiter).

The ethics of research are diverse: those who make ethical decisions based on universal moral rules; those judging that the consequences of actions in the research process will decide those actions' morality; those acknowledging that an element of dissimulation is inevitable; and others who reject the concept of moral rules (Kimmel, 1988; Bryman, 2008). What could be said throughout these tensions is the need to maintain the integrity of the research. Hammersley (2005) holds to the view that the aim of research is the production of knowledge where the integrity of the researcher is judged in terms of the outcomes achieved and the legitimacy of the means used to those ends. Approaches that question to what extent the ethics of research should be drawn from Enlightenment, utilitarian or rationalist philosophies with their emphasis on methodological neutrality arguably continue to rely on some form of research integrity be that trustworthiness and authenticity (Guba and Lincoln, 1994) or interpretative sufficiency (Christians, 2005). These issues of 'good' within the research, the tensions between personal and professional ethics, the relationship of ethics to practice and a researcher's ethical integrity are all to some degree critical in the practical outworking of this research project.

Balance between the intrinsic good and the instrumental good of the research raises the first ethical issue. The University of Strathclyde ensures that its doctoral candidates receive supervision and training to a standard commensurate with the good research practice (University of Strathclyde, n.d.). The research questions are underpinned on the basis that the research aims and objectives are inherently good or academically 'sound' as a means of investigating the subject matter of organizational change. The research questions are also premised on the basis that the research strategy and approach will produce outcomes that will achieve stated intentions. This particular research adheres to the researcher's personal belief in the intrinsic value of research for its intellectual challenge, but critically that some beneficial outcome will accrue to the PCS and its members.

The second issue relates to the tensions that may exist between the ethical standards of the researcher and those of the professional bodies with oversight of the research process. In the current university environment there are several problematic strands that impact on the study of social science. In terms of the political economy of higher education, UK research policy has not only shifted towards the creation of outcomes rather than research for its own sake, but is geared towards improving UK economic performance and "increasing the

effectiveness of public services and policy” (Research Councils UK, n.d.), aims which some have argued tend to the subordination of scholarship to the requirements of capital (Wood, 2010; Callinicos, 2009).

In this study, whilst many of the participants were likely to share the researcher’s critical caution in examining the rhetoric around public sector efficiency, there is a presumption that academic research will contain, at least to some degree, an element of belief in the link between an improvement in the quality of working life for individuals and economic improvements for business, organizations or the nation as a whole. This may manifest itself in a range of issues, not least in the assumption that academic research will work in tandem with the business community rather than act against it (Darlington, 2009).

Another tension that exists between the ethical standards of the researcher and the professional bodies that oversee research is the underlying ethos of university ethics committees. While the link between the political economy of academic research may not be wholly unconnected to the way that ethics committee operate, the most relevant issue is the historic, but problematic, alignment between medical and social science ethics. The discipline of medical research ethics are based on the individual’s right to agree or refuse to participate based on informed consent; non-maleficence or the principle that the research must not cause harm; beneficence or the principle that the research must benefit others; and justice where all participants are treated on an equal basis (Wiles *et al.*, 2005). Wiles *et al.* (2005) argue that in social science terms ethics are often situation-specific. Appreciation of the issues around social science research is often poorly understood by university ethics committees which are dominated by those with an understanding rooted in medical ethics. (It might also be argued that more pragmatic issues around the issue of minimising risk to the institution have also been critical in this area (Coomber, 2002).)

There are two main issues arising from these tensions. The first is that although this research is unashamedly located in the tradition of an approach that seeks to critique social structures (Dickens, 2009), this may not sit easily with Civil Service as an institution whose cooperation may require some benefit in terms of business efficiency at odds with the ethical code of the researcher and the other research participants. The second is that, with this research rooted in the social science tradition, the University Ethics Committee may have a limited appreciation

of research that attempts to get behind the legal barriers created to prevent or restrict civil servants from discussing their work.

This tension between personal and professional codes brings into play one final issue in terms of ethics. This issue is the relationship between ethical belief and ethical practice, highlighting to what extent the moral code of the researcher will justify the adoption of certain research approaches and rejection of others. Homan (1991) argues that the fundamental axiom of research is that the delivery of truth is paramount and research integrity is destroyed by the falsification of results. Honesty and accuracy of results built on a foundation of a carefully planned research methodology are critical in the maintenance of research integrity (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). However the situation facing each researcher is unique and often emerges or develops throughout the course of the research. The ethical beliefs of individual researchers, as previously discussed, may also legitimately support their views that research should not only simply examine those denied power in society, but that that research should be a catalyst for societal changes (Silverman and Gubrium, 1989; Burrell and Morgan, 1992). To that extent, the approaches used to elicit data will be shaped by the ethical stance of the individual researcher. Two important issues face more conventional management and critical researchers alike: informed consent and integrity of findings.

The theory of informed consent, with its origins in medical science, refers to the principle that “[as] far as possible participation in sociological research should be based on the freely given informed consent of those studied” (British Sociological Association, 2002) but may apply to organizations as well as individual participants (Oliver, 2010). Individuals and organizations participate on the basis that they are ‘informed’ in terms of what will happen with the research data throughout the entire research process and that it is consensual insofar as they are free from coercion and inappropriate pressure to participate (Homan, 1991). This may be operationalised in terms of the amount of information that participants receive prior to their involvement; the extent to which participants allow data to be collected and/or recorded as a means of maintaining confidentiality or anonymity; and the manner in which the information will be used (Wiles *et al.*, 2005; Oliver, 2010). The issue of informed consent is problematic insofar as there is a limit to the amount of detail about the research which is practicable to provide to individual participants. Researchers will invariably exercise a degree of selectivity in what information they

share in advance of meeting their participants to protect the integrity of the concepts they wish to explore. Over the course of the research process, researchers may also become party to data that changes the nature of the relationship between the researcher and subsequent participants. There is also the issue to what extent data collection is confined to what is gathered within, what might be seen by research participants, as the formal processes of recording information and what a researcher may observe before, during and after data collection (Homan, 1991). What is discussed between researcher and data subject informally prior to and after the more structured interview may be of significant value to the researcher in evaluating the issues. The data informant may ultimately be unaware that such information is used in the research process. Using information without the knowledge of the data subject in this way may be justified in terms of the wider moral good of the research project or increase the potential for participants to inadvertently provide more honest responses. The issue of consent becomes more complex particularly in view of the conflictual nature of relationships between employer and trade union, the contractual-legal relationship between civil servants and their employer and arguably also the relationship between the PCS and its members which carries no presumption of harmony. These relationships are unlikely to be static over the timeframe of the research and may vary as interactions between researcher and data subjects develop due to factors external to the study (Punch, 1986). Justifying how informed consent is used and to what extent the research aims are hidden in part or in full from any of the research participants has to be made explicit in methodological terms but also in terms of the ethics of the research.

The integrity of the findings will be measured in terms of the robustness of the research methods used and the legitimacy with which they are applied. The integrity of the research is also strengthened by the way in which findings are presented. There are ethical issues around protecting the anonymity of participants throughout all stages of the research process from data collection to publication of findings (Cresswell, 2003). Every reasonable attempt should be made to protect the anonymity of participants within the caveat that researchers fall within the ambit of the law and cannot claim legal privileges in respect of information collected by them (Wiles *et al.*, 2005; British Sociological Association, 2002).

Management research has typically emphasised the requirement to maintain the anonymity of the organization under study, usually for commercial reasons

(Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The current research is different insofar as the foci of the research are government departments, whose functions are of such renown that attempts to disguise the names would arguably be a fruitless exercise. This, however, does not preclude the consideration that individual parts of the departmental structure should be disguised in terms of geographical office location. More importantly the onus falls on the researcher to ensure that individuals are incapable of identification, through any form of material in the public domain, any internal report or by default in the retention by the researcher of documentary evidence, particularly that held electronically and therefore subject to the provisions of Data Protection legislation (Oliver, 2010; University of Strathclyde, 2001).

Potential risks to participants and organizations are not restricted to the period of the data collection, but extend principally throughout the period that the research findings are promulgated not only in the public domain, but also internally within the organization that commissioned the report. The caution with which factual information is put together may reflect the seriousness of the consequences for those who may be penalised for having contributed to the research. It is not only in terms of the factual information where the researcher needs to exhibit ethical integrity. Sekaran (1999) notes that research findings are disseminated, not only in academic circles, but are often requested by the sponsoring organization as a condition of the contract between the researcher and the organization. Ethical integrity needs to be maintained in terms of producing a report that honestly reflects the findings albeit with tact and diplomacy. The interpretation of the report is something over which the researcher has ultimately little power (Hammersley, 1995). Any report written may be subject to what Cohen and Taylor call “anticipatory censorship” (1977:79) where tactics used to discredit the findings include questioning the research sample and arguing that the research described something that has subsequently been changed and improved. The foresight and planning that anticipates ethical issues should form a central part of the researcher’s thinking as a means of maintaining ethical integrity.

Having examined the issues around the politics of research and the related issue of ethics, the next section of the chapter will examine in detail how these issues and the other matters relating to the provisional design of the project affected the research process over time. The next section describes the difficulties

encountered and the subsequent need to redesign the research in the light of these.

3:6 Research Design over Time

As described above, the initial approach was one that attempted to undertake a comparison of four departments. This approach had the potential to assess the nature of lean across a significant sample of Civil Service departments. Each of the four departments would be accessed through their respective trade union Groups with designated PCS officers acting as gatekeepers for each level until access was gained to the membership working at local office level. By this means a degree of legitimacy in the minds of the union officials and members would be conferred on the research when accessing each layer in turn. To gain an understanding of what developments were happening within each of the four chosen areas, Full Time Officer ① agreed to provide the researcher with contacts who could progress matters. These four departments would each constitute an embedded unit of the whole case study (Yin, 2009).

For ease of discussion, this section will, first, cover the progress in each of the PCS groups throughout the period of the preliminary discussions where initial contacts were made. It will then describe how these initial contacts led to changes to the way that the research was ultimately undertaken.

To facilitate a closer relationship with PCS and to assist in the research process, two specific actions were agreed at the outset of the project. First the researcher suggested submitting a monthly update report on progress to PCS²¹. A suggestion was also made at the outset by Full Time Officer ① that the researcher could use the facilities in the PCS office located in Glasgow situated around half a mile from the University, perhaps working *in situ* one day a week. The researcher agreed that this latter suggestion had the potential to provide a higher profile for the research within PCS. However, a few weeks later, Full Time Officer ②, an officer with responsibility for the Scottish region, replied by email to say that there was

²¹ During the research project (October 2008 to September 2011), the researcher sent PCS, by email, a total of 30 reports, normally consisting of information about the level of contact between the researcher and PCS 'gatekeepers', requests for additional information and updates on data collection. PCS did not respond to any of the reports. Unresolved issues, of access for example, had to be handled in other ways.

insufficient desk space available within the office and although the office could be used for interview purposes, there was no desk that the researcher could use²². Losing this facility was not fatal to the conduct of the research, but it did create from the outset a more detached relationship between the researcher and PCS. An arms-length relationship potentially allowed the researcher to be more objective in assessing PCS and its approach to lean. On the other hand, by reducing face to face contact, there was a greater reliance on communication by email which might build in, at best, delays and, at worse, the potential for obstruction (Wanat, 2008).

3:6:1 HM Revenue and Customs

The first embedded unit was HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC), a government department established in 2004 from a merger of the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise whose primary purpose is the administration of tax (HM Revenue and Customs, n.d.). The statistical figures for March 31 2009 show that HMRC then had a staff of 92,990 (Office for National Statistics, 2009a), representing around 17% of the total Civil Service workforce (Civil Service, 2009). Previous research and union publicity confirmed that lean had been widely used in the period following the merger of the two departments and the use of lean was a contested area between trade union and management that had resulted in industrial action (Carter *et al.*, 2009; Radnor and Bucci, 2007; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2006).

The approach used within HMRC to identify gatekeepers to the various levels of entry (as it would be in general terms for each of the PCS groups) was to make contact with a senior officer, either full time or lay, and then use that individual to help identify who could provide access at a regional or site level. The researcher was provided with the name of Full Time Officer ③ (an officer, based in London, with national responsibilities for HMRC Group). Email contact was made with this person. Six weeks later, Full Time Officer ③ advised that a preliminary meeting would be arranged with him, the researcher and the lay officer with responsibility for lean in HMRC, Steward A. Full Time Officer ③ advised he would provide the researcher with published material held by PCS in relation to lean. After a telephone call and

²² Although a plausible reason for not providing facilities, it was suggested by a PCS steward of the researcher's acquaintance that having an 'outsider' based within the office would make that person privy to information, albeit not necessarily related to the research, which those working in the office would like to keep private.

further exchange of emails, a meeting was arranged for the end of January 2009 to which ultimately only Steward A and the researcher were present.

The preliminary meeting gave the researcher the opportunity to explain the research aims of the project and methods, and to acquire an overview of lean within HMRC. Steward A explained that PCS members had recently contributed to a research project: the report by Carter *et al.* (2009) containing this project's findings was shortly due for publication. He believed that although HMRC management would continue to maintain an oppositional stance to any research into lean conducted under the auspices of the union, careful liaison would allow both the use of surveys and research interviews among members in HMRC. Steward A identified two tax offices in Scotland as potential fieldwork sites. Of these two offices, Steward A, as a means of increasing the likelihood of participation, recommended using Office α as the alternate site had already been subject to extensive research into lean by both trade union and management. Steward A also indicated that he would provide the researcher with published material on lean within HMRC. Steward A agreed to liaise with a senior PCS representative at Office α , and to forward published material to the researcher. Despite several emails sent by the researcher over the next few months, Steward A neither facilitated contact with Office α nor provided any material. It was only at the point of his imminent retirement scheduled for May 2009 that Steward A made further contact by email explaining, first, that his national duties had been assigned to Steward B, and secondly that due to the illness of a senior PCS representative at Office α , no progress had been made with getting access to members at that site. Steward B proved to be as elusive as his predecessor and after several attempts to contact him, by email and telephone, the researcher secured a brief and cursory telephone conversation with him at which point Steward B agreed to liaise with Office α and forward the published material the researcher had earlier been promised. Neither actions were undertaken nor was further contact received from him despite the researcher 'copying' him into relevant emails. The reasons for the delays were never made explicit. There was admittedly a period of potential national industrial action during the initial phases of the research (Carter *et al.*, 2009; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2008a) that would have been of greater priority for the union, however delays thereafter caused through the shifting of responsibility between PCS officers and the failure to act on promises made was indicative, if not of resistance to the project, but of reluctance to prioritise the research against other areas of union work.

The second phase was to move the level of contact from national to office level. The researcher used an 'opportunistic' [authors' emphasis] (Buchanan *et al.*, 1988:53) initiative. One of the authors of Carter *et al.* (2009) provided the researcher with the name of PCS representative, Steward C, who had been instrumental in facilitating access at Office α in their study. The researcher undertook a preliminary discussion with Steward C by telephone at the end of July 2009²³. The researcher outlined his proposal that each of the 1200 staff based at Office α should receive an anonymised questionnaire distributed and collected by the PCS representatives on site. This method had the potential advantage over postal surveys in that it was likely to generate a higher return rate (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). Issuing a questionnaire to each member of staff at Office α was likely to obtain results based on a more representative group of staff in terms of gender and working patterns than if issued by PCS on site to a sample of the staff over which the researcher had no control. The researcher explained that he wanted to conduct a pilot study, but as at that juncture another PCS Group had tentatively expressed an interest in undertaking the pilot, the survey would be piloted outwith HMRC. In addition, the researcher explained that a number of PCS members would be asked to participate in interviews. Steward C intimated that, confirming the pattern of research in other areas of Civil Service industrial relations, his management was likely to maintain an oppositional stance to the research on the basis that a report endorsed by the trade union was likely to be critical of the way that organizational changes had been carried out. He also held to the view that it was unlikely that management would allow staff to be interviewed or complete questionnaires in work time. Steward C described how local management were 'marking' staff down in their annual appraisals for 'negativity' that included making adverse comments about work conditions. Steward C believed this would dissuade union members from participating in the research. Steward C opined that members' recent participation in the Carter *et al.* (2009) study might reduce willingness to participate in a further study particularly in view of the fact work conditions had not improved subsequent to the previous study. The researcher was mindful that the new study should not simply address the same issues in order that the response rate was not reduced through either survey-overload or by failure to see the practical relevance of the work being done (Baruch, 1999).

²³ Steward C subsequently agreed to give a further interview and his contribution is denoted Interview 11.

3:6:2 Department for Work and Pensions

The second embedded unit was the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP was formed from the merger of the Department of Social Security and Department of Employment in 2001 (National Archives, 2003). DWP is responsible for welfare and pensions policies. At that time, DWP consisted of two executive agencies, Job Centre Plus and the Pension, Disability and Carers Service (Department for Work and Pensions, n.d.). As of March 31 2009, a total of 121,150 people were employed within DWP comprised of those working within the two executive agencies, DWP corporate services and several non-departmental bodies (Office for National Statistics, 2009a). Around 23% of all civil servants then worked within DWP (Civil Service, 2009).

In contrast to HMRC, the access to PCS 'gatekeepers' within DWP was different due to the researcher's previous employment within that department. Having maintained contacts on a social level and through other work completed on behalf of the union (Martin, 2010), the researcher was offered an interview in October 2008 with Steward D, a senior lay officer, with responsibility for lean within the DWP group. Steward D provided the researcher with copies of union circulars and internal DWP documentation on lean that indicated that DWP was adopting lean practices across a number of its work areas. With Steward D's resignation from the Civil Service within several weeks of this interview, no further information was received from this source. It was not until February 2009 and a face to face meeting with Full Time Officer ① after repeated attempts by the researcher to first identify and then make contact with Steward E, Steward D's successor in office, that an initial telephone discussion was held to discuss how the research in DWP should be conducted. Steward E identified a local contact within the Scottish region, Steward F, who would seek out an appropriate site for data collection. Steward F was personally known to the researcher allowing the researcher to circumvent delays by means of direct contact. Steward F suggested locating the field work within Office β. This was a large benefit processing site in central Scotland in which were based a significant number of union representatives who could support the issue of questionnaires on a distribution and collection basis. In May 2009 the researcher met Steward E and Full Time Officer ④ at the PCS regional office in Leeds²⁴. In the course of this discussion, these two officers expressed the view that DWP

²⁴ Steward E gave a subsequent interview whose contribution is denoted as Interview 4.

management was likely to be hostile to any research that examined what DWP considered 'internal' matters particularly in view of recent security breaches and suggested that if an approach was to be made for use of 'official time' that this should be done at as low a level of management as possible to avoid a national approach being refused outright. The researcher attended a meeting of the Scottish Regional Committee at the end of May at which he presented the research, the proposed research methods and the problems that might be encountered. This meeting maintained the type of personal contact beneficial to good research relationships while acknowledging the power structures within the union (Wanat, 2008).

The next stage of the research was to seek facilities from DWP management. This was done partly to protect staff members from the type of penalty threatened on those 'disclosing official information without authority' (Civil Service, 2006), but also as a way of obtaining the views of management about lean implementation and changes in work organization. However approaches both by the researcher and by the trade union failed to elicit any positive response. Despite management at Scottish level expressing some initial interest, they declined to sanction any 'official' facilities deferring any decision to DWP at national level. DWP management at national level, despite the researcher's assurances around the good standing of research conducted within the academic environment at Strathclyde University and ethicality of the study, failed to respond to this request and subsequent reminders issued by Steward E. This confirms Beynon's (1988) view that trade union sponsored research is more likely to be resisted by management due to its supposed bias. It was significant that in one email copied to the researcher that a senior member of DWP management questioned whether its response to providing facilities should not form part of a wider Civil Service management response. Although the researcher was never made party to the outcome of this suggestion, the researcher was never likely to have unfettered access to PCS members in work time.

3:6:3 Ministry of Defence

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) formed the third sub-unit in the case study. The MOD is both a policy making department having political control over the UK's military operations and an administrative department managing the resources given to it to support UK armed forces (Ministry of Defence, n.d.). As of March 31 2009, a

total of 77,750 people worked for the MOD inclusive of those working within four smaller specialised agencies engaged in related defence work. The MOD had then around 15% of the UK Civil Service workforce (Civil Service, 2009; Office for National Statistics, 2009a).

The researcher approached this PCS group, because unlike HMRC and DWP, its members were not dealing with the public, and therefore had the potential to offer a contrast in how its services were delivered. Published material suggested that lean approaches had been adopted within MOD (National Audit Office, 2002). An initial approach by email to the relevant PCS full time officer (Full Time Officer ⑤) in November 2008 was positive insofar as he identified two stewards willing to assist. A small amount of published material was also emailed to the researcher. As a means of progressing the study, the researcher suggested that he might meet with the General Executive Committee of the MOD Group to provide a fuller explanation of the study and the research methods required. Despite several further email requests to this effect, no further reply was received from the full time officer. With the researcher at that time pursuing field work possibilities within HMRC, DWP and as discussed below Scottish Government, it was agreed in tandem with Full Time Officer ① that there were sufficient sub-units within the overall case study to abandon this area. Researching the MOD, although never expressly said to the researcher, was in any event likely to have been more difficult than other departments and subject to more significant restrictions in view of recent highly publicised alleged breaches around disclosure of information from MOD to outside bodies (Chapman, 2006).

3:6:4 Scottish Government

Civil servants working for the Scottish Government have both unique and shared characteristics with their counterparts working for the UK government. Their terms and conditions are substantially similar (including those relating to the disclosure of information to outside bodies (Scottish Executive, 2006)) although they administer the policies of the devolved Scottish administration (Cabinet Office and Scottish Administration, 1999). The Scottish Government has devolved responsibility for health, rural affairs, education and justice among other areas (Scottish Government, 2010). Statistics issued by the Scottish Government show at the end of the second quarter of 2009 there were 16,700 civil servants within the Scottish Administration employed in twenty departments (Scottish Government, 2009; Office for National

Statistics, 2009a). Material indicated that the Scottish Administration had taken an interest in using lean as an organizational model (Scottish Government, 2008; Radnor *et al.*, 2006).

With a plethora of departments from which to choose, the researcher opted at the outset to liaise with the full time officers located within Scotland requesting advice on which departments might provide useful research data. The approach of using email as a means of contact (as with the other PCS groups) continued to be the 'mixed blessing' that it was elsewhere in that it allowed full time officers sufficient time to read and respond to the material the researcher was sending, but it also provided the opportunity for email recipients to avoid replying to repeated requests for assistance. At the face to face meeting held in February 2009 with Full Time Officer ①, he identified the two people who he believed were necessary to pursue the research within the Scottish Government area. Although he failed to supply the researcher with contact details, the researcher was able to locate the two individuals to whom Full Time Officer ① had referred. Despite frequent often unanswered email reminders and the difficulty of trying to liaise with two people (eased after one of the individuals was seconded to a full time PCS post), a meeting was arranged with Steward G, the remaining contact, in July 2009. Steward G at this preliminary meeting suggested basing the research in one particular department whose staff worked in Office γ as the PCS members working there were engaged in the quasi-judicial processing work closely comparable in style and grade to PCS members in HMRC and DWP, and thus capable of providing a better comparison rather than the policy work done in Steward G's own location. However due to internal restructuring of this department, Steward G said she would need to discuss the issue with members of the relevant PCS committee. It took until October 2009 before this committee intimated its decision that the fieldwork could be held in Office γ , a site containing around 500 staff. With Steward G's own secondment to a full time officer post, the researcher was asked to contact Steward H, a lay representative with the PCS Scottish Government Group. A meeting was arranged and held at the end of November 2009 at which the researcher met with Steward H and Steward I, a lay representative based in Office γ . Ostensibly, Stewards H and I were supportive of the research ("[members] would be queuing up to speak to you"), but due to the internal restructuring whereby members in this department would be transferred to a UK central government department from Scottish Government, they reserved judgement on the feasibility of conducting fieldwork in that location. In early January

2010 and subsequently in March 2010, in response to his own prompts the researcher received emails stating that the time available to trade union stewards in Office γ would be used in negotiating with their management over the major restructuring and consequently the stewards had insufficient time to coordinate the fieldwork. Steward H thereby declined participation in both the survey and interview parts of the research.

3:6:5 Ministry of Justice

In line with the suggestion of Buchanan *et al.* (1988) that researchers need to make use of opportunities as these arise, this researcher was contacted by a PCS steward (Steward J) working within an agency of the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) replying in response to an article written by the researcher and published in a PCS magazine (Martin, 2009). Although ultimately this individual was only able to provide a brief overview of lean within her office, the researcher did contact the full time officer with responsibility for MOJ to ensure that the PCS in that group would support the research. The MOJ is the department that deals with criminal, civil and family justice, and constitutional issues (Ministry of Justice, 2009a). It had responsibility for four main agencies and also a variety of non-departmental bodies. The bulk of the 89,200 staff (March 31 2009 figures) work in England and Wales (Office for National Statistics, 2009a). Around 17% of the Civil Service workforce was employed within this department (Civil Service, 2009).

The approach taken to gain access to PCS members in the MOJ Group was broadly similar to the approaches taken in the other PCS Groups. During a preliminary telephone discussion in October 2009, with the full time officer responsible (Full Time Officer ©) for the MOJ Group, he stated that he saw no impediment to collecting data by either a survey of members or by interviews. He also believed that the senior manager in charge of lean implementation within MOJ would be interested in assisting with the research from a management perspective and expressed the view that despite her position within MOJ management that her contribution would be 'frank'. PCS had in July 2009 concluded a 'protocol' with MOJ management in respect of the implementation of lean within the HM Courts Service whereby there existed a formal agreement that regulated the introduction of lean practices within that agency (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2009). This agreement was indicative of more consensual relations between management and trade union, at least at national level, with the potential to draw in data from both

sides of the employment relationship. The researcher issued material to Full Time Officer © with the intention that this would be sent to the senior manager. The intention was that this manager would then contact the researcher in due course to discuss the project, both in terms of the conduct of the research and in terms of assuring her of the legitimacy of the research. In November 2009, the researcher also had a telephone discussion with Steward K, a lay officer with national responsibilities for MOJ. Steward K confirmed that information on the project had been sent to the manager concerned. He identified two large sites in England where PCS members were engaged in processing work of the similar type and grading structure to the other PCS Groups from which comparisons would be drawn. However he also expressed the view that management in contributing to the research may try to skew the research results by granting permission to access sites where lean implementation had been relatively problem-free. The final choice of site would need to be the subject of negotiation between PCS and management. Steward K, however described himself as 'dislocated' from activities within local offices: he was reliant on PCS stewards working in local sites to inform him of problems with lean implementation. Following a series of email reminders, three months later the researcher had a further telephone discussion with Steward K at which point he explained that the MOJ manager in question had expressed great reluctance in granting facilities for the research founded on a suspicion to what the outcomes might be. The researcher was invited to contact the manager directly. The researcher declined this approach expressing the view that direct contact could potentially place him outwith the remit of what PCS at national level had commissioned.

These preliminary discussions with the four PCS Groups raised a number of critical issues that would affect the conduct of the research. The first was the extent to which PCS at national level understood the nature of the research process. Whilst the union could reasonably not expect to know the technicalities of academic research, the *laissez faire* approach to the research suggests that PCS at national level had limited understanding of research methods and their implications. Sekaran (1999) argues that there is significant value in an organization that commissions research having knowledge of the process of research. The primary disadvantage was that good 'gatekeeping' access at every level was not secured at each stage of the research. The second issue is that as Reeves (2010) suggests 'gatekeepers' can both help and hinder the research process. Reeves further suggests that

personal contacts are a significant aid. The implication for the research is that for an area such as DWP where the researcher had maintained personal contacts and had an understanding of the nature of the work the access and understanding of the issues around lean will differ from those in other PCS Groups. To what extent findings drawn from DWP may cause an imbalance within the research is, however, an issue in considering the Civil Service as a whole. Thirdly the extent to which the PCS is able to provide access to its own members is also crucial. The extent of management opposition and its repercussions was to some extent underestimated by some senior full time or senior lay union officials. The restrictions on access to the PCS membership meant that views on lean would come from union officials, not from ordinary PCS members at the 'sharp end' of lean implementation. A question arises to what extent lean is viewed differently by stewards and members. The fourth consideration relates to the position of Civil Service management. On the one hand, a management perspective may have been a useful form of triangulation, but more importantly, on the other hand, the restrictions of access have the potential to confine respondents to a sub-set of the whole membership. To what extent would this, for example, mean that respondents would be drawn from union activists or disaffected PCS members with time or inclination to participate in the research? Some of these issues remain as a common theme into the next phases of the research.

3:6:6 Questionnaire Survey

The insights gained from the preliminary discussions allowed the researcher to consider how best to design a questionnaire that would fit with the overall strategy of the project. Although questions around the issue of where to locate the fieldwork remained unanswered, the researcher decided to progress the design of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was devised primarily to explore the issues of skills addressing the second of the research questions. The survey would capture a mixture of descriptive elements, but using well-established concepts relating to the meaning of skill would also help the researcher to explore the link between work skills and organizational change at the interview stage of the project. The utilisation of well-established concepts in the field of work skills is advantageous in trying to ensure that the data captured by the survey is valid, reliable and generalizable (Easterby-Smith *et al.*, 2002). Using a survey that encompasses a multi-dimensional view of skill is liable to capture a fuller picture than one focussing on a single dimension.

The next phase of the process was the circulation of the survey instrument among PCS members. The researcher sought to initiate a pilot test of the questionnaire prior to issuing the document to a wider population. This pilot would help to ensure that the questions were clear in intent and that the format of the survey instrument was appropriate particularly as the questionnaire would be completed outwith the researcher's immediate control (Bryman, 2008). Forza (2002) suggests that piloting a study should be a two-step process. In the first phase, the document should be forwarded to a small group of respondents to test the clarity of instructions and questions; and to assess the effectiveness of the administrative procedures. The second phase, where the questionnaires were issued to a larger group, would assist in judging whether the measurement scales used were appropriate, whether the answers were different from what was expected and whether the context might require modifying the questions.

The researcher's intention had been to follow this two-step model by issuing the questionnaire to a number of senior PCS officers, to several PCS members of his acquaintance and to one PhD colleague working in a related area. Aware that he would need some form of pilot study, the researcher over the course of his preliminary discussions had asked union officers whether they would be willing to participate in such a study. To take account of potential variations between different parts of the Civil Service, in November 2009 the researcher sent an email to fourteen full time and lay officers asking if they would be prepared to contribute to the first stage of the pilot. Of these fourteen people, five agreed to assist with the pilot. On completion of the questionnaire draft in January 2010, the researcher forwarded copies of the form to the five people who had agreed to examine the document, but also to Full Time Officer ① and, to ensure the consistency of any potential MOJ Group contribution, to Stewart K. Of these seven, only two people replied with comments, Stewart D from DWP Group and Stewart K. The two PCS members of his acquaintance and the PhD colleague also returned comments on the survey form. There were no significant issues raised with the forms with minor corrections subsequently made. The second stage was to locate a site where PCS stewards would be willing to issue a batch of the forms to members, where members would be willing and able to complete the forms, and the stewards could collect completed forms for the researcher to analyse. The problems outlined above with access to DWP, MOJ and Scottish Government meant that the most logical location for a pilot was Office α in HMRC. Stewart C, who had been party to the

earlier email correspondence, agreed to take part in the survey issuing 30 questionnaires to a selected group of staff. However by mid February 2010, the researcher had decided that rather than risk a poor return rate on the main survey he would ask Steward C whether his office would be able to undertake the survey without a further pilot. Steward C agreed to this course of action. After a period of delay due to Steward C's other union commitments, in early June 2010 the researcher delivered 500 survey forms and explanatory letters to Office α ²⁵. In view of the cost to the researcher and the likely time available to Steward C and his colleagues, the researcher limited the number of forms to less than the 1200 that would be needed to ensure all staff members received a copy. The issue and collection of the survey forms should have formed the next part of the research process, but the approach of the management at Office α meant a significant revision of this part of the research design.

While the power of management control within Office α was not such that it restricted the union from engaging with certain aspects of the research, the power imbalance within the employment relationship was evident in the way that management restricted the survey. In late July 2010, Steward C advised the researcher that the office management would not allow the survey forms to be issued or completed in work time. A later telephone call to Steward C confirmed the willingness of stewards to distribute the survey, but that informal discussions with some of his members suggested that having been denied the opportunity to complete the forms in work time members would be unwilling to complete them in their own time (for example undertaking completion in tea breaks or at lunchtime).

Having discovered this management imposed restriction, in August 2010 the researcher in one of his regular monthly reports suggested to Full Time Officer ① that the distribution and collection method originally envisaged should be replaced with information drawn from postal questionnaires. Postal questionnaires are generally considered to reduce the response rate (Forza, 2002) but in view of the fact that the PCS has the capacity to forward the forms to all members within appropriate branches via their unique union branch indicator code what might be lost through a lower rate of response would be compensated by other tangible benefits. Where PCS members could feel they were contributing anonymously, it would, for example, reduce fear of sanctions by management. Although attempts to

²⁵ The survey is found in Appendix 5.

speaking directly to Full Time Officer ① were unsuccessful due to his apparent unavailability, he replied by email saying that he had not anticipated these types of management-imposed restrictions and would need to consult with various Group and branch union officers to gauge their views on a postal questionnaire. Bizarrely in view of the earlier actions taken by the researcher to ensure that all parties had the opportunity to comment on the survey document, the researcher was advised that a copy of the proposed questionnaire would need to be submitted for PCS approval prior to issue. Despite assurances that the matter of postal questionnaire would be pursued, no further action was taken by PCS on the issue citing problems arising from the recent Comprehensive Spending Review as the reason why any previously agreed timetable for progressing the research would require revision.

This debate over the survey suggests that research within the arena of trade union studies is as much as subject to continual negotiation and re-negotiation as any other study of work organization (Bryman, 2008). To what extent this confirms the lack of understanding of research processes within the national union (Sekaran, 1999) or to the expectation that whatever data is found will justify a pre-existing position (Beynon, 1988) is open to question. More critically, however, the apparent surprise expressed by senior national union officials over access difficulties indicates a level of disconnection between the national officers of the organization and the PCS members at local office level, particularly when these issues were repeatedly raised with the researcher by senior Group officers throughout the preliminary discussions. With no likelihood that PCS at a national level pursuing the issue of a postal questionnaire to selected branches, or indeed support for any other form of large scale survey data capture, the researcher decided that the principal means of collecting information should now be through the use of research interviews.

3:6:7 Research Interviews

As a means of comparing different departments within the Civil Service, the researcher decided to adopt an exclusively qualitative approach to the collection of data using semi-structured interviews. It was apparent to the researcher that waiting for PCS officials to provide access to interviewees, based on his experience of the preliminary discussions and negotiation over the survey was unlikely to generate a sufficient number of interviews. The researcher's strategy was therefore to adopt a twofold approach. The first of these approaches was to continue using the formal

channels of communication utilising one layer of the union hierarchy to reach the layer beneath. The second approach was to use more informal channels, drawn from personal contacts. In some cases the informal channel circumvented formal channels, while in other cases it by-passed uncooperative links in the union hierarchy. The researcher began to use a more opportunistic approach to circumvent the problems of inertia within the union structure (Buchanan *et al.*, 1988).

To address the three research questions, the researcher decided to use semi-structured interviews. The phrase “semi-structured” is capable of different interpretations, but in this context the intention was to use the interviews as a means of exploring specific topics derived from the research literature, personal knowledge and the preliminary work done at an earlier stage of the project (King, 2004). Bryman (2008) argues that using unstructured interviews reflect the view that adherence to a specific structure will reduce the likelihood of getting access to contributors’ authentic views, whereas investigations which have clear foci on specific topics from the outset of the study are likely to benefit from semi-structured interviews. An examination of multiple cases, represented by different Civil Service departments, would in this project also benefit from semi-structured interviews as these types of interview assist with cross-comparisons between units of study. This research project based on examining different parts of the Civil Service fitted more appropriately with semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured nature of the interviews lent itself towards addressing causal issues, sensitive areas and varied experiences (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994).

A variety of matters were addressed prior to starting the field work. As the University’s rules on ethics required that all research undertaken with human subjects done with a body external to the academic institution be submitted to the Ethics Committee of the University (University of Strathclyde, 2009), an outline of the research was sent to that body and subsequently approved²⁶. Potential issues around ensuring that the content of interviews was kept within the relevant Civil Service codes of conduct were not specifically addressed by the relevant University bodies confirming the view these bodies are better equipped to deal with issues of clinical ethics and risk assessment rather than the situation-specific ethics of the social sciences. In practical terms, however, the restrictions on particular types of

²⁶ The documentation submitted February 2010 to the University Ethics Committee did include the proposal to undertake a survey.

research that Coomber (2002) suggest emanate from ethics committees was absent from this proposal leaving the researcher largely free to determine the ethical parameters of the project for himself.

The researcher produced a letter²⁷ that would be issued to participants that explained in relatively brief terms the aim of the research and the purpose of the interview. The letter also emphasised the voluntary nature of the interview; the absolute right of the participant to withdraw from the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question; the fact that the interview would be digitally recorded subject to the participant's agreement; the strict confidentiality in the handling of any information; the use to which data would be put (*viz.* a report for the PCS and other published research); contact details for the Chair of the Departmental Ethics Committee, the researcher and his primary academic supervisor; and data protection information including confirmation that anonymity and confidentiality would be protected by storage of data on the University's computer systems on a 'password-protected' basis thus conforming to the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University's responsibilities under that legislation²⁸. A balance was struck between too much information around the research and too little with the main concerns being to ensure participants would feel comfortable with the level of anonymity to which they were afforded and the degree of professionalism exhibited by the researcher. The presumption that the interview would be recorded was included within the letter (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). A consent form²⁹ was appended to the letter which stated that the participant had read the letter; understood the voluntary nature of the interview process and the absolute right to withdraw from all or part of the process; understood that the information given remained confidential such that he or she could not be identified; consented to participate in the project; and assented to the audio recording of the interview. All participants would be invited to sign and date the form to confirm their willingness to take part under the conditions described. More specific information around the potential consequences of participation was omitted from this letter. The

²⁷ See Appendix 4

²⁸ Following the researcher's change of location to the University of Central Lancashire in September 2011, data was then held securely on its computer system on a password-protected basis thus securing continued confidentiality of data.

²⁹ See Appendix 4

intention was to draft a letter of a length that would encourage participants to read it in full, but it also reflected that a sensitive issue of this sort would better be discussed face to face allowing the participant to make an informed decision on whether to take part in the research process. The measures taken to protect interviewees' anonymity balanced the need for ethical integrity in addition to helping to collect robust and reliable data.

Bryman (2008:315) highlights the need to prepare for the interview process with an "interview guide". This forms the basis for conducting semi-structured interviews. Within the parameters of semi-structured interviews, questions were designed to be 'open' to allow the interviewee to define and describe their circumstances; 'probing' to explore themes raised in more depth; and at certain points 'closed' where specific information might be required or where confirmation was needed (Saunders *et al.*, 2007:329-330). The researcher as his interview guide drafted an aide-memoire. The aide-memoire contained the following information: a reminder to thank the participant for his or her willingness to take part in the research project; a basic explanation of the research, including confirmation that the project was supported by PCS; confirmation that Civil Service management was not involved in the research; the likely use to which the research would be put; a reiteration of the right to withdraw from any part of the interview; the confidential nature of the material; the structure of the interview including the likely duration; the request to use a recorder subject to the condition that it could be switched off at any time during the interview; the request to take written notes; the right to be provided a full transcript of the interview; how the data would be held; that personal acquaintance with the researcher did not invalidate the research; the invitation to ask any questions about the research process; and a reminder to get the participant to sign the consent form.

The schedule of questions was divided into certain key themes corresponding with the research aims and objectives. The use of a pilot interview would assist in ensuring that the clarity and logic of the questions asked (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010). The first part of the interview dealt with personal work history within the Civil Service partly as a way of easing a participant into the interview through asking factual or descriptive questions (King, 2004). This section included questions on office organization and the individual's job. This section included a section on the use of information technology, important in view of the influence of

technology on the workforce (Braverman, 1974; Webster, 1990; Zuboff, 1988; Blauner, 1964).

The second section addressed the nature of the job that the individual was performing specifically dealing with the question of skills, team working and problem solving. The questions on skills utilised material drawn from the British Skills Survey (British Market Research Bureau, 2006). The section addressed job complexity and autonomy control: the length of time needed to learn the job, the length and format of training; the amount of freedom to decide the order of work tasks and the amount of discretion exercised within each task; the complexity of the tasks undertaken; the amount of supervision; work intensity in the context of management control and task discretion; and the span of the job done (Felstead *et al.*, 2007; Gallie, 2007; Field, 1980; Spenner, 1983). The schedule specifically included a section dealing with forms of quasi-judicial decision making (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992). The second section also asked about problem solving (how problems were identified and resolved, and management's role in this area) and team working, both issues central to lean (Richardson *et al.*, 2010; Stewart *et al.*, 2009; Ishida, 1997).

The third section of the interview asked respondents to reflect on changes that have occurred to their jobs over time. The time period over which respondents would be asked to comment was the last five years. Certain risks exist around participants' ability to recall with sufficient accuracy events that occurred in a past period, particularly when these relate to matters of belief or opinion rather than fact. Inaccurate recall may result from "inappropriate rationalizations, over-simplifications, faulty *post hoc* attributions and simple lapses of memory" (Miller *et al.*, 1997:189), problems of recall related to the distance between the events described and the research interview and the number of changes occurring in that period (Golden, 1992) or the nostalgic attribution of qualities to a past period (Ybema, 2004). Nonetheless restricting the period to the last five years would potentially link participants' recollections to significant concrete events (*e.g.* the introduction of lean into HMRC, the publication of the Gershon Report) improving accuracy of recall. The final part of this section asked participants to comment on whether they believed that the Civil Service was still a bureaucratic organization following standardised rules (Robson, 1956) and whether their specific department or location used any form of standard operating model.

The fourth section of the interview dealt specifically with interviewees' knowledge and understanding of lean. The placement of this section after discussion of skills and changes in the nature of the bureaucracy of the Civil Service was an attempt to avoid interviewees equating change in work organization directly with the techniques of lean when other factors may be as relevant. Interviewees would also be asked to comment on the extent to which lean was used within their office, their views on the effectiveness of lean and the extent to which lean had impacted on work organization. Respondents would be asked to reflect on whether they believed that the changes they had experienced were attributable to factors other than lean working.

The fifth section related to the effectiveness of communication between management and workforce continuing the debate around problem solving and control. Respondents were to be asked questions about the format, direction and style of communication between workforce and management asking specifically whether focus groups were used as a means of joint management-worker problem-solving.

The sixth section asked respondents about the effectiveness of PCS in dealing with lean. This part of the interview would seek to address issues around the employment relationship, particularly the governance compromise between management and workforce and the impact of the trade union as an institution on the organization of work (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002; Amable and Lung, 2005). Union stewards involved in negotiation issues with management would be asked specific questions relating to these matters. Union representatives would be asked to comment on the format, style and content of negotiation with their management primarily at local office level, the union's effectiveness in dealing with work changes and the amount and level of information that PCS had issued to its members about lean. Those interviewees who were not union post holders would be asked similar questions although with the expectation that they may not have detailed knowledge of the processes of negotiation at site level.

The final section asked participants to reflect on two final areas: to what extent their personal circumstances in terms of work patterns, home care responsibilities, any disabilities, or gender impacted on their working lives in the Civil Service; and a concluding open question asking interviewees how optimistic or pessimistic they felt at the present time.

The process of identifying people to interview used both formal channels through the union structures and more informal channels using contacts derived from previous union and work involvement. At the outset Full Time Officer ① requested that all contacts were made through the appropriate union channels. A nominated senior officer would identify a PCS official at a regional level who in turn would secure access to interviewees. The attendant risk was that it increased the number of gatekeepers and the greater potential for access problems (Wanat, 2008). Endorsement at the union's national level does not preclude that at lower levels there may be a lack of interest in, or worse, resistance to the aims of the project. Personal contacts within DWP were advantageous in this respect compared to other areas such as HMRC where the researcher lacked the personal contacts and knowledge of the work (Reeves, 2010). For the researcher, informal contacts were justified on a pragmatic basis to generate a sufficient number of interviews to support the integrity of the findings. However as will be described subsequently, the distinction between formal and informal became blurred. Many of the interviews although not obtained through the strict hierarchical lines of contact envisaged by Full Time Officer ① often linked back into PCS structures later in the process.

The researcher contacted 79 people over the period March 2010 to July 2011 requesting an interview. In addition, requests were made to four PCS union branches for a group interview. These requests resulted in 30 individual interviews and three group interviews encompassing 16 contributors. Of these 16 people, three agreed prior or subsequent to their group interview to give an individual interview giving a total of 43 respondents at this stage of the research process. This meant that in tandem with those from the preliminary phase a total of 56 people provided an interview³⁰. Appendix 2 summarises the schedule of interviews.

However some additional comments are required to explain the development of the semi-structured interview process. The original intention was to hold two pilot interviews as a means of testing the schedule of the questions (Bryman, 2008). Ultimately due to the ill health of one of the potential participants, only one pilot was held, in May 2010, following which some minor changes in the schedule of questions was made, principally the need to focus on more factual questions at the

³⁰ Two of the respondents in the preliminary phase subsequently provided interviews during the semi-structured research interview phase. The total of 56 reflects the number of different contributors rather than the number of interview interactions.

outset of the interview leaving more reflective questions until later in the interview. The pilot interviewee, a former work colleague of the researcher, had expressed a willingness to assist with the project. To maintain confidentiality, he was sent an electronic copy of the information letter and consent form to his home email account rather than his work email. This first interview was undertaken on University premises and outside the interviewee's working hours. The interviewee at the time of the interview worked in DWP in a social security benefits adjudication role at executive officer grade. Although a PCS member, he held no position within the union. The interview was recorded on a digital voice recorder (Olympus WS-110) and the recording transcribed in full using the Olympus AS-2400 PC Transcription Kit. The pilot interviewee was offered a copy of the interview transcript or an electronic audio file of the interview. Subsequent to the interview, he was sent an email with a letter of thanks³¹ in which he was thanked for his contribution to the research (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994). The letter reiterated each of the points made at the interview about its confidential nature, the availability of the transcript on application, and how the material would be used, as well as an invitation to provide further information that a respondent might think relevant. The content of the data collected was of a quality sufficient to include it within the material obtained during the later interviews.

The subsequent interviews varied in terms of the departments where the interviewees were employed and their locations; the type of job they did and their job grade; how the individual was contacted; the locations of the interviews; the length of time that the interviews took; the respondents' level of involvement with the union; their gender, work pattern and other personal characteristics³². However the basic structure of subsequent interviews mirrored the pilot. Audio recording and transcription were done using the equipment and software described above. Consideration of the factors distinguishing the interviews from each other is nonetheless important in terms of assessing the reliability of the research findings.

3:6:7:1 The Departments

The original intention of the research was to undertake a study across a number of different government departments accessed through the appropriate PCS Groups. One way of undertaking a cross departmental comparison would be to locate

³¹ See Appendix 4

³² A full description of the interviewees is found at Appendix 2.

departments doing similar types of work. As previously discussed in relation to the questionnaire, access was problematic allied to the variations in departmental cultures that are known to exist (Corby, 1998; Fairbrother, 2000). Ultimately the PCS Groups from which data was gathered represented areas where civil servants were generally engaged in the processing of case work.

The historic division within the Civil Service, established in 1931, was that between Clerical Officers engaged in routine administrative duties, Executive Grades engaged in managerial functions and required to exercise discretion and judgement, and the Administrative Class, the senior managerial level of the Civil Service, largely engaged with administering the policies of the Civil Service rather than implementing its functions (Campbell, 1965). The historic division within the Civil Service is between those who devise policy and those who administer the bureaucracy of government (Pilkington, 1999). Whilst the ongoing processes of change witnessed from 1979 onwards have blurred the divisions between civil servant functions, in terms of the research data, data for this study was drawn exclusively from those engaged in the administration and implementation of government policies rather than those dealing with the formulation of policy. Furthermore, the data was (with one exception) drawn from either clerical grades or the lowest tier of the executive grades. The information gathered to support this project came from interviewing civil servants engaged in processing individual units of work as a part of the state legal framework; from those supporting others to undertake these functions; or from junior line managers working in these areas.

A significant number of interviewees were engaged in administering legal processes. In terms of the legal framework of Civil Service work, Baldwin *et al.* (1992) argue that the adjudication of social security benefit is in this respect quasi-judicial as the decisions are made on behalf of the Secretary of State judged on the merits of the individual case based on the relevant statute and case law. Functions exercised in other departments relating to the processing of government policy require an equivalent level of adherence on legal grounds to relevant statute and case law. Routine or non-complex decision making was increasingly delegated to clerical members of staff.

The choice of departments to study was based on three main factors. The first factor was that the researcher's personal levels of contact were more conducive to examining some departments rather than others. As a former DWP employee and

trade union steward, there was more scope through pre-existing personal contacts derived from earlier friendships and shared work experience and knowledge to, first, know where and how to contact PCS members in DWP. Pre-existing contacts in DWP were more likely to generate a greater level of rapport between interviewer and interviewee and a degree of confidence in how the material would be handled (Hannabuss, 1996). Personal contact was also critical in gaining access to a PCS member working in the Commercial Sector Group that did work contracted out from DWP. Personal contacts through third parties were also decisive factors in gaining access to respondents in HMRC, Scottish Government and the Home Office. The second factor was the size of the departments. As earlier highlighted, DWP and HMRC are among the largest departments in terms of numbers of staff employed³³ and are therefore more likely to be representative of the work done by the majority of civil servants. The final factor relates to the nature of the work performed within the departments studied. Particularly within DWP and HMRC, the majority of the work done is in the form of bulk processing of individual case work relating, for example, to the adjudication of social security benefits or tax assessment, rather than specialised jobs that are less capable of comparison across different functions. There are attendant risks associated with selecting departments on these bases. Familiarity with the researcher may raise expectations around the likely outcomes of the research and may generate socially desirable responses to questions asked. It cannot be assumed, furthermore, that work done in other departments will necessarily be identical. The data drawn from Scottish Government and the Home Office will to a certain extent add the necessary counterweight to the interviews done with respondents in DWP and HMRC.

Within individual departments, the researcher derived his findings from civil servants working in different locations. The semi-structured interviews were drawn from 13 DWP sites, four HMRC sites, one Scottish Government site, one Home Office site and one Commercial Sector site. The sites ranged between those delivering face to face provision (for example, in a Job Centre), call centre or telephony work and 'back of house' work. The sites ranged from offices with several hundreds of members of staff to small units with less than twenty people. The preliminary meetings also allowed the researcher to speak respectively to stewards

³³ Approximately 40% of all civil servants were employed in HRMC and DWP at the outset of the research.

working on a second Scottish Government site and a Ministry of Justice site. Appendix 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the interviewees' details.

The need to rely on a more opportunistic approach to the collection of data meant that in some cases particular offices provided multiple respondents. Whilst following through the development of lean in a single site would have provided a useful narrative, it could also be argued that drawing on a wider group of offices may allow the researcher to draw on what might be typical of developments within the Civil Service (Yin, 2009).

3:6:7:2 Job Functions and Grades

The interviews were conducted among a variety of job types reflective of the range of work activity done within the Civil Service. As previously indicated, the interviews were divided between those performing clerical and administrative duties and those who had managerial duties. Insofar as grades were identifiable, 45% of the interviewees were administrative or clerical grades while 55% were managerial grades³⁴. The most recent Civil Service statistics (Office for National Statistics, 2011) indicate that around 47% of staff are graded at administrative or clerical level with around 53% at managerial grade of whom 25% are executive officers. The proportion of the grade of interviewees was consistent with the composition of the Civil Service. Job type was not necessarily representative in the same way, but did encompass a wide mix of duties and roles.

3:6:7:3 Contact Methods

The problems identified above in securing access created a situation that required the use of 'gatekeepers' to negotiate the tiers of the union hierarchical structure. It was also recognised that being wholly reliant on designated gatekeepers would not generate a sufficient number of interviews to provide robust findings. It meant effectively that a degree of notional compliance was given to the guidelines issued by the union that access should only be undertaken through designated union contacts, whilst at the same time using former work colleagues and other University contacts to generate other interviews. The researcher used a hybrid approach contacting union branches, which gave the researcher a degree of authority, but in reality, branches were chosen through personal contacts and not through designated union gatekeepers. Six interviews including the pilot interview were

³⁴ All bar one of the managerial grades were executive officers.

obtained directly through personal contacts independent of any union structures. The remaining interviews had the semblance of union approval insofar as the researcher could point any interviewees to senior tiers of the union to sanction his intervention. These interventions included self-generated requests to union branches in DWP and HRMC Groups in the Glasgow area where the researcher attended branch meetings, gave a short presentation, took interview notes and circulated a sheet on which attendees were invited to consider contributing to the research. Those who signed the sheet were followed up by email or telephone call to be invited to contribute to the research. The implications of this method of selecting is the risk that the researcher is effectively determining the research population and that personal contacts may provide socially desirable answers, but a group chosen through the auspices of gatekeepers would be no less susceptible to these dangers. The advantage from the researcher's point of view was that interviewees chosen independently of the union were less likely to feel the need to disguise their views on the role of the union.

Whilst the research data was collected with the agreement of the PCS, none of the information was collected with the knowledge of the government departments concerned. Although not explicitly stated, certain potential contributors to the research may have declined to participate due to fears around breaching the Civil Service Code (Civil Service, 2010). It was certainly clear from discussing this issue with union officials and branches that there was reluctance for union members to contribute to the research in their own time when their management was not likely to sanction any facility for this in the working day. PCS members did run the risk that management may have penalised those contributing to the research as a breach of their conditions of service. The researcher could arguably have been placing individuals at risk. However interviewees were made aware of management's lack of cooperation with the project and that the research was conducted under the auspices of the union. In the preamble to each interview, it was emphasised that the researcher did not wish the interviewees to reveal any information regarding any member of the public with whom they had dealings. Every effort would be made to disguise interviewees' contributions to the research project to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. This need for confidentiality was instrumental in the way that interviewees were contacted: contacts were made by face to face discussion, telephone calls to home or trade union office numbers, or by use of personal email addresses. Confidentiality was also maintained through conducting interviews in

most cases in locations where conversations could not be overheard by third parties (on University premises, in trade union offices, by phone to the person's home or busy public spaces such as a public house or coffee bar). Confidentiality was also protected by curtailing interviews where there was a risk that prolonging the interview might result in the conversation being overheard: two research participants initially opted to discuss lean working by telephone at their work station that ultimately resulted in curtailing the interviews prematurely to avoid compromising the individuals concerned.

3:6:7:4 Interview Structure and Format

The format of the interviews varied whilst maintaining a basic structure around the key concepts under exploration. Appendix 2 provides detailed information on the format, location and length of interview. Where interviews could be conducted on government premises, the opportunity was taken to use these facilities as these were more convenient to those being interviewed. When visiting government premises, the researcher generally used the private facilities afforded by trade union rooms where interviews could be recorded without interruption. To enable the researcher to meet interviewees in private and to record the conversation, other interviews took place at the PCS office in Glasgow or at the University. Interviews were also conducted on public premises (public house or coffee shop) as venues mutually convenient to researcher and interviewee usually after work in the evening.

Some interviews were conducted by telephone. Telephone interviews were conducted to fit around interviewees' work or home circumstances and where it was impractical for the researcher and interviewee to meet face to face at a mutually convenient venue. It allowed some respondents to be interviewed at home in the evenings without the interference of work constraints. Those telephone interviews which were conducted where a degree of privacy existed provided a degree of openness, but this was matched where contributors had to moderate their comments where they were speaking from a communal work space. Telephone interviews have a potential disadvantage that non-verbal clues may be missed and their success as a tool will rely in the context in which it is used (Holt, 2010). However for those able to speak frankly these interviews did provide data in line with face to face approaches. Time constraints were, however, more apparent in the telephone interviews and generally these interviews were on average shorter than face to face interviews. Participants in face to face interviews had set aside time

away from office or union duties to be available for a discussion and were under less time pressure to conclude the interview prematurely (Ghauri and Grønhaug, 2010).

The group interviews were held either in a trade union room of a government office or in the PCS Glasgow office. The group interviews were conducted primarily as a convenient way of gathering data from a larger number of people. These group interviews allowed points of view to emerge and be developed and debated (Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

The interviews were conducted opportunistically where the practical constraints around respondents' availability outweighed standardising the procedures (Buchanan *et al.*, 1988). Several of the interviews took place in a public setting, either in a public house or a café. Utilising social skills (Healey and Rawlinson, 1994) in a relaxed atmosphere drew out levels of discussion that may not have become possible in a more formal setting. It was inappropriate to have too much paperwork on open view to others in a public setting in order to disguise the nature of the interaction, particularly in one public house close to one of the office locations. However the fact that most of the interviews took place in settings outwith the respondents' places of work confirms the difficulties that researchers have in studying those at the weaker end of the employment relationship including those employed in the Civil Service working at clerical and junior managerial grades³⁵.

The location of the majority of the interviews confirms the particular issues relating to interviewing people in the Civil Service. As Gregorczyk (2005) argues, there is a culture of secrecy around the activities of government. Such an obstacle makes it difficult to research issues relating to the employment relationship and leads to a greater reliance on PCS activists for data than would exist if the employment relationship was more collaborative.

3:6:7:5 Respondents and their Union Involvement

The interviews consisted of data taken wholly from union members. Current union density in the Civil Service is estimated by PCS at around 67% (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011a) representing a significant proportion of the workforce. What non-union members would have to say on work related issues or

³⁵ All semi-structured interviews were recorded except for two group interviews, one of which was not recorded at the request of the meeting. In the second case, it was due to equipment error.

about the role of the union would be speculative. What is of more relevance is the extent to which the participants were union office bearers, either union stewards, health and safety representative or branch or regional officers.

Only eight of the interview respondents did not currently hold a post or position within the union. The balance between interviews with PCS office holders and PCS members holding no union post reflects the difficulties in securing access to respondents through the existing union structures. Access was significantly dependent on the union having an element of control over those who contributed to the research. The potential for bias exists insofar as union post holders are being asked to comment on an organization of which they are representatives. The contribution of PCS members holding no post allowed the potential for better balance in relation to respondents' views on the role of the union.

Another relevant factor arising from the division between the two groups was that those who contributed as non-office holders may have done so as a result of disaffection with their work and the significant organizational changes occurring within the Civil Service. The risks attendant in contributing to the research in potential defiance of Civil Service rules may suggest that, disenchanted with their working conditions, they were willing to contribute to the research.

3:6:7:6 Personal Characteristics

The final issue to be considered was the extent to which the respondents were typical of the constituent population of the Civil Service as a whole. The constraints and restrictions described above limited the practicalities of acquiring detailed information around personal characteristics. Of the contributors, only 14 were female which is unrepresentative of the Civil Service as a whole where 53% are currently women (Civil Service, 2013b). The fact that the respondents do not mirror the gender composition of the Civil Service means that some limitations must exist insofar as the concerns of particular groups within the Civil Service may not be representative. However as with any form of qualitative research, an exact match may not be required to produce research that is valid, reliable and generalizable to a wider population (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The way that the data was collected and analysed forms the next part of this chapter.

3:7 Data Analysis

The final phase of the research process is the means whereby the data is prepared for analysis. Conventionally, qualitative data is analysed by means of some form of data coding. Saunders *et al.* (2007) identify a number of approaches that could be used to facilitate this type of data analysis. This form of analysis assumes the value in classifying data in meaningful categories, attaching parts or units of the data to these categories and using this as a means of recognising relationships between different parts of the data collected. In deductive forms of analysis, the categories might originate from the academic literature on which the research is founded, while in inductive forms interview data is used to form patterns to aid theoretical understanding. Alvesson and Kärreson (2011) argue that because both forms are heavily theory-laden, they fail to allow the researcher to develop new lines of theoretical enquiry. Data coding in effect becomes a technical exercise. In choosing how to code, a researcher will make distinct choices that may fail to capture the complexity of what is communicated during the interview.

The data analysis was ultimately undertaken in a pragmatic manner (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998). The researcher listened to the audio recordings of the interviews whilst transcribing the interviews in full. Such a method allowed the researcher to not only accurately record the interviewees' spoken words, but to get a sense of context derived from voice intonation, recollection of the interview and a sense of the meaning of the discussion. The interviews were transcribed *verbatim* in order that no seemingly insignificant points were missed (Alvesson, 2011) and where for example, extended pauses or laughter occurred, these were noted. The researcher made the initial written transcriptions as soon after the interview as was practicable. He then listened to all the interviews for a second time prior to writing the analysis chapters. This allowed the transcriptions to be corrected for accuracy, but, as it was some distance removed from the interviews themselves, allowed the researcher to reflect on the data. The researcher then used the written transcripts and field notes to search for key themes identified from the literature. This was done by reading the written transcripts. The researcher used the fact that he had transcribed his own questions as well as the interviewees' comments to assist with this analysis of the data. Passages from the transcripts were selected from the analysis chapters to illustrate the issues raised. Those sections chosen were in part selected because they were representative of the comments made, but were also chosen as they provided the opportunity to analyse the comment in context. Whilst

as Alvesson (2011) states, the passages selected must necessarily involve a measure of choice on the researcher's part, the frequency with which certain key themes emerge allows the opportunity to discover to what extent the data is generalizable to other parts of the Civil Service albeit within the caveats discussed earlier in the chapter.

3.8 Limitations

There are limitations to the research arising from the methods used to gather data. The three issues that need discussion are those arising from the lack of senior management input; the fact that data from DWP forms a significantly greater proportion of the research material than that from other departments; and the need to rely heavily on PCS stewards and activists rather than PCS members and a significant number of civil servants working under lean systems who were not union members.

Despite efforts to engage with Civil Service management, these attempts were rebuffed. Significant value would have been gained by undertaking semi-structured interviews with senior departmental managers as it would have allowed them, for example, to explain how their understanding of the policy aims of their departments linked to the government's efficiency agenda and the relationship between these aims and the use of lean. There was correspondingly a significant reliance on participants' views of their senior managers' actions and on documentary evidence, neither of which provides first hand evidence for explaining the rationale for using lean. Without direct senior management input, there was a greater reliance on inference using third party evidence.

It is also acknowledged that using DWP as the main source of data, even where supported by several other departments, may skew the findings. It cannot be assumed, with in excess of 350 government departments, that organizational restructuring was conducted in identical fashion in every department. There is a risk that locating the research primarily within DWP, and to a lesser extent HMRC, will neglect the specific issues relevant to other departments which may not match those in the bigger departments.

Finally, there is the issue of relying extensively on PCS stewards and activists. The preliminary interviews assisted in locating lean and the union response into a context wider than DWP and HMRC and the offices from which data was

collected. However, there was clearly a significant number of civil servants, both trade union members and non-members, working under the lean agenda and whose views are not represented. Carter *et al.* (2012) highlight that in certain office locations trade union membership density exceeded 90%: with overall density at 67% (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011a), there are clearly areas in the Civil Service where union membership is comparatively low. Particularly in relation to issues of the union response to lean, caution needs to be exercised to what degree the data gathered is representative. Where membership density was low, the response to lean was likely to be different.

Nonetheless, despite these caveats and the need for a degree of caution, the research methods adopted in this thesis are sufficiently rigorous and nuanced to achieve robust academic analysis.

Chapter 4: Lean in the UK Civil Service

This chapter will examine the nature of changes in the organization of work and lean systems in the Civil Service. The chapter will, first, examine documentary evidence produced by government departments to support the implementation of lean. The chapter will then examine the evidence relating to changes in the organization of work and the impact of lean at the workplace using evidence from PCS members. Rather than simply examine lean as a set of techniques or tools supporting a business improvement process, the chapter analyses Civil Service management's use of lean within the context of the political economy of work.

Before examining lean at a workplace level, there is value in exploring documentation that Civil Service departments have produced in relation to lean. In this way, it allows an examination of the aims and intentions of departmental management at the meso level of analysis that underlies organizational change at the micro level.

The Lean Vision, produced in 2007, set out DWP's objectives of creating a lean organization over the following ten years. As an internal document, it was likely to be more candid in discussing its strategy than material available in the public domain. The first issue to note was that the responsibility for using lean and how that would impact on operational matters at a workplace level was decentralised to departmental level. The locus of control on lean was decentralised at departmental level in common with decisions on other operational matters such as personnel terms and conditions (Kessler *et al.*, 2006). The Lean Vision states:

Senior leaders and managers (defined as ET³⁶, business boards, SCS³⁷ and managers above SEO³⁸ level) focus on the long term strategic direction of the Department, and facilitate staff taking responsibility for the day-to-day improvements that deliver strategy and surface opportunities for future strategy

³⁶ Executive Team

³⁷ Unclear what this terms means – not explained in the document

³⁸ Senior Executive Officer – a manager above SEO grade would normally be in charge of a district comprising a number of offices or workplaces.

(Lean Vision, page 3, “Leadership”)

The Lean Vision also placed great emphasis on both quantitative and qualitative targets. The document envisaged increased productivity of 15% after the first sequence of lean activity and, thereafter, 5% year on year improvement until 2017. The document also reflects the specific emphasis within lean working of the use of team working and processes emphasising continuous improvement as a way of generating greater efficiency and increased performance (Womack *et al.*, 1990). Under the section Business Results, the document records the following:

- Our targets and performance measures across the Department reflect and support Lean principles. Performance is jointly managed by managers and teams, with much of this being in ‘real time’.
- Team challenge targets through visible performance growth. Leaders continuously review targets.
- Performance measures reflect the strategic business and customer needs.
- Performance consistently exceeds targets

(Lean Vision, page 5)

The document refers to being “informed by what is happening in other organisations” and endorsing the use of “networking with other proponents and practitioners of Lean across government and in the *wider business and industry arena*” (my emphasis) (page 6). The annex to the document lists private sector organizations and government departments with whom expertise was shared or sought. These included Unipart, Siemens, Sainsburys and HMRC. This is consistent with the contention that Civil Service management was continuing to attempt to break down the traditional models of Civil Service organization by using the private sector as an exemplar of efficiency (Osborne and Gaebler, 1992). The document endorses the lean mantra (Womack and Jones, 1998; Ohno, 1988a) relating to the elimination of waste in the production process and thus the need for parsimony and discipline in the use of resources, *viz.*:

All our people to be obsessive about waste – not producing it, not passing it on onto others and not accepting it from others

(Lean Vision, page 2, “2011 and beyond”)

The Lean Vision provides evidence, not only of the intention to decentralise operational matters as the part of the ongoing process of restructuring the Civil Service, but also the marketization of DWP service delivery.

While the DWP Lean Vision was a document produced for internal use, other documentation providing evidence about the ethos underpinning organizational change is located in the public domain. The external report commissioned under the auspices of HMRC (Radnor and Bucci, 2007) to evaluate the implementation of the Pacesetter programme in the Processing Directorate³⁹ provides further confirmatory evidence that the lean model of organizational change adopted within HMRC has followed the a market-based approach⁴⁰. As this report and others discussed below (unlike the DWP Lean Vision that was a policy document reflecting future intentions) were evaluating existing practice, there is scope to use the material to evaluate current lean practice as well as analysing aims and intentions. However, with the focus in this section primarily on establishing the links between the marketised approach promoted at meso level and organizational systems at micro level, the more practical aspects of lean working are considered later in the chapter.

Radnor and Bucci (2007) provide a 'timeline' for the implementation of Pacesetter showing that whilst lean was first used July to November 2004 and supported by external consultants, McKinseys, Pacesetter was not formally adopted by HMRC until the autumn of 2005 (page 73). The report states that the status of lean was one strand⁴¹ of the HMRC's Pacesetter programme, a project designed to "make £5 million efficiency gains by March 2008" (page 9). Although ostensibly an externally produced report rather than one written by civil servants, the report contained indicators that HMRC at senior managerial level endorsed an approach to

³⁹ The report was an evaluation of 10 different sites and the central administrative office dealing with Pacesetter within one directorate of HMRC.

⁴⁰ The report was produced independently of HMRC, but in view of the fact that it was published in the public domain, there is a reasonable presumption that the data collected by Radnor and Bucci from HMRC management reflects to a significant degree 'an official line' or management view.

⁴¹ Pacesetter was the umbrella title for a number of strands of organizational changes. Under the HMRC's Capability Delivery Projects, the strands included Lean implementation (the subject of the commissioned report), but also contained strands relating to Operational Management, Senior Leadership and the Model Office (page 9).

organizational change that was predicated on the continued decentralisation of management authority on operational matters to departmental level. The report contains numerous references to the development of 'leadership' as a means of assisting senior managers to use lean working more effectively. The report (page 11) describes five types of 'events'⁴² designed to "[develop] management capability, [foster] new leadership behaviours, and [engage] staff" along with bespoke events provided for senior managers. To what extent these events are indicators of genuine decision making autonomy for managers is a moot point, but the significance of their inclusion in the report suggests, at very least, a rhetoric of decentralising the locus of management control.

Similarly the stated aim of lean outlined at page 11 of the report highlights a number of the elements of the marketised public sector. HRMC had a "three pronged approach" to organizational change, *viz.*:

Redesigning service delivery processes so as to eliminate waste and variability and maximise flexibility. This will improve productivity, quality and reduce lead time.

Changing current management processes to create appropriate management infrastructure to sustain improvements.

Changing mindsets and behaviours of leaders and front line staff to support the new systems and deliver continuous improvement.

(Evaluation of Pacesetter Final Report, page 11)

This extract is consistent with approaches found in the DWP Lean Vision. Organizational change is premised on changing the existing bureaucratic structure and using new "infrastructure" as a vehicle for continuous improvement in operational practice; the emphasis on parsimony and discipline through the elimination of waste; and the use of targets as a measurement of quantitative and qualitative efficiency. The evidence from this document also support Pollitt and Bouckhaert's (2004) contention that public sector adaptation of organizational change approaches is "imitative" of models used in other employment sectors.

⁴² Kick Off, Performance Improvement, Performance Improvement training, Deep Dive and Launch

The Report emphasises that three consulting groups⁴³ were involved with the initial use of lean within HMRC indicative of the use of private sector organizational models in a public sector setting. Typical also of the lean approach are the emphases on the reduction of waste and the reduction of process variability⁴⁴ (Womack *et al.*, 1990); the belief that improved productivity will directly accrue from the use of lean working (Womack and Jones, 1998); and the emphasis on leadership as key in developing lean approaches (Holweg, 2007). Equally critical to the use of lean, as Holweg states, is the emphasis on continuous improvement. The quotation from page 11 above confirms that, within HMRC, the emphasis on continuous improvement gained through changing “mindsets” and “behaviours” of “leaders” and “front line staff” was a central plank in the adoption of lean.

Garrahan and Stewart (1992) argue that fundamental to the use of lean is the emphasis on team working. The HMRC report states:

Teamworking was generally acknowledged to be better under Lean and there was a better team spirit. At some sites competition between teams was driving improvements rather than demoralising teams.

(Evaluation of Pacesetter Final Report, page 39)

The report argued that, with the advent of lean, HMRC implemented genuine team working for the first time for all staff working in processing. The report argued that team working was the vehicle for the collaborative problem solving that had been missing until that point. What the report fails to explain is how the traditional structure of the Civil Service, based on a quasi-military or bureaucratic model where groups of staff worked in ‘sections’ or ‘commands’, differs from the lean conception of the team or why previous incarnations of team working in the Inland Revenue were fundamentally flawed (*e.g.* Currie and Proctor (2003)). This criticism of the traditional Civil Service model confirms a trend within prescriptive analyses of lean that tend towards a-historical revisionism. In relation to forms of collaborative working, previous organizational models are dismissed, while elements that fail to fit

⁴³ McKinseys, PA Consulting, Unipart – the first two of which were contributors to the Gershon Report (2004) on improving efficiency in the Civil Service.

⁴⁴ Page 13 of the HMRC report describes the aim of standardising processes across sites.

the current rhetoric are ignored to create a narrative of lean that fits the purpose of the organization (Williams *et al.*, 1992a; Coffey, 2006).

The documentary evidence from other departments is less definitive. The DWP Lean Vision as an internal document was more likely to exhibit greater candour than documents available within the public domain, whilst the HMRC report was commissioned as a case study of 11 offices within one part of HMRC in the wake of industrial unrest arising from lean implementation. Other material rarely makes explicit the aims and objectives of organizational change in detail. Typical of such material is the Ministry of Justice report (Ministry of Justice, 2008). The introduction of lean within the HM Courts Service was presented as a way of “[enabling] our staff to re-evaluate the way we do things in order to find more efficient ways of processing work then to share that knowledge across HMCS” (page 39). The report also refers to lean creating a “problem solving” approach that will “increasingly” empower staff to make suggestions as a means of continuous improvement. The report states that the lean approach had allowed or will allow HMCS to generate efficiency savings of 12.5% in the years either side of the report’s publication. Similarly to HMRC, lean forms one plank of the department’s strategy. The report refers to other strands of organizational change or as the report phrases it the “overall architecture of key areas of our business” (page 39). This report is confirmatory of those elements of the marketised approach to organizational change within the Civil Service, namely the emphasis on decentralised decision making, parsimony and discipline in the elimination of waste and, typical of the lean approach, the emphasis on utilising the workforce in a process of continuous improvement as a means of generating greater efficiency.

The use of lean within the Ministry of Defence exemplified in the report of National Audit Office (2008) refers to outcomes from lean working. Lean generated the “best value for money from assets” highlighting a saving of £1.4 billion over the period from 2001-2 to 2006-7 and the reduction of “turnaround” time in the production of aircraft for front line operations (page 34). Although this report contains little specific detail explaining the success of lean in MOD, this document is nevertheless further evidence that parsimony and discipline were ostensibly key reasons for using lean.

Attempts to gather evidence from senior managers in DWP and MOJ who had responsibility for lean implementation were rebuffed. The reasons why

government departments have chosen lean as their specific strategy is less clear in terms of the available documentation. The widespread adoption of lean may in part confirm a degree of faddism (Näslund, 2008) where departmental management use a common or popular form of organizational change. The references in the DWP Lean Vision to “sources of expertise” from both private and public sectors suggest that there is a degree of isomorphism between organizational forms (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Arnaboldi *et al.*, 2010). Without direct evidence from senior Civil Service management, it is not possible to ascertain to what degree the use of lean in different departments was a result of coercion, mimicry or the need for normative forms of standardisation. What can be said with a greater degree of confidence is that the use of lean is clearly imitative of private sectors models of change.

At the meso or sectoral level, the level of Civil Service departmental management, the documentation that supports the implementation of lean working is coherent and consistent with the institutional “architecture” (Boyer, 2005:19) and is underpinned by the market-led UK economy. Not only is organizational change in Civil Service departments predicated on marketised values typically espoused within neo-liberalism, but the documentary evidence confirms that departmental management upholds the view that the public sector is fundamentally inefficient and needs to be run on private sector lines adopting its best practice. By this token, the neo-liberal ideology of the UK state (the macro level) drives the ethos and aims of departmental management at the meso level into attempting to achieve forms of work organization consistent with the state’s restructuring of the public sector.

The next part of the chapter examines how management applied lean at the workplace level and whether lean was applied in a consistent and coherent fashion. Boyer and Fresseynet (2002) argue that organizational changes can be found in different forms even with the same industrial sector. The evidence will examine the extent to which variations in lean implementation exist in the Civil Service.

4:1 Lean at the Workplace Level

This section will examine the operation of lean working at the micro level of analysis. The section will be central to answering the first research question that addresses the nature of lean working. In practical terms the micro or unit level equates to the individual office or workplace level. The office level is where the impact of changes in the organization of work can be visibly seen and observed. Boyer (2005) argues

that there are problems in theorising the national political economy of work from case studies. This caveat aside, it is only at the micro level that detailed empirical evidence can be gathered to establish the degree to which the micro unit level coheres with broader analyses of political economy.

Some of the initiatives at office level were clearly identified by respondents as 'lean' initiatives. Respondents highlighted specific management attempts at lean working. Often these were techniques or tools that came from specific management initiatives or related to particular people in the office structures who had a designated job associated with lean projects. However, many of the attempts at changing the way work was organised lacked the 'lean' epithet or were undertaken in offices or units in which there were no employees with a designated lean role or function. Even within offices in which lean techniques or tools were the purportedly accepted mode of working, there was evidence that these tools or techniques were ignored or had fallen into abeyance over time. This issue raises the question to what extent different forms of organizational change are coherent expressions of a single approach to restructure work in the Civil Service.

What is critical in understanding lean is not the presence or absence of a specific imitative form of organizational change, but the extent to which these attempts by management to restructure work are coherent with the UK's marketised form of work organization. This chapter contends that the designation of a business improvement process as 'lean' is not the determining factor in changing the organization of work in the Civil Service. For management, lean's value as a designation derives from its worth as a purportedly successful exemplar of good practice found in other industries. The 'lean' designation, both reveals and disguises the nature of organizational change. The extent to which this is manifested in the various locations from which the empirical data was collected will now be examined to evaluate the precise nature of change at operational level. This section on work change at the office level will argue that the application of lean can be seen in four different ways. This typology of lean working will help to theorise lean within the UK Civil Service.

4:1:1 Change at the Workplace level

Before examining its implementation in detail, it is important to examine the context into which management introduced lean. There are two important aspects to consider, without which management could arguably not have implemented lean in

the manner it did. These two inter-linked aspects are the increased functionalization of services and the use of information technology.

The functionalisation of work had been a central objective for management over an extended period of time. There had been a shift over time to move work from smaller local offices to large centralised sites remote from the public they served. The tendency was also increasingly to use these large remote sites to process one discrete block of work often related to one specific function or client group. Typical of this approach was the following statement:

[Management] compartmentalised the work and streamed it to different sites. So the introduction of Lean a few years ago reduced the variation in the work considerably. They've gone on now to further reduce that because they have sites doing single streams of work, so [name of office] has now become the Pensions and Benefits Centre for the whole of the UK, so whenever someone goes on to an occupational or state pension, we receive notification and deal with that and determine the tax code, so there's absolutely nothing apart from that. So it's all single streamed work. (Interview 11, HMRC tax processor and local steward)

Among these remote sites were offices dealing with, for example, specialist tax collection. A respondent described her office in the following terms:

basically we're a national unit. There is no other unit that does what we do
(Interview 7, HRMC line manager)

In addition to the tendency towards centralising single streams of work in one large location, the smaller work units were increasingly managed remotely by senior managers based in other locations⁴⁵.

One interviewee who within the previous five years had worked in a local office dealing with a variety of social security benefit functions was asked to describe his experience in relation to the range of duties he was now expected to perform:

⁴⁵ Interviewee 7 stated that since April 2010 that her unit of 25 people been managed remotely by a Senior Officer grade. Interviewee 11 said in his site of approximately 860 staff there were Senior Officers present who in turn were managed on site by a more senior grade.

I do Community Care Grants and I do Community Care Grants and then if I'm lucky I'll do a Community Care [Grant] and maybe the odd Direction 49⁴⁶ just to, you know, give me a wee bit of [variety] (Interview 1, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

His office had several months previously been converted to a processing site dealing solely with Social Fund applications and several weeks after the interview was made into a telephone call centre restricted to dealing only with Social Fund Crisis Loans. Processing work done on other social security benefits was transferred out and centralised in another unit. The increasing functionalization of work was mitigated only to the extent that certain services such as Job Centres still required some face to face contact with the public. The trend was increasingly to deliver central government services from large centralised locations.

This level of functionalization was, as Fisher (2007) asserts, predicated on the basis that Civil Service services were computerised and that work was reliant on information technology systems. The trend to centralise work from a network of smaller offices into larger sites was increasingly sustained by IT systems that allowed for the electronic transfer for work between locations. The specific impact of technological change on skills will be discussed in greater detail below, however in terms of the way that management has used computerisation two critical themes emerge from the data. The first is that information technology has supported increased functionalization by removing the need to deliver services geographically adjacent to the public who are being served. The second critical theme arising from the use of computerisation is similar. Not only can work be delivered remotely from the public, work can be delivered remotely from other civil servants doing similar or interrelated functions. Whereas Civil Service work had previously relied on the physical movement of paperwork, the use of 'virtual networks' allows the electronic transfer of information from one functionalised work unit to another effectively creating silos of discrete areas of work.

The interviewees discussing the impact of information technology highlighted a number of the issues around functionalization and the use of computer

⁴⁶ Direction 49 of the Social Fund Directions was the consideration of the award of a Crisis Loan where a Community Care Grant could not be given, not a separate benefit area.

technology. Interviewees confirmed the way that services had the capacity to be delivered remotely from the public. One interviewee working in a DWP call centre highlighted the increased functionalization even within one specific social security benefit:

It's all incoming calls, either for enquiries for Social Fund or for Crisis Loan claims and that is our sole purpose now, whereas before we obviously dealt with all the different types of Social Fund activity (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

The use of call centre work epitomised the decoupling of work from any one specific geographic location. It was also seen in other processing activity such as tax assessment and social security adjudication. Interviewee 6, a clerical officer processing disability benefits from a location in the west of Scotland and local steward, referred to his office having recently been allocated work from Suffolk and Essex. Arguably of more impact in terms of functionalization was the way that computerisation was used to delineate distinct boundaries between functions. This was both done within offices and across locations. When asked how the IT systems generated work, one HMRC respondent stated:

The next case will simply appear on your computer when you finish the last one, and they'll be segmented into work types (Interview 26, HMRC tax collector and local steward)

A DWP team leader for benefit adjudication processors stated somewhat similarly:

as soon as the claim is set up with the Contact Centre⁴⁷, it's build on this CAM system, and it's ready to go or whatever they do in the Contact Centre, it then comes on electronically via CAM to our processors and they're all...it just allocates them in order to whoever has got space for the...basically capacity to take the claims in (Interview 34, DWP line manager and team leader)

⁴⁷ Anyone wishing to make a claim to social security benefit would in the first instance phone the Contact Centre to make his/her claim. The Contact Centre's function is one of information gathering and verification rather than adjudication. Prior to the establishment of the Contact Centre network, information collection and benefit adjudication was usually undertaken, if not always by a single functional role, in a single local office location.

The two quotations are revealing in two particular ways. For the first respondent it was the computer system that delineates and hence functionalises the work type. For the second respondent, despite its obvious importance, it was no longer critical to her staff that they understood earlier parts of the benefit assessment process to undertake their work. The use of computerisation becomes a means for management to establish work boundaries differentiating between functions even down to the level of distinguishing areas of work done in the same location. Equally critical is the increased capability to switch units of work between different locations as workloads necessitate. This confirms Fisher's (2007) argument that decoupling Civil Service work from a specific geographic location is a strategy fundamental to changing the nature of work within the organization.

This restructuring of Civil Service work through functionalization supported by the use of increasingly sophisticated systems of computerisation provides what might be described as the architecture upon which management has tried to implement what it describes as lean working. The restructuring was never uniformly applied: the historic and political context of certain Civil Service functions meant that in certain sectors of government functionalization was less advanced than in others. The devolved nature of Scottish Government, for example, meant that it has a large number of relatively small units performing discrete areas of work⁴⁸. Computerisation was often described by respondents as inefficient: government departments had either declined to update its existing systems to support the increased levels of functionalization or had decided to use computer systems with limited functionality. Respondents stated:

all I can say is that when I start up in the morning I have to have eight or nine applications on my desktop open, bearing in mind that we've [laughs] have still the Social Fund system that's been there for twenty years wanting to close down every couple of minutes and other applications that are there doing the same thing, so you can imagine what it is trying to jump in and out of these things. (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker, call centre)

DWP paid for [the telephony system] rather than [name of private company delivering outsourced telephony service on DWP's behalf] and they went for

⁴⁸ Scottish Government has five Directorates, 11 Agencies, four non-ministerial departments and 150 Public Bodies.

the cheapest system. For instance, [...] a lot of callers assume that like most call centres their calls are recorded: they're not, simply because that was an additional cost that DWP wasn't prepared to come up with. So there's that down-side and also the actual software you need to interrogate to find out how quickly a call is answered is pretty clunky and it's not really very intuitive (Interview 2, call centre line manager, former civil servant working for private company delivering DWP services and local steward)

The way that computerisation is applied to the functionalization of work is only applied to the extent that it facilitates the restructuring of work. This suggests that at its root functionalization as a means of reorganizing work is never wholly driven by its efficiency: it is used to the extent that it supports the overarching architecture of work organization. If the underlying issue is in reality the increasing pressure to marketise the Civil Service rather than any inherent merits of functionalization *per se*, then it is unsurprising that variations in restructuring can co-exist even within departments. The extent to which lean systems are used within specific government departments can then be explained in similar terms.

4:1:2 The Implementation of Lean

This section examines the extent to which lean systems have been applied across government departments. As the research specifically addressed lean working, to some extent the focus of the research tended to concentrate on those areas where lean was most visibly being used. However from the perspectives of the interviewees, it was apparent that lean as a tool or technique was not applied consistently even within major departments. In response to the interview question "are you familiar with the term 'Lean'?" one respondent said "I think it's an HMRC term, isn't it?" (Interview 23, front line officer, Home Office). Even within parts of HMRC, one interviewee in response to the same question said "I know it, but I've never experienced it" (Interview 7, junior manager, HMRC). As will become apparent, even in the offices in which lean was applied it was often applied inconsistently. The chapter will now examine lean using available documentation to explore how management presented lean to staff before examining lean from data collected from the workforce. Although there is some degree of overlap with the documentary evidence that sets out the overarching approach to lean at departmental level, the documentation discussed in this section will focus on organizational practice at site level.

4:1:2:1 The Management View of Lean

To explore the inconsistencies around the use of lean, the first issue is how the techniques and tools of lean were presented to the workforce. Womack and Jones (1998) argue that the fundamental principles of lean working relate to specifying the value desired by the customer; identifying the value stream and thereby eliminating waste in the production process; making the process flow continuous; using the concept of 'pull' to process work; and aiming towards perfection by reducing the number of steps in the production process. Radnor and Bucci (2007) argue that these principles apply equally to the public sector as to manufacturing. The emphasis is on "continuous improvement" using workforce knowledge to improve productive processes (Bradley *et al.*, 2000; Stewart *et al.*, 2009). Information from the DWP Lean Home page⁴⁹ is consistent with the principles outlined by Womack and Jones (1998):

Key to DWP Lean is continuously listening to our customers (internal and external) to find out how they perceive our services and where we can improve (this version dated 13/05/2009)

It is about eliminating waste from the services we provide which are very simple but when used together can dramatically improve the way we do things (this version dated 13/05/2009)

The same Homepage also states that the standardised lean approach has been developed to "embed across the department ways of working that ensures a continuous cycle of improvement [that] becomes part of daily business". The Lean Lite newsletter⁵⁰ from the DWP Intranet site emphasises what it defines as the critical role of the employee in the process of continuous improvement. The newsletter reads:

Lean recognises **your** expertise, knowledge of the business and understanding of the needs of the customers ('your' printed in bold type in the original)

⁴⁹ Any information from the DWP intranet was provided in confidence – due to access issues it is not possible to provide any internet link

⁵⁰ Issue 1 is undated, but judging from other material predates 2010.

This emphasis on the employee's contribution to improving work processes is reflected at local office level where in one example of a locally produced newsletter it stated:

This is YOUR NEWSLETTER..... This is YOUR CHANCE to get involved.
We would really appreciate your suggestions for future Newsletter content!!
(Lean Newsletter from DWP Benefit Processing Centre 19/09/2008)

While asking for employee contributions may appear innocuous, it does accord with the overall management approach under lean to attempt to derive benefit from worker knowledge. To what extent this type of communication material from DWP is typical of other departments, it is not possible to say: access to this type of material from other departments was not readily provided by the trade union 'gatekeepers'. However, interviewees did confirm that this type of communication was found elsewhere.

Insofar as specific techniques were used, the documentation also indicates that the lean techniques advocated were those found in other work sectors. The DWP Lean Lite newsletter 1, in addition to identifying key 'behaviours' describes *inter alia* a number of Lean techniques:

Removal of waste

In Lean terms, 'waste' is anything that does not add value to your service

Visual management techniques

Visual management is about making visible to everyone, at a glance, the way we are working. Some key visual management techniques are:

Information Centres

An information centre is a clear and visual representation of the current state of your part of the business. It allows you to make decisions using the full information available

Key information is shown on easily visible display boards with visual triggers to show any problems

The Lean newsletter issued in the Benefits Processing Centre dated 19/09/2008 described above refers to the system of dealing with any problems raised by staff. The newsletter refers to the system whereby problem solving by the staff is formalised through what it calls 'concern strips' on which staff would record any process problems that required resolution or on which staff could suggest ideas for the improvement of processes. The newsletter referred to 'containment' as the "word on the concern strips that you use to pass on a concern or idea. Containment is basically a short term solution to the problem identified". The newsletter also referred to 'countermeasure' as "the long term solution and is monitored on an agreed basis, for example daily or weekly'. Insofar as DWP is representative of Civil Service management thinking, its approach to lean typifies the emphasis on the use of employee knowledge as a means of continuous performance improvement. Equally the techniques were those drawn from the range of tools used in other sectors.

A variety of examples from DWP illustrates how lean was extended into other parts of the organization. The second Lean Lite newsletter stated that the Blackpool Disability and Carers benefit processing centre had through the use of Lean generated in excess of 100 new ideas directly from staff. Through the removal of "unnecessary scrutiny checks", staff productivity had improved by 21% and processing time had been cut by 11%. Another part of the same newsletter stated that in Wrexham benefit processing centre the information centre directly contributed to greater productivity:

People know their suggestions will be listened to, tested and, if successful, taken forward. For example one colleague identified a way to improve maternity allowance. Three weeks later it was part of the official process guidance. The improvement shaves just 30 seconds off each application but multiply this by 800 claims a week and you get a better idea of the impact.

In addition to the lean techniques, DWP also identified individual members of staff who had defined roles and functions within the lean working process. These were described as Lean Practitioners and Experts who were "individuals who are involved in delivering Lean to the businesses". A Lean Practitioner was "an individual who can support Lean implementation across DWP businesses in line with business requirements [and] support delivery of the required customer, people and efficiency outputs". Their function under the supervision of the Lean Expert was

described as delivering “Lean “implementation activity”, “application of the Lean ways of working and techniques”, “transfer of Lean skills” and “engagement of and support to the front-Line delivery staff”. The Lean Expert was described in terms of delivering “strategic business requirements” and whose expertise was defined in terms of “Lean Skills, application and delivery (DWP and wider)”. The Expert role was senior to the Practitioner role: “leadership of Lean implementation”, “delivery of culture change” and “Lean leadership and management coaching were integral to this role⁵¹.

Although lacking the same level and type of detail available from DWP, there is also material on the use of lean in HMRC. Radnor and Bucci (2007), in their evaluation of Pacesetter, argue that HMRC management had understood four of the key principles of lean working (identifying the value stream; developing a continuous flow; introducing flow where continuous flow is impossible; and managing towards perfection (Womack and Jones, 1998). Radnor and Bucci argue that these four principles were achieved through respectively business diagnostics based on calculating work timings and assessing the geographical location of where work could most effectively be performed; standardisation of work and using visual management to achieve ‘key performance indicators; the flag system in teams⁵²; and through performance boards and structured problem solving.

From the perspective of DWP and HMRC, the intentions of their respective managements are clear. Both HMRC and DWP have sought to utilise and promote lean working across their work areas. Any deficiencies in implementation are either attributable to the restrictions on the degree or speed with which lean can be put into effect, or as a failure by both workforce and managers to understand lean’s underlying principles. Radnor (2010) argues that HMRC focused on the elimination of waste rather than on identifying customer value and did not address issues of organizational change. HMRC thus failed to address one of the central planks of lean, that of understanding the value specified by the customer (Womack and Jones, 1998). This contention that the failure of lean is one of implementation will be elaborated below. However, for the present, the point remains that government

⁵¹ All material in this paragraph is cited on the DWP Lean Intranet pages – Lean Practitioner and Expert Roles (version dated 13/05/2009)

⁵² The term is not defined in the report. However in Radnor (2010), it relates to the lean ‘pull’ system.

departments have sought to introduce a clearly identified approach under the umbrella term of lean. This form of working is manifested in specific tools and techniques based on the premise that efficiencies in delivering Civil Service work can directly accrue from this approach.

The lean approach however operates in the context of the restructuring of Civil Service work. Lean is both reliant upon and integral to that restructuring. Lean is reliant upon the restructuring for its operation in the way that each part of the organization is increasingly bound through a series of work processes that form a sequential chain from one work activity to another. Lean working would arguably fail without the forms of functionalization and standardisation introduced by management to operate throughout the departments. Lean supports and encourages increasing work functionalization and standardisation. The various parts of the Civil Service work processes increasingly resemble the form of supply chain found in other sectors (Durand, 2007). As Fairbrother (1994) and McAdam and Donaghy (1999) indicate the Civil Service has not been immune from forms of business process approaches. What arguably differentiates the use of lean from the Total Quality Management or Business Process Re-engineering initiatives of the 1990s is not anything substantively different in the content of the techniques, but the extent to which lean working can be applied by management in the context of increasing functionalization over an extended period of time supported by more sophisticated information technology systems.

4:1:2:2 Lean and the Workforce

Having explored lean working from the perspective of management this section will examine the impact of organizational change on the workforce and the inconsistencies in lean implementation.

Some respondents, it must be noted, expressed the view that they had not been affected by lean. Although there had been significant changes in the organization of their work, management in the respondents' work area had not formally endorsed or promoted lean working as a distinct approach. Yet even within those areas of the Civil Service that not been 'leaned', workers were still subject to the same organizational restructuring and to some degree often subject to tools and techniques akin to those used in more identifiably 'lean' parts of the organization. This paradox requires investigation.

The data collected from the workforce suggests that work organizational change fell into four categories. This thesis will use the following terms to develop a typology of lean: 'lean embedded', 'lean abandoned', 'lean instrumental' and 'lean replicated'. The first of these categories, 'lean embedded', is where lean was perceived by the respondents as the primary means of organizational change used by management. All aspects of the work were apparently determined by a lean approach. The research found that the first approach was manifested sometimes in the use of pilot projects that led to the rolling out of new processes in other locations. Particularly within HMRC, at the point when the interviews were conducted, lean working had been embedded into the organizational fabric of the office and all new work initiatives were being operated under the lean 'umbrella'.

The second approach, 'lean abandoned', is where the office had been subject to lean working, but over time, in the views of the respondents, its use had not been maintained.

The third approach, 'lean instrumental', is where lean was notionally advocated by management, but applied contingently to the circumstances of the individual location. In practice, its use in this approach was often marked by a lip service approach to departmental management's espoused endorsement of lean techniques. Lean served as a pragmatic device or platform on which management could develop new work processes, but where outcomes derived from these lean techniques could be ignored by management as circumstances dictated. This third approach was largely instrumental.

The final approach, 'lean replicated', is where management did not overtly use lean terminology or practices, but where the approach to organizational change used by management is similar to those used in 'lean' offices.

The differentiation between these categories is often fluid even within individual locations. However, the value of this typology is that it highlights the extent to which management employs particular techniques or tools is often not necessarily related to their effectiveness in the delivery of work outcomes. The value of these four categories is that it will help to examine the political economy of work at the micro level. Each of these categories will now be explored in more detail.

4:1:3:1 Lean Embedded

The first category, 'lean embedded', was at surface level summed up in the response to the interview question "how widespread is Lean throughout Scotland in DWP?"

I would use the word 'endemic'. It's everywhere (Interview 3, DWP Job Centre adviser, line manager and local steward)⁵³

Lean was embedded in DWP, first, by the increased use of lean techniques and tools. To this extent, it confirms that what management promoted in its internal publications was seen at a local office level. There was evidence of the increased use of daily lean meetings and the use of lean 'boards':

They have, I think in most cases a couple of meetings a week with their team leader and their Lean practitioner and they get a board, (it's all very Play School), and the idea is that we discuss whatever is relevant that day, but the purpose of the board really is to start hatching ideas about how to do things better and quicker. So that would be the forum to do that [...] to cut a long story short you would put ideas on this board, if you've any ideas or suggestions for change: that would be the place, at this meeting, a couple of times a week in front of this board (Interview 3, DWP Job Centre adviser, line manager and local steward)

Interviewee 9, a DWP line manager and local steward, stated that in his office lean meetings were scheduled to last for around 15 minutes each day with staff members expected to be absent from their desks for the duration of the meeting. Some of the lean board meetings were described as "virtual":

the Lean thing is there now where you can put any concerns you have on the Lean board. Our Lean board is now virtual. We have the first virtual Lean board in the district, but they have...when the virtual Lean board started, we had two meetings a week as a...on a 'telekit' (Interview 26, HRMC tax assessor in a call centre and local steward).

In addition to the daily lean meetings, there was also evidence of working parties comprised of staff members of clerical and managerial grades run under the

⁵³ This steward had regional responsibilities for PCS and at time point of interview was effectively on 100% union time giving him an overview of issues beyond his own location.

auspices of lean that were set up to identify how work could be done more efficiently. In some cases, these replaced or absorbed existing working parties. One respondent stated in describing his previous involvement with a focus group:

we would discuss [work processes], see if we could come up with a solution, put it to the management, and have their 'okay'. Now there was a management observer at that [forum] who took no lead role in this: this was led, led by staff for staff. It was a great thing.

He went on to reflect on the way that management absorbed the existing staff forum into a 'lean' forum:

[At] the following meeting I voiced my objections to the presence of this Lean Champion and what [management were] attempting to do and use the focus group. If [management] want a separate Lean team, then that's what they should have set up. They should not and they did, they took away a great forum where staff could raise legitimate concerns regarding process, work processes and have them...we were very successful in a lot of things that we achieved. And that was with good communications with the management, I hasten to add, who seen the benefits [...]. What they wanted to do was to use the staff forum then to implement Lean and I didn't join the staff forum to implement Lean, I'm afraid. I joined the staff forum to help staff with the process of work (Interview 1, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

Working parties under the lean umbrella were also established to review existing work procedures in discrete areas of social security work. These pilot projects would trial new working procedures that were rolled out to the rest of the UK based on an evaluation of the work processes from the pilot office. Two aspects of these pilots are noteworthy. First, the pilots appeared to be premised on equating greater efficiency with increased output even where it involved decision making functions. Part of this process involved a simplification of existing procedures. One interviewee stated:

There was a project in [name of town], I think it was, about two years, two and a half years ago, [name of town] where they initiated the electronic [laughs] Community Care Grant form. And there was...we had our on-site discussion, or Benefit Fraud Directorate discussion board where somebody was asking a question about Community Care Grant decisions and this is

where benchmarks were starting to come out and people were saying “I don’t know how we can do twelve decisions [a day]” and this guy from [name of town] came on and said “oh, we’re managing to do...well, I’m managing doing 14 to 15 because we’ve got this new Lean process [laughs] but some of the experienced ones can get more than that” so somebody sent back an email in discussion “how have you managed this?” “oh, we’re using templates” (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker, call centre)

Second, the outcome for offices whose managers had volunteered to undertake pilot projects witnessed the loss of staff due to these ‘efficiencies’:

The one in Wales that’s doing all this work is gradually getting all its core work shipped out because it’s a self-defeating prophecy because they’re doing all of this stuff and “we’ll volunteer for this and we’ll volunteer for that” and while they’re all doing this, their core work is getting sent out. And as their core work is getting sent out, their staffing’s reduced and they don’t seem to realise is what they’re doing because of one particular centre manager or one particular centre management team (Interview 9, DWP line manager and local steward in processing centre)

Many offices had staff members allocated to specific ‘lean’ duties, variously described as Champions, Experts, Coordinators, or Practitioners. These staff members had responsibility for promoting and implementing lean initiatives. Interviewee 4, a senior lay union officer in DWP stated:

[DWP] then trained, if that’s the right word, [...] people to become Lean experts in their terms or Lean practitioners and put them through a process giving them a greater background and understanding of what Lean is and what it means in the Department and then they have set up regional Lean Centres of Excellence with people dedicated to Lean and spreading the Word.

In relation to local office practice, one interviewee stated:

[Management] appoint and train up Lean Coordinators and they set up a board in the office (I think it’s called an Information Centre) where people post potential problems and discuss potential solutions (Interview 10, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

Within DWP, the use of lean was manifested through the standardisation of work processes and the attempts by management to eliminate what it considered as unnecessary steps in the process of assessing benefits. One respondent was asked to compare how he undertook the processing of his clerical work following the introduction of lean working into his work area. He describes the requirement to use what he called the Big Box:

With the introduction of Lean, and the introduction of Big Box, what's now happened is that there's no specific area that anybody deals with, you just deal with whatever comes out of the Big Box scenario. And you now, as I say, have to take three cases and they have to be done end-to-end, you can't preview and then allocate as such. Under the Lean model, you're supposed to do every single case individually from start to finish up there, but you still take a bundle of three, simply because it's easier to take three than get up and go for one case, but the idea is that even though you've got three cases on your desk you must do one case at a time. So there's no flexibility over how you do your day's job (Interview 16, DWP local steward and clerical officer))

The previous way of working where benefit processors had the autonomy to organise their work by, for example, previewing cases as a block of work prior to assessment and then processing them as they judged their time allowed was replaced by the Big Box system where all processors needed to deal with cases in a prescriptive and standardised fashion.

This standardised approach often ran in tandem with the use of Standard Operating Models. Referring to a standardised pro forma used to support the processing of benefits in a remote site, one respondent stated:

that was something that the Lean Team brought about which actually in some ways it was quite helpful [...] what they call a Standardised Work Sheet, so that whatever kind of case you're working on, you're supposed to...you would pick up this work sheet and you have to do it in the order that this Sheet says (Interview 29, DWP benefits processing team leader and local steward))

This use of Standard Operating Models, evidence of whose use predates the use of lean within DWP (e.g. Aylen (2007)⁵⁴) is consistent with the way that lean working was based around standardisation of work processes (Womack *et al.*, 1990; Ohno, 1988a). Most of the DWP interviewees⁵⁵ commented on the use of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) in their work areas. A senior full time lay officer in PCS in DWP stated:

Most businesses have now got what are called Standard Operating Models and Standard Operating Approaches which by and large tell every member of staff what to do and the ability to introduce any initiatives or deviation from that is, quite frankly, frowned on (Interview 4)

In response to the question asking him to describe the origin of SOMs within DWP, he added:

management came up with them on...I'm not entirely sure at what level, but these Standard Operating Models suddenly started to appear because it would appear because of management's obsession with standardisation as a cost saving measure, but equally there's a measure of control. When you move into an organization with so many fewer middle and senior managers that operating model approach is seen as a replacement for managers (interview 4)

The widespread use of SOMs is indicative of a common management approach to the standardisation of work typified in lean systems. The fact that SOMs predated lean within DWP suggests that this approach to the processing of work both acted as a framework upon which management could attempt to more effectively initiate lean practices and thereafter to embed lean within the organization.

Evidence from other Civil Service departments confirms that this embedded lean approach is found more widely. Interviews from HMRC confirmed that management had attempted to embed lean approaches into the fabric of the organization through the use of their equivalent of the SOM, described variously as Standard Process Descriptions, Standard Operating Procedures and Standard Work

⁵⁴ Documented evidence of the Standard Operating Model dates from 2004.

⁵⁵ Eighteen out of 21 DWP semi-structured interviews referred to SOMs were being used in their work areas.

Instructions. Interviewee 13, a tax assessor and local steward in HMRC, referred to the existence of 12 or 14 different procedures in the large processing centre in which she worked exemplified by the description of one specific process:

You get a pension form appeal 161. You go to the SPD, you open it up, and it in theory it takes you step by step through everything you should do with hyperlinks into the Pay-As-You-Earn manual

There was a clear correlation between the way work was organised around the standardisation of the 161 form and the way that lean was being used to stream or functionalise the work.

Each stream of work had a separate performance target. Interviewee 13, a tax assessor and local steward in HMRC, stated that lean and the Pacesetter programme was the means by which management initiated these performance targets or key performance indicators (KPIs). The streaming of work made it easier for management to allocate a target to each block of work. She stated:

the thing is about Lean, it's now Pacesetter, [...] what that allows [management] to do is stream the work and we've got 11 streams here in this place and you wouldn't think about it, but you take the P161 form and that form can now be divided into maybe three or four streams: one, low income; two, two incomes; three incomes; four incomes; five incomes. So they're all different streams and each one of them has got a separate KPI, so it just depends on which stream you're working on and what KPI you have [to] attain. So there isn't one fixed KPI.

In contrast to the interviewee in DWP dealing with the Big Box scenario where in his office, lean was used to maintain a form of whole case working with someone dealing with the case end to end, in HMRC there was evidence of the demise of whole case working. One interviewee stated:

I think it seems to be it's about splitting things up so that people are doing less and less and therefore doing it quicker and...but the problem is what it takes you away from is 'whole case' working, as I said before, and if you're not 'whole case' working, so many things can slip through the net and so all these people out there with the wrong tax code (Interviewee 14, HMRC tax processor and local steward)

The forms of standardisation found within lean working have a degree of similarity to forms of standardisation that have traditionally been found in the Civil Service. However lean working is different from the traditional bureaucratic forms of standardisation required to maintain probity and consistency of approach. Lean working is premised not only on standardising the instructions needed to carry out work processes, but also in standardising how workers interact with these instructions. Briefly stated, it is not simply about *what* people do: it is about *how* they do it. In the context of an environment where the number of line managers is reduced and those who remain have less autonomy of action, standardising processes fulfil a surrogate management role.

4:1:3:2 Lean Abandoned

Although some interviewees noted the widespread use of lean working, there was also evidence from other interviewees that the visible manifestations of the lean system of working had been implemented but subsequently been abandoned or neglected. The evidence of this waning in the use of lean systems came from DWP sources. There were a variety of instances where lean processes were no longer explicitly used. In response to the question asking him to describe the current duties or functions of the Lean Team, this reply was given:

They sit in a room. And I'm [laughs] telling you that's all (Interview 1, DWP Social Fund decision maker, processing centre)

In one of the group discussions, Interviewees 18 to 21 stated that their Lean Team continued in existence, but appeared to be doing work unconnected with lean. Interviewee 1 stated that the Lean Champion role in his office had effectively gone into abeyance. Despite earlier efforts in that office to promote lean working through, for example, hosting training events where staff could view how Standard Operating Procedures would work in that location, there was little evidence that the Lean Champion had currently any obvious role in developing work processes. Another respondent in a different location stated that:

Lean was around when I started, 'cos I remember reading about it during my induction, but it didn't kick-start here until about two years ago when two people were appointed as Lean Officers and the information boards have all been set up, but then we had a little five minute 'stand up' meetings. They

didn't really come to anything (Interviewee 30, DWP administrative officer in specialised processing team and local steward)

Other interviewees confirmed that lean meetings had been introduced, but subsequently abandoned. Many of the offices in which interviewees worked brought in lean meetings and information boards. Interviewee 24, a Fraud Officer in DWP, stated that between October 2010 and the date on which he was interviewed, a period of four months, no lean meetings had been held in his work area. One interviewee said that her office had undergone an extensive lean programme when it was first introduced into her Job Centre. It involved the realignment of staff members' desks, reorganising stationery supplies and daily 'buzz' meetings held each morning. However she added in relation to the lean meetings:

I haven't attended one in about six or seven months. I think they've kinda fallen by the wayside. I know that sections do still have meetings, but that, you know, they don't have the five minute buzz round the Lean board that I'm aware of now (Interview 38, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)]

The evidence suggests that it was relatively common for management to bring in lean initiatives with a degree of vigour, but activities such as the lean meetings were often only used for a limited period of time. Interviewee 30, a DWP administrative officer in a specialist processing team and local steward, stated in relation to lean activities in his office:

nothing was implemented, no, because it kind of disappeared before it really got up and running

No single reason provides an explanation for the apparent abandonment of lean procedures. In interview 1, the type of work performed in this location shortly after the completion of this interview shifted from the remote processing of social security benefits in paper and electronic form to the delivery of Social Fund decision making over the telephone. Another interviewee stated:

Apart from the fact we've now been allocated three Lean Practitioners [...], I would say in general terms it's not used by anyone. We have nominal Lean boards in each section which the theory is that any proposed change in working practice would go up there, be discussed at team meetings and be collated and centralised and raised at a higher level, but in practice they're

not really...they haven't really been utilised in the last seven or eight months, but there's a view to re-initiate that process within the next few weeks. So Lean's effectively been suspended and is not really practically applied by individuals on a day to day basis in the office. (Interview 33, DWP Social Fund decision maker and local steward)

One of the reasons that lean was effectively abandoned within the telephony environment was arguably due in part to the work intensification that occurred in the shift from one type of social security benefit delivery to another. It was also stated that the cuts in staffing had made it impossible for staff members to attend these daily meetings

we're at the coalface, so we can't come away at nine or half nine or ten o'clock [...] even it's for five minutes, we can't all get away at the same time (Interview 38, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

Furthermore, the increased use of metrics in measuring performance and management attempts to limit the amount of time where operators were not on the telephone constrained management's attempts to actively use the types of tools and techniques found elsewhere. Put simply, to achieve the performance targets set out by management required the abandonment of some of the lean techniques found elsewhere.

Another reason given by respondents was that lean failed to deliver the continuous improvement promised by management. Initiatives often had an impact in the initial stages. Interviewee 24, in relation to his Fraud work, stated that the impact of lean had been the loss of a staff member and an increase in his work. He stated that junior managerial officers had to construct their own files rather than rely on clerical staff to do that job for them. However other interviewees stated that new procedures introduced through lean pilots failed to deliver any efficiency savings and in fact generated more work per case. Interviewee 5, a Social Fund officer, stated in relation to the assessment of Community Care Grants, that a pilot project had resulted in the replacement of a clerical decision form with a decision done 'on-line'. He reflected:

we saw some of these [pilot] decisions and they were possibly some of the worst things you could possibly see and I think it died a death. I mean

electronic 902s⁵⁶ for CCGs did come in, but when it came in last year decision makers ended up taking twice as long [laughs] to do decisions using this one, [...] and that was supposed to be a Lean document

Reflecting on how lean affected his office, he commented:

in practical terms for us, no, I don't think there's anything really that Lean has impacted in any shape or form

Despite the contention that lean provides the opportunity to generate continuous improvement, the evidence from the interviewees challenges this view. Other than short term efficiency savings, often expressed in terms of staff cuts, lean failed to generate the ongoing efficiency savings promised. Paradoxically, some of the changes in work practice resulted in greater inefficiency which suggests an important reason why lean initiatives were not maintained. Under lean abandoned, there was little evidence of ongoing or continuous attempts by management to increase efficiency through lean techniques or tools.

4:1:3:3 Lean Instrumental

The third approach to lean, 'lean instrumental' is one which appears to treat lean working in a more instrumental fashion. Managers in local offices gave lip service to lean processes enforcing their use to the extent that they were seen to be conforming to instructions from more senior tiers of management. Alternatively lean working was utilised in a more authoritarian manner ostensibly used to enforce discipline rather than have any pretence of engaging staff in problem-solving activities. Its use was also instrumental to the extent that lean techniques were manipulated to achieve management objectives.

As evidence of the 'lip service' approach to lean, in the course of attendance at a DWP branch committee⁵⁷ meeting, two stewards who held supervisory roles stated that they did not hold weekly 'lean' meetings. One line manager stated that he was in charge of a team of 26 members of staff doing basic administrative duties. He was supposed to hold a weekly meeting with his staff, but he expressed the view that his team had no interest in lean. With the tacit approval of his own line

⁵⁶ SF902 was the name of the clerical form on which Community Care Grant decisions were recorded.

⁵⁷ Interview 25: DWP PCS Branch meeting 11/02/2011

manager, he stated that provided he gave assurances that the meetings were religiously held, did not actually hold 'lean' meetings. At this same branch meeting, another supervisor stated that the lean boards were used as partitions rather than their intended purposes for performance management information. At another interview, it was stated managers in her office were "pragmatic" about lean:

[managers]'ll do what they're [told] 'to tick a box' or whatever (Interview 15, DWP steward in processing centre)

What appeared important from this perspective was the appearance or pretence, rather than the practice, of conformity to departmental management instructions on the use of lean working particularly as it related to such techniques as lean meetings and boards. Senior office management was complicit in this pretence. The line manager at the branch committee meeting described how lean came in as "a big bang", but in his office it was now a cosmetic exercise "made to be seen".

The 'lip service' approach was also seen in the way it was used to avoid dealing with problematic issues. Rather than address the concerns over inefficient working practices, lean was used by some managers to avoid dealing with problems. One of the functions of the lean boards was to record staff concerns. When new procedures were introduced, staff members often identified problems in implementing new processes. Staff members were sometimes told that they needed to wait until their weekly lean meeting to raise issues at which point the matter would be recorded in an issues log as a "concern". One interviewee commented:

staff still get the option and the ability to communicate their concerns. Usually management will set up an issues log and [...] because it's time [consuming] "if you've got a complaint about a process that you're doing or a query, put it into the issues log and we will see what we can do with it". I was always in favour of the face to face approach where we used to be able to go up and say "this isn't working; I want to have a meeting about why this isn't working" which tends not to be the case now. It's a bit faceless: "we know you've got a concern, just write it down electronically and then we'll have a look at it." (Interview 28, DWP benefits assessor in processing centre and local steward)

Lean techniques were ostensibly used, but for this interviewee this way of dealing with staff members' concerns served as a means of avoiding problematic issues.

The problem solving mechanisms used in lean were seen by interviewees as ineffective. Staff members, who could have formerly raised issues as they arose, were constrained into dealing with problems in a formulaic fashion that failed to take into account the urgency with which some issues needed to be handled. Moreover, even where problems were recorded, the issues were often not resolved. Where potential solutions to problems did not fit with management's objectives, problematic issues were either ignored or dismissed. In response to a question about the effectiveness of the lean boards, Interviewee 28, a DWP benefits assessor in processing centre and local steward, stated:

I would probably say it is very ineffectual. That's just a personal opinion. It's seems to be that unless it has got a...unless the problem has a specific maybe health and safety implication or a stress factor implication, and not even then that [management] don't take cognizance of a lot of the stuff that's going. The line managers do agree in many cases that maybe things could change, but if it's not the flavour of the month or if it's not the way that senior department wants to do it, then it doesn't seem to be rectified easily.

Although lean boards were positioned in their workplaces ostensibly to record, among other things, work issues that required resolution, one of the interviewees at the branch meeting (interviews 18 to 21) stated that it was rare for final resolutions to be logged on the board effectively leaving the issue outstanding.

The instrumental use of lean also gave licence to managers to control the workforce. One respondent stated in relation to the lean meetings in her office:

Now the Lean board was literally right behind my desk, but you had to get up and stand in front of it, 'cos you're not allowed to sit which again is pointless bureaucracy from my point of view. (DWP benefits processor and local steward, interview 27)

To this extent, the use of lean techniques might be seen as an amalgam of personal control exercised by dictatorial managers and a form of bureaucratic control where specific techniques were used to exercise control based on the adherence to administrative rules. However with the rhetoric of lean premised on worker participation, managers used lean techniques as a further means to exercise direct control over staff. Any objections raised by the workforce questioning lean techniques and their outcomes could be rebutted by managers: managers could use

the standardised instructions as a justification for enforcing adherence to the lean procedures that they wanted the workforce to follow.

This instrumental approach to lean was manifested by management using lean as a basis for changes, but also ignoring the findings of lean pilot studies if the expected efficiency savings were not generated. One full time lay official in DWP (Interviewee 4) referred to “guerrilla lean”, the way in which local managers attempted to create local variants of processes that had previously been subject to negotiation at national level between PCS and DWP management. He believed that this was done sometimes with the cognizance of more senior managers and sometimes because local managers could not achieve the performance targets through the existing lean processes. He stated:

if [managers] can use Lean as a vehicle to chop out chunks of what they view as awkward time-consuming parts of the process, then, yes, they will do that

One steward working in a Job Centre described the introduction of a lean pilot in his area where to improve job broking targets each job seeker interview was allotted an additional amount of time. However with the longer interviews generating the need for more staff time, the Lean Coordinator was under instruction by his management to re-examine the timings. The steward opined:

But from my mind, pressure from elsewhere in the organization meant that [the Lean Coordinator went] into that with a pre-determined objective, so in my mind it's almost like he's doing a role for management. It's badged as Lean, but, you know, where is the participation and where's the involvement? I don't see it. (DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward, interview 10)

Despite the fact that a lean pilot had identified the value of additional time for each job seeking interview and that staff endorsed the value of that additional time, management would at times only use lean systems to the extent that these could generate efficiency savings. The premise of lean that workforce participation was integral to its value as a means of increasing performance efficiency was realised only to the extent that it fitted with management's agenda. Efficiency, defined largely in terms of cost efficiency, was on that basis on management's terms.

4:1:3:4 Lean Replicated

The fourth and final category describes those parts of the organization where management made no direct or overt reference to lean production yet where the approach to organizational change was substantially similar to those offices where lean was promoted by management. The similarities of approach were manifested by the encroachment of forms of working little different to what would be described as lean working in other locations.

The practical impact of 'lean replicated' was often seen in attempts by management to use approaches to work organization premised on the standardisation of work processes. This was often done by aligning the existing ways of organising work with forms of work organization analogous to those found in more overtly lean locations. Interviewee 7, a HRMC junior manager, stated how she believed that the team meetings in which she already participated achieved what she believed lean was intend to accomplish, namely a means to resolve problems using the knowledge and skills of the existing workforce. She anticipated that within the next six weeks that her team would need to adopt the system used in other HMRC locations for logging and reporting problems on a lean board, but that currently her team had freedom to resolve problems in its own way. Elsewhere, there were also attempts by management to standardise work processes in identical fashion to more obviously 'leaned' offices. Another respondent stated:

[Name of government department in Scottish Government] have a full set of SOPs, Standing...Standard Operating Procedures. [...] Just basically desk instructions for every process that we do (Scottish Government administrative officer and local steward, interview 36)

In lean replicated, opinions on whether people worked under lean varied. For some interviewees, the lean title was the determining factor. Interviewee 8, a line manager and local steward in Scottish Government, equated lean with "conveyor belt" working where work was broken down into "pretty menial mundane tasks". Because she worked in a specialist area of government, she did not believe that she was affected by lean. Interviewee 7 said she had never "experienced" lean. Interviewees sometimes equated lean with a set of techniques applied in a particular way. However, one steward opined in relation to the question whether lean was operated in his office:

[Lean has] always been threatening and always been looming and we're always being told, it's always being mentioned "Lean will come to us as some stage, it's probably on its way, we're gonna get it at some point", all these, sort of you know, but it's never actually came to us. But what they have said to us is they kind of do in our office a lot of what Lean's about anyway. They're constantly reviewing and looking at work processes and workloads and trying to put in measures to streamline it (Interview 6, DWP benefits processer and local steward)

Interviewee 17, a pensions decision maker and local steward, had learned of lean through his union contacts and had read information on the DWP intranet site, but he stated:

I mean officially the word 'lean' has never been mentioned in the [name of location] Pensions Centre, well [not] to me anyway

He stated that there were no Lean Champions, for example, operating in his location. However he added referring to the way management organised work in his location:

I suppose it probably is 'lean' because every other section, everybody only does certain bits of work, [has a] clear desk

To what extent this data reflected the prelude to the introduction of more overtly lean forms of work organization is to some degree speculative. Furthermore, it might also be argued that there may be a distinction between those government departments such as HMRC and DWP that have adopted lean as their operating model and those such as Scottish Government where that department had not endorsed lean⁵⁸. However the degree of similarity of approach suggests that the issue of how one theorises lean is broader than merely examining a set of techniques. Some of the interviewees recognised that 'lean' existed even where management appeared not to acknowledge or use the lean designation for their approach to the organization of work.

⁵⁸ A preliminary study had been undertaken by Scottish Government into lean (Radnor *et al.*, 2006), but Stewart G advised that lean has not been taken forward.

4:2 Theorising Lean at Workplace Level

The variety of ways in which organizational change has been implemented by management at local office level provides a challenge in analysing lean systems. On the one hand, lean could simply be seen as an approach to work premised on the application of various management techniques. In these terms, the success of lean would be evaluated to the extent that these processes were successfully implemented and applied. Hence as Radnor and Bucci (2007) argue, the application of lean within HMRC was not wholly successful, but with the appropriate application of the correct 'levers', the lean approach could operate effectively. On the other hand, viewing lean as an approach to work reliant on either endorsing a set of principles or copying a set of techniques will fail to capture the political economy of work at workplace level. This final part of this chapter will contend that Civil Service management's approach to work change transcends the utilisation of any specific business improvement technique. Despite management's apparently inconsistent approach to lean a theoretical approach based on the political economy of work ties the various strands of work restructuring into a coherent whole.

The final part of this chapter will challenge the assertion that lean should be seen in terms of the application of specific techniques. Although, as will become apparent, this approach fails to give adequate weight to the political economy of work, its popularity in academic and management practitioner circles is such that some attention needs to be given to its rebuttal.

There are arguably two levels at which lean as a business improvement method needs to be explored. There is on one level, what Womack and Jones (1998) contend are the principles of lean relating respectively to specifying value, identifying the value stream, uninterrupted value flow, the 'pull' principle and the achievement of perfection. There was however very little evidence that these principles had any resonance with the interviewees. These terms were rarely used by interviewees in their discussion of lean. Interviewee 11, a tax processor and local steward, was one of the few who discussed it. He stated:

for a long time 'flow' was God, although the transition of 'flow' from a manufacturing environment to a clerical environment didn't sit well, so [HMRC management] actually had to deconstruct the tax return process to artificially introduce 'flow'.

DWP departmental management did use this type of lean terminology in attempting to publicise lean within their departments, but it can reasonably be argued that these principles were not embedded into the popular consciousness of staff. Equally, if lean is premised on returning responsibility to the workforce eliminating, if not the intensity of Taylorist forms of work, then the division between the conception and execution of work (Womack *et al.*, 1990), worker knowledge becomes a source of advantage to the organization. However the data provides limited evidence of attempts by management to allow worker knowledge to influence the operation of processes at office level. The opposite mostly holds true in that management increasingly sought to limit workforce participation.

The failure to implement lean either at a level of underlying principles or employee involvement does give rise to the criticism that what is being implemented may be changes in the organization of work, but these changes cannot be called 'lean' (Hines *et al.*, 2004; Delbridge, 1998). On this basis, the extent that government departments have in reality introduced lean working could be called into question. Furthermore, at an operational level, in terms of the specific techniques or tools associated with lean working, whilst it was apparent these were used, their use was limited and inconsistently applied. It was clear from the data that management at local level used various forms of visual management and workforce meetings to attempt to generate greater operational efficiency and utilise worker knowledge. However this limited and inconsistent approach to changing the organization of work also raises the question to what extent the approaches used by management in the Civil Service were genuinely 'lean'. Hines *et al.* (2004) argue that using lean merely as an operational tool fails to utilise the fundamental advantages of lean that are based around its use as a strategic approach. Using lean solely as a cost reduction measure is at odds with the principles of lean that seek to generate improvements in quality and public service (Hines *et al.*, 2004; Seddon and Brand, 2008). Consequently in this line of argument, the failure to use lean in an appropriate fashion is but a manifestation of a failure to apply a lean approach at a strategic level. It coheres with the contention that lean has been *adapted*, but not *adopted* by Civil Service management (Radnor, 2010). However whilst this argument may have some resonance, it fails to capture issues relating to the political economy of work. The apparent misapplication of lean, both principles and techniques, has a more convincing explanation elsewhere.

What is critical in evaluating lean in relation to changes in work organization is a need to focus on the context of these changes. Focusing solely on the utility of a set of techniques or evaluating the strategy of lean as nothing other than a neutral business improvement process disembodies the use of lean systems from the political and economic context of these changes. What is common to each of the four categorisations of lean discussed above is their specific context within the broader political economy of work. As Littler (1982) argues in relation to changes in the organization of work in relation to other work sectors, Civil Service management will systematise work to the extent that matches the needs of capital in any given situation. Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) argue in relation to their 'productive model' approach that critical to understanding the organization of capital at the micro level are the 'product policy' and 'the productive organization'. Furthermore, they hold that different styles of work organization can exist within the same industry and within the same national economy provided these are coherent and viable with the national political-economic architecture.

The terms 'product policy' and "productive organization' in the productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) should not, however, be applied uncritically from private to public sector. It is important to remember that the productive model approach draws much of its conceptualisation from examining how manufacturing firms in the motor vehicle sector dealt with markets, types, range and quality of products, and the methods by which these firms organised their work and workforce to create these products. The extent to which these terms, derived from conceptualising the production of commodities, can be mapped on to public sector delivery of services on behalf of the state needs justification. Ultimately as Moody (2011) highlights in relation to the UK health sector, the state's increasing attempts to commodify the provision of public services through a quasi-market within the public sector, any service delivered by the state is increasingly treated as a product or commodity. The state services delivered are subject to commodification albeit subject to the economic and political constraints that prevent full marketization of the public sector. If the 'product policy' of the Civil Service is understood in these terms, relating to the commodification of public services, the 'productive organization' can be more clearly understood as the ways in which work is restructured and integrated to effect that commodification. Civil Service work although distinct from other parts of the public sector insofar as it is linked to the apparatus of government is still

premised on the basis of workers selling their labour power or allowing others to do the same (Fairbrother, 1994).

Despite the inconsistent application of lean practices, the form of productive organization found within the Civil Service has an underlying level of coherence. The four conceptions of lean (lean embedded, lean abandoned, lean instrumental and lean replicated) are united through several features that provide a coherent analysis of changes in the organization of work at the local office level. Changes in work organization were used as a vehicle to secure increased control over the production processes. The forms of standardisation used, whether the lean epithet was present or not, reflect the attempts by management to use common standards of approach. The rhetoric of management may suggest that forms of standardisation are piloted and thus apparently proven to generate greater levels of efficiency⁵⁹. However this standardisation of work is consistent with the contention that lean systems are introduced in periods of declining profitability (Stewart *et al.*, 2009). Even in areas where specific lean practices were abandoned or used instrumentally, Civil Service management maintained their attempts to implement control over the way work was undertaken. All the interview respondents were aware of the attempts to generate efficiency savings even if these attempts were not directly associated in the minds of the interviewees with lean working. The way that work was organised in the 'Lean abandoned' approach often only resulted when management found more efficient means of processing work and dispensed with the lean techniques which it had previously endorsed. The 'lean instrumental' approach was equally premised on utilising the lean epithet only insofar as it was useful for managing control. The variations in the control of processes reflect the influence of mitigating factors relating to the individual office sites and the degree of control that management found necessary to generate process efficiencies. Thus, the level of control in the telephony site lacked the application of lean techniques, but had significantly higher levels of standardisation. On the other hand, small remotely managed sites doing bespoke atypical work were subject to increased attempts at standardisation, but lacked the high levels of monitoring and the rigid application of techniques associated with lean.

⁵⁹ The degree of secrecy in which the Civil Service operates leaves the claims of greater efficiency unproven at an empirical level: the statistical information is not available to external researchers.

Through various forms of standardisation, management had sought to remove workforce autonomy from the production process. This removal of autonomy is fundamental to management's attempts to organise and restructure the labour process. Historically, Civil Service work, by its nature as a public service, followed codified instructions for reasons of public probity, fairness and consistency. The removal of autonomy under lean systems of work is specifically premised on eliminating variants in work practice as a means of control. The use of standardised work procedures in lean systems suggests rather than a measured or rational response to find more efficient ways of working that their use was a *post hoc* rationalisation to reflect the intensification of work and reduction in staffing levels created by cuts in departmental budgets. Respondents were sceptical about the impact on lean in their jobs. One steward stated:

I spoke to a [Lean] practitioner this morning and asked for an example of the sort of things that [Lean]'s achieved. She gave me one example. I said to her "could you give you another five?" and she said "no, not yet" (DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward, interview 3)

However, another steward argued that within HMRC his management adopted this *post hoc* justification to support the effectiveness of lean when in reality it was used to manage problems created by cuts in financial resources:

Well, [HMRC management] were unapologetic in that they said right at the beginning "Lean will save us twelve and a half thousand jobs in processing. So they reverse engineered it. They knew the number was twelve and a half thousand. They brought in Lean and tried to drive it to deliver these savings while still doing the work. What it's proved [is] that they've cut the jobs, the amount of work on hand's gone through the roof, but they still claim that Pacesetter's a success (HRMC tax processor and local steward, interview 11)

The four types of lean are united not only because they reflect management's attempts to control the state labour process, but also because they reflect the way that management tries to control the labour control in very specific ways. The 'politics of production' (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998) is premised on exercising that control by attempts to limit worker autonomy. The use of standardised processes forms one strand of this approach where the replacement of

the autonomy of line managers to organise the work of their sections is replaced in effect by adherence to standardised procedures. It is, as before, mitigated to the extent that certain parts of the work require greater levels of standardisation than others and the degree to which each part of the organization links to other parts. Specific lean techniques such as visual management and daily team meetings may be used inconsistently and superficially, however what these techniques do convey is the ability of management to increase control of the working day. Whereas previously local office management could allow their staff to organise their working day permitting a significant degree of autonomy, the advent of lean working required staff to attend meetings with line managers at a time and in a format prescribed at a departmental level. The fact that in practical terms these techniques achieved little of value for the participants may be less significant than the fact that management was increasingly making efforts to not only structure the processing of work, but the ordering of the working day.

The final theme in relation to the nature of lean at local office level is the way in which organizational change is used to elicit worker knowledge as a means of improving efficiency. Clearly there were individuals involved in structured forms of organizational change, who had either volunteered for working groups, pilot projects or who had been selected by their management to, for example, become Lean Practitioners. However other than *ad hoc* groups organised to deal with specific issues, the data suggested staff involvement was generally at the level of attending various types of lean meetings that management expected all workers to attend and that were scheduled into the working week at designated times. A steward and line manager in a Job Centre (Interview 3) stated that “most folk just think it’s their job to go along with this and to a put a happy face on and go”. He and other respondents confirmed that existing mechanisms for workers to participate in work improvement had been subsumed or replaced with designated lean meetings. As described above, Interviewee 1 withdrew from what he described as a staff-led forum (“this was led, led by staff for staff”) after the management observer was in effect replaced by a Lean Champion who wanted to use the forum to implement specific lean initiatives within the office.

There was a paradox between the way that management used the rhetoric of continuous improvement and the reality of its use. What is arguably important is the way in which the organization of work was undertaken, not as a source of problem

solving, but as an alternative source of authority to the existing modes of engaging with worker knowledge. How these lean approaches were used to counteract the strength of collective labour will be examined in a later chapter, but for the present what is critical is, that with limited exceptions, Civil Service management circumscribed the ways in which the workforce could contribute their knowledge. The critical factor is the way in which employee participation at work is controlled in terms of an organizational system determined by management. It is naïve to believe that these lean fora provided nothing of value⁶⁰, but ultimately the contribution of the workforce was increasingly circumscribed and directed towards management's ends, and not for the benefit of the workforce. Even where lean meetings were used instrumentally, there was little scope for workforce-generated solutions to resolve workplace problems. Ultimately the contention that systems of work organization, such as lean, enhance continuous improvement through the use of worker knowledge is chimerical: lean systems apparently developed to facilitate the use of worker knowledge were structured to enhance and support management objectives. As will become apparent in the discussion on the trade union response to lean, the management agenda seeks to limit workforce contribution. The need to generate efficiency costs, or to manage the efficiencies, does not permit the workforce to contribute any suggestions for improved work processes where that fails to accord with an agenda premised on efficiency savings.

Ultimately the nature of work organizational change within the Civil Service at the micro or office level is increasingly governed by a system of control underpinned by an agenda set at the macro level to reduce spending and increase efficiencies. The attempts by management to generate worker compliance were increasingly premised on controlling the state labour process supported by a rhetoric based on utilising worker knowledge to increase efficiency. The reality is, however, although there is limited scope for staff to provide their knowledge, this is within narrowly defined boundaries. The techniques and tools of lean relate more to the attempts by management to control the effort expended by the workforce during the working day than any inherent value in these processes. The degree to which the actual tools and techniques of organizational change are used is mitigated by the specific circumstances of the local office. At one extreme (such as in the call centre

⁶⁰ The pilot scheme that gave additional interview time to help job seekers into work described above was initially well received by staff members as beneficial.

environment) management has the greater capacity to manage performance using the available technology without the need to use additional techniques or tools. At the other extreme, local Civil Service management either lacked the capacity or willingness to implement control through lean techniques. Using the epithet 'lean working' has worth not in indicating anything about the efficacy of specific techniques or principles, but does have value in providing a convenient shorthand to describe a system of work organization premised on controlling the labour process derived from a marketised political-economic architecture. The 'lean' epithet has value for management insofar as it disguises the nature of the productive organization. Any failures in the application of lean can be attributed to the misapplication of specific techniques thus providing a convenient scapegoat for failures in the application of lean processes. In highlighting that one large HMRC office had 70,000 items of unprocessed mail in an office, interviewee 11 placed the blame on lean working⁶¹ and yet their management continued to persevere with lean working.

The productive organization of the Civil Service is not now ultimately based on utilising worker knowledge, but based on changing the material conditions under which civil servants work with the aim of maximising output from the workforce. The compartmentalisation of the work at the meso level formed the basis on which standardisation could take place. Standardisation is manifested in the processes adopted to deal with the work, the removal of the autonomy of the way that individual workers can organise their work and the restricted ways in which the workforce is given the capacity to contribute its knowledge. The variation in the way that work organizational change is implemented at the local level, as Boyer and Freyssenet (2002) argue, may vary in precise form. It may even lack the 'lean' epithet. However the nature of changes in the organization of work as it relates to the productive organization of the Civil Service derives from its relationship to the way that the state at macro level is seeking to marketise the public sector and how this is implemented at the departmental or meso level. Management thus attempts to change the productive organization of the Civil Service such that it coheres with

⁶¹ He stated that the measure used to calculate 'outstanding mail' was the number of days that had elapsed since the mail had been received in the office and on which staff members were now working. Local office management formerly described a figure of 28 days as a "crisis". The figure at point of interview was running at 65 days.

the 'products', the public sector services that are themselves subject to marketization. The Civil Service labour process is, as Fairbrother (1994) argues, distinct from other UK work sectors with civil servants working as both agents and employees of the state. With no buffer between the workforce and the state, changes in work organization impact directly on the material conditions under which civil servants work. The Civil Service comprises a range of different work areas and to that extent management control of the labour process has to be exercised in the context of disparate organizational forms and job functions. What unites these separate forms and functions is, however, its subjection to the state's increasing attempts of marketization. The variations in the Civil Service work equate no less to lean than if they followed identical approaches.

The next section will examine the ways in which these lean systems of work impact on workforce skills.

Chapter 5: The Impact of Lean on Skills

The previous chapter argued the merits of lean for management are not primarily based on its effectiveness as a set of techniques or tools. The value of lean for management comes from the way it is used to control the labour process within a specific political-economic architecture. Lean working is found in different forms, yet is consistent with attempts to, as the previous chapter argues, achieve certain aims. Those aims are to standardise work processes, both the procedures themselves and how workforce interact with those work processes, and to attempt to use worker knowledge within very narrow limits to support management objectives. Each of these aims are consistent with a marketised political-economic architecture where the logic of the market determines how work should be performed. These lean forms, “embedded”, “abandoned”, “instrumental” and “replicated”, are each underpinned by a marketised form of work organization.

This chapter will examine the impact of lean on workers’ skills. If as Braverman (1974) contends, deskilling is integral to management attempting to gain control over the labour process, then the direction of skill becomes a crucial factor in evaluating the extent to which lean production systems in the Civil Service are used by management to control the state labour process. The second research question asks what impact lean has on the skills used by civil servants, particularly those that enable civil servants to undertake decision making functions. The chapter will examine the direction of skill under these two component parts.

The chapter will argue that whilst there is some evidence to suggest that substantive job complexity has increased and is therefore an indicator of increasing skills, the direction of skill is on a downward trajectory due to the significant reduction in the amount of autonomy control that workers can exercise in their jobs. The chapter will explore the direction of skill viewed in relation to the four categories of lean described in the previous chapter.

5:1 Substantive Job Complexity

Substantive job complexity will be evaluated in terms of length of training; time taken to do the job well; level, scope and integration of skills; and the importance of

particular activities to the performance of the job⁶² (Field, 1980; Spenner, 1983; Felstead *et al.*, 2004).

5:1:1 Length of Training

The first area to be examined is the length of training for the job. This element arguably is the most straightforward and objective measure of job complexity. The general, albeit not universal, trend, was to reduce the length of training periods for new entrants or those changing job functions. Reflecting on their experience in the previous five years, interviewees referred to the reduction in the length of training allocated to social security benefit assessment training. Interviewee 4, a full time lay officer in DWP Group, referred to the reduction in the time allocated for the standard classroom based training course. It had gone from 13 weeks to 6 weeks and subsequently to 10 days. Training courses for other job functions saw similar reductions. Even for those job functions that included quasi-legal decision making, reductions were in evidence. Interviewee 35 stated that to enable her to undertake the Social Fund decision maker role in a telephony section she received two weeks of training. The background knowledge of the interviewees gained from extended periods of work within the Civil Service would arguably mitigate the impact in the reductions in the time allotted to training courses. The reduction, however, in training periods had more impact for new staff lacking background knowledge of the Civil Service derived from previous work experience. New staff members were often restricted to short training periods related to a specific part of a job, often carried out 'on the job' shadowing more experienced members of staff. Interviewee 32, a line manager in DWP, stated that his staff had received a half day's training to undertake basic computer input work in one particular work area. Newer staff referred to training being limited to several days' job shadowing and generic induction events. There was evidence to indicate in some areas that training periods were being maintained and classroom training was used to allow workers to undertake their quasi-legal functions, but this tended to be found in atypical areas of work⁶³. For the majority of the interviewees, the trend was to reduce the length of training and to shift the form of training away from classroom teaching to 'on the job' training.

⁶² Job qualifications were not covered in the field work: external or previously gained qualifications were not significant for the types of work studied in this project.

⁶³ Interviewee 23 working in the Home Office noted the continuing use of externally validated qualifications and extended training courses lasting around 6 weeks.

Interviewee 9, a line manager in a processing area and local steward, quoted a manager who in discussion with a new member of staff had said in relation to that new job “you’ll pick it up as you go along”.

The reduction in periods allocated to training must also be seen in relation to training content. Interviewees noted that training was used by management to address specific areas of work rather than give an overview of the full range of the job functions of the departments in which they worked. A senior full time lay PCS officer in DWP in addressing why training periods had been reduced stated:

Nowadays it’s a week, ten days maximum, because a lot of the work that processors do and call centre people do does not require in-depth knowledge of benefit entitlement conditions (interview 4)

There was little evidence that training was used to provide trainees with any information on the background or specific contexts of their jobs. The function of training was to provide workers the means to achieve management’s performance targets. The trend was to reduce the amount of time even on those jobs that required the exercise of some form of decision making authority. The downward direction of skill was exacerbated by the way that training was more limited in scope. It was also exacerbated by the way that the reduction in training periods sought to limit the capacity of trainees to react and modify their abilities to the wider environment of the departments in which they worked.

The evidence suggests that with the adoption of lean, there was a reduction in the time allocated to training and its content. The inherent contradiction of lean is that lean jobs increasingly focus on narrowly defined tasks that consequently require shorter training periods. Lean fails to address the deskilling that accompanies what must inevitably arise from shorter training periods that focus only on a limited range of job tasks. Management used lean to redefine jobs in order that work can be accomplished without recourse to what management treats as the ‘waste’ of learning about the context of Civil Service work. As Interviewee 12, HMRC tax processor and local steward, said in relation to the inadequacy of the training offered:

[New staff members] have no idea of what the consequences of what they’re doing is going to be and if they do it wrong what are the consequences

5:1:2 Time Taken to do the Job Well

With the majority of respondents having extensive experience of working in the Civil Service⁶⁴, often in different job roles, an analysis of the time someone would take to learn to do a job to a satisfactory standard is more problematic than examining the length of training. Respondents were able to move from one work area to another without necessarily requiring the sort of training that a new entrant might need. The period allowed for consolidation of knowledge gained during the training period to achieve effectiveness in a job role should arguably have some value as a proxy for the ability to do the job. However this aspect should be considered in tandem with interviewees' views on their personal effectiveness as they reflected on the value of the training they had received and the value of the subsequent consolidation period.

The specific periods allocated to consolidation varied considerably between job functions and roles. Interviewee 34, a line manager in DWP, stated that staff members new to benefit assessment⁶⁵ were allowed a period of three weeks of consolidation after five weeks of classroom based training. Staff members were given a further six weeks to pass line manager assurance of competence. The line manager stated that staff members were deemed to be competent after having assessed 50 cases consecutively without error. Interviewee 14, a tax processor in HMRC and local steward, stated that management, albeit in response to local trade union pressure, provided around two to three months of consolidation for basic tax processing work. These periods of consolidation contrasted with other functions where consolidation was minimal or negligible. In the call centre environment where staff members were engaged in decision making on Social Fund applications, interviewee 35 stated she was notionally given a week of consolidation in a 'live' setting, but in reality was expected to start taking calls after two days. Another staff member working in this area, Interviewee 5, indicated that consolidation lasted four weeks⁶⁶. A variety of jobs had similarly short consolidation periods although the nature of the work and the experience of the person performing the job may have mitigated the impact. Overall the limited consolidation periods matched the reduction

⁶⁴ Only three of the interviewees had less than five years' working experience in the Civil Service.

⁶⁵ The benefit in question was Employee Support Allowance.

⁶⁶ This person worked part time and he may have needed the four weeks to complete the training that a full time member of staff could have completed in a shorter timescale.

in the periods allocated to training. The approach to consolidation of training by management indicated that a narrowly defined job, even where that job involved the use of quasi-legal discretion, required a significantly shorter period of consolidation related only to the specific demands of the job function rather than a wider knowledge of other related job functions.

Moving from the periods of time that management allowed for consolidation of new skills to interviewees' views on the length of time that it took workers to become proficient in the job, a different picture emerges. On the one hand, with the increased functionalization, the jobs themselves have fewer elements that need to be learnt and understood. On the other hand, certain elements of the job retained significant elements of complexity most often related to dealing with the circumstances of the individual members of the public.

Interviewees indicated that in one sense the rudiments of certain jobs could be learnt and applied quickly. In jobs that required the processing of data, achieving a satisfactory standard could be done in a relatively short space of time. For more complex processing work, several months was needed to achieve proficiency. However according to Interviewee 32, line manager in DWP, in his current area of processing work, a satisfactory standard could be achieved almost directly on completion of a half day's training such was the simplicity of the tasks. However even for relatively basic data processing jobs, one interviewee opined:

because you need to know how tax works because although the computer system does it all for you, calculations, you need to know if it's working out correctly or not (Interview 12, HMRC tax processor and local steward)

The type of job where proficiency could be achieved in days often reflected that the capacity to undertake the job to a satisfactory standard was divorced from the wider context of the overall work of that department. It also reflected as interviewee 14, an HMRC tax processor, stated, when asked about whether he or his work colleagues encountered complex cases, that management "will sift through [their work] to make sure they don't". The attempts by management to limit the scope of individual jobs meant that the amount of time to achieve a satisfactory standard was inevitably less than previously where jobs contained a larger number of elements. Interviewee 17, a local steward with eight years' experience of working in DWP in the pensions area, stated that it took him a couple of years to be fully

competent in his work. This duration is in marked contrast to others, particularly in those who were relatively new to the Civil Service or those who had changed jobs. Interviewees whilst indicating that they understood and could apply the rudiments of the job also stated that they had gaps in their knowledge base and were ill-equipped to deal with certain more complex parts of the job. One interviewee believed he was doing his job “reasonably well”, but also conceded:

I am not satisfied that I have yet received the type of training to do the job properly. There are still major gaps in my knowledge levels and I would say that applies to most of my colleagues ‘on the floor’. [Management] want you to apply a regime which will allow for sanctions to take place, in other words, [job seekers’] benefit gets removed if they don’t do enough to look for work, but it’s quite a complicated process and there was no training whatsoever involved (Interview 10, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

In the call centre environment, Social Fund decision makers dealing with often complicated personal issues faced by people applying for Crisis Loans were unable to attain what they considered satisfactory levels of competence. The call centre regime did not allow decision makers the time to share benefit knowledge with colleagues or to seek their advice through informal discussion of more complex cases. This situation was in marked contrast to the period before the call centre operated when interviewees could more easily resolve complex cases through discussion and sharing of knowledge with work colleagues⁶⁷. For interviewees, the capacity to do a job well was not simply the achievement of performance targets, but in being to deal with the more complex aspects of their jobs and in understanding where their functions fitted into the overall social security benefit system. This is not to say that previously every member of staff had an in-depth knowledge of every aspect of the department’s work, or that complex cases were always handled correctly. It is to say, however, that the trend by management was to redefine job competence along narrower lines with the expectation that aspects of complexity could be removed or effectively ignored even where it involved quasi-legal decision making.

⁶⁷ The Social Fund call centre had previously dealt with a range of social security benefits and it was to this period that some interviewees were referring when they highlighted how capacity to do the job well had been enhanced by the sharing of knowledge.

The trend of truncated learning matched the downward direction on skill in terms of length of training periods and was consistent with the increasing functionalization of job changes where a narrow perspective in technical ability and background knowledge became in management terms a more efficient way to restructure work. Thus the period it took to learn to do the job well is indicative of the lean approach to work with its downward direction of skills. The narrowing of individual job functions supported by job segmentation is integral to the implementation of lean. With increasing functionalization, learning to do the job well is not only constrained by management in terms how long management give to consolidate job knowledge, but lean also deskills through management's attempts to reduce the scope of what is learnt in that period. Gaining a wider perspective is again effectively treated by management as a 'waste', as a factor no longer critical to the effective performance of the work.

5:1:3 Scope, Level and Integration of Skills

It is important to evaluate skills in terms of their scope, the level at which skills are exercised and how these skills are integrated into Civil Service work. As highlighted above, the context is one where the scope and integration of skills has increasingly moved away from the historic divisions of Civil Service work. In examining this area of skills, the focus here will be primarily on mental or intellectual skills as these are integral to decision making.

Job scope, or task variety, was increasingly limited. Even at the level of decision maker where civil servants potentially had legally delegated authority to decide on any aspect of the law legitimately presented to them, interviewees repeatedly commented on the monotony of the job and the high level of task repetition comparing it unfavourably with earlier periods where they had potentially had a wider range of quasi-judicial questions to determine. Typical of the comments relating to current jobs is the following:

There are differences obviously from one applicant to the other, but in general I would say that most of [the applications] are the same. You have the single parent looking for items [...] to replace or to review or just to get because they can't afford it. And that's mostly what the applications are about (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

Certain jobs within the Civil Service retained some element of task variety. Interviewee 26, a customs officer and local steward in HRMC, having moved from a tax processing area to customs work stated that he had now around six “heads of work”. However where the impact on task variety was most noticeably found was in the way that jobs were, first, increasingly standardised using the Standard Operating Model approach, and secondly organised or ‘mapped’ in such a way that tasks unrelated to the job holder’s main function or any complex or atypical work was passed or diverted to other workers.

As chapter 4 highlights, standardisation of work with its emphasis on the use of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) approach even delineated the work that decision makers undertook. The fact that these models were often not rigidly followed in practice did not add variety. The functionalization of work meant that management at local office level only provided workers with a very limited range of work based on the department’s strategy of allocating limited streams of work to specific locations. This was supported by the computer systems that controlled the flow of work between one group of workers and another. Closely related to the SOM approach were management’s attempts to ensure that work that fell outwith the narrow confines of the jobholder’s duties should be diverted elsewhere. The distancing of one group of workers from another through the use of IT, that ‘pushed’ blocks of work from one location to another, was one factor in reducing task variety. Even where civil servants had face to face contact with the public, tasks had to be diverted elsewhere. In relation to this process of ‘sign posting’, one interviewee stated:

Part of the way [management] tried to reduce duties was to instruct staff not to use certain systems any more (so the IT was very important), but a number of staff were told not to use certain parts of it so we could signpost customers elsewhere (Interview 3, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

Even where IT systems were available (and staff members had the technical ability to use them), management tried to limit the scope of the job. Notwithstanding the reduction in the amount of training and consolidation that staff members were given, interviewees retained a considerable residue of work knowledge. Despite the benefit that this knowledge would provide to the public, management sought to limit its application.

For all that might be said about the limitations in task variety for decision makers, the reduction in task variety among clerical grades was in some cases much more pronounced. In consequence of the allocation of single streams of work to specific locations, in HMRC, for example, Interviewee 14, a tax processor and local steward, stated that his work consisted of processing two forms and that any complex cases were sifted out prior to his part in the tax assessment process. Ironically, this particular interviewee felt that he had had more task variety before he had been promoted to a more senior clerical grade. Only in certain atypical work areas was task variety more likely to be retained. Some interviewees continued to undertake a range of jobs, but even here “not nearly as much as there used to be” according to Interviewee 36, a clerical officer and local steward working in one small agency of Scottish Government..

If consideration is given to the level at which work is completed, a slightly more complex picture is found. It is complicated by the fact that a number of the interviewees had changed job over the period of five years upon which they were asked to reflect. For example, a number had been promoted to a more senior grade or had been recruited into the Civil Service. Interviewee 8, a junior line manager and local steward working for an agency in Scottish Government, had been not only been promoted from a clerical grade to a managerial grade, but had also transferred out of DWP. In addition to changes in job grading, the way that work had been restructured meant that blocks of work were moved from one site to another. One large DWP processing centre that for a period had operated a telephony centre to deal with inbound calls from one specific part of the UK had closed down this section and returned the staff members to benefit processing work. The issue of skills level is further complicated by the way in which more routine decision making had been devolved from managerial to clerical grades. In around one sixth of the interviews⁶⁸, there was evidence of changing job levels that increased levels of substantive complexity. In contrast, however, the levels at which certain jobs were performed were often subject to change in two critical ways.

The first related to the use of the standard operating model approach. While notionally work remained assigned to specific grades, decisions were assumed to

⁶⁸ Seven interviewees stated that they had either been promoted within the previous five years or that the category of job they did had changed significantly (e.g. moving from telephony work to processing work).

be made on the basis of standardised guidance that supposedly dealt with all scenarios that an individual decision maker might face. When asked what the difference was between the standard operating model approach and the more traditional Civil Service model of making decisions based on codified guidance, one interviewee stated:

Well, Standard Operating Models [are], I've got to say, technically probably not that different. The difference is within the confines of what was there before, those rules and instructions that we had and the guidance, we could look at them, you could make the decisions, but like as I said earlier on, the Standard Operating Model seems to have been driving you to do the one thing, the same way, all the way through, the same type of decision, the same way of thinking on it. [...] As I say, this thing, you could look at guidance, you could get two people looking at it and come up with the different decisions. You can still do that just now, but I think [management] would be surprised if you came up with different decisions for the same type of case (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker in call centre)

This approach may not have replaced the job grade at which decisions were made, but there was a qualitative change in the style of decision making where decisions would be made by simplified and standardised guidance that sought to eliminate all variation in decision outcomes.

The second issue relating to the level at which skills were performed was a shift in the role of those with line management responsibility. The shift related to the role that all line managers were expected to perform, namely the expectation by departmental management that executive grades would 'manage' people. More will be said on this in relation to autonomy control, but the impact in relation to job complexity was that increasingly managers, particularly beyond the first tier of line management, had limited technical or detailed knowledge of the work done by their staff members. Exceptionally one junior line manager stated that her manager:

certainly knows his stuff. He's been the manager that's really had control of ESA⁶⁹ prior to it coming in. He was one of the managers that helped to bring it in and helped to get all the training and whatever organised, so yeah, I think he's knows his stuff (Interview 34, DWP line manager and team leader)

⁶⁹ Employment Support Allowance

However, more typically, interviewees emphasised how senior local office managers had increasingly less understanding of the specific detail of the work under their control. Another junior manager stated in relation to a conversation with his own line manager around the number of staff that were required to undertake a processing job:

[the line manager] was constantly saying “what are all these staff doing?” And I’m saying “well, I can tell you anything, [to name of line manager], ‘cos you don’t really know, but to be honest I don’t think you need this number of staff to be doing this” (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

In effect, the qualitative change was that jobs at junior managerial grade were changing to shift the balance from one based on decision making to responsibility for implementing the human resource policies of their respective departments. The use of standard models was used to replace the expertise formerly held by senior workplace managers, but also managerial grades more generally. This, in effect, both reflected how performance management was used, but also indicated as one interviewee stated:

When [the department] started cutting jobs, then they had to find a way of delivering this with less staff so they’d to make a complicated Standard Operating Model (Interview 3, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

The level at which jobs were performed was integrally linked both to the restructuring of the role and function of management jobs and the government’s efficiency agenda.

Finally, under the heading of scope, level and integration of skills, the ways that these attributes were used in relation to the public who are the recipients of these services is also critical. Field (1980) argued that the evaluation of skills needs to include the way that judgements and modifications are made in relation to the external environment. The environment into which skills were integrated was the continuing complexity of the work undertaken by civil servants and their interaction with the public.

The legislation that civil servants applied retained significant elements of complexity, but what had greater complexity were the individual circumstances of the public who accessed those services. Particularly for those civil servants who

interacted with the public either by face to face contact or by telephone there remained issues of considerable complexity⁷⁰. One interviewee based in a DWP Job Centre stated:

You're interfacing with the public and within that group of the public a significant minority of people who, as you say, have chaotic lifestyles who actually may present at the Job Centre in a disinhibited fashion (Interview 31, DWP administrative office in Job Centre)

Similar issues of complexity were identified not only in the context of social security claims, but also in issues of tax assessment and customs work. The issue of whether government had simplified legislation is a moot point (on several occasions interviewees noted waiving the need to verify, for example, employment status or tax liability⁷¹). However, what was seen to create complexity were the public's individual circumstances. There is a case to be made ironically that while individual circumstances have always been complex, as the public are increasingly denied direct face to face access to civil servants, any problems arising from complex or complicated situations are exacerbated. In describing what makes cases complex particularly in relation to those with direct contact with the public, one interviewee summed it thus:

Well some people might have behavioural difficulties, or they could just be an awkward customer, or they could be frustrated at the process that they've found themselves in because it gets more or more...or less and less personal, so a number of reasons can set somebody off. It becomes harder to do what you have to do, but also calm them down and then get cooperation from them (Interview 3, DWP line manager/adviser in Job Centre)

The direction of skills in terms of scope, level and integration presents a complex picture. Whilst the trend in terms of scope denoted by significant reductions in task variety was largely one of deskilling, in terms of skill level a variety of factors either increased or maintained "skill in the job". Furthermore, despite management's attempts to standardise and thereby simplify work, the jobs that either involved decision making or direct interaction with the public retained significant levels of

⁷⁰ Fifteen of the interviewees had face to face or telephone contact with the public.

⁷¹ Interviews 16 (DWP) and 7 (HMRC)

complexity. Despite management restructuring and the deskilling associated with reductions in task variety that are undoubtedly significant, in part the Civil Service retained its historic skilled service work characteristics (Carter *et al.*, 2011a) with the direction of skill maintained or increased.

The way that certain facets of skilled service work have been retained within the Civil Service has effectively no relationship with management's adoption of lean working. Ironically it contradicts the argument propounded by those who advocate lean working as a means of increasing skill levels. Lean, both by reducing task variety and by treating the potential to reach different decisions as aberrations, stands in contradiction to those who argue that it integrates skills into the job. The (oft-quoted) accusation that the failure of lean relates to a misunderstanding of its principles (*cf.* Seddon (2009) discussing Radnor and Bucci's (2007) study of HMRC) or that lean fails due to its misapplication by management (Delbridge, 1998) is unconvincing. This research supports the view that lean working ultimately relies on stripping out job elements considered by management as extraneous to the job (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992; Beale, 1994; Stewart *et al.*, 2009). The contention of Seddon (2009) that the reliance on standardising work practices is one of the main problems for lean's failure in HRMC is still premised on "the requirement to remove all arbitrary measures from the [processing] system" (Seddon and Brand, 2008:9). What is deemed 'arbitrary' by management within Civil Service work is the complexity of dealing with the public over which management lacks control.

5:1:4 Importance of Particular Activities

The final concept that defines job complexity is the importance of particular activities to the job as a whole. Felstead *et al.* (2007) identify two significant contributors towards skill change within the UK. One is computer skills, both in terms of their significance within the job and the level of sophistication with which these skills are utilised. The other is the area of interpersonal skills. These include communication skills, but crucially within the context of the lean agenda, problem solving skills.

As Fisher (2007) identifies, the use of IT systems was integral to Civil Service management's restructuring of work. Without exception, computerisation was central to interviewees' work. As it was in Felstead *et al.*'s (2007) analysis of skill elsewhere in the UK, IT is a highly significant feature of Civil Service work. Typical of the comments relating to the importance of information technology and computerisation is:

Well, it was crucial really. Delivery of JSA⁷² is based on an internal departmental legacy IT system which is a cornerstone of benefit delivery within the department, so knowledge of that system was important (Interview 4, full time lay PCS officer in DWP)

This interviewee proceeded to say:

although having said that it was relatively easy to administer those benefits electronically without absolutely any programming knowledge or any knowledge of navigating systems such as Windows

Whilst the significance of IT skills was paramount, the level of sophistication that was required was often limited. This low level of sophistication was more noticeable among those involved in data processing. On one very limited data input process, half a day was all that was required to master the computer technology:

Bottom line is we got a half day's training on this. Because the systems ran through JSAPS⁷³ [...] you do know everything about it. The thing is what you don't know, you don't know conditions [...], qualifying conditions to enable people to go on these courses. So we don't know the first thing about it as in "are these people eligible to be doing Training for Work? are these people eligible for doing New Deal?" But the bottom line is that we got a half day's training on eligibility and how the system is supposed to work (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

Contrary to the assertion that the use of IT will enhance intellectual skills and the conceptual understanding of the processes being undertaken (e.g. Zuboff (1988)), in many of the processing jobs the obverse holds true. Computer users have very limited understanding of their part in the wider processes.

Civil Service departments have used information technology as a means to facilitate the restructuring of work. Its use has become endemic across all aspects of Civil Service work including quasi-judicial decision making where these decisions are promulgated by the input of data through a computer system rather than being recorded in written form. The use of IT in work restructuring exists to the extent that

⁷² Job Seekers Allowance – a social security benefit for those out of work

⁷³ JSAPS – name of the computer system

it supports the often limited levels of sophistication required under the standard operating approach.

The second issue, that of problem solving, is crucial. One justification for lean is its capacity to allow the workforce, through utilising its knowledge of the work, to contribute to the improvement of work efficiency. However, as others argue (Beale, 1994; Stewart *et al.*, 2009), because workers' knowledge is in effect a means that management uses against workers' own interests, upskilling through problem solving is largely absent.

While there were examples of civil servants utilising problem solving skills to improve work processes, it was significantly more common for respondents to state that there had been a diminution in problem solving skills. One interviewee in a small HMRC tax office described how, due to failures in management planning at the establishment of their particular office, she and her colleagues had been forced to develop training programmes to ensure that others joining the office would not have to experience the difficulties that she and her colleagues had faced several years previously. In relation to complex case work, she stated:

We have an Officer meeting whereby we would try and take complex case work and we'd sort of meet up and go "right, can we do it at this level?" [...] So we do try to do it locally among ourselves within the knowledge base (Interview 7, HMRC line manager)

However, the more typical experience was that problem solving was increasingly linked to those specific lean activities described in chapter 4 where workers had to engage in problem solving within highly standardised and prescribed limits. In terms of skills, there was little evidence that problem solving skills were enhanced. The *raison d'être* of problem solving related to a management agenda that meant that the sort of innovative problem resolution envisaged by lean that workers could use to potentially benefit co-workers in their jobs and the organization more generally were discouraged or disregarded. Interviewee 1, a Social Fund Officer in DWP, described how a proposal he and a colleague had put together to resolve a problem with girocheque payments was ignored. The issue was that by waiting for social security recipients to attend the office before inputting the payment details on the IT system considerable time would be saved later for staff in processing the impact of

uncollected payments⁷⁴. Interviewee 1 contended that for the sake of 15 minutes' delay in inputting benefit recipients' details on arrival at the local office considerable time would be saved elsewhere. Interviewee 37, a local steward and management support officer in DWP opined that these formalised mechanisms for problem solving introduced through lean were largely seen "as an inconvenience, a tool to cut posts". Respondents were generally reluctant to provide solutions to any problems that they might identify. Where respondents did identify problems and were seeking to resolve these problems, unlike interviewee 7 noted above, often the pressures placed on staff to achieve performance targets precluded the opportunity to develop any problem solving skills, either in terms of dealing with more complex legal or quasi-legal questions or technical issues relating to the processing of information. This lack of involvement with problem solving mechanisms was writ large within the Social Fund telephony centre where one respondent stated:

I think there is an ongoing [focus] group that's supposed to looking at things, but I don't volunteer for anything any longer, 'cos I just can't be bothered with them any more (Interview 35, DWP Social Fund decision maker in telephony section)

Several interviewees stated that outwith formalised management led mechanisms, even time to discuss complex issues with co-workers were constrained by the requirements of achieving performance targets.

This final aspect of job complexity suggests a decline in the level of skill in the job. Using the capacity to use a computer may be a useful proxy against which to judge national skill levels, however in the context of the Civil Service the widespread use of computerisation is arguably an indicator of reducing skill levels when allied to the limited sophistication with which these systems are used. Particularly for those jobs that consist of basic data input, but also for those jobs that involve decision making, computerisation had deskilled work by delinking its usage to the purposes for which it was intended. Forms of data input become less about the intellectual process of applying the law and more about mechanistically implementing a process. Taking problem solving as a proxy for the direction of

⁷⁴ Social Fund crisis loans decisions were made by phone and payments were only collected from the office on successful application, however successful applicants did not always collect the payments they were due.

interpersonal skills, the direction of skills is also largely on a downward trajectory. The forms of standardisation integral within lean working have significantly decreased levels of job complexity.

In terms of the way that management had attempted to use computer handling and problem solving skills, important activities central to the work undertaken by civil servants, lean working had resulted in deskilling. The pervasive use of IT on all aspects of Civil Service work and subsuming of problem solving under a lean agenda has reduced the substantive complexity of the work. Computerisation was used by management to restructure work to support the functionalization and segmentation of work. Its use was therefore organizationally rather than technologically driven (Webster, 1990) to support lean working. Irrespective of whether civil servants had the intellectual ability to make better use of the IT systems, staff members were restricted to using IT as means of accomplishing management's performance objectives. Equally, management attempted to restrict problem solving to the narrow confines created by lean. Problem solving was not an open agenda: it was premised on management's agenda of excluding those features or stages of the production process considered by management as arbitrary or extraneous. Contrary to the rhetoric of lean where management presented lean as a catalyst for skill enhancement, lean working was a significant contributory factor in worker deskilling.

Whilst there may be some evidence to show that the picture around task complexity shows instances of both deskilling and some examples of limited skill retention or skill increase, autonomy control presents a more consistent story.

5:2 Autonomy Control

Whilst task complexity comprises one part of the way that 'skill in the job' is defined, autonomy control forms the other side of this conceptual framework. Spenner (1983) argues that autonomy control can be measured in terms of task discretion, the pace of the job and the level of supervision. This section will examine these issues in turn. This section will also highlight that in terms of lean working, contrary to Adler (2004) who seeks to separate job complexity from autonomy control, this research argues that the two concepts are integrally linked.

5:2:1 Task Discretion

The issue of task discretion as a proxy for skill will be examined, first in terms of the freedom that workers are able to exercise in the ordering and structuring of their work on a day to day basis, but secondly, a critical issue for decision makers, their freedom to reach decisions.

Task discretion for decision makers is critical in a number of ways. From a judicial standpoint, civil servants engaged in either legal or quasi-legal decision making are assumed by law to be exercising discretion (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992). Even in the simplest of cases, there remains a legal presumption that discretion is exercised. One differentiating feature between managerial and clerical grades is that the former group were historically deemed to have the capacity and authority to exercise judgement or discretion in the performance of their work (Campbell, 1965). The capacity to exercise discretion will be examined in terms of freedom to make decisions, a significant issue for those involved in forms of legal or quasi-legal decision making.

For those civil servants with decision making authority, respondents indicated that freedom to reach one outcome rather than another remained unchanged. One interviewee stated that:

As for what I'm awarding, well I would say I had a certain element of freedom based on the information that's provided and it's got to satisfy the Social Fund directions (Interview 1, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

Another interviewee opined in relation to the advice given by civil servants to job seekers:

They still have some freedom if they're an adviser, but subject to certain conditions. If I was your adviser, for example, I might think you need a certain training course or a certain line to go down (Interview 3, DWP line manager/adviser and local steward)

Discretion in decision making can never be unfettered with civil servants bound by the law that they implement. However, there remained a level of freedom insofar as the law permits a degree of interpretation based on the facts of the individual case. That degree of freedom was less commonly found at the clerical grade level. With increasing standardisation, administrative procedures were less

subject to different interpretations. Clerical officers still retained some potential to exercise discretion as the following quotation shows:

Well, I think one the key points about learning the job is to learn when given your prior knowledge, you can make an individual judgement and quite often it is the case that you'll know enough about the situation that you yourself can inform a customer about a situation. You know what their options are. You know what the legal requirements are. You know what is required of you as somebody working for the Civil Service for Job Centre Plus. And some of discretion is maybe at the level of how effectively and in what way you communicate that to your customer, how you explain that information, how you deliver it, how you break it down (Interview 31, DWP administrative officer in Job Centre)

More commonly however at the clerical grade, the potential to choose between different outcomes was constrained. In HMRC, the processing of clerical work was, for example, limited in this way as management, rather than view processing as an arm of the legal decision making process, viewed the handling of correspondence, as Interviewee 11, a tax processor and local steward put in, as "as item of posts" to be processed in a standard fashion ignoring the complexity that might lie behind the correspondence.

In terms of the ability of individuals to structure their daily tasks, there were increasing constraints on their ability to exercise discretion. For clerical workers engaged in processing work, the structure of the working day and the order in which cases were handled was increasingly subject to forms of management control. As previously discussed, Interviewee 16 referred to the decision made by his management that staff members had to use 'Big Box' where workers had to process cases by picking up three cases at a time and doing these end to end before picking up a further three cases. Whereas workers had previously decided the order in which they could undertake the constituent parts of the administrative process, management now insisted on limiting worker freedom in a much more prescriptive fashion. Processing work was particularly susceptible to this kind of restriction. Summarising what he perceived to be the management view of task discretion, one interviewee said:

“this is what you’re doing and we’ll just give you the work to do as and when we have it” (Interview 22, HRMC tax processor and local steward)

Although some decision makers had flexibility to structure their day, others did not. Those decision makers working in the call centre environment had their working day structured around answering telephone calls sequentially. Any absence from the phones for such activities as reading emails and toilet breaks were controlled through call operators entering designated codes into the computer system to account for periods not available for calls. Call centre work was at one extreme of the spectrum. Even lunch and tea breaks were controlled through a national computer system that allocated work breaks based on call volumes across the UK. However across most areas of work, increasingly less task discretion was allowed.

The impact of standardisation on the limitation of task discretion is manifested most obviously through the use of the Standard Operating Model (SOM) approach. As work processes are increasingly completed through following process maps, where each part of the process is set out in exact detail, workers lose the ability to decide how to structure their day. The SOM approach was different from previous Civil Service work processes in that it sought to describe not only the procedures in detail, but sought to establish which groups of workers were responsible for specific tasks. This removed the discretion that office managers previously had to set the parameters of their staff’s work. In turn, it limited the degree of freedom of more junior managers to organise their staff’s work. One interviewee said:

Standard Operating Model is the process in which an applicant gets first contact with the department and the processes is from the first contact, the processes that would be made all the way through it until an outcome decision was made. [...] Somebody’s got to get the form, receive the form, the form’s got to go to particular place, it’s got to be opened, it’s got to be stamped, it’s got to be sent to the benefit processing centre, it’s got to be put in all its alphabetical order, it’s given to a processor to put on to the computer system, they’re banded into bundles of ten, they’re put into a filing cabinet, [decision makers] take them out, that type of thing, that’s the kind of Standard Operating Model. It goes down into the minutiae. (Interview 1, DWP Social Fund decision maker)

Discretion was reduced principally not because the procedures were codified (Civil Service procedures historically relied on codified procedures), but because standardisation limited the degree to which local office management had the capacity to allow variation in work practice. The administration of work at local level was increasingly bound to processes enforced by departmental management at national levels. This change and the shift to larger processing centres constrained the capacity of site managers to exercise independence of action in work delivery. Often the only 'independence' shown was the way that local managers tried to circumvent lean procedures by 'leaning' the standardised processes to achieve even greater efficiencies. The functionalization of work, often in large processing centres dealing with large geographical areas of the UK, reported by Interviewee 6, a PCS steward and benefits processor in DWP⁷⁵, reduced discretion for the reason that each site had a prescribed role in a chain of work processes.

Closely linked to work standardisation was the use of information technology as a means of reducing task discretion. IT systems were at the forefront of task standardisation. Work processes were increasingly based on the electronic transfer of blocks of work from one group of workers to another. Within the social security benefit claim process, for example, a benefit claimant began the claim process by telephoning a Contact Centre where details were recorded on the computer system and then forwarded electronically to the Benefit Processing Centre:

CAM⁷⁶, that's how our claims come in through ESA⁷⁷, so really that controls what comes in, everything comes in via the Contact Centre through this CAM system and it's allocated to the staff via the CAM system, that does it itself (Interview 34, DWP line manager and team leader)

Certain Civil Service processes still retain some clerical aspects, but increasingly the evidence shows that management had attempted to eliminate reliance on paper systems. The result has been the removal of task freedom with each part of the computer network, however imperfectly at times, 'talking' to other parts of the network. Interviewee 5, a Social Fund Officer in DWP, stated that he often needed

⁷⁵ Interviewee 6, benefits processor and local steward stated his office had until recently only dealt with benefits for Scotland, but had now acquired work for Essex and Suffolk.

⁷⁶ Name of computer system

⁷⁷ Employment Support Allowance

to have 8 or 9 computer programmes open to process social security applications over the telephone. Workers needed to adapt their working to a highly prescribed format controlled by the computer system.

The evidence relating to the exercise of task discretion indicates a significant level of deskilling. The exercise of discretion for those with a decision making authority notionally remained unchanged. However the context of that decision making in terms of standardisation and the use of electronic systems narrowed the scope of those matters on which decisions could be made. The extent to which the state had ultimately simplified the law itself is beyond the scope of the thesis, however the narrowing of the scope of decision making had effectively deskilled the jobs that were done. What is clear from the evidence is for those jobs that relied on information technology and the electronic transfer of blocks of work from one group of workers to another, task freedom was significantly reduced.

With lean's emphasis on 'flow' (Womack and Jones, 1998), there is an inevitable logic to a reduction in autonomy and the accompanying reduction in skills. This emphasis on standardisation supported by the use of IT systems attempts to eliminate any variations in how workers interact with their work. The rhetoric of lean working presents a vision of a production system where discretion is exercised with workers at the forefront of using their knowledge to better their organization. However the reality of lean is a system of control from above that gives increasingly little scope for site managers to allow any discretion or variation on work practice. As will become apparent in the next section on the impact of performance targets, lean working is premised on control over freedom around both the contents of the work processes to be followed and the order in which the processes are handled by the workforce. The emphasis within lean on flow creates for management a belief that for its successful operation there needs to be a rigid and inflexible adherence to the processes set out in the standard models. The fact that these standard processes were subject to change, by local managers seeking to achieve greater efficiencies, does not detract from the argument that whatever standard processes were used staff were not expect to deviate from standardised instructions.

5:2:2 Pace of the Work

The data suggests strongly that the pace of work had increased in two distinct but interrelated ways. The first is the speed at which work needed to be completed and the second is the way that management tried to increase the amount of time

devoted to what it considered as the key elements of any job task. Both resulted in the intensification of work.

The speed at which individual civil servants were expected to work did vary. One line manager, when asked how hard he had to work said:

How hard do I think the job make me have to work? For me personally, I don't have to work particularly hard and I don't, Douglas, I'm purely there as a line manager. I have work I've got to do, mundane stuff, reports, SASIs⁷⁸, weekly...monthly reports I've got to do for staff and things like that (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

Interviewee 36, a PCS steward and clerical officer in Scottish Government indicated that work intensity was related to the loss of staff due to government inefficiency cuts and the need to cover work previously done by others people. Other interviewees stated that work intensity often depended on line managers' attempt to achieve targets:

I mean we're given KPIs⁷⁹, and [management] basically say that if you don't meet your KPI, then there's something wrong (Interview 12, HRMC tax processor and local steward)

Interviewees 5 and 35, staff working in the Social Fund telephony section on part time contracts, expressed the view that they did not know how those who were working full time on the telephones were able physically to do the work. As he approached retirement, Interviewee 5 expressed worry over younger colleagues: he was "totally pessimistic" over the future of DWP. Interviewee 35 stated:

I don't know how full time staff do it, honest to God, Monday to Friday, eight hours a day, I think it's pushing it and I couldn't do it, I know I couldn't

Management also attempted to structure work in order that variations in daily performance and output were minimised. This was most obviously found within the call centre environment where DWP management used the Workforce Management computer system to control staff members' daily work patterns. One interviewee commented on the impact of this system:

⁷⁸ Share and Support Interviews, the name for appraisal interviews in DWP.

⁷⁹ Key Performance Indicators

It's a commercial tool and basically as soon as you come in in the morning you've to log on to this and basically be ready to take telephone calls. You have codes that you put into this to allow you to obviously take calls, do after-call work, telephone somebody about a claim. There are codes for, what's called, communications, if you're having to read emails, attend meetings, break tools...[...], codes for when you go for your breaks or when you need to go to the toilet, that type of thing. (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker in telephony centre)

This interviewee described how reading emails was largely relegated to the margins of the working day in effect denying workers the opportunity to break up their working day to intersperse taking telephone calls with other activities. Even for those who had more freedom, for example, those interviewing members of the public in Job Centres, they indicated that there was much less capacity to vary their work pace across the course of a working day. Interviewee 38, a clerical officer and local steward working in the Job Centre, explained that her role involved previewing cases for the following day's adviser interviews by gathering evidence from job seekers related to social security benefit entitlement. On the day prior to the research interview in her role as a benefit processor, she had to preview 69 cases, of which 15 ultimately required an office interview, with the remaining job seekers having what she called a 'non face to face interview'. These 'non face to face' interviews were done by telephone call on the day before the jobseekers were due to attend the Job Centre to meet their advisers. What for her created the job intensity was first that she had to cover more than one job. She and her colleagues had to balance dealing with the public whilst also having to process the claims by sending them electronically to the Contact Centre. Secondly, the pace of work was determined by performance targets. In response to the question what was an acceptable number of claims to process in a day, the interviewee stated:

It's pretty much led by the date of claim. The Department runs with a 'date of claim plus three' so they aim to see any customer, you know, within three days of their initial contact. (Interview 38, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

This interviewee and others in different locations indicated that the pace of work was ostensibly not decided by management calculating on a reasoned basis individuals' work capacity. It was determined often solely at a departmental level

using targets that seemingly took no cognizance of the number of staff available to process the work. Without any opportunity to interview members of Civil Service management at senior departmental levels where national targets were set, there was no opportunity to explore the rationale for the calculation of these targets. One interviewee stated in response to how individual work performance targets were calculated:

I don't know: it just seems be, so that just comes out from the managers, the HEOs⁸⁰. There doesn't seem to be much consultation with the staff. It's just more of, I think, kind of based on intake, based on headcount, based on...you know, what's seems to be an average number. But what I would say they do seem to take average numbers from long-term members of staff who have a lot of experience who do do higher numbers. And they seem to take it from that and then try and push that on to other members of staff. (Interview 6, DWP administrative officer and local steward)

The pace of work was hostage to reduced numbers of staff and the intake of work. At site level, the volume of work that management wanted the workforce to achieve was largely decided on the basis of meeting national targets over which site offices had no control. In addition, management expected all staff to achieve targets based on average work output figures calculated from the work performance of more experienced staff. Effectively, the pace of work was driven by the use of performance targets and a mathematical rubric that would logically drive up the expected performance output.

The second critical aspect of work pace was the attempts by management to maximise the usage of the working day. One interviewee stated:

There's no such thing as being 'clear' any more. You can't have "oh, that's me, I'm finished for the day; I've got nothing left to do." There's always something to do (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

Clearly increases in performance targets driven by using average work as a means to drive up targets would result for less experienced staff or staff performing under

⁸⁰ HEO is Higher Executive Officer, the tier of management above executive officer (known as HO or Higher Officer in HMRC). HEOs or HOs would normally manage several sections of staff or be in charge of small office locations.

the average to increase the pace at which they worked. There was some evidence of management trying to introduce hourly monitoring of performance, but particularly in HMRC this was challenged by the union and, notionally at least, management removed hourly monitoring. In DWP, only one instance of an overt attempt to introduce hourly monitoring was found. According to Interviewee 29, a line manager and local steward in a processing centre, following union opposition this was successfully resisted. However despite a lack of overt hourly monitoring formally structured into workers' performance targets, monitoring continued often based on the reporting cycles for performance management. One interviewee stated:

[HMRC management are] not keen as an organization on people having periods of intense activity and periods of calm. They're looking for this constant approach across the day and across the shift and across the sites (Interview 11, HMRC tax processor and local steward)

The pace of the work was increased either by the records that the staff had to keep to show how they had met their performance targets (in some cases ironically on an hourly basis despite the supposed absence of formal hourly performance management monitoring), but also critically due to the way that work was passed electronically from one part of the process to another. One interviewee in response to a question asking him to compare how hard he worked five years ago to the present time stated:

I think I worked very hard, but I think there was a degree of balance there which isn't there now because there would be quiet periods when you could look at your emails, talk to the manager or staff about problems and that avenue's not there to the same extent now (Interview 10, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

With this person undertaking 14 job seeker interviews a day, management tried to maximise the amount of time spent on tasks related to the achievement of performance targets and limit the amount of time on what for management were considered non-productive duties. It has to be said that not every interviewee necessarily experienced this level of monitoring. Interviewee 7, a line manager in a specialist area of HMRC, stated that due to the complexity of her work her line management had obviated the need for specific individual targets. However more commonly, these attempts by management to deal with the issue of what it

considered non-productive time increased the pace by focusing on the achievement of targets to the detriment of other aspects of the work.

The increasing pace of work as a proxy for the direction of skill suggests a significant level of deskilling. It is not only manifested in how hard respondents had to work, but the objectives to which that pace of work was directed. Respondents recognised that work in the Civil Service was intense. Critically this intensification was not undertaken to satisfy the personal work ethic of the worker, but to achieve management goals. These goals were set and determined by departmental management over which workers had no control other than by recourse to collective action or to conform to the performance management regime. What is critical is the way that the personal work ethic is subsumed by the levels of supervision exercised by management in furtherance of its aim of increasing the pace of work.

Although Womack *et al.* (1990) do not deny the intensity of lean systems, their justification of lean working is that the intensity of work is compensated by more fulfilling jobs. This fulfilment derives from the contribution that the workforce can make to the effectiveness of the organization. Apart from the obvious point that interviews expressed little fulfilment in their work, lean working was one of the critical factors in intensifying work. When allied to efficiency cuts, management needed to use lean working to compensate for reduced resources to control work processes. How this control is manifested is rooted in the issue of supervision.

5:2:3 Level of Supervision

The final element in terms of autonomy control relates to the level of supervision exercised by management over the workforce. The reduction in task discretion and the increase in the pace of the work, highlighted in the two previous sections, are integrally linked to the levels of supervision that Civil Service management currently attempt to exercise. Two particular areas will be examined in order to explore this issue in more detail and illustrate how fundamental these areas are in increasing the levels of management control. These two areas are the use of performance targets and the related issue of performance management. Changes to the nature of the formal authority structures within the Civil Service, particularly in relation to changes in performance management, the use of technology as a means to control and measure performance and the relationship between one job and another (Spenner, 1983) are important factors in evaluating the nature of supervision within the Civil Service.

The use of targets has been discussed in relation to the pace of work. What arguably needs to be reiterated specifically in relation to the use of targets is not only how they are used to measure the performance of individual workers, but also how their use often had little relation to the quality of the work done and the substantive purpose of the job. Previous research has confirmed that performance targets have featured prominently as a means of supervising work in the Civil Service (Carter *et al.*, 2011a; Bailey, 1996). The detrimental effect on the quality of decision making caused by the need to meet performance targets (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992) has become more apparent. Where it might be assumed in the public interest that, at the very least, targets should be based around accuracy and the length of time taken to process work, the research discovered the targets set were increasingly incidental to the quality of the work. Targets were based around the achievement of more arbitrary features. One interviewee in relation to one of the targets he was expected to achieve, the percentage of time he was expected to be active of the telephone, stated:

The target's completely irrelevant. It's got nothing to do with the work that we do in the slightest (Interview 26, HMRC tax processor in telephone centre and local steward)

The interviewee believed that a numerical target for calls taken was not an indicator of the quality of his performance in dealing with the public. In the Social Fund telephony section, targets were not based primarily on the quality or accuracy of decision making, but on average call times. The measurement of performance related solely to the length of time operators spent on the telephone and not on the outcome of the decision. Often the result of this was the curtailment of calls on the basis of what Interviewee 33, a Social Fund officer and local steward, described as "spurious" grounds, for example callers failing to correctly quote their home post codes in full or failing to cite benefit payment rates even where this might only be inaccurate by as little as 10 pence. Management's attempts to achieve what they considered to be the defining measure of efficiency for that work unit meant that there was a significant decline in the quality of the decision making under the pressure to achieve those targets. This, for example, was manifested increasingly by decision makers declining to complete applications over the telephone. Callers were advised following an initial discussion of their circumstances that their applications were likely to be refused and were correspondingly dissuaded from

continuing with their applications. Even where the use of targets in other areas of Civil Service work was arguably more related to the substantive purpose of the job, targets of all types were almost universally recognised by respondents as the main measure by which management judged performance. What respondents adjudged to be key elements of the job that lacked a specific performance target were for management not the primary indicators of employees' performance. Civil Service work was generally more than the sum of achieving performance targets. However management increasingly sought to polarise management supervision around achievement of these narrow numerically based performance targets.

The use of performance management and measurement was most obviously manifested through developments in the way that performance appraisal was used as a means of control over the labour process. There was evidence found to show that increasingly the primary use to which performance management systems were used by management was to force employees to meet specified targets. This was noticeable in two ways: the first was management's emphasis within the appraisal system on how employees were meeting targets to the exclusion of other aspects of work, and the second was the increasing frequency of the appraisal interviews that management used to evaluate worker performance.

Historically, the Civil Service has had systems of evaluating performance. The relative importance of these systems increased in tandem with the attempts to link pay with performance in the 1980s (Bailey, 1996). However, the evidence from this research suggests that increasingly the focus within performance management has been the achievement of performance targets rather than the broader aims around, for example, development that would be identified within more prescriptive forms of HRM (Bratton and Gold, 2012). Formal appraisals were undertaken by line managers on their staff focusing on performance targets. One line manager described the DWP appraisal procedure⁸¹ as follows:

I give them lip service and I know a lot of other line managers give them lip service. Bottom line is [...] you give them lip service if everybody's making their mark. See if you've been asked to clear 25 claims and you clear your 25 claims, you know, a day and you clear whatever amount of claims you're

⁸¹ Known by the acronym SASI – Share and Support Interview (acronym confirmed in interview 33)

expected to do within that month, then the bottom line is, yeah, you pay that SASI lip service (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

The emphasis within the appraisals conducted by this line manager was provided targets were met no other factors were relevant in the performance appraisal process. This interviewee confirmed that failure to achieve the required targets would result in the use of Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) to ensure that targets were improved in the future. From the perspective of the job holder, Interviewee 35 working in a telephony centre did highlight that her manager had very recently moderated the emphasis on discussing performance targets and had asked the interviewee if there were other issues she wanted to discuss. The interviewee expressed the view this might be a ruse to get her to discuss co-workers and accordingly she stated her response was:

I don't say anything anyway. I just go "no, I've got nothing to say"

By increasing the relative importance of the achievement of performance targets in relation to other aspects of the appraisal system, management thereby increasingly sought control of the state labour process. A 'narrowly' defined job based around clearly identified performance targets was clearly easier to control than a 'widely' defined job containing numerous elements.

The second feature of the performance management system was the attempts to change the appraisal system in order to evaluate performance on a more frequent basis. The 'Share and Support Interview' or 'One to Ones' were the means by which DWP evaluated employee performance. The revised appraisal system envisaged fortnightly evaluation of performance although in some parts of DWP, as Interviewee 10, a Job Centre adviser and local steward stated, the frequency had only moved to a monthly cycle. Interviewee 26 working in HMRC stated that he had moved from a quarterly review to a monthly review of performance. However the frequency of appraisal made it difficult for managers to schedule the volume of appraisal interviews envisaged within the timeframe. Appraisal meetings became cursory discussions of performance between managers and their staff. Interviewee 5 stated that one of his co-workers had had what that person had thought was a casual conversation with a manager in an open work area in front of other workers and discovered only subsequently that this conversation has been treated by the manager as a performance review. Interviewee 26 stated

that as part of his monthly appraisal there was supposedly a coaching system to help improve telephone usage skills, but in his view 'coaching' consisted of being told not to repeat errors with the implicit threat that repeated errors would result in disciplinary action. Provided targets were met the more regular appraisal meetings were perfunctory. However where the level of supervision was critical was in terms of the threat, both implicit and explicit, that failure to meet a target over these comparatively short assessment periods of a fortnight would result in some form of inefficiency action. One interviewee stated:

there's a degree of apprehension every two weeks now that you may not have passed muster and there's the possibility it's a matter of when you will be put on a Performance Improvement Plan. So they're viewed very much as a detrimental weapon (Interview 33, DWP Social Fund officer in telephony centre and local steward)

The level of threat was more apparent in those areas, such as telephony work where electronic monitoring could be used. Nonetheless it did extend to processing sites illustrated by the following quotation:

If you can't do X, Y and Z, [management] will put you on a PIP, Performance Improvement Plan, because you're not producing what we want. And the thing is that, what they're doing is these benchmarks and clearance figures keep getting changed at very, very, very little notice and unlike the old Key Work Objectives which was "we expect you to do X, Y and Z as an individual", and you could agree it individually, benchmarks are being applied across the board (Interview 9, DWP line manager and local steward in processing centre)

The levels of supervision were therefore exercised through the imposition of often nationally set targets over which individual workers had no influence allied to increasing the frequency of formal appraisals that held the threat of disciplinary action.

Overall, Civil Service management by increasingly trying to link performance management systems to the achievement of targets increased the level of workforce monitoring. Granted the supervision levels were never uniform and higher performing staff were less likely to be subject to disciplinary penalties, nonetheless levels of supervision were increased to direct employees' efforts into achieving what

management asserted were the measures upon which efficiency should be judged. Correspondingly, as a proxy for skill, the increased levels of supervision showed a decrease in skills within the Civil Service.

The operation of lean within the Civil Service, both in terms of the stated objectives of work restructuring and in terms of how performance management is operated, confirms the contention of Taylor (2013) that there is an organic link between lean systems and the use to which performance management is directed. The aim of lean working set out in the DWP Lean Vision, for example, was to exceed the performance targets set. Inevitably, in terms of supervision and control at site level, with lean premised on that basis, line managers directed their attention towards achievement of those measures identified by management as the standard of workforce efficiency. Utilising targets, often only as arbitrary measures of performance, rather than indicators of genuine standards of quality has changed the nature of the authority structures within the local office where there is an increased emphasis on reducing the level of autonomy that workers can exercise. With the use of IT as a means of monitoring performance often in relation to the way that work is passed from one group of workers to another, supervision in the lean system of working has the effect of deskilling. The argument of Seddon (2008) that measurement should be based on the 'actual' time it takes to undertake the work based on individual workers' 'capacity' and that managers should be responsible for those areas beyond the control of the workforce neglects the context of lean. What constitutes the 'actual' time taken to undertake a job is a construct borne of the marketised architecture rather than a measure over which the worker has control. The purpose of performance management within the lean environment is to dissociate worker control from the calculation of performance targets. Using the word 'capacity' cannot fundamentally alter the nature of the supervisory relationship between manager and employee.

5:3 Lean and the Direction of Skill

Having examined each component part of the conceptual framework that constitute "skill in the job", substantive complexity and autonomy control, this section will seek to summarise the direction of skill. The direction of skill provides the opportunity to place job restructuring in a wider political-economic context.

In contrast to data drawn from large scale quantitative survey, there is evidence in this study of significant deskilling. In the larger scale quantitative surveys, the picture in the UK is one of divergence where there is evidence of polarisation of skills (Gallie, 1994; Gallie, 2007), but where skill levels are generally considered to be rising (Felstead *et al.*, 2007) related in part to the increased use of information technology. In terms of task discretion, however, the picture does reflect a reduction in the autonomy that workers can exercise. The shift in skill levels derives from movement between occupational group rather than loss of skill within the same occupational group. The data drawn from this qualitative research, however, indicates that within the Civil Service the direction of skill fails to match the UK as a whole. In terms of substantive job complexity, this research does show that in certain instances jobs have become more complex and accordingly this has raised the skills levels of the employees. Significant job changes arising from such factors as job promotion or where management have restructured in an almost counter-intuitive way to the wider narrative of work reorganization has increased skill levels⁸². There were, however, only a limited number of instances where workers had more control of their jobs. Even in those instances of rising job complexity, work restructuring significantly limited worker autonomy. The opportunity to explore management's use of information technology questions a view that equates the use and introduction of computerisation with rising skills levels. The use of IT needs to be understood within the political economy of work rather than make the assumption that its increased usage equates with rising skills. Within the Civil Service, whilst there may be some divergence in the direction of skills, the evidence indicates a downward shift among both clerical and junior managerial staff.

What is critical in terms of this research is the relationship between lean working and the direction of skill. In the previous chapter, the argument was posited that although lean working needs to be seen within the context of the political-economy of work, there also existed variants of lean working differentiated by the way that management needed to systematise work (Littler, 1982). The accompanying tables present a comparison of the direction of skill in relation to the four categories of lean (embedded, abandoned, instrumental and replicated). Table 1 allows all interviews to be examined together. Tables 2 to 5 break down skill by

⁸² This includes evidence drawn from interviews 15 and 28 where respondents described how staff members were moved from a "mini call centre" back to doing processing work.

Table 1: All Variants

Interview Number	Lean Variant	Job complexity	Autonomy Control	Decision maker
1	Abandoned	D	D	✓
2	Replicated	D	D	
3	Embedded	D	D	✓
4	-	-	-	
5	Embedded/Abandoned	D	D	
6	Replicated	U	D	
7	Replicated	U	U	✓
8	Replicated	U	U	✓
9	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	✓
10	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	✓
11	Embedded	D	D	
12	Embedded	D	D	
13	Embedded	D	D	
14	Embedded	D	D	
15	Embedded/Instrumental	U	U	
16	Embedded	U	D	
17	Replicated	NC	NC	
18	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	✓
19	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	
20	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	
21	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	
22	Embedded	U	U	✓
23	Replicated	NC	D	✓
24	Abandoned	-	-	✓
25	-	-	-	
26	Embedded	D	D	
27	Embedded/Instrumental	NC	D	
28	Instrumental/Abandoned	D	D	✓
29	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	✓
30	Abandoned	NC	D	
31	Embedded/Instrumental	U	D	
32	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	
33	Abandoned	D	D	✓
34	Embedded	D	D	✓
35	Instrumental	D	D	
36	Replicated	D	D	
37	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D	
38	Abandoned	D	D	✓

Key to the table:

The table shows the interview number (column 1), the variant or variants of lean (column 2), the direction of skill in terms of job complexity (column 3), the direction of skill in terms of autonomy control (column 4) and whether the individuals concerned had decision making or quasi-decision making functions (column 5). In

columns 3 and 4, “U” refers to upskilling or an increase in skill, “D” refers to deskilling or a decrease in skills, and “NC” refers to no change in skill level. Interviews 4, 24 and 25 are left blank for reasons related to the nature of the interview.

Table 2: Lean Embedded

Embedded			
3	Embedded	D	D
5	Embedded/Abandoned	D	D
9	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
10	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
11	Embedded	D	D
12	Embedded	D	D
13	Embedded	D	D
14	Embedded	D	D
15	Embedded/Instrumental	U	U
16	Embedded	U	D
18	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
19	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
20	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
21	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
22	Embedded	U	U
26	Embedded	D	D
27	Embedded/Instrumental	NC	D
29	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
31	Embedded/Instrumental	U	D
32	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
34	Embedded	D	D
37	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D

Table 3: Lean Abandoned

Abandoned			
1	Abandoned	D	D
5	Embedded/Abandoned	D	D
24	Abandoned	-	-
28	Instrumental/Abandoned	D	D
30	Abandoned	NC	D
33	Abandoned	D	D
38	Abandoned	D	D

Table 4: Lean Instrumental

Instrumental			
9	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
10	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
15	Embedded/Instrumental	U	U
18	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
19	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
20	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
21	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
27	Embedded/Instrumental	NC	D
28	Instrumental/Abandoned	D	D
29	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
31	Embedded/Instrumental	U	D
32	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D
37	Embedded/Instrumental	D	D

Table 5: Lean Replicated

Replicated			
2	Replicated	D	D
6	Replicated	U	D
7	Replicated	U	U
8	Replicated	U	U
17	Replicated	NC	NC
23	Replicated	NC	D
36	Replicated	D	D

lean variant. Whilst these tables need to be seen in the context of the interviewees' individual circumstances, presenting an argument that the variants in lean working have an impact on skills has cogency.

Each of the four variants presents a slightly different picture. For those working in a lean embedded environment the trend of skill was generally downwards. This deskilling was mitigated only by those factors such as individuals changing jobs and the fact that some management reorganization of work, in responding to service delivery needs, moved staff from more intensive forms of work, for example, telephony work back to processing work. Even within these caveats, the trend towards deskilling was significantly more noticeable in terms of the loss of job autonomy. Secondly, the 'instrumental' use of lean working mirrored those trends in 'lean embedded'. The same patterns of deskilling occur with a marked loss of autonomy control in comparison to substantive job complexity. Thirdly, where lean working 'replicates' more embedded forms of lean, the trend towards deskilling was less noticeable. The interviewees were affected by such factors as atypical work or specialist activity perhaps more than for other groups of interviewees. The deskilling was still noticeable in terms of loss of autonomy control more than in substantive complexity. It may also suggest that where the tools and techniques of lean were not explicitly used that the work retained more of its skilled service work quality. It was still increasingly subject to attempts by management to assert control over work organization, but without the specific lean tools the rate of deskilling was less apparent. Fourthly, lean 'abandoned' did not lead to reskilling, but quite the reverse: deskilling occurred almost universally in terms of job complexity and autonomy control. It suggests that once management has 'leaned' part of an organization and then abandoned the exercise, it would prove difficult to regain the skills that were lost. The deskilling under 'lean abandoned' arose largely in a context where management no longer used lean techniques or tools because having staff spend time on such activities would have prevented the achievement of performance targets. Despite the management rhetoric surrounding the value of lean techniques, where performance targets were jeopardised, those lean techniques were jettisoned challenging the contention that only by fully adopting lean into an organization is the organization made more efficient. It indicates that lean techniques cannot fully address the issue of efficiency savings that lie at the heart of the marketised organization of work.

The trend for those engaged in decision making appears little different to those engaged on other duties. Irrespective of the lean variant, decision makers were equally subject to losses in skill, both in terms of job complexity and autonomy control. Despite the legal requirement that discretion is exercised within the legal or quasi-judicial processes to which civil servants are bound, the use of lean affected the decision making work in much the same way as processing and administrative work. The way that management has systematised work has failed to maintain the skill quality even within the decision making function.

It has been argued that deskilling was integrally linked to the attempts by management to dissociate the labour process from workers' skills (Braverman, 1974). Although this argument is subject to the critique that neglects the way that employers use different strategies to control the labour process (Little, 1982), the use of lean in the Civil Service is a critical contributory factor in the loss of skills and the reduction of freedom that civil servants have to undertake their work. Lean in effect dissociates workers' skills from the state labour process. The distinctiveness of the state labour process (Fairbrother, 1994) fails to protect workers from management's efforts to intensify work. Management's attempts to increase control over the state labour process has, in part, been mitigated by the need to maintain levels of public probity in delivering the functions of the state and to ensure that civil servants can still deliver state services to standards that meet legal requirements. Unlike other parts of the public sector, however, the state has direct control over its own employees who deliver government services. It is into this context that deskilling occurs.

Where job complexity is retained, it is because of the complexity of the public's circumstances that lie beyond the control of management. With Civil Service management purposively reducing the complexity of its workforce's jobs, the deskilling evident within substantive job complexity confirms the contention that job complexity is the precondition for job autonomy (Thompson, 2007). This reduction in job complexity was both the catalyst and the harbinger of reduced worker autonomy.

At the heart of the issue is the way in which the state labour process is subject to the pressure on departmental management at a meso level to marketise the delivery of Civil Service functions and the subsequent pressure on management at local level to conform to this political-economic architecture of work. The outcome is the need to impose control over the workforce by reducing its level of job

autonomy to support the financial efficiency savings imposed by the state and to provide the scope that facilitates greater capacity for further marketisation. The degree to which elements of Civil Service jobs retain their autonomy or complexity and thereby gain, maintain or lose their level of skill reflects in part the extent to which management will use different strategies to systematise work (Littler, 1982). In this thesis, these different attempts at systematising work link to the four different ways that management use lean. The outcomes in skill levels are never uniform even within the four variants, but provide a means to understand differentiations in the direction of skill.

Having considered the nature of lean working and its impact and relationship to skills, the next chapter will examine how the PCS and its membership have responded to lean working.

Chapter 6: The Trade Union Response

Having examined changes in the organization of work and its relationship to skills, consideration needs to be given to the role of the PCS trade union and its members. The previous chapters demonstrated that rather than view lean solely in terms of a management improvement process supported by a number of techniques lean needs to be viewed in the context of the political-economic architecture of work and management's attempts to control the state labour process. This chapter will argue that the trade union response must also be viewed in this context. The distinction between lean as a business improvement process and lean as a system of control is equally critical in analysing the response of the trade union and its membership.

First, this chapter will address the nature of trade union-management relations at site office level. The opportunity to examine PCS documentation and to interview senior union officials who negotiate with senior departmental management will put the nature of the union response at local level into context. The discussion will focus on the union's response to the specific lean initiatives, but will evaluate the union's response to broader issues of organizational change and attempts by management to control the state labour process. The discussion will examine the employment relationship in terms of interactions within the formal negotiating fora, but will examine the union's response to the productive organization of the Civil Service as its management seeks to use that organization to achieve its service delivery (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002). What is omitted from discussions in a structured negotiating forum between management and trade union may be as crucial to understanding conflicts and compromises over the labour process as what appears in a formal negotiating agenda.

The second main issue is the response of the trade union to organizational change. There are two facets to this. The first is an examination of the role of the trade union representatives and their response to the changes. The second seeks to comprehend the union's understanding of the nature of lean and its relationship to the way the Civil Service is attempting to manipulate the state labour process. Interrogating trade union representatives and members primarily at local office level will help to explain the union's response. The ways that the union has responded to changes in work organization, both in its formal positional stance and visible signs

of opposition, as well as how it has responded to changes to the labour process, will allow the debate to be positioned within wider issues of political economy. How the union has responded to organizational change as a whole, rather than by discrete reactions to specific initiatives, will be instructive.

6:1 Industrial Relations in the Civil Service

Industrial relations in the Civil Service have undergone significant change from the 1980s onwards (Bailey, 1996). Changes have occurred in the face of relatively high levels of trade union membership density and collective bargaining coverage. As chapter 2 highlighted, responsibility for setting staff terms and conditions has increasingly been devolved to individual departments (Kessler *et al.*, 2006). This decentralisation of responsibility is paradoxical (Carter *et al.*, 2011a) as it encompasses the devolvement of operational functions to departmental level while allowing the state to retain strict financial control over the Civil Service as a whole.

This research needs to examine the nature of industrial relations within the Civil Service to frame the union response to the changing nature of the state labour process. This section will explore industrial relations through the lens of collective bargaining from six strands (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004). These six strands (the processes that make up collective bargaining; their form in terms of formality, flexibility and bureaucracy; the levels at which negotiations are conducted; the coverage of the individual bargaining unit; the range or scope of issues that fall within the ambit of negotiation; the depth of influence that union and management have over negotiating issues) provide a framework against which to evaluate the nature of industrial relations.

As the methodology chapter made clear, the focus falls largely on DWP and HMRC. However the evidence from other departments helps to confirm that patterns found within the two large departments across the six strands noted above are broadly representative of the wider Civil Service.

6:1:1 Processes of Collective Bargaining, Form, Levels and Coverage

The process of collective bargaining in DWP is broadly representative of developments elsewhere in the Civil Service. Chapter 2 highlights that collective bargaining was decentralised and restructured to limit the ability of the trade unions to negotiate on behalf of their members (Corby, 1998; Bailey, 1996). Since 2002, DWP had operated under the Employee Relations Framework (ERF), an

administrative framework that tried to deformatize the negotiations between management and PCS (Martin, 2010). The ERF was purposively set out to limit issues on which lower tiers of management, at office level for example, could negotiate with the trade union and to prevent escalation of disputed issues to more senior tiers. The ERF was imposed on PCS replacing the more collaborative Whitley system (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2003).

Despite these attempts to limit the negotiating power of the union, the research data confirms the continuing existence of processes of negotiation and management-trade union interaction. The attempts by DWP management to restrict union power through the ERF and the subsequent reduction in facility time for PCS stewards did not vitiate stewards' ability to act on behalf of their members. The process of negotiation was, however, often the product of several factors. With DWP subject to constant organizational restructuring and the allied functionalization of work, tiers of negotiations were subject to incessant change. Collective bargaining units changed as staff members were transferred from one managerial structure to another. The form of negotiation also varied significantly between office sites, often related to the office size, job function and levels of union activism present. Thus a site steward in a large benefit processing office with a history of union activism said:

Yeah, we have a formal/informal, if you know what I mean, replaced the Whitley, process that we meet with the manager (we actually just met with him yesterday, our bi-monthly) where we meet to discuss obviously issues affecting the office, as part of the Trade Union Side, and we've also got scope within...at any time, we can request a meeting with management. We meet regular with the SEOs, you know, who have got responsibility for the various commands, if issues come up within those commands, we can request a meeting at any time, so we do have a quite a good relationship in that respect with management (Interview 15, DWP steward in processing centre)

At local office level a degree of formality remained in some local negotiating arrangements. In other offices, often the smaller ones, more typically procedures were more informal insofar as site management treated its bargaining role as limited to responding to *ad hoc* issues raised by the union or as a vehicle for imparting information around often relatively minor local issues:

in local office we often have issues [...], we're not so much consulted, but informed of changes, sometimes after the change has been made especially in cases of if they're asking for people to act up to cover a role, you know, if you're acting from one grade to another, we find that those they're allocated and we're kinda...we find out as the person takes up the job. We're not informed as like, you know we're not given our place as union reps. It's "this is what's gonnae happen in the next few weeks". It's just "oh by the way, so-and-so's been acting up from Monday" (Interview 38, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

This level of informality often reflected that stewards were in some sites acting as the sole union representative and had to negotiate on a one to one basis with the local management.

In terms of lean implementation, the evidence indicated that in DWP, consultation between management and trade union were undertaken by the mechanisms described above. Interviews with senior union officials confirmed that DWP's national management had a format for relaying information on such areas as 'lean pilots'. This format was replicated between management and union at lower tiers, for example at regional or district levels. At national level, DWP management would typically 'copy in' senior stewards at Group⁸³ level with details of lean pilots from throughout the country. Typically, these lean pilots were used to eliminate stages in the social security benefit assessment process. One document seen by the researcher⁸⁴, for example, provided evidence of the reduction in the number of steps from six to two.

In considering the processes, form and scope of bargaining within HMRC, there were significant similarities, but also one important difference. The formation of HRMC in 2004 resulted in the replacement of the Whitley system that operated within the Inland Revenue and HM Customs and Excise with a new employee relations framework. There is an indication that this was done less unilaterally than in DWP (cf. HM Revenue and Customs (2005)), but the outcomes in terms of management-union negotiation were not significantly different. Changes in

⁸³ As section 3:4, PCS is divided into Groups that mirror the Civil Service's organizational structure. References in the text to 'Group' usually refer the national PCS lay and full time negotiators who deal with management at national or senior departmental level.

⁸⁴ Document viewed in confidence.

bargaining structures again mirrored organizational restructuring. How management and union negotiated at site level was again related to historic levels of activism within offices, office size and job function. Large offices, albeit taken from a smaller sample of offices than in DWP, suggest that within HMRC meetings with management at site level were undertaken on a regular basis, often initiated by the union to address issues it wished to raise.

Unlike DWP, there existed specific mechanisms to deal with the implementation of lean. At Group level, there existed a concordat between HMRC and PCS that regulated the formal bargaining parameters on lean. The Pacesetter joint Agreement⁸⁵ between PCS and HMRC signed in February 2011 (following a joint agreement contained in HMRC's Pacesetter Way of December 2010) indicated that the Agreement should be seen as part of the HMRC ERF. The full impact of the document is difficult to gauge as the Agreement was signed midway through the interview schedule: neither HMRC respondents interviewed after December 2010 made reference to it. Data gathered in HMRC prior to December 2010 indicated that local stewards negotiated with their management over lean in the context of existing bargaining procedures.

The evidence from other parts of the Civil Service in view of the limited access afforded must carry less weight. However the form and processes found elsewhere were by no means dissimilar. PCS stewards were engaged in bargaining with management throughout all the research sites examined. Bargaining at national or departmental level often retained a formal structure, while at local office levels negotiation structures reflected local steward activism, and the way that management had restructured the delivery of services. Particular procedures to deal with the introduction of lean practices varied to the extent that the department openly endorsed a lean approach and the union was willing, for example in the Ministry of Justice (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2008b), to endorse working agreements similar to the Pacesetter agreement.

Overall, in terms of form, process and scope, certain trends can be identified. Decentralisation of management created a situation where bargaining continued in a state of flux. For each change in the structure of the organization instigated by management, new bargaining structures were created. The demise of the Whitley

⁸⁵ Reproduced at Appendix **b**

system did not eliminate negotiating processes, but decentralisation did reinforce that bargaining was based on departmental structures rather than done Civil Service wide. More critically, despite management's attempts to informalise the collective bargaining, structured negotiation procedures remained in place. This was manifested at national level by the maintenance of written documented procedures that decided the conduct of industrial relations. At local level, formality was retained in terms of regularity of meetings, protocols based on historic custom and practice and an expectation from management that the trade union maintained a level of dialogue over workplace issues. Escalation routes for disputes were retained. Disputes continued to be passed from one management tier to those above. In terms of lean processes, negotiation was largely conducted within existing fora, although as the next section makes apparent, the more crucial issue is the range and depth at which these negotiations are conducted.

6:1:2 The Range and Depth of Bargaining Structures

Whilst there was some evidence that decentralisation of industrial relations did provide the trade union with the potential to resist management attempts at control (Fairbrother, 2000), management restructuring of the collective bargaining processes was significant in how it restricted range and depth of collective bargaining particularly at site level. Much of the restructuring was connected to the systematic dismantling of the Whitley system in the late 1990s (Corby and White, 1999; Bailey, 1996). The current research also confirms that the constant organizational restructuring including the creation of new departments was also a catalyst, if not the reason, for reshaping industrial relations in favour of management.

In terms of evidence gathered from DWP sources, at senior negotiating levels, for example at national or regional levels, there was a significant flow of information between the management and union. This was generally through the sharing of such information as management wished to release to the trade union. The value of attending union committee meetings was the opportunity to glean information on the sort of interaction that was occurring between management and trade union. These might range from personnel issues to changes in work organization. These changes included details of lean projects in addition to those not specifically designated as 'lean'. Interviewee 4, a senior union representative, who had negotiated with management at national level, had been provided with

details of the management consultants employed by DWP and their subsequent replacement by in-house measures to cascade lean through the organization. There was no lack of 'high level' information. The reports on lean pilot projects discussed above were one such type of communication. At regional or district level, the union was also given presentations on lean in advance of similar events being given to all staff. The presentations were given as a way of promoting the concept of lean and its advantages for use in the workplace. One regional representative (group Interview 25) said management wanted to "sell [Lean] as a positive". One presentation included an exercise in demonstrating how to fold a T-shirt in a 'lean' way, the assumption of which was that this exercise could demonstrate how lean could be replicated in social security benefit assessment. Another steward said:

Well, there's been very little Lean consultation. [...] the most consultation about Lean took place at District level where I was allowed a meeting with the Scottish Lean Coordinator and he sent me a Powerpoint presentation and made it clear that it was the aim of Scotland to have two full time Lean Coordinators for every hundred staff by April of 2011. [...] So that's as near as we would have got to consultation, but I don't suppose it was consultation in that we were told that it was happening (Interview 10, DWP Job Centre adviser and local steward)

At site or office level, the scope and depth of consultation on organizational issues was much more restricted. In terms of the issues that trade union stewards could raise with management, there was no evidence to suggest that local management declined, when pressed, to discuss organizational change. The crucial issue was the depth at which issues were debated. Negotiation on site matters was determined in part by the strength of union activists on site. Thus there were some differences on where the union could achieve a successful outcome for its members. However, it might also be reasonably argued that where the union was able to negotiate successfully on site matters this was attributable in part to a degree of residual sympathy by some site managers to the union position⁸⁶ some of whom would be PCS members. Successful negotiation also reflected the degree to which managers were given freedom to organise their work at local level. A steward on a large processing site in response to the question asking him where he thought

⁸⁶ The first four grades of management were eligible to join PCS: this would include site managers. More senior managers would be represented by the FDA.

that the union had been most successful in negotiating with management on organizational change said:

probably the biggest change that we actually helped kind of and I do believe we did help change was they were trying to bring in Workforce Management to the particular centre that I worked in and a few months before the business processes were going to be adopted, management did recognise that this was not going to be workable in the type of business environment that we were working in (Interview 28, DWP benefits assessor in processing centre and local steward)

The capacity of the union to resist the use of the Workforce Management systems that significantly reduced job autonomy elsewhere in DWP reflected the nature of work organization and a degree of greater management flexibility over the need to control work. However more typically, the management response was:

Generally, it is myself and the lead rep for the office go in and ask them for a meeting with the relevant manager, and sitting down with him and explaining what our issues are with it and...but, as I say, nine times out of ten the answer you get back is “aye, well it’s [departmental] rules and I can’t change it” (Interview 16, DWP benefits assessor and local steward)

Although at site level, the union had some capacity to negotiate some improvements in working conditions, this was effectively restricted to issues over which the local management had retained some degree of flexibility. What was apparent was this flexibility covered an increasingly reduced number of activities. For example, because in the call centre network, workers’ ‘on-call’ time was decided by a national central network rather than at local site, local management would refuse to contemplate any deviation from decisions made by senior tiers of management. In response to questions posed around where the union was least successful in negotiating with management, stewards identified that benchmarks and targets set by DWP at national level were not negotiable at local level.

The critical issue is the way which DWP management has sought to increase its control over the state labour process by imposing performance standards over increasingly more aspects of Civil Service work. This confirms the trend towards increased monitoring of performance within central government (Gains, 2003), but also confirms the existence of new loci of control (Carter *et al.*, 2011a) where

pressure is placed on site management by more senior tiers as a means of enforcing control. Management's lack of willingness and capacity to negotiate over work organization is symptomatic of attempts to extend control throughout the whole of the organization. This lack of willingness to negotiate was writ large in relation to lean initiatives where these were presented as a *fait accompli* without any attempt to allow the union any opportunity for consultation. The trade union was effectively denied the opportunity to debate with management issues that ranged from the implementation of new workplace practices often developed from pilot projects to the use of lean techniques. What was noticeable from the interviews was the lack of examples where the trade union successfully prevented the introduction of lean initiatives at site level. Decentralisation of collective bargaining provided little scope for optimism that negotiation at site level could be used by local stewards when faced by departmental management who increasingly allowed office managers little leeway for manoeuvre. The potential for increased union power in a decentralised environment described by Fairbrother (2000) proved to have been a brief hiatus before management reasserted its authority.

In some ways the range and scope of negotiation in HMRC was not significantly different to DWP. Arguably the higher public profile that lean had within HMRC that resulted in strike action in 2006 (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2006) and the subsequent commissioning of the Radnor and Bucci (2007) report into Pacesetter sites were factors that shaped negotiation on lean implementation at departmental level. Negotiation and consultation did occur at site level, but much of the local negotiation centred on the local union establishing that local management was following the protocols and decisions made at departmental levels. In similar fashion to DWP, negotiation between PCS and management was limited to the extent that departmental management prescribed the exact forms of work organization. However, in the sites at the forefront of lean or Pacesetter implementation, management's presumption was that negotiation should be restricted to monitoring or policing protocols agreed between management and union at more senior levels. Notwithstanding that the Pacesetter Agreement was agreed during the data collection phase, the wording and content of the Agreement connote this policing role for local union stewards. The substance of any procedures introduced by national management, even those prior to the Agreement, were not issues upon which local management were willing to negotiate. Site management in effect sought to restrict collective bargaining to monitoring the implementation of

decisions negotiated at national level. There was a distinct feeling of disempowerment at office level:

The latest one that they want to bring in is a training thing called OSCAR. Now that's come from nationally and at the moment we're still waiting to see whether...where the discussion nationally is on it, but while we wait at local level, the management can go ahead. They're...the management's equivalent are never told "don't stop until we discuss it with the union. They're going ahead with it." There's nothing we can actually do because we're reliant on our negotiator to either get it stopped or to come back and tell us and that's a frustration for us (Interview 13, HMRC tax assessor in processing centre and local steward)

Union representatives also felt compromised because they believed that senior PCS negotiators at national HMRC level were failing to deal with the underlying issues. The union representatives at some of the larger HMRC sites believed that rather than challenging departmental management on its use of lean as a business approach, national negotiators were failing to deal with the root problem of work restructuring and the intensification of work. There was in effect an ongoing compromise between management and PCS at national level whereby national negotiators addressed issues piecemeal. The fear existed for local stewards that management would attempt to renege on these national agreements resulting in a worsening cycle of workplace conditions. In confirming that management attempt to control the labour process by continually undermining its own agreements (Durand, 2007), the strength of local union bargaining is weakened through the management-labour compromise at more senior levels. Escalation of issues centred on specific lean or Pacesetter issues rather than addressing underlying and ongoing issues related to changes in work organization.

The more limited evidence from other parts of the Civil Service confirms the reduction in scope and depth in collective bargaining between PCS and management. Decentralisation and reorganization of Civil Service functions have limited the scope and depth of bargaining mitigated in part by such factors as local union activism and the nature of the jobs undertaken. These limitations on the scope and depth of collective bargaining were evident both in such areas as the Ministry of Justice where PCS had reached a concordat over lean (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2009) and in areas such as Scottish Government where

management did not overtly use lean. As a proxy for the changing nature of industrial relations, the reduction in depth and scope of collective bargaining confirms the continuing shift away from the more pluralist forms of bargaining evident under the Whitley Council system (Corby, 1998).

The previous chapters highlighted that the significance of lean lies not in the use of specific techniques, but in the way that lean is used as a system of control. Not every central government department has endorsed lean working and those that have used it have done so in an inconsistent fashion. Arguably, the critical issue is that the introduction of lean practices has magnified the reduction of both scope and depth of collective bargaining. Civil Service management's implementation of lean has brought into stark relief an approach to negotiation whereby what management consider the unassailable logic of lean brooks no challenge. That is not to say that those departments where lean is not explicitly used encourage union negotiation, but the introduction of lean does provide an avenue for management to use the rhetoric of organizational change as a vehicle to restrict both the scope and depth of collective bargaining at office level. Some local site managers retained a residual sympathy for the union position and through the strength of local bargaining acceded to union demands around the fringes of work organization. Other managers used lean as an excuse to negate union power. However, with local site management's autonomy to act independently increasingly constrained by more senior tiers, the scope of negotiation, while notionally broad insofar as the local union could still raise issues, was significantly reduced in depth. Fundamental issues around the labour process were relegated at the expense of bargaining around the fringes of organizational change. It confirms a pattern in UK industrial relations since the 1980s (McIlroy, 1988). Using lean as a totem, management have attempted to amplify this trend. The management focus on the tools of a business improvement process disguises the fact that underpinning lean is management's attempt to exert greater control over the state labour process. Interviewee 22, reflecting on his past experience of union-management negotiation on lean, said:

So it isnae about white boards, it never was about white boards and individual monitoring, that was...that was part of the game. It was about breaking the staff down into units that were where they wanted them.

For the union, negotiation over techniques distracted from it from underlying material changes.

The paradox of decentralisation under which this regime of industrial relations exist is not merely that it devolves operational management to the level of individual government departments whilst allowing the state to retain strict financial control (Page, 2010). Within each department, decentralisation has resulted in increasing attempts by management to retain control at the most senior levels of the department rather than devolve any level of autonomy to lower tiers of management. This has had a significant impact on the scope and depth of bargaining at local office level. The emphasis for the union at national level becomes one whereby the success of local bargaining is judged on how effectively matters are policed, prejudicing the procedural issues of bargaining over the substantive (Flanders, 1970).

The very limited scope and depth of negotiation afforded the trade union indicates a concerted effort by management to nullify or minimise the influence of organised labour along the narrow lines of management's own choosing. However the use of work systems premised on control of the workforce and based on the fragmentation and functionalization of work has, as Durand (2007) suggests, weakened the trade union's ability to represent its members. With sites increasingly dealing with very limited streams of work, industrial relations at local level developed a very narrow focus dealing more with the contingencies of specific work functions rather than broader issues around the labour process. Work reorganization, where supported by a managerial rhetoric of lean is integrally linked to the ways that management has tried to manipulate systems of collective bargaining thereby deflecting from the union from challenging management over its attempts to change the workforce's material conditions. The next section will examine the PCS response.

6:2 The PCS Response

The changing picture of industrial relations, typified by management's attempts to reorder systems of collective bargaining, creates a lens through which the changing nature of the employment relationship between management and labour force can be studied. The role of the trade union as the collective voice of the workforce is clearly crucial. Without the discussion of the state of collective bargaining in the section above, it would be difficult to contextualise the union's response to lean, the third of the research questions.

An exploration of the union response will allow a fuller understanding of the employment relationship within the context of a management system of control and the employment compromise that arises from this. There are two aspects that illustrate the PCS response. The first is the response of the union representatives at site level and the second is the collective response of the union.

6:2:1 The Union Representative and the Intensity of the Labour Process

The basis of PCS organization is the Group (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2012). As explained above, the Groups generally mirror Civil Service department organization. Each Group has full time officials, who along with lay trade union stewards, negotiate with management. With decentralisation, negotiation on personnel and operational matters is self-contained along departmental lines.

The representative structures of PCS have increasingly relied upon a network of lay stewards (Fairbrother, 2000) in preference to utilising full time officials. The role afforded to paid officers of the union is negligible for most union members. Where expert or specialised guidance is needed, this is likely to come from branch stewards or regional lay officers who have built up expertise through training or by experience. The interviewees included a branch officer specialising in health and safety who negotiated with management at regional level, and a steward who dealt with complex personnel problems across a number of sites. Complex personal cases were generally handled by lay officers from the local union branch although the majority of the increasing number of personal cases was handled by local site stewards.

To undertake their union functions, stewards were allocated 'facility time'. The DWP ERF (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2003) allowed paid time away from work duties for "trade union activities" such as attendance at branch meetings and for "trade union duties" that included local negotiations with management. Facility time was subject to limitations that specifically stated that ordinary union representatives were restricted in the amount of time that they could use for trade union work. Additional time was provided for health and safety representation, personal case representation and union learning. Local union stewards often held a variety of posts simultaneously. The need to interview representatives in unconventional locations and fit in with representatives' time constraints reflect increasingly stringent restrictions on union facility time.

On one level, the ability of any union to respond to changes in work organization relies on the capacity and number of union representatives. This research confirms Upchurch *et al.*'s (2008) findings that PCS had significant strength in being able to mobilise its membership in resisting management. Union representatives used health and safety legislation as a bulwark to mitigate some of the effects of management policies. Interviewee 33, a Social Fund officer and local steward in DWP, discussed how his management was attempting to use performance management as a disciplinary tool and how the union used health and safety procedures to combat this. He said:

as a TU side we've been very successful by preventing this through putting in stalling mechanisms such as ISRAs⁸⁷, reasonable adjustments that would have to be brought into effect, insisting on occupational health referrals and it's only through a very protracted individual case by case battle to move away from them

These union strengths came in the context of countervailing forces whereby Civil Service management had increasingly imposed on its workforce increasingly rigid and punitive personnel and human resource (HR) policies, most of which were underpinned by disciplinary policies. There was increased monitoring of sickness absence through attendance management policies. Performance management systems particularly in the telephony sections were extensively used to monitor work output. Interviewees also referred to the increased monitoring of security procedures. The researcher's attendance at union committee meetings confirmed that in addition to the more rigid adherence of the procedures themselves, these were allied to a more punitive use of disciplinary penalties, with sanctions often exceeding those set out in the departmental HR policies. One example was where a member of staff had replied to an email from a private sector partner organization, sending the email to a non-'gsi'⁸⁸ address and omitting to delete the National

⁸⁷ Individual Stress Risk Assessments

⁸⁸ GSI is the government email system. The system is secure insofar as it is password-controlled and accessed through the use of an identification device. The security issue is that the same level of security may not be operated by the private sector partner organization. The irony of the incident is on a 'send reply' email that the sender from the partner organization would already know the National Insurance Number of the social security benefit claimant concerned.

Insurance Number of a social security claimant from the reply. Management treated these security breaches as gross misconduct rather than the minor or serious misconduct penalties set out in the HR policies. Management's use of the disciplinary rules resulted in the dismissal of members. Disciplinary penalties were also imposed on managers who failed to apply these penalties. One DWP union representative (Interviewee 33) stated that he was currently dealing with around 40 disciplinary cases for various reasons and had within the recent past had 80 such cases outstanding at the one time for an office with a staff of under 500. One of his colleagues said:

there is a room quite near where I sit and he's never out of it with people just trotting in and out. He must be extremely busy. I don't know whether it's personal cases or whatever it is, but he's in and out, in and out all the time (Interview 35, DWP Social Fund decision maker in telephony centre)

The intensification of work has had a direct bearing on the increasing personal case workload of union representatives and the complexity of the issues that need resolved. Allied to the amount of local negotiation on organizational issues, there were increased pressures on union stewards. The data suggests that the more intense the workplace regime and the more skilled or committed the representative the greater the pressure on union representatives at a time when Civil Service Management was attempting to place increasing constraints on the facility time allocation of individual stewards. One steward commented:

I think we're swimming against the flow, so there's a great deal of effort expended on many, many fronts, just because there are so many issues. [...] there's too few people dealing with it all (Interview 16, DWP benefits assessor and local steward)

In lean systems where the needs of the individual worker are secondary to achieving the financial needs of the organization (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992), then it comes as no surprise that silencing or negating employee dissent is central to the employment relationship. Effective union representation that contests the intensification of the labour process is a bulwark that the employer would wish to eliminate or control to its own ends. Issues of work intensification come to the fore at the point where union stewards represent their members in disciplinary cases. Not only do stewards have their facility time to support their members 'squeezed',

pressure on stewards to concentrate or bargain with management on the problems of individuals rather than collective issues is a potential source of weakness for the union (Darlington, 2010). In practical terms, the more time that stewards spend on individual cases, the less time they have available to concentrate on the organizational issues that created the personal cases in the first place. With stewards forced to concentrate their efforts on the conflict between the individual worker and the organization, it shifts the focus away from the collective relationship between workforce and organization from which the underlying problem originates.

6:2:2 The Union and the Collective Response

This next section will examine the response to lean in terms of the collective response of the union. This section will provide an overview of the national union's approach to changes in the organization of work through examining its conference decisions and public pronouncements. This will help to place into context how the union has responded to lean at a local level. Two arguably critical incidents will help evaluate.

6:2:2:1 The National Union View

At national leadership level, PCS has appeared to maintain a largely consistent stance on lean. Since the election of Mark Serwotka as General Secretary in 2000 (Charlwood, 2004; Public and Commercial Services Union, n.d.), the PCS leadership has been controlled by a left wing group following a broadly consistent ideological and political platform. Not unexpectedly where organizational change was seen by PCS as a direct threat to members' job conditions, the national union's response was broadly consistent with the degree of militancy that might be expected from the likely ideological stance of the leadership and the espoused goals of the union (Kelly, 1996). PCS during the research period supported 39 strikes by its members⁸⁹, not all admittedly with the expressed aim of challenging work change initiatives, but indicative of the union leadership's opposition to successive governments' restructuring of the Civil Service and its services. With the adoption of lean by HMRC, the national union approved the use of industrial action to combat the resulting changes in work organization (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2006). Subsequent motions to national union delegate conferences have committed PCS to an oppositional stance on lean (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2008d; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011c). PCS also commissioned the

⁸⁹ Appendix 1 for full details

production of a booklet (Gall, 2007) for distribution to its members highlighting the threats to members posed by lean. In the foreword, Serwokta wrote:

Lean involves breaking up skilled jobs into less skilled jobs and increased monitoring of work. Staff with years of experience and many skills are finding their job now consists of performing monotonous and repetitive tasks, in the context of an increasingly aggressive and target-driven management culture. Job satisfaction and the quality of work are falling as incidents of bullying, stress and sickness absence are increasing. (Gall, 2007:4)

He also added in highlighting why members should read the booklet that:

The purpose of this pamphlet is to alert our members to what Lean is, why it should be opposed, and how it can be stopped. (Gall, 2007:4)

In one sense, the approach of the union to the efficiency agenda of the pre- and post-2010 governments and to the implementation of lean was largely consistent with the PCS's political and ideological standpoint. The strikes undertaken during the research period centred on the state's efficiency agenda. PCS opposed the reduction in staff numbers, an increase in workloads and the removal of financial resources from the public sector. Intuitively, there appears to be a link between the approach taken by PCS to the state's efficiency agenda and oppositional views expressed in Gall's (2007) pamphlet. On one level, there was a level of congruence between the national union and the wider membership witnessed by an alignment of shared views on the problems associated with lean and an oppositionist stance at senior union levels driven by the concerns of activists and union members (Upchurch *et al.*, 2012). Yet as will become apparent, there are significant discontinuities in the union's approach to lean and changes in work organization where the union had agreed concordats on lean. Despite an apparent realisation by the union that the efficiency agenda and lean systems are inextricably linked, the contradictions in the position of the national union around work change become difficult to reconcile.

The exact reasons for these contradictions are difficult to discern. There are two caveats that need to be made before exploring these contradictions. The first is the historic development of the PCS. Branches have historically pursued a more militant line than the full time leadership (Fairbrother, 2000). Members in different

Groups have also varied in levels of militancy although with departmental restructuring and amalgamation these different traditions have become less significant over time. The second caveat is the tendency of full time officials to become socialised to management views (Hyman, 1989; McIlroy, 1988) and become less likely to pursue frontal opposition. The lack of support for the research project described in chapter 3 suggests that despite its apparent ideological stance on lean, PCS at national level in practical terms lacked a willingness to provoke its management by supporting a more thorough investigation into lean. The suggestions made during the initial research phase that the researcher make contact with senior civil servants may indicate a degree of socialisation between management and union, and that the tenor of relations over lean was not wholly one of 'frontal opposition'.

The contradictions in the union position are revealed in a number of areas. There is an obvious contradiction between decisions reached by national conference which set the official policy of opposition to lean working and the subsequent actions by negotiators in dealing with management. The PCS National Conference of 2011 highlights this issue (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011c). Despite earlier Conference decisions to oppose the further extension of lean, the emergency motion to conference⁹⁰ indicated that union negotiators had been acting in way that ran contrary to its own union policy. For reasons of their own choosing national negotiators had effectively provided tacit approval to HMRC management for its use of lean working. This contradictory approach by the national union reflects, as Carter *et al.* (2012) argue, the marginalisation of workplace control issues to the detriment of the union's members.

Whilst there might be grounds to view this type of compromise on lean as a tactical or instrumental approach to industrial relations, another aspect of this contradiction is much less easy to explain. Pragmatism may dictate an instrumental approach to negotiation at national level due to the union's relative weakness in the collective bargaining systems discussed earlier in this chapter. However, why the national union would want to actively endorse the ethos of lean is more difficult to discern. Two examples illustrate this contradictory approach. The agreement between Departmental trade union side and HMRC management over the Pacesetter Way document (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011b) where

⁹⁰ Full text at Appendix 7

PCS publicly endorse lean is difficult to reconcile in the context of conference decisions and its public oppositional stance. The Pacesetter Way contains *inter alia* the statement:

Both DTUS⁹¹ and HMRC agree that Pacesetter contains tools and techniques that, where correctly applied can improve the quality and productivity of business delivery and public service. Both parties want to improve the processes that deliver a quality public service – cutting unnecessary and time-consuming bureaucracy

The second example is reflected in the invitation to Vanguard Consulting to address a special PCS Conference in 2005. Vanguard⁹² was invited to discuss the issues arising from the implementation of lean within HMRC. Whilst his contribution at the conference is no longer extant⁹³, Seddon reiterated his argument that the implementation of lean in HMRC was fundamentally flawed (Seddon, 2009). However the invitation by the union to a consultant whose opinions uphold the argument that when implemented correctly lean would be of benefit to the organization is telling. Collaboration with Seddon endorses the view that for some sections of the national union leadership the issue of lean is one of implementation. The problem with lean in effect arises from the ineffectual way that management has implemented lean rather than more fundamental issues around control of the state labour process. Critically these views fail to link the government's efficiency agenda, ironically over which PCS has supported numerous strikes, with the way that management have used lean systems.

As Fisher (2004) argues, there has been a fundamental misunderstanding by PCS leadership of the nature of organizational change and its relationship to the manipulation of the labour process. How widespread this misunderstanding is within the national union leadership must remain speculative, nonetheless to a significant

⁹¹ Departmental Trade Union Side

⁹² John Seddon is the Managing Director of Vanguard Consulting.

⁹³ Gall (2007) refers to a PCS Conference held in December 2005 (The Civil Service: Visions for the Future) at which Richard Davis, an associate of Seddon, makes the point "HMRC do not have a proper understanding of the Toyota system, but are just cutting costs. Toyota works differently, by upskilling people, concentrating on understanding the customer, and using resources to provide better services, with the extra consequence of reducing costs.

degree the national union has failed to comprehend and thereby address two critical issues. Civil Service management has, first, used lean systems to attempt to reorder work organization and, secondly, that lean systems are premised on the exclusion of collective voice. Effectively treating lean as a 'stand-alone' issue unconnected to the marketization of the Civil Service and the other issues over which PCS has taken strike action reveals a flawed understanding of how management controls the state labour process. This lack of understanding also explains the lack of urgency in promoting the research: why else would stewards in the Scottish Government office in the preliminary phase of the research decline to participate because stewards were *too busy* with organizational restructuring? The consequences of this lack of understanding can be seen in terms of the response of the union at local office level and the impact on the management-workforce compromise.

6:2:2:2 The Union Response at Site Level

A central question in analysing the union response is whether the management-union compromise at national level impacts on the union response at the local level. In view of the inter-relationship between the productive organization and the employment relationship (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002), the response of the local union and its members is critical. This section will examine the extent to which the parameters created by the types of concordats found in the Ministry of Justice and HMRC limit or influence the local union response.

As Kelly (1998) argues, the response of a union is influenced by the degree to which the union ranges from moderate to militant. Members in public sector white collar unions have historically acted collectively out of a sense of public service and less due to a perception of conflict within the employment relationship (Price, 1983). Some account of the views of the PCS members and stewards must be noted to frame the local union's response.

Two themes emerge from the PCS membership testimony. The first confirms the continuing commitment of the membership to a public service ethos and the desire to provide a good standard of service to the public despite management's attempts to create a public service based on marketised values (Price, 1983; Carter *et al.*, 2011b). The second theme was opposition to lean: it was seen as a system designed to extract maximum effort from the workforce and as an inappropriate way of responding to the individual needs of the public.

A belief in the value of an efficient and effective public service was important to respondents. There was evident pride in the service provided on behalf of the public and belief in the need to undertake that work in an efficient fashion. One respondent stated:

I don't have any problem with getting things done more efficiently as long as it's counter-balanced by the fact, well, you should be spending more time in looking at the customers' needs, customer requirements. It's that whole thing, but this is all...this is all just about making things quicker from the point of view of administration. There's no customer service aspect to it. It's just purely about driving down costs and bugger the customer! (Interview 5, DWP Social Fund decision maker in telephony centre)

The belief by staff that they could contribute to the improvement of service reflects that the distinct nature of Civil Service unionism remained even in a period of more conflictual employment relations. Where union members parted company with management's interpretation of how efficiency could be achieved was over management's use of lean. Lean was not seen as a panacea, but as an unnecessary imposition of a process that added little towards improving efficiency. Lean was seen as a device to enforce greater control over work processes and thereby extract more work from the workforce in a period of reduced financial resources in the public sector. The following quotations illustrate these themes:

Well the theory of Lean would be, to my mind, that you try to get more and more results out of less and less resources or the same results out of less resources. That's my understanding of it (Interview 3, DWP Job Centre adviser/line manager and local steward)

Me, personally, I just see it as a lot of bureaucratic nonsense at this point of time because, one, staff don't care about it, they don't see the benefits of using Lean if it was used properly. Secondly, if any of my staff have a problem I can still be approached, so they can come to me with a problem and it's not they have to go through effing Lean boards or the Lean 'polis'⁹⁴ or a Lean Practitioner. They can just basically air their grievance to me there and then, but then, believe it or not, I'm still classed as quite approachable, [...], you know, I'm awright to talk to. There may be situations in other offices

⁹⁴ "Polis", *i.e.* police

where the management may not be approachable, you know, you may not be able to talk to you, you know... maybe that is your only option to put any concerns or grievances forward, but for me I find unnecessary. I don't need it; I don't need it to do my job and I certainly don't need it for my staff. Staff have totally...they don't need it and if they've got any concerns, grievances or anything they want changed, then they can do it themselves without having any impact on policy or anything like that. They've got my 'go ahead' to do it, just go ahead and do it (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

The following quotation makes clear that lean was seen as the catalyst for management to intensify the processes of work allying it to more punitive personnel policies:

I think my impression is that Lean became the blame hound, but it also became a vehicle that let them introduce much more aggressive forms of management outside how they delivered the work at the same time as we had to deal with Lean and all that it brought to the table. We've got much more aggressive forms of sickness absence management, much more oppressive management in terms of leave and your ability to take leave, family friendly policies which have become less and less family friendly (Interview 11, HRMC tax processor and local steward)

This evidence reflects the link between the productive organization, the lean techniques, and the employment relationship in which lean operates.

Using the rhetoric of lean to disguise the nature of the work processes was ineffective. Staff members had from the 1980s been subject to a raft of business improvement schemes (Foster and Hoggett, 1999; Currie and Proctor, 2003) each in its turn, in a form of managerial amnesia, presenting the newest approach as a panacea neglecting that previous systems had made similar claims to organizational efficiency.

Participants generally rejected lean as an approach appropriate for the Civil Service. Lean was often viewed as a system of work from a manufacturing sector and thereby inappropriate for use in the public sector. It was primarily seen as inappropriate as civil servants had to deal with the personal and individual circumstances of the public rather than handle people as units of production:

The difficulty I have when I translate my understanding of its origins in terms of productions into the post Second World War Japan, is how that relates to a service like Job Centre Plus where there are so many potential interactions and so many potential interactions with quite a broad variety of customers and human beings, and every time you do that, there's a level of unpredictability, almost a randomness about what a possible outcome will be, and I think...I don't think I'm the only person who feels that the difficulty of trying to apply Lean and apply your understanding of Lean is that it still seems to carry within it, if you like the DNA of being related to production, and it seems to me quite a difficult thing to then translate into a very customer-related service (Interview 31, DWP administrative office in Job Centre)

Arguably, these views that place lean into a manufacturing setting miss the point that lean is a system of control irrespective of the industrial sector in which it is used. However these views frame the context of the response of the union at local level and help explain the degree and form of opposition to lean working.

The union response at local level is the product of three inter-related factors: the nature of local industrial relations, the way that PCS at national level has framed the debate on organizational change and the perspectives of local union members. However the response of the union at site level should also be seen in terms of the union and its members' capacity to contest management attempts to control the labour process. The union and its members are not passive recipients of forces beyond their control (Littler, 1982; Webster, 1990). The responses ranged from spontaneous and individual acts to organised collective action.

The spontaneous and individual actions are significant because for members lean was the most visible emblem of work change and the accompanying human resource management regime against which PCS members could voice their dissent. The following quotation is illustrative:

each team was supposed to have a [lean] board meeting for about five minutes each evening and when I moved to her team in the first place about six months ago or so, it was the first time that I'd ever been told that you have to come and stand round the board. Well, of course, as a union rep, I knew that this had reared its ugly head in the past and I basically asked her

to show me the guidance that said that you had to do that and I've got to say she was incandescent with rage that I wouldn't...that I wasn't compliant on that. I mean it's such a petty thing, and she even took me into a room and threatened me with disciplinary action and all sorts because of that, and told me how other managers had overheard me saying it and it was terrible and all this (Interview 14, HMRC tax processor and local steward)

Often the responses to lean were avoidance or circumvention rather than overt opposition. Such responses included trying to avoid participation in lean activities. Examples included: a line manager who failed to hold daily lean meetings whilst pretending to hold them⁹⁵; a steward who avoided attending management training on lean; and withdrawing from a lean focus group in protest over management's use of this group to promote a lean agenda. For the most part individual responses were *ad hoc* and cautious reflecting the risks accruing from the performance management regime where, as Interviewee 12, a tax assessor and local steward in HMRC stated, employees exhibiting "negative behaviours" were likely to receive poorer performance markings for voicing dissent.

The collective response by the union at local level was framed by the way that local PCS representative structures formed a conduit through which dissent could be voiced. The collective response consisted in part by the way that the local PCS representatives were engaged in the monitoring and policing role discussed above. There was some evidence to suggest that this monitoring role provided scope for the local union to contest management's attempts at restructuring work. However the interviews revealed that even within offices with high level of steward activism, the capacity to restrict management using this policing role was limited. Interviewee 13, a tax assessor and local steward in HMRC, referred to the union preventing "rogue" managers from implementing changes that breached national agreements. There was no evidence to suggest, however, benchmarks and targets imposed at national level were subject to successful challenge. Respondents consistently stated that PCS was largely ineffective in challenging performance targets. There was also a recognition that, allied to the increasing workload on stewards arising from personal cases, management continually amended and

⁹⁵ This was done with the collusion of his line manager – the section on 'lean instrumental' discusses this in more detail

changed processes and procedures without consultation. One member reflecting on his observation of union stewards opined:

They [management] will have them [union representatives] running ragged, covering this, covering that and especially now covering all the personal cases due to attendance management and things like that. They basically have them tied up and therefore they're slipping things in, [...]. I'm only assuming that this is what's going on, but I reckon I'm not far off the mark. (Interview 32, DWP line manager)

On one level, the collective union response failed to counteract the use of lean working and organizational change. The PCS response inadequately addressed key issues of organizational change, for example, the imposition of work targets and the ability of management to change or amend its work procedures without negotiation. Where the union was most capable of contesting organizational change was in those areas where local management had a degree of autonomy free from restrictions placed on it by more senior tiers. In a DWP telephony centre, PCS health and safety representatives could use stress risk assessment procedures to move staff off telephone work. In a DWP processing centre, union pressure on its local management prevented the use of something akin to the Workforce Management system found in telephony centres to control break times. The level of success in collective action by the union over lean systems was related in part to the form of work organization and the degree to which it was controlled through the use of performance targets and information technology. The limited success that the union had in resisting the use of lean techniques was mitigated to the extent that management wanted to impose these tools and to what extent specific lean techniques were central to management achieving its performance targets. Where, for example, in 'lean embedded' it was a critical factor in achieving performance targets, the union was less able to challenge lean tools. In 'lean abandoned' where management no longer relied on lean techniques to implement control, the union's collective challenge was blunted as it faced 'head-on' the performance targets on which management was adamant in its desire to impose control.

The final type of response relates to certain critical incidents or flashpoints in the implementation of lean. Two particular instances are worthy of examination in typifying the collective response to lean. The first relates to the initial implementation of lean in HMRC in 2005 and consequent strike action. The second incident relates

to the use of workforce metrics in a DWP telephony call centre, at the point of interview an ongoing and largely unresolved issue.

The industrial action in HMRC in 2006 came as a direct result of the implementation of lean in a number of tax processing centres in 2005 (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2006). HMRC management piloted lean in one site before rolling it out to ten other offices. Interviewee 22, a steward in HMRC highlighted that several Scottish HMRC union branches had “failed to agree” with management over its use of lean in two locations. Union representatives from these branches had had the opportunity to visit another site used to pilot lean. Following their visit, the stewards were confirmed in their views that lean was a source of work intensification with work conditions akin to “battery farming”. The initiative for this strike action was led by local stewards in response to the impact of lean on their members and the lack of concrete response by the union at Group level. Despite finally securing Group support for strike action, the local union stewards felt they remained thwarted by the national union. They believed that the national union had not understood that the real aim of HMRC in introducing of lean was to make fundamental changes to the structure and delivery of tax and revenue work. One of the practical outcomes of these changes would be the closure of an office of 250 people and the transfer of work. Attempts by representatives on one specific site to attempt to ‘work to rule’ were thwarted by the national union. Representatives in one of the more militant union branches were accused of leading a “rep-driven”, not a “member-driven” dispute, the inference being that local stewards were persisting in a dispute for presumably political or ideological reasons rather than for the benefit of the members for whom national negotiation could resolve outstanding issues.

The Group Executive Committee negotiated a settlement to the dispute in June 2006, at which point dissident stewards were told that “they had to be trade unionists on this; [they] just had to bite to bullet on this.” What this example illustrates is that the response of the local union as a collective body is not one of passivity in face of organizational change, but is directly connected to the management-union compromise at national level. Agreements on lean negotiated at national level from the resolution of this dispute to the advent of the Pacesetter Agreement confirms the weakness of the trade union side at all levels of negotiation where management can continually revise and impose organizational changes (Durand, 2007).

The second significant incident was the industrial action that arose in a DWP call centre network. The catalyst for strike action was the increasing intensification of work within the Social Fund call centre network primarily due to management's use of performance metrics. In common with the call centre industry (Taylor and Bain, 1999), the Civil Service has used performance metrics to measure and control the way that work is processed. However, unlike earlier attempts within the Civil Service to match systems used within the private sector (Fisher, 2004), by the time of the current research government call centres were using significantly more sophisticated systems. These systems could measure the receipt and output of work, but also control the management of staff members' time and their work output in relation to the time worked. The Social Fund call centre for the receipt of Crisis Loans⁹⁶ was not the first time that DWP had used a telephony operation, but it was unusual in that it was staffed by decision makers thus extending the intensity of the work regime beyond clerical workers to those of junior managerial grade. Interviewees in one office highlighted that although lean had been implemented and supported through the use of Lean Practitioners, by the time of the dispute, lean had fallen significantly into abeyance. In practical terms, the intensity of the call centre regime had significantly reduced management's capacity to allow staff to engage in problem solving groups or use lean boards. Put more starkly, there was not sufficient time in the working day for management to allow staff the facility to engage in these types of activity. A steward, Interviewee 33, in one call centre opined that the main reasons for industrial action were increasingly unachievable performance targets and management's control over the working day summed up in the phrase "insidious micro-managing culture". One union member was honest enough to state that her reasons for strike action were less than ideological:

we all went out on strike, but to tell the truth I think a lot of the times it's not because of the strike, it's to get away from the phones for a couple of days and they're quite willing to lose the money to go out on strike so they don't have to come to their work. I think that's what it's got to (Interview 35, DWP Social Fund decision maker in telephony centre)

⁹⁶ Social Fund Crisis Loans were discretionary loans given to applicants in an emergency or as a consequence of a disaster where an award was the only means to prevent a serious risk to health and safety to an applicant and his/her family. Social Fund was abolished in 2013.

Although the reality of strike action did ultimately realise some minor improvements in some aspects of the workforce management regime, many of the issues remain unresolved. One steward argued that the national union at DWP Group level failed to support the local offices, by first failing to communicate with local union officials, and secondly appearing to fail to grasp the key issues, and thirdly, and most importantly, suspending forms of industrial action without involving the local union stewards. This critical incident is also symptomatic of the impact of the management-union compromise at national level. The fact that the use of lean was largely abandoned indicates that the absence or presence of specific lean techniques is not the substantive issue. The issue in both these flashpoints relates to the way that the national union has sought compromise over systems of control negotiating a policing role for the union at workplace level in return for the normalisation of industrial relations at those affected local offices.

The responses of the union at local level to forms of organizational change have ranged from, in Kelly's (1996) terms, moderate to militant, but also from the individual and spontaneous to the planned or organised and collective. Although the union response has seen short periods of very heightened activity, more commonly the union has attempted to resolve the issues through structured forms of response found within the existing collective bargaining procedures albeit against a background of constant and intense work restructuring.

6:3 The Trade Union Response: Its Direction, Intensity and Place in the Political-Economic Architecture

The conclusion to this chapter will draw together several strands examining the union response in terms of the direction of the union response, the intensity with which the union has directed its response and the union response in terms of the political-economic architecture of work within the Civil Service.

The union response to changes in the organization of work is mitigated by its capacity to deal with the restructuring of the labour process. The intensification of work, driven by lean, has undermined the local union's capacity to deal with the restructuring of work. Performance management systems have deflected the local union's efforts into dealing with personal cases that result directly from management's pursuit of lean working rather than tackle the underlying problems of work intensification. With local management's very limited autonomy to act

independently of senior tiers, functionalization of work regulated through IT and the management-union compromise at national level, the role for the local union is reduced to one of policing an increasingly limited number of work issues rather than contesting work restructuring. The issues covered in collective bargaining were increasingly reduced in scope and depth with performance targets and lean initiatives introduced without negotiation. Senior departmental management through its ability to functionalise work and retain control through IT systems and subsequent 'supply chain' relationships between different parts of the organization has the capacity to negate the union's collective voice within the workplace. Management's restructuring has effectively outmanoeuvred the union's ability to match management's reorganization of work. Although management attempts at control are a crucial factor they do not fully explain the ways in which the union has directed its efforts or the vigour or intensity with which these responses have been followed.

The union has directed its efforts in a number of ways. However, the more that management is able to control the use of technology and the accompanying systems of performance management that support it, the greater management's capacity to control the labour process (Fisher, 2004). The union's capacity to respond is correspondingly reduced. As management increasingly expands its capacity to control areas of work organization, the PCS has reduced the areas over which it has been able to bargain. Areas such as performance management and benchmarking targets that are most susceptible to measurement using computerisation are least likely to elicit an effective union response. The union is left to concentrate on those areas over which local management has less control.

Fisher (2004) argues that with the national union failing to understand the new politics of production, PCS leadership attempted to bargain members' conditions by sacrificing work quality to secure jobs. The employment compromise in the current context appears premised on the belief by the union at national level that there was scope to ameliorate the worst aspects of lean working through negotiation at national level by putting in place a series of safeguards. These safeguards were contained in such documents as the Pacesetter Agreement and the MOJ concordat (Public and Commercial Services Union, 2011b; Public and Commercial Services Union, 2009), but also implicitly through the sharing of information on forthcoming lean pilots. In return the union would be allowed to exercise a monitoring role to protect members' job quality. That compromise has, in

effect, validated the legitimacy of using lean initiatives without any real attempt to challenge lean's ethos and has allowed management the scope to widen the use of lean to more areas of Civil Service work.

Crucially for the union at local level, it has reduced the degree to which it is feasible for the union to direct its opposition at organizational change. Where the national union has supported strike action, it has done so in a way that supports the local membership to the extent that it ameliorates the worst excesses of organizational changes. The national union has failed to recognise certain issues that underlie management control. The number of days of industrial action, supported by PCS, bear witness to the national union's opposition to successive governments' neo-liberal agenda. Critically it has failed, however, to address the practical manifestations of lean at workplace level. The local union is left unsupported able only to contest a narrow range of issues. The national union's capacity to mobilise members into taking strike action and its rhetoric of public opposition against lean whilst sidestepping issues fundamental to the labour process at site level casts significant doubt on the idea that congruence exists between the PCS leadership and the membership at workplace level in the way that Upchurch *et al.* (2012) suggest.

Where the importance of lean comes to the fore is in terms of how the union has both only partially recognised its significance as a means of work restructuring. Despite material changes in working conditions, the union has missed the significance of lean. In part, its significance is that management has made a sacred totem or fiction out of lean. That fiction, as Coffey (2006) argues, has rhetorical power. In the Civil Service, the fiction effectively excludes certain aspects of work restructuring from the ambit of negotiation between union and management. Management presents lean as a system of work organization that has unchallengeable logic: lean's worth as a means of achieving productive efficiency is axiomatic that belies any union challenge. The fiction is exhibited in three ways: the amount of effort management has expended on presenting lean as a solution to work process problems to the staff through Intranet material, the appointment of staff members training in lean delivery and lean awareness courses; the uncritical adoption of lean techniques that denies any potential problems; and the failure to demonstrate why lean is different from previous ostensibly very similar forms of organizational change. For the most part, the union has tolerated the introduction of

lean techniques and tools whilst failing to recognise that one of its central tenets is the exclusion of the collective voice of the workforce. The significance of lean lies not in the value of its inconsistently applied tools and techniques, but as a system of management that seeks to control the labour process. Lean techniques become a means to create a new locus of management authority by-passing the collective voice of the union. Equally, the collective voice of the union is side-lined by limiting the union to a policing role founded on an employment compromise where the outward manifestations of lean are tolerated in return for certain safeguards ultimately not realised in practice.

It is at points where the fiction of lean wears thin that the type of spontaneous responses discussed above creates a reaction among the membership. Equally at those points where the intensification of lean working reveals its true nature that more collective and organised opposition occurs. Granted the totem of lean has not appeared in identical form in every location or has appeared with the same degree of evangelistic fervour. Yet where the national union believes it has negotiated away the worst excesses of lean working, it has in effect only argued away part of the fiction. In failing to address lean as a system of management control, the union has failed to recognise that the underlying ethos of lean does not change through re-branding or re-labelling. Where the local union has identified that lean is integral to a fundamental shift in work restructuring the response has been directly confrontational. Although union members found the rhetoric of lean unconvincing, the very fact the rhetoric was *unconvincing* disguised its nature. The more insidious effects of lean that exclude employee voice under the self-evidently meritorious guise of team working (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992) are obscured. The flashpoints of lean implementation generate a reaction leading to collective action. The routine lean techniques, supported by management rhetoric, becomes increasingly familiar and less threatening, but no less a means by which management attempt to deflect and eliminate the collective voice of the union membership.

The vigour of the union response continues to reflect the history and context of Civil Service unionism. There remain significant elements of comparatively collaborative management-employee relations typical within white collar unions (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004; Price, 1983). However the research supports the contention that the level of intensity of union opposition at local level is a product of

the degree to which the union at national level will support local action, both short and long term. With the national union intent on bargaining with management to achieve a pragmatic compromise rather than maintaining frontal opposition, frontal opposition at local level was short-lived. The tendency was to return to more regularised forms of response at local level mediated through the concordats between management and union where the focus was on the form of industrial relations rather than the substantive issues around organizational change leaving the symptoms of the underlying problems only ameliorated in part.

The level of support given to this research is indicative of the PCS approach. Throughout the research project, where the lack of support was ostensibly because the union needed to concentrate on other priorities other than lean suggests two points. It, first, suggests that it is easier for the union to engage in short bursts of industrial action rather than maintain frontal opposition to organizational changes over an extended period. However it also suggests that for the national union lean is a 'side issue', a passing management fad that in due course will be replaced by some other process. The lack of intensity in addressing lean indicates that it has failed to identify that lean is a means to exert increased control by excluding the collective voice of the union from all aspects of work. The techniques of lean are largely ineffectual in achieving their stated aim of promoting continuous improvement: the techniques are often little more than ways of working that are *post hoc* rationalisations required due to cuts in staff and resources. Failing to identify that lean techniques are the means to exclude PCS from the negotiating process through the axiomatic logic of lean is a significant weakness for the union. Where the reliability of lean techniques are seen as ineffectual, the union response has been relatively passive, but where the impact of lean has been more fundamental to the core of working conditions, the response has been more oppositional. However failing to direct more overt opposition to all lean techniques allows management to blunt the union response in the extended periods between the short periods of more militant action.

Any analysis of the union response must ultimately be placed in the context of the employment relationship and the way management and union contest the frontiers of control. The analysis must also be placed into the context of the political economy of work within the Civil Service reflecting the political, the power exercised by management and union in the employment relationship, and the economic, the

organization of work and the division of labour (Wamsley and Zald, 1973). The union response must also be viewed within the context of the productive model of the Civil Service (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) where the model of work reflects the interrelationship between the product policy, the productive organization and the employment relationship. There are three crucial points that must be made at this point in respect of this framework.

First, the way that management has attempted to restructure the organization of the Civil Service is directly linked to the way that it has attempted to eliminate and control the collective response of the union. By increasingly excluding more parts of the productive organization from the forum of debate, it has attempted to squeeze the union response into a more limited range of areas and to lessen the effect of the union response across those areas where the union retains influence.

Secondly, the employment relationship between management and workforce in the Civil Service has become increasingly similar to and consistent with that found elsewhere in the UK. The employment relationship has been increasingly individualised often through systems of performance management. Management control over work organization is supported by the drive for efficiency and the reduction of waste purportedly the means by which the private sector demonstrates its economic superiority over the public sector. Civil Service work historically conducted in “an atmosphere far removed from the rough and tumble of the business world” (Campbell, 1965:232) is increasingly subject to the marketised forms of work organization where eliminating collective voice is central to freeing market forces (Coates, 2000; Clark, 1996). The fact that different forms of lean working exist even within the same government department does not detract from the ways that work organization in the Civil Service is being assimilated into political-economic forms found elsewhere within the UK. What has happened within the Civil Service is consistent with the neo-liberal political-economic architecture of the UK (Boyer, 2005). Variations in work organization, as Amable and Lung (2005) suggest, relate to the political processes that shape the institutions in which work is carried out. This, in part, reflects the function of the Civil Service that delivers state services and retains levels of probity and consistency in the public interest (Robson, 1956; Du Gay, 2000). It reflects the degree to which management have the capacity and desire to exercise control (Littler, 1982), but also in terms of the capacity of the union to confront and contest the management agenda. This relationship is located

within a form of double-interaction across different levels from macro to meso to micro (Amable and Lung, 2005). The state's attempts at commodifying and marketising the public sector impact directly on government departments. This marketization provides the impetus to find the means to exercise control over the organisation of work and any form of collective opposition that impedes that control. With institutions affected by the socio-economic compromises found at organizational levels, the shape of work organization is driven by the degree of collective worker pressure from below and management-union relations at departmental level.

This raises the third issue. The research data supports the existence of an employment or governance compromise at the meso and micro levels of the organization. The governance compromise at the meso or departmental level between union and management is based around accepting certain assurances around the introduction of lean in return for the right to negotiate within set parameters on organizational change. For PCS, the compromise seeks to ameliorate the worst of aspects of lean, but without challenging the underlying systems of control. At micro or site level, the governance compromise provides the means to police organizational change within limited parameters, but without providing the capacity within the formal system of collective bargaining to challenge the lean agenda or the efficacy of lean techniques. The local compromise regularises employment relations at the cost of blunting collective union power. The governance compromise has increasingly become based on the exchange of information where management provides the information it believes the union needs to police organizational change in return for the retention of vestiges of previous systems of collective bargaining. At those points where the intensification of work creates direct frontal opposition, the balance of the governance compromise shifts towards the union, but often only briefly. The temporary re-alignment of the employment compromise forces management into ameliorating a small number of the most visible manifestations of lean working. It leaves untouched many of the tools and techniques upon which management seeks to subvert collective voice. The re-alignments are often temporary leaving management with the capacity to break its own agreements often without fear of reprisal (Durand, 2007).

The final chapter will draw together key themes from the three analysis chapters to assess to what degree the information from this case can help understand the nature of changes in the organization of work in the UK Civil Service.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The final chapter draws together the key themes of the thesis. The conclusion will highlight important new insights into the use of lean working in the context of the UK Civil Service. Utilising a productive model approach previously used in the private sector to evaluate the political economy of work, this thesis holds that there is significant value in applying this model to the public sector. There are important new theoretical insights to be gained from using this political-economic model of work to evaluate the nature of lean in the public sector. The data from the research has developed an important contribution to understanding how lean working is implemented, its impact on civil servants' skills, and the context into which the trade union, the PCS, has responded to work restructuring. The research has provided a significant opportunity to view how lean is applied within several government departments and has found important variations in practice. These variations have allowed the thesis to develop a new typology of lean in the context of the increasingly marketised Civil Service. Rather than view lean as a unitary entity, these original insights address why management uses lean and why lean's significance lies not in its effectiveness as a set of tools and techniques, but in the way that lean is used to control the state labour process and minimise the collective voice of the trade union.

Lean, its impact on workers' skills and the trade union response are firmly located within the political-economic infrastructure of the UK. The state has adhered to a neo-liberal agenda that promotes economic individualism and the curtailment of collective power of labour in the interests of capital. The Civil Service has not been immune from this marketization. Work organization at an office level is significantly impacted by the state's neo-liberal agenda and the way the departmental managements have used imitative private sector practices (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2004) such as lean to achieve costs savings. The productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) when applied to assess changes in the Civil Service provides original insights to link the delivery of government services at a local office level to the way that work is organised to deliver those services and to the employment relationship between civil servants and their management. The approach also allows evaluation of the way that the state (the macro level), Civil

Service management (the meso level) and the workplace level (the micro level) are inextricably bound and interact (Amable and Lung, 2005). The unique position of the Civil Service, where civil servants are both agents and employees of the state results in a distinct state labour process (Fairbrother, 1994) in which management apply lean.

The thesis is also original in that it has examined lean looking not at a single department, but unlike other studies it compares a number of departments during a period of economic and political restructuring. The happenstance of the research project's timing however did not allow the researcher to witness the full impact of the new government's efficiency cuts: it was too early for respondents to gauge the impact of the new government's spending policies in the wake of the 2010 general election.

Contrary to the viewpoint that lean is a way to use the knowledge and skills of the workforce as a means of increasing the productive efficiency of the workforce (Womack *et al.*, 1990; Hines *et al.*, 2004), the thesis concurs with the argument that lean is integral to a 'politics of production' where management increasingly seeks to expand the locus of control into more areas of work (Stewart and Martínez Lucio, 1998). The application of lean in the Civil Service has distinctive features attributable to the historic and national context of the organization and its place within the UK state's agenda of marketization and efficiency savings. Lean is coherent with and integral to the state's agenda of marketization. The argument either at a strategic level in terms of flow or at operational level in terms of specific techniques that lean generated greater levels of efficiency is contentious. Clearly evidence points to management being able to make efficiency savings and having the capacity to increase worker output. In plain terms, a reduced number of employees had to make up the shortfall for staffing cuts by greater effort. However, lean systems did not work in the way that its advocates claim. Lean tools or techniques were certainly used to cut out elements of work processes, but there was little evidence to show that changes were worker-inspired. The efficiencies that came from lean techniques were in some ways less efficient than the processes that they replaced. 'Flow' reduced the number of stages in many work processes, but often at the expense of quality. The efficiencies were not wholly generated by lean techniques or tools, but were often the result of *post hoc* rationalisations of changes in work practice created by the intensification of work allied to increasingly punitive performance

management systems. Lean was made to work by management largely because it reflected the reduced resources within central government. Lean, linked into the political-economic infrastructure of work, was efficient only to the extent that it was a system of management control over the state labour process

The data from this research has provided an original contribution. Rather than view lean as a unitary and consistent system, the opportunity to study a variety of different office locations and types of work shows that lean is significantly more complex. This thesis has developed a new typology of lean reflecting that management did not use lean in a coherent fashion. The data showed that there were four distinct types of lean implementation. There is 'lean embedded' where lean activities were foundational to work organization and widely used across all processes. There is 'lean abandoned' where management had failed to maintain its earlier use of lean, often because achieving performance targets could be attained without the use of identifiable lean tools. There is 'lean instrumental' where management had adopted a pragmatic approach. Tools were given lip service, or adapted to fit the management agenda. Finally 'lean replicated' is, where without the use of the lean epithet, work was undertaken in similar fashion to those locations where lean was identifiably used. Management used different approaches to lean to the extent that particular lean techniques helped management achieve control in the specific circumstances of each office or area of work.

Despite differences of approach, these four types share an important level of coherence wider than the impact of individual techniques. Each in its own way was reliant on forms of standardisation not only of work processes, but also in the way that management circumscribed how workers performed their jobs in relation to other employees. The use of information technology was crucial in this standardising process. The four types of lean were also united by the way that each sought to limit worker autonomy. This reduction in autonomy was seen both in how civil servants dealt with their work and in their capacity to structure their day. Worker knowledge, supposedly a strength of lean working, was used to fit a management agenda. Lean sought to fashion employee participation in a way that met employer rather than worker objectives.

The thesis highlights that without certain key antecedents management would have been unable to implement lean systems of work. These antecedents, the decentralisation of operational control to departmental management, the

functionalization and segmentation of work, and the use of information technology, were crucial factors that allowed management to implement lean working. Without the standardisation of work and the capacity to restructure work organization and systems of personnel management, it would have been significantly more difficult for management to implement lean systems. Not only are these factors antecedent to lean's implementation, these factors are also the basis on which management can enhance their lean systems. When overlaid with a rhetoric of more efficient ways of working and axiomatic logic that promotes seemingly self-evidently meritorious forms of collaborative working (Garrahan and Stewart, 1992), management seek to disguise their attempts at controlling the labour process. As the thesis has consistently argued, whilst lean does generally operate using particular techniques, lean is more than the sum of its tools. Lean is a system of management control over the labour force that uses a range of strategic and operational approaches and techniques where the significance of the tools are not their efficiency *per se*, but their effectiveness as a means of control.

The investigation into the nature of lean confirms that management will adapt and adopt whichever approaches to managing control that most fit the political-economic infrastructure of work at local level (Littler, 1982). To reiterate, the way that lean is used relates to the circumstances of the situation into which lean is applied rather than the efficiency of the techniques themselves. Management's capacity or ability to use or discard forms of lean is important in this respect. The value of the productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002) is that it places variations in the productive organization into the context of the political-economic architecture of work where at a micro level lean is used to change work to reflect pressures from the state and departmental management implementing the state's agenda.

The second research question addresses the ways in which lean has impacted on the skills of the workforce. Across each of the variants of lean (embedded, abandoned, instrumental and replicated) the trajectory or direction of skill was downwards. Whilst job complexity was retained in certain areas, the amount of job autonomy exercised by the workforce was diminished. Civil Service work retained elements of its skilled service work characteristics (Carter *et al.*, 2011a). Job complexity continued to feature in Civil Service work primarily because of the complexity of the personal circumstances of the public who accessed

government services and the need for civil servants to handle that complexity. Even the work of decision makers undertaking judicial or quasi-judicial functions whose work is premised on the exercise of discretion (Baldwin *et al.*, 1992) were not immune from loss of skills. The process of decision making was constrained by the need to meet arbitrary performance targets often unconnected to the quality of legal process that underpinned those functions. The trend across those areas investigated was one of deskilling where work not directly linked to achieving management performance targets was effectively treated as waste.

The original contribution of the thesis to understanding the impact of lean on work skills is, first, that there is a particular focus on decision makers whose role has rarely been explored in terms of their interaction with their judicial functions. The second relates to the differences that types of lean implementation have on skills. There is certainly confirmation from the data that job complexity is a precondition for autonomy control (Thompson, 2007), but more significantly the thesis has provided an analysis of the ways that Civil Service management purposively used lean to reduce the level of skills to control the state labour process. Management's restructuring of work provided the means to create simpler jobs, even for decision makers, based on understanding a very narrow range of tasks where a wider knowledge of other employees' job roles and the context of Civil Service work was treated as an unnecessary luxury. Management's actions in reducing task complexity and job autonomy were purposive as it allowed management to initiate efficiency and costs savings. Lean systems, premised on simple jobs and worker participation within very limited bounds, reduced skills levels. The lean techniques provided little by way of worker-inspired continuous improvement. The new typology of lean allowed an examination of skill in different contexts crucially providing data to show the significant point that following abandonment of lean techniques, job autonomy did not reappear. Once an area of work has been 'leaned', the damage was done and lost skills were not recovered even for those involved in the decision making functions. In reality, lean provided the means to support increased management control over the workforce. Even within the Civil Service with its public sector ethos of service to the public, there was a disassociation of worker skills from the state labour process widening the gap between the conception and the execution of work (Braverman, 1974). Often it was the complexity of the public's circumstances that inadvertently acted as a protection against further deskilling. The degree to which the state will in future try to simplify the level of interaction between

the public and the state apparatus, through changes in the law, remains speculative, but may be an area of potentially profitable study.

The final research question relates to the response of the PCS trade union focusing on the union at workplace level. The data allows for new insights into the response of the union within the distinct context of the state labour process. The employment compromise, an important feature of the productive model approach at workplace or micro level, is central to trade union-management relations in this research in that it is directly linked to compromises found at the meso level of analysis.

The thesis confirmed the continuing existence of structured forms of collective bargaining even within a decentralised Civil Service. The thesis provided new insights in comparing different departments rather than in looking at departments in isolation. The crucial issue is how across the Civil Service management restricted the union to a policing or monitoring role over changes in work organization. These forms of negotiation reduced the capacity of the local union to maintain frontal opposition to lean working. Nationally, despite ideological opposition to lean, the union's approach premised procedural issues over substantive ones. Concordats such as the Pacesetter Agreement in HRMC between PCS and management provided a negotiating framework on lean, but these agreements failed to deal with the substantive issues of the intensification of work and deskilling, areas that had prompted this research in the first place. A type of governance or employment compromise was formed whereby in return for the union acquiring consultation rights over its implementation, management was able to use lean as a tool of organizational change. This compromised the position of the local union and its membership where direct frontal opposition was often of short duration and always subject to management's ability to continually restructure work undermining its own rules (Durand, 2007).

This raises the important issue of why a union with a militant ideology has apparently succumbed to this employment compromise. Whilst union representatives and PCS members at site level are directly affected by work restructuring, the senior union officials who approved the research on which this dissertation is based are often remote from the changes in work organization over which they negotiate with management. The research project is evidence of the disconnection between the national union and PCS members facing significant work

restructuring in their workplaces. However the thesis also shows that there exists a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of lean working within the union. As with the introduction of information technology (Fisher, 2007), a major antecedent to lean working, the form of governance compromise left the underlying issues of work restructuring often untouched. The issue around lean is not that it was badly implemented or “adapted” rather than “adopted” (Radnor, 2010; Seddon, 2009). The issue is that fundamentally lean is premised on controlling the labour process. The apparent inefficiency of lean techniques disguises that, first, lean relies on a *post hoc* rationalisation for new work procedures reflecting cuts in resources and staffing. Secondly, lean moves the locus of control away from the collective strength of the union. The shift in the locus of control is disguised by the axiomatic logic of lean that management present as requiring no justification other than its own existence. The failure of the union to support the research indicates that lean was seen as a side issue rather than something fundamental to the employment relationship. The fact that lean techniques did not generate the *employee-led* improvements promised by management disguises that one of the central material changes is that the use of lean techniques are designed to reduce the union’s capacity to effectively negotiate on issues collectively for its members. The union may ridicule lean techniques, but the more that management uses them, the greater the likelihood that these tools become the focus for management-employee relations rather than underlying issues of work restructuring.

For the local union and its membership, it was at the points where the fiction or rhetoric wore thin that collective and frontal opposition was most obviously seen. For the local union, frontal opposition was successful to the extent that it revealed management’s intentions. It created the impetus to press the national union into negotiating on the worst excesses of lean working. However the employment compromise reached at national level impacted on the employment compromise at local level where the union was reduced to a policing and monitoring role without the capacity to deal with underlying issues of work organization. Where the impacts of standardisation and information technology were less pervasive and, critically, the union had sufficient strength through its steward and member activism, PCS did have the capacity to contest management’s attempts at work restructuring.

The originality of the research derives in part because it locates discussions of lean within a distinct state labour process and the distinct status of civil servants

as both agents of the state apparatus and employees of the state who have a unique legal-employment relationship with their Civil Service employers. The productive model approach (Boyer and Freyssenet, 2002), on the other hand, is rooted in its examination of the automobile industry. The thesis argues that there are significant theoretical insights to be gained from holding the distinct nature of the state labour process and the productive model approach in tandem.

There are clearly a number of caveats to this. The first is that this research is based on a case study approach examining organizational change in a limited number of local Civil Service offices. The productive model approach has its origins in macro-economic theory (Boyer, 2005): this case study is primarily one examining Civil Service work organization at a micro level. Its origins in *régulation* theory place it firmly within a theoretical framework that contends that work organization has undergone a paradigmatic change that is contested (Hyman, 1991) creating the risk that a form of false periodization, of the type this author critiques in others, is used to underpin the research. There is, finally, the issue that this case study deals with a limited number of government departments and relies for its data on union stewards and members whose participation is likely to reflect a level of dissatisfaction over work conditions that may not be held by other civil servants in other locations where lean is less prevalent.

Nonetheless, the thesis can contribute significant value to an understanding of lean within the Civil Service. The case study approach is reliable in that the measures by which lean is evaluated derive from a robust academic framework. The research is valid. Access problems led the research in a different direction from that originally envisaged, but those unexpected avenues and the consistency of the respondents' narrative indicates that the research methods were of sufficient rigour to validate the research's findings and conclusions. Ironically the difficulties experienced in finding participants were in part an indication of the regime of control exercised by current Civil Service management.

The productive model approach has value in the public sector arena because it links the politics and economics of local work organization in a coherent whole. It reflects that the three components of the productive model (product policy, the productive organization and the employment relationship) influence and shape each of the others. This research has focused more extensively on the latter two facets than the former. However the delivery of public services is integrally linked to

how work is organised at a local level and how that impacts on the employment relationship. The model has value in that it locates lean in the Civil Service within a specific historical and national context. The Civil Service, subject to the neo-liberal agenda of the UK state, has used lean working as an approach that supports a marketised political-economic regime.

The UK Civil Service is undoubtedly different to the private sector. The Civil Service is uniquely bound to the state and its constituent parts retain many of its historic features in terms of organizational structure and personnel policies despite decentralisation. What is critical is that variations introduced by lean working and other forms of organizational change, regardless of epithet, reflect the interaction between the economics of the productive organization and the politics of the employment relationship at the workplace level. The double interaction (Amable and Lung, 2005) that the thesis has witnessed between the departmental level and the office level provides evidence of a model of work organization in the Civil Service in which the employment relationship at the office level is both a reflection of and a means to influence the employment relationship at a departmental level. At the same time, management pressure to use lean working as a means of generating the savings required by the state allied to the governance compromise between union and management is central to workplace restructuring.

This research has contributed to the theoretical understanding of lean. The main new insights are, first, a new typology of lean where each variant reflects different ways in which management can control the labour process. Lean, secondly, derives its meaning within the context of the political economy of work. Specifically, the productive model found in the Civil Service helps explain how lean is used as system of control, and significantly how that power to control is realised across different departments within an employment compromise central to which is the union's capacity and willingness to contest the lean agenda. There are important implications for worker skills where the more power management can exercise in the state labour process, the greater the likelihood that the union will be constrained in arresting the purposive deskilling of the workforce.

The union has challenges to face. PCS has to address the ways in which it can support research on issues of importance to its members. With the politics of research in the Civil Service increasingly likely to inhibit researchers from investigating key areas of concern, the union needs to recognise how its own

political processes may deter research into the issues that most affect its members. The possibility of unfavourable comments over how PCS have handled lean should be the impetus of future action, not a position of defensiveness. The strength of the union lies in the activism of its members in contesting the lean agenda, not in policing a management-union compromise. Lean derives its meaning and significance not solely from an inconsistently applied management system. but from the degree to which the workforce contest and collaborate with its implementation. Work change and restructuring is ultimately, as the thesis argues, not simply about an agenda of management control. The nature of work organization reflects the strength of the workforce and its capacity to contest restructuring. Therein lies the greatest threat and the most formidable challenge for the union.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: PCS Strike Action

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Appendix 3: Schedule of Interview Questions

Appendix 4: Supporting Letters to Accompany Interviews

Appendix 5: Survey Questionnaire

Appendix 6: The Pacesetter Joint Agreement

Appendix 7: PCS Motion to National Conference 2008 on Lean

Appendix 1: PCS strike action

The following table provides information on strike action taken by PCS during the currency of the data collection phase of the research project.

The table shows the dates upon strike action were taken, the work areas affected by industrial action and the reasons for the strike action. The information was taken from the PCS website: the internet information was accurate as of August 13 2012 when the data was collated. Where action was suspended, this is noted. As the table is included to reflect the degree to which PCS is prepared to engage in strike action rather than evaluate the effectiveness of the action, the table does not deal with the outcome of the strikes.

Action short of strike action is not included in this table.

Date(s) of Strike Action	Work Area	Reason for Strike	Web address
November 10 2008	Civil Service	Pay (action suspended)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/317AF477-88ED-4224-955F4C23CE3891F6
April 27 2009 (approx.)	HM Courts and Tribunals Service	Work conditions (action suspended)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/E951ADA6-9B11-433B-8A3079C6C43D5CA3
July 10 2009	HM Revenue and Customs	Deskilling and downgrading	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/FCA98BE3-D708-4B66-94229F0F4A8C5B34
August 5 2009	UK Border Agency	Job cuts (action suspended)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/79F19251-3CAF-4157-BF645ABFB7F5A1D7
December 10 2009	Hewlett Packard	Pay and job cuts (action may have been suspended – not clear from the information on the website)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/9E6DBC30-B9DE-4100-86B4B0FC305E7AC2

December 19 2009	UK Border Agency	Job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/01FC185C-E3EF-47DC-9CD2F775E42D7426
January 22 2010	Hewlett Packard	Pay and job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/18515304-43CA-4EA7-A741A9FE1131512B
February 20 2010	UK Border Agency	Job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/513A90E4-2D59-4596-8E1CA37E685035FB
February 23 and 24 2010	National Galleries	Pay (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/BA7EDA81-8411-409B-8F7380E6B4DC5B12
March 8 and 9 2010	Civil Service	Redundancy terms	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/4776A18F-5093-4F96-9B3C324F914CEA94
March 8 and 9 2010	Hewlett Packard (selected areas only)	Pay and job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/4F239FE9-A4C8-4BEF-B6D194E3A23BC6CC
March 24 2010	Civil Service	Redundancy terms	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/A3B4F4F4-0991-4020-AC4CB88BECB1C09A
March 29 and 30, April 6 and 7 2010	Hewlett Packard (selected areas only)	Pay and job cuts (action suspended)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/B2CC7B2C-3F43-4643-8E9EEFE3F4E30460
Conservative-/Liberal Democrat Government elected to office			
September 28 2010	Computa-center	Pay	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/52037AA8-8C33-4278-93F561B092F6BFA0
January 20 and 21 2011	Job Centre Plus	Work conditions in call centre network	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/47132D68-A651-4697-908B2C06DFD483ED

April 18 2011	Job Centre Plus	Work conditions in call centre network	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/5EEFAEA6-1589-4BD5-90EE38833B698D5F
May 3 2011	Office of the Public Guardian	Relocation	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/A1760D09-B96C-407F-991EA876A00334C1
May 4 2011	Equality and Human Rights Commission	Funding cuts (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/E68BF6CE-5922-4584-B7ACDF2BC19F7AB2
June 6 2011	Equality and Human Rights Commission	Funding cuts (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/275A441C-FFD3-4ABE-B10EC99840D9C4A9
June 17 2011	My Civil Service Pension	Privatisation	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/2AC33AAF-143A-4789-AB56D40B2CB5141A
June 30 2011	Civil Service	Pensions	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/B8C3F701-AD89-478C-AFD43656FD790EF0
September 19 and 20 2011	Fujitsu	Pay (action suspended after agreement)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/512B6223-8A75-402B-81CA7C47EE3BB36C
November 30 2011	Civil Service	Pensions	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/C0DE0583-9E24-4B85-A7AD85813151B54C
December 12 2011	HM Revenue and Customs	Privatisation (selected areas)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/9EC48325-6B49-4545-A96B97C09980A23B
January 16 2012	HM Revenue and Customs	Privatisation (selected areas)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/6DEA4154-0A65-45CD-9EACDB423509ADCD

January 19 2012	National Galleries	Job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/860713F9-1FCE-4C01-BE69D9CBE25B4C67
January 27 2012	National Galleries	Job cuts (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/95CFBC1C-7AB2-48D1-8E01B839A7782178
January 31 2012	HM Revenue and Customs	Privatisation (selected areas)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/03944470-4552-43D0-B919EDE22A4590EB
February 23 2012	Equality and Human Rights Commission	Funding cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/AB85E8E8-9941-42F1-8A55F157D4741C05
April 10 2012	Balfour Beatty	Redundancy terms (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/archived_news.cfm/id/E7E3592E-0692-49EE-9DD159495904EB76
May 10 2012	Civil Service	Pensions	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/recent-news.cfm/id/727EFF68-53F8-4D80-BE5AB2A7296EF2F2
June 1 2012	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Office closures (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/recent-news.cfm/id/285B291A-1C73-41AD-9DD231CD21F14D92
June 8 2012	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Office closures (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/recent-news.cfm/id/0600C485-6AA5-4D84-A39412A77459D912
June 8 to 13 2012	Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Office closures (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/recent-news.cfm/id/0600C485-6AA5-4D84-A39412A77459D912
June 25 2012	HM Revenue and Customs	Job cuts	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/recent-news.cfm/id/BA09A194-6E96-4BCC-B464009ADF065ED3

July 13 to 26 2012 (approx.)	Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency	Office closures (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/index.cfm/id/B0B6A53A-8348-4F8D-A34D65CB72457F59
July 16 to 24 2012	Maritime and Coastguard Agency	Office closures (staff walkouts)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/index.cfm/id/B0B6A53A-8348-4F8D-A34D65CB72457F59
July 26 2012	UK Border Agency	Job cuts (action suspended)	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/news_centre/index.cfm/id/B88BF1AF-7440-4F5D-8CD86F339315E80F
August 13 2012	Job Centre Plus	Call centre work conditions	www.pcs.org.uk/en/news_and_events/pcs_comment/index.cfm/id/94844B83-C01B-4DBF-893B9A73B692BB7E

Appendix 2: Interview schedule

The following table provides information on the contributors to the research process, both those in the preliminary phase and those involved in the semi-structured interviews. For reasons of confidentiality, real names and locations have been withheld. Detailed information on the role of the individuals in the preliminary phase of the research is found in chapter 3.

The table shows that each interview was designated a distinguishing number or numbers or letter. (Interview 25 is given a single number due to the larger number of attendees and the structure of that meeting.) The table also shows the government department for which the interviewee worked, the date and duration of the interview, the location of the interview and that individual's job grade. The table also shows the work location of the interviewee, a description of job function and the type of interaction with the public the interviewee had. The table also shows whether the individual at the time of the interview held any form of union post (for example, office bearer at national or regional level, trade union steward in a local office, health and safety representative or learning representative). The final column indicates whether or not the interview was recorded.

Notes to table:

Column (1): Interview number or letter – each interview was assigned a number or letter for identification purposes. Except for interview 25 which was an interview at a union branch meeting, each interviewee, both individual and those interviewed as part of a small group, had a designated number or letter that has been used for identification purposes. Interviews done as part of a group have an asterisk adjacent to the numbers or letters. FTO is used to denote Full Time Officer and Std to denote Steward, the indicators used in the preliminary phase. The semi-structured interviews have no letter before the number.

Column (2): Department – the name of the Civil Service Department. Individual agencies (for example under Scottish Government) are not named for reasons of confidentiality. Where the individual was either a full time official or a lay steward on full time duties and had responsibilities for a specific PCS Group, the department for which they had responsibility is listed.

Column (3): Date and duration of the interview – the duration refers to what might be described as the ‘formal’ interview, either audio recorded or in note form. These ‘duration’ periods do not include preliminary discussion prior to the interview or more informal discussion after the end of the recorded interview. None of the preliminary interviews were timed.

Column (4): Location of interview – other than Strathclyde University, locations are anonymised.

Column (5): Grade – the grading structure within Civil Service departments retains the distinction between executive or managerial and clerical or administrative grades. Exact job titles are not used as different departments have different names for broadly equivalent grades. E/M in the table denotes executive or managerial grades and C/A denotes clerical or administrative grades. For preliminary interviews, this part of the table is left blank as the grade of the interviewee was largely incidental to the nature of the discussion. This also applies to columns 6, 7 and 8 for the same reason.

Column (6): Work location – precise locations are not used for reasons of confidentiality. Definitions of particular locations are described in chapter 3. The description used here relates to the function undertaken by the interviewee: some locations housed multiple types of activity, often operating under different chains of management.

Column (7): Job function – this relates to the main duties of the interviewee. Definitions of particular functions are given in chapter 3. The term ‘decision maker’ is used generically to covers a broad range of quasi-legal or legal functions rather than connoting a specific legal function such as Social Fund Decision Maker (*cf.* Social Security Act, 1988, Schedule 3).

Column (8): Local/remote, direct interaction with the public – ‘local’ refers to an office serving the population in the area directly adjacent to that location, whilst ‘remote’ refers generally either to a centralised location to which the public do not have direct physical access, or to a national unit covering the whole or part of the UK for a specific function. Where the interviewee had direct interaction with the public either face to face (*e.g.* by regular interview or some form of targeted anti-fraud activity) or by telephone (both telephony centre or *ad hoc*), this is noted.

Column (9): PCS post – all ‘yes’ replies here were from PCS trade union stewards, but interviewees often simultaneously held other branch or union positions (e.g. health and safety representatives) – the semi-structured interviewees were all with lay officials with varying amounts of facility time. Some interviewees had held union positions prior to the date of the interview, but only current post holders are denoted as “yes”. Where the individual was a full time official of PCS, this is denoted by “FT”.

Column (10): Recorded – with three exceptions, all semi-structured interviews were recorded. Interview 18 to 21 had an equipment malfunction, while the decision not to record in other two instances was at the request of the participants. The preliminary discussions were not recorded – permission had not been given at this stage to record.

Additional information on the interviewees is provided.

(1) Interview no. or letter	(2) Department	(3) Date and Duration of Interview	(4) Location of Interview	(5) Grade	(6) Work Location	(7) Job Function	(8) Interaction with Public	(9) PCS Post	(10) Recorded
FTO ①		August 27 2008 and February 17 2009	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM					Yes (FT)	No
Senior national PCS official based in London – responsible for supervision of the project. As union supervisor, contact was maintained throughout the project, but the two main occasions where information was shared are noted above. Contact was maintained intermittently throughout the project (this included a brief meeting in the course of a PCS strike rally on March 8 2010), but no further interviews were conducted during the research project.									
Full Time Officer ②'s role in the preliminary phase is described in the main text, but the interaction was by email and no interview was conducted. She was a regional PCS officer for Scotland. She is not included within the number of interviews undertaken.									
FTO ③	HMRC	December 2008 (exact date no longer extant)	Telephone interview					Yes (FT)	No
Full time PCS official based in London working in HMRC Group – contact by telephone call. He was supposed to meet with the researcher and Steward A on January 29 2009, but failed to attend the scheduled meeting.									
FTO ④ *	DWP	May 13 2009	Coffee shop					Yes (FT)	No
Full Time Office ④ was a full time PCS official based in one of the regional union offices with responsibilities for DWP. The person was interviewed together with Steward E.									
Full Time Officer ⑤'s role in the preliminary phase is described in the main text, but the interaction was by email and no interview was conducted. He was a full time officer working for the PCS MOD Group. He is not included within the number of interviews undertaken.									
FTO ⑥	MOJ	October 7 2009	Telephone interview					Yes (FT)	No
Full Time Office ⑥ was a full time PCS official working in the MOJ Group.. He was based in London. He was involved in trying to get MOJ management input into the project..									
Std A	HMRC	January 29 2009	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM					Yes	No
Senior elected union representative in HMRC Group. Lay officer on full time union duties with responsibilities on the impact of lean. He suggested that HRMC Office α be used for the issue of the questionnaires – retired before the semi structured interviews started									

Std B	HMRC	May 2009 (exact date no longer extant)	Telephone interview					Yes	No
Senior elected union representative in HMRC Group. Lay officer on full time union duties. Steward A's successor in post. Had responsibilities for lean in HMRC Group.									
Std C	HMRC	July 28 2009 and November 10	Telephone interviews					Yes	No
In addition to initially supporting the distribution of survey forms at HRMC Office α , Steward C also provided an interview – his contribution is noted at Interview 11 below									
Std D	DWP	October 10 2008	Government building					Yes	No
Senior elected representative in DWP Group. Lay officer on full time union duties. Resigned several weeks after the meeting.									
Std E *	DWP	May 13 2009	Coffee shop					Yes	No
In the preliminary phase, he was interviewed with Full Time Officer \textcircled{D} . In addition to his contribution to the preliminary phase of the research, Steward E also provided an interview – his contribution is noted at Interview 4 below. Steward E was Steward D's successor in office									
Std F	DWP	May 29 2009	PCS regional office					Yes	No
Senior elected representative in DWP Group in Scotland. He suggested the use of Office β as the location for the field work in DWP									
Std G	Scottish Government	July 2 2009	Government building					Yes	No
Senior elected representative in Scottish Government Group. Lay officer on full time union duties. She suggested the use of Office γ as the location for the field work in Scottish Government. Moved to full time job with PCS shortly after this meeting.									
Std H *	Scottish Government	November 25 2009	Government building					Yes	No
Std I *	Steward H was a senior elected representative in Scottish Government Group. She was a lay officer on full time union duties. Steward I was an office steward working in one of the Scottish Government agencies. He was based in Office γ .								
Std J	MOJ	August 7 2009	Telephone interview					Yes	No
Steward J was an office steward working in an agency of the Ministry of Justice. She was worked in a processing centre dealing with judicial issues									
Std K	MOJ	November 16 2009 and February 9 2010	Telephone interviews					Yes	No
Steward K was a senior elected representative in MOJ Group. Two separate telephone discussions were held with this individual.									

1	DWP	May 7 2010, 1 hour, 22 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Processing centre although at point of interview converting to telephony centre	Decision maker	Remote, telephone contact with public	No	Yes
Male, Social Fund Officer, worked in social security for 23 years At point of the interview was about to start in telephony work having had experience of processing Social Fund applications both in a local office and in a large processing centre in addition to dealing with a range of other benefits. This was the pilot interview for the semi-structured interviews.									
2	Commercial sector (privatised, previously DWP)	July 27 2010, 1 hour, 26 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Telephony centre	Line manager	Remote (no personal contact with public)	Yes	Yes
Male, line manager in a telephone call centre, worked for Civil Service (social security) for 21 years before his job was privatised in 2007. Local steward and senior committee member on national branch in Commercial Sector.									
3	DWP	August 3 2010, 43 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Job Centre	Decision maker and line manager	Local with face to face contact with public	Yes	Yes
Male, line manager in Job Centre, worked in DWP and predecessor departments for 13 years. He was a local steward and held a senior post on the regional committee for PCS in DWP; at point of interview was on full time union duties									
4	DWP	August 11 2010, 1 hour, 11 minutes	PCS regional office	E/M	Full time lay PCS official based in a union office	NA	NA	Yes	Yes
Male, worked for Civil Service for 36 years. Senior lay national union official. On full time union duties for the past four years, previously middle ranking line manager in charge of social security benefit delivery. This individual provided data earlier in the research process as Steward E									
5	DWP	August 12 2010, 1 hour 24 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Telephony centre	Decision maker	Remote, telephone contact with public	No	Yes
Male, Social Fund Officer, worked for DWP and predecessor departments for 36 years. Working in call centre assessing Social Fund applications by telephone. His previous experience was working in a local office and in a large processing centre. At the point of interview, he was working part time.									

6	DWP	August 13 2010, 58 minutes	PCS regional office	C/A	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote (limited outbound telephone contact with public)	Yes	Yes
	Male, clerical officer, processing social security benefit claims. Had worked for Civil Service for 11 years. Local steward, also on regional committee								
7	HMRC	September 17 2010, 1 hour, 6 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Specialist tax office	Manager, recent experience of decision making	Remote	No	Yes
	Female, working in small specialised tax processing office, Was a line manager for a small team of clerical staff having moved from assessing tax claims 11 months previously. Had worked for Civil Service for 23 years. Formerly worked for HM Customs and Excise								
8	Scottish Government	October 8 2010, 28 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Specialist agency	Decision maker and line manager	Remote	Yes	Yes
	Female, line manager in agency of Scottish Government. Had worked in Civil Service in 15 years. 10 years in DWP and Department of Social Security as clerical officer before promotion to junior managerial grade. Office steward								
9	DWP	October 14 2010, 1 hour, 33 minutes	Public house	E/M	Processing centre	Decision maker and line manager	Remote	Yes	Yes
	Male, line manager and decision maker on social security benefit claims. Exact length of service not known, but in excess of 10 years in social security work, had previously worked in small local site before transferring to remote processing site. Office steward								
10	DWP	October 19 2010, 44 minutes	PCS regional office	E/M	Job Centre	Decision maker	Local with face to face contact with public	Yes	Yes
	Male, adviser in Job Centre, had worked in social security work for 30 years. Office steward and member of regional union committee, also had lead responsibilities in negotiation with management at office and district levels								
11*	HMRC	October 29 2010, 1 hour, 4 minutes	Government building	C/A	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
12*									
13*									
Two male and one female officers working in large tax assessment centre. All three were office stewards. No information on length of service although none were recently appointed members of staff. Interviewee 11 had provided information earlier in the process as Steward C									

14	HMRC	November 30 2010, 1 hour, 6 minutes	Government building	C/A	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
Male, clerical officer working on an evening shift, had worked in tax processing for 3 years – promoted during this time between clerical grades. Office steward									
15	DWP	November 30 2010, 1 hour, 6 minutes	Government building	E/M	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
Female, junior manager for 9 years out of 23 years in social security work, previously clerical grade. Office steward – at point of interview was on full time union duties although prior to this had managed a team of staff in a telephony section									
16	DWP	January 11 2011, 45 minutes	Public house	C/A	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
Male, clerical officer, processing social security work, worked for DWP and Department of Social Security (DSS) for 11 years, of which the later period were at the more senior of the clerical grades. Local steward									
17	DWP	January 19 2011, 36 minutes	Telephone interview	C/A	Processing centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
Male, clerical worker, processor and decision maker on pensions, had worked for DWP for 8 years. Local steward and senior branch officer									
18*	DWP	January 21 2011, 1 hour	PCS regional office	E/M & C/A	Processing centre	Decision maker and administrative	Remote	Yes	No
19*									
20*									
21*									
Members of branch committee undertaking various administrative and decision making functions – all were male									
22	HMRC	February 2 2011, 1 hour, 6 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Processing centre	Decision maker	Remote	Yes	Yes
Male, decision maker on customs and excise work, length of service not known, but had worked for HMRC and Inland Revenue for at least 6 years. Had worked in current job for 3 years having moved from an office that had closed due to the impact of Pacesetter/Lean. Office steward and senior branch official – had active involvement as a lead local negotiator in HMRC dispute over lean in 2005									
23	Home Office	February 3 2011, 29 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Divided between training function and local office	Divided between trainer and decision maker	Local for decision maker & remote for training, with face to face contact with the public	No	Yes

	Female, working in agency of Home Office, length of service unknown, previously worked for HM Customs and Excise and HMRC undertaking the same work when these departments had responsibility for the type of anti-fraud work now done by the Home Office. Divided her time between anti-fraud work and leading staff training								
24	DWP	February 8 2011, 10 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Specialist benefit function	Decision maker	Remote but with face to face contact with the public	Yes	No
	Male, decision maker in anti-fraud work. Local steward with regional union responsibilities. Interview had to be curtailed to protect the individual's anonymity								
25*	DWP	February 10 2011, 30 minutes	PCS regional office	M & C/A	Various	Various	Remote but includes telephony work	Yes	Yes
	9 branch members – various duties, grades – 6 men and 3 women. Present at the meeting were the main branch office bearers. Attendees worked in two large processing centres, one of which was a telephone call centre. Some of the interviewees did include people who had already been interviewed or would be interviewed subsequently to the meeting								
26	HMRC	March 2 2011, 48 minutes	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	C/A	Telephony centre	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
	Male, worked in HMRC for 7 years. He was a tax collector working in a call centre. Office steward and senior branch official								
27	DWP	March 2 2011, 49 minutes	Government office	C/A	Specialist benefit function	Administrative	Local	Yes	Yes
	Female, had worked in DWP and DSS for 21 years. Had experience of different job functions, including social security benefit assessment and computer support, currently a support and liaison officer for anti-fraud work. Recently elected local steward and branch officer								
28	DWP	March 4 2011, 1 hour, 8 minutes		C/A	Processing centre	Administrative and decision maker	Remote	Yes	Yes
	Male, had worked in social security for 23 years, at point of interview did processing work and decision making for social security. Local steward and senior branch officer								
29	DWP	March 10 2011, 1 hour, 6 minutes	Telephone interview	M	Processing centre	Line manager and decision maker	Remote	Yes	Yes
	Female, 25 years' service in social security work, currently line manager for 8 staff and decision maker – her office is effectively a satellite location (she works in a rural area that lost a number of its previous functions and was given other work to prevent redundancies). Local office steward – also recently taken on regional and national union roles								

30	DWP	March 16 2011, 43 minutes	Government office	C/A	Specialist benefit function	Administrative	Remote but with telephone contact	Yes	Yes
Male, had worked for DWP for almost 3 years in a specialist benefit junction - no experience of more mainstream benefits work. This person had a number of union responsibilities: he was a local steward and had recently been elected to branch post									
31	DWP	March 17 2011, 1 hour, 16 minutes	Coffee shop	C/A	Job Centre	Administrative	Local	No	Yes
Male, had worked for DWP for 3 years, worked in the Job Centre processing social security benefit claims and administering job seeking activity. Had recent experience of being a steward, but at point of interview had recently opted not to stand for re-election									
32	DWP	March 18 2011, 46 minutes	Public house	E/M	Processing centre	Line manager	Remote	No	Yes
Male, had worked for DWP and Employment Service for "21 long years", line manager for a team of new and inexperienced staff members – currently working in a pilot in a satellite office dealing with a new set of procedures for job seekers									
33	DWP	March 22 2011, 1 hour, 1 minute	Strathclyde University, Department of HRM	E/M	Telephony centre	Decision maker	Remote but with telephone contact	Yes	Yes
Male, had worked in social security for 20 years – Crisis Loan decision maker in Social Fund telephone call centre. Office steward with branch responsibilities – also had lead role at local level in industrial action in Social Fund call centres									
34	DWP	March 23 2011, 38 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Processing centre	Line manager and decision maker	Remote	No	Yes
Female, had worked in social security for 25 years; she was a decision maker and line manager for a team of 9 benefit processors. She had returned to a line management role after a period of a couple of years working in a management support capacity. This individual had experience working in a local office environment									
35	DWP	May 23 2011, 38 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Telephony centre	Decision maker	Remote but with telephone contact	No	Yes
Female, had worked in social security for 34 years, Social Fund decision maker working in a call centre – previous recent experience of line management and decision making in a processing centre, This individual was currently working part-time.									
36	Scottish Government	May 25 2011, 1 hour, 7 minutes	PCS regional office	C/A	Specialist agency	Administrative	Remote	Yes	Yes
Male, had worked for Scottish Government in a variety of different agencies for 14 years – currently processing financial work in a specialist agency. Office steward, senior branch official and had regional union responsibilities at Scottish Government level									

37	DWP	May 26 2011, 21 minutes	Telephone interview	E/M	Job Centre	Management support function	Local but no contact with public	Yes	Yes
Female, had worked in social security for 26 years, now working in management support role, has had experience within the past year of social security claims processing. Recently elected as an office steward									
38	DWP	June 16 2011, 26 minutes	Telephone interview	C/A	Job Centre	Administrative and decision making	Local with face to face contact	Yes	Yes
Female, had worked in social security for 16 years, worked in a Job Centre, had two roles (administrative support supporting employment advisers and then benefit processing and decision making). Office steward									

Full written transcripts of all interviews and audio files are available on request. Interviewees were advised before being interviewed that as the thesis was an academic piece of work that examiners may wish to see a sample of the transcripts subject to confidentiality being maintained.

Appendix 3: Schedule of Interview Questions

The research interviews were semi-structured. The following schedule of questions formed the basis of the interviews. Questions were modified appropriately during the course of the interaction with the interviewee to reflect the context of the interview. The questions were supported by including a number of prompts to remind the researcher to ask the respondents to amplify or elaborate their answers.

The schedule of questions below was modified following the pilot interview

Questions:

- 1) How long you have worked for the Civil Service?
- 2) Which departments have you worked for in the Civil Service?
- 3) What jobs have you done?
- 4) I want to find out about the way that work is organised within your office: what is the organizational structure of your office?
- 5) How does the office management decide how work is allocated to staff?
- 6) Could you tell me about the job you are doing now?
- 7) How long did it take you to learn to do the job well?
- 8) How much variety is there in your job?
- 9) How important is knowledge of the benefits/services that your Department/office provides?
- 10) Do you work as part of a team with others?
- 11) The Civil Service has traditionally been organised by teams of staff working under a senior officer: have you seen any changes in the way that teams or section of staff are organised?
- 12) I want to think a bit about how currently you and your colleagues resolve problems in the way that work is done in the office? If, for example you came across a work process that wasn't working well or could be done better, how would you deal with it?

- 13) How do your colleagues deal with it?
- 14) How do your managers deal with it?
- 15) If your managers identified a problem with work processes, what would they do?
- 16) What training have you had to do the job you do now?
- 17) What do think of the training you have received?
- 18) If you think about the job you are doing now, how much freedom do you have on a day to day basis to decide what work tasks you do?
- 19) What factors influence your freedom to do your job?
- 20) If you think about the actual content of the work you are doing, how much freedom do you have to decide on individual cases?
- 21) Do you deal with complex or complicated cases? How often? Why are the cases complex?
- 22) How do you cope with these types of cases?
- 23) How hard do you have to work?⁹⁷
- 24) Can you vary how hard you work over the course of a day or week?
- 25) How closely is your work monitored?
- 26) Do you think that your manager understands in detail the job you are doing?
- 27) If you think about the job you did around 5 years ago, were you doing a different job to the one you are doing now?
- 28) In terms of the areas we have discussed, how was the job different?

⁹⁷ Question 23 was amended at an early stage of the schedule interviews to “How hard do you think the job makes you have to work?” This allowed respondents to divorce personal inclination to work hard from the way that their jobs generated work intensification. All other questions remained largely unchanged.

- 29) The Civil Service is traditionally thought of as a bureaucratic type of organization where people need to follow standardised rules: do you think from your experience that this is still the case?
- 30) What changes, if any, have you noticed over time?
- 31) Are you familiar with the term Lean?
- 32) Is Lean used in your office?
- 33) Can you tell me what you understand by the term of Lean?
- 34) What difference has Lean made in the work done in your office?
- 35) What difference has Lean made to the work that you do?
- 36) Have you seen evidence to show how Lean is working?
- 37) What is your view about Lean as a way of working?
- 38) Do you think that the changes you are seeing in your job are because of Lean working?
- 39) What other factors have changed the way you do the job?
- 40) How do management communicate with you? Line manager, office & national management?
- 41) What do you think about the way that management communicate with you?
- 42) Are you a union member?
- 43) Are you a union activist?
- 44) How effective is the union in dealing with work changes that management puts tries to put in place?
- 45) Do you think your organization would be run differently if the union wasn't there?
- 46) How much discussion or negotiation is there between management and trade union about the way that Lean/organizational change is operated in your work area?
- 47) [If the person is a PCS rep], what strategies have you used as a rep in negotiating with management over Lean/work organizational changes?

48) [If the person is a PCS rep], to what extent has the union been successful in negotiating with management over Lean/work organizational changes?

49) What has the union said about Lean and how it will respond to it?

50) Are any personal circumstances that influence the way you think about working for the Civil Service?

51) Overall are you optimistic or pessimistic about working in the Civil Service at the present time?

52) More so or less so than 5 years ago?

Appendix 4: Supporting Letters to Accompany Interviews

The following two issues were used in the research process.

The first letter was issued to participants at the interview to advise them of the aims of the research project, details of the research process and outlining the ethical issues relating to their participation in the project. The third page was a consent form that interviewees were invited to read and sign intimating their agreement to participate under the conditions stated. Where the data was collected by telephone, the contents of the letter were intimated to the respondent and verbal assent was obtained in respect of their participation. Assent forms have been retained and are available for inspection.

The second letter was one issued to participants following the completion of the project where it was possible to email the letter to a home email account. It thanked the participants for their contribution and assured the individuals that any data collected would be used subject to the appropriate ethical framework. It also invited interviewees to contribute further information to the project. Participants were told that they could receive an audio recording of their interview or a written transcript of that interview if they wished. (Only one person ultimately made such a request.)



Dear Participant,

Work Changes in the UK Civil Service and the impact on PCS members

Thank you for volunteering to help with this research project.

This interview is a part of a research project being undertaken at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, supported by PCS, looking at changes in work organization and practice throughout the UK Civil Service and its impact on PCS members. The research will deal with issues you are facing within the Civil Service.

This part of the research involves undertaking a number of interviews with PCS members. I am interviewing a number of PCS members from a variety of government departments as a way of comparing what is happening throughout the Civil Service. I must stress that your participation is voluntary and you are fully at liberty to withdraw from the interview at any time or to decline to answer any question that I have asked. Withdrawing from the interview or declining to answer a particular question or question will in no way invalidate any of the information that you provide.

I would like to record this interview by means of a digital recorder. However if you do not wish to have the interview recorded in this manner or wish the recorder switched off at any time, I have no problem with doing that. The interview will cover such areas as: what it is like to work in the Civil Service at the present time; the impact of work changes on your job; and the issue of work skills. The interview will last between an hour and 90 minutes.

All the information you provide (both written and digitally recorded) will be treated in strictest confidence. You will find further information over the page that you may find useful in understanding how research is conducted and how the information you provide is handled.

Thank you for taking the time for this interview. If following this interview you wish additional information my contact details are found over the page.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Martin

What happens to the information on the project?

To ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, all data will be securely held by the researcher at the University of Strathclyde. Information extracted from the digital recordings will be securely held on the University's computer system on a 'password-protected' basis. Data will only be retained for the duration of the research project.

The University of Strathclyde is registered with the Information Commissioner's Office who implements the Data Protection Act 1998. All personal data on participants will be processed in accordance with the provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998.

What happens next?

The information you have provided will, along with other research, form the basis of a report commissioned by PCS and may also assist with informing other published research.

If you have any questions/concerns, during or after the investigation, or wish to contact an independent person to whom any questions may be directed or further information may be sought from, please contact:

Dr Calvin Burns, Chair, Departmental Ethics Committee, Department of Human Resource Management, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XU

Telephone: 0141 548 4251

Email: calvin.burns@strath.ac.uk

Researcher Contact Details:

Douglas Martin, Department of Human Resource Management, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XU

Telephone: 0141 548 3113

E Mail: douglas.martin@strath.ac.uk

Research Supervisor:

Prof Paul Stewart, Department of Human Resource Management, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XU

Telephone: 0141 548 3219

E Mail: paul.stewart.100@strath.ac.uk

Consent Form

Department of Human Resource Management



Project: The impact of organizational work changes in the UK Civil Service and the PCS response

- I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above project and the researcher has answered any queries to my satisfaction
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time, without having to give a reason and without any consequences
- I understand that I can withdraw my data from the study at any time
- I understand that any information recorded in the investigation remains confidential and no information that identifies me will be made publicly available
- I consent to being a participant in the project
- I consent to being audio recorded (Yes/No)

I	hereby agree to take part in the above project
PRINT Name	
Signature	Date



Dear Participant,

Work Changes in the UK Civil Service and the impact on PCS members

Thank you once again for volunteering to help with this research project.

I am very grateful that you were able to help contribute to the research by agreeing to be interviewed. I very much appreciate that you were able to give your time to answer the many detailed questions that research of this type entails.

As I explained when I met you, any information you shared with me will remain confidential. If you wish access to a copy of the transcript of the interview, then I can make this available.

If there are, however, any other points that you would like to make then please feel free to contact me at the address overleaf, particularly if you are aware of any changes or developments that you think may interest me.

I am not able to tell you, at this stage, how the PCS will report the findings, nor how the research will be presented in published research. However, if you are interested in finding out about how the data may be used, please let me know and I will keep you informed.

Many thanks once again.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas Martin

Researcher Contact Details:

Douglas Martin, Department of Human Resource Management, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XU

Telephone: 0141 548 3113

E Mail: douglas.martin@strath.ac.uk

Research Supervisor:

Prof Paul Stewart, Department of Human Resource Management, Graham Hills Building, 50 Richmond Street, Glasgow, G1 1XU

Telephone: 0141 548 3219

E Mail: paul.stewart.100@strath.ac.uk

Appendix 5: Survey Questionnaire

The following document was not issued. The circumstances surrounding this are discussed in chapter 3. The survey instrument is included to contextualise the issues around PCS's unwillingness to issue the document. It is also included as many of the questions in the questionnaire were later instrumental in helping to form the schedule of questions found in Appendix 3.



Civil Service Work Changes Survey

Instructions: It is important that you answer all the questions. Please answer each question by either writing your answer or answers on the dotted line or by ticking the appropriate box. Sometimes none of the answers will fit exactly. Please choose the answer that comes closest. **All responses will be treated in strict confidence.** Please make sure you read and complete all 8 pages of the survey.

Section 1: About You and Your Work

- 1.1 What was your age at your last birthday? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
 16-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 56-65 Over 65
- 1.2 Are you? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box) Male Female
- 1.3 What is the name or title of your job?
- 1.4 What is your normal job grade? (for example, AA, AO, EO, HEO)
- 1.5 Are you currently doing the job of a higher grade? (you might know this as 'acting up')
 (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
 Yes No
- 1.6 What are your main duties at work?

- 1.7 Does your job involve computerised equipment? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
 Yes No
- 1.8 Do you currently supervise other employees or have managerial duties? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
 Yes No
- 1.9 If you supervise other employees or have managerial duties, how many people do you currently supervise or manage?

(Next question is over the page)

1.10 How long have you worked for each of the following? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

	Less than 6 months	Between 6 months and 1 year	Between 1 year and 3 years	Between 3 years and 5 years	More than 5 years
The Civil Service					
The government department where you are currently working					
The location or site where you are currently working					
In the job you are currently doing					

1.11 Leaving aside your own personal intentions and circumstances, is your job permanent? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No

1.12 If your job is not permanent, in what way is the job not permanent?

.....

1.13 In your job, are you working full time or part time? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Full time Part time

1.14 How many hours a week do you normally work excluding overtime?

.....

1.15 On average, how many hours of overtime do you work each week?

.....

1.16 Do you consider that you have a disability? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No

1.17 Please tick ✓ the box that most closely describes your ethnic origin

White	Mixed	Asian or Asian British	Black or Black British	Chinese	Other Ethnic Group

1.18 Are you a PCS union member? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No

1.19 Do you hold any official position within PCS? (for example, office steward, health and safety or union learning representative, branch officer) (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No

Section 2: What Your Job is Like

2.1 How important are the following in the job you do now? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate boxes)

	Essential	Very important	Fairly important	Not very important	Not at all important	Doesn't apply
Playing close attention to detail						
Dealing with people						
Using a computer or other types of computerised equipment						
Counselling, advising or caring for customers or clients or members of the public						
Working with a team of people						
Knowledge of particular services						
Specialist knowledge or understanding						
Spotting problems or faults (these could be yours or somebody else's)						
Analysing complex problems in detail						
Thinking of solutions to problems (the problem could be with your work, somebody else's or with equipment)						
Planning your own activities						
Planning the activities of others						
Organising your own time						

(Next question is over the page)

Section 3: Your Training

3.1 What training or instruction have you had to enable you to do the job you are doing now?
(Please tick ✓ **ALL** the boxes that apply)

Instructor led course or event away from your desk or workstation	
Instruction or training from a work colleague or manager at their desk or workstation (you might know this as 'sitting in' with someone)	
Taught yourself from a book or from a manual	
Used computer-assisted learning or e-learning	
Done some other form of work related training (please tell us what this training was.....)	
None of these	

3.2 In the **last year** what training or instruction have you had to enable you to do the job you are doing now? (Please tick ✓ **ALL** the boxes that apply)

Instructor led course or event away from your desk or workstation	
Instruction or training from a work colleague or manager at their desk or workstation (you might know this as 'sitting in' with someone)	
Taught yourself from a book or from a manual	
Used computer-assisted learning or e-learning	
Done some other form of work related training (please tell us what this training was.....)	
None of these	

3.3 Over the last year in your current job, on how many separate days have you had training or instruction?

.....

3.4 Over the last year in your current job, on how many separate days have you had training or instruction that relates to the technical content of your work?

.....

3.5 Was there any time over the last year in your current job when training or instruction would have been useful for keeping up to date with the skills you required? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No Don't Know

3.6 How helpful was the training or instruction you received over the last year in your current job for keeping up to date with the skills you required? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Very helpful Quite helpful Neither helpful nor unhelpful
 Quite unhelpful Very unhelpful No training in the last year

3.7 How long would it take to train someone in your job? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Under a day Between a month and 6 months
 Between a day and a week Between 6 months and a year
 Between a week and a month Over a year

3.8 After you first started doing the job you do now, how long did it take you to learn to do it well? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- | | | | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Less than a week | <input type="checkbox"/> | Between 3 months and 6 months | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Between a week and a month | <input type="checkbox"/> | Between 6 months and a year | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Between a month and 3 months | <input type="checkbox"/> | Over a year | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Section 4: Your Work Environment

4.1 Does your workplace currently use any of the following programmes? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate boxes that apply)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
LEAN			
Six Sigma			
LEAN Sigma			
Business Process Re-engineering			
Total Quality Management			
Other: please say what			

4.2 Does your section or team currently use any of the following? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate boxes that apply)

	Yes	No	Don't Know
LEAN			
Six Sigma			
LEAN Sigma			
Business Process Re-engineering			
Total Quality Management			
Other: please say what			

4.3 When was this programme brought into your workplace? (if your workplace uses more than one type of programme, please tell us about the **main** programme that is currently used) (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

In the last month	Between 1 month ago and 6 months ago	Between 6 months ago and 1 year ago	Between 1 year ago and 3 years ago	Between 3 years ago and 5 years ago	Over 5 years ago	None used	Don't know

(Next question is over the page)

4.4 When did your team or section start working under this programme? (if your team or section uses more than one type of programme, please tell us about the **main** programme that is currently used) (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

In the last month	Between 1 month ago and 6 months ago	Between 6 months ago and 1 year ago	Between 1 year ago and 3 years ago	Between 3 years ago and 5 years ago	Over 5 years ago	None used	Don't know

4.5 Have you received training or instruction about this programme? (if your workplace uses more than one type of programme, please tell us about the **main** programme that is currently used) (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes No No programmes used in my workplace

4.6 How helpful was this training in helping you to understand what the programme was about? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Very helpful Quite helpful Neither helpful nor unhelpful
 Quite unhelpful Very unhelpful Received no training on this programme
 No programme used in my workplace

4.7 Can you name at least 3 new management practices used in your office related to the main programme used?

(1).....

(2).....

(3).....

4.8 How effective has the trade union been at local level in influencing the way that new management practices have been brought into your workplace? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Very effective Effective Neither effective nor ineffective
 Ineffective Very ineffective Don't know

Section 5: Your Views on Work Changes

5.1 How would you describe your current work speed or work pace? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Much too fast Too fast About right
 Too slow Much too slow

5.2 Do you currently work faster in terms of work speed or work pace than you did 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

Yes, much faster No, a little slower
 Yes, a little faster No, much slower
 No difference Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago

- 5.3 Over the course of a working day, how much can you vary the pace of work? (for example, can you work harder for part of the day so you can work less hard at other times?) (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| A great deal | <input type="checkbox"/> | A fair amount | <input type="checkbox"/> | Some | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A little | <input type="checkbox"/> | None at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
- 5.4 How much influence do you have on how hard you work? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| A great deal | <input type="checkbox"/> | A fair amount | <input type="checkbox"/> | Some | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A little | <input type="checkbox"/> | None at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
- 5.5 How does the level of influence in deciding how hard you currently work compare with 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| I had much more influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | I had a little less influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I had a little more influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | I had a lot less influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No difference between now and then | <input type="checkbox"/> | Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 5.6 In your current job how much influence do you have on deciding what work tasks you have to do? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| A great deal | <input type="checkbox"/> | A fair amount | <input type="checkbox"/> | Some | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A little | <input type="checkbox"/> | None at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
- 5.7 How does the level of influence in deciding what work tasks you currently have to do compare with the way you did the job 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| I had much more influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | I had a little less influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I had a little more influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | I had a lot less influence 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No difference between now and then | <input type="checkbox"/> | Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 5.8 How often does your work involve carrying out short repetitive tasks? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | | | |
|-----------|--------------------------|--------|--------------------------|-------|--------------------------|
| Never | <input type="checkbox"/> | Rarely | <input type="checkbox"/> | Often | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Sometimes | <input type="checkbox"/> | Always | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |
- 5.9 Do you currently carry out more of these types of task than you did 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Yes, many more than 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | No, a little less than 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Yes, a little more than 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> | No, much less than 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No difference between now and then | <input type="checkbox"/> | Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago | <input type="checkbox"/> |
- 5.10 How much variety is there in your job? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)
- | | | | | | |
|--------------|--------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|------|--------------------------|
| A great deal | <input type="checkbox"/> | A fair amount | <input type="checkbox"/> | Some | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| A little | <input type="checkbox"/> | None at all | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

(Next question is over the page)

5.11 How does the level of variety in your current job compare with the way you did the job 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- Much more variety 5 years ago Little less variety 5 years ago
 Little more variety 5 years ago Much less variety 5 years ago
 No difference between now and then Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago

5.12 How closely is your work performance monitored or checked? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- Very closely Closely To some extent
 Not closely Not closely at all Depends on the task

5.13 How does the level of monitoring or checking of your current work performance compare with how you did the job 5 years ago? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- There was much more 5 years ago There was a little less 5 years ago
 There was a little more 5 years ago There was much less 5 years ago
 No difference between now and then Didn't work for Civil Service 5 years ago

Section 6: Other Matters

6.1 In which of the following ways does your local management communicate with you? (Please tick ✓ ALL the boxes that apply)

Team or section leader speaks to you on an individual basis	Team meetings with team or section leaders or supervisors	By e-mail, internet or intranet	Locally produced bulletins or newsletters	Use of notice or information boards	Use of information boards or data displays in electronic form	Other (please tell us what)	None
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

6.2 If you have team meetings with your team or section leaders or supervisors, how often are these meetings held? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- Every day 3 to 4 times a week 1 to 2 times a week
 At least once a fortnight At least once a month Less than once a month

6.3 Overall, how satisfied are you with communications between management and employees in your workplace? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied or unsatisfied
 Unsatisfied Very unsatisfied

6.4 All in all, how satisfied are you currently with your job? (Please tick ✓ the appropriate box)

- Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied or unsatisfied
 Unsatisfied Very unsatisfied

Many thanks for taking the time to complete this survey.

Appendix 6: The Pacesetter Joint Agreement

A full copy of the text contained in the Pacesetter Agreement reached between PCS and HMRC Management is reproduced below. The Agreement was fundamental to the negotiation and consultation between the trade union and management over lean working.

'The PaceSetter Way'

Agreement between the PCS and HMRC on PaceSetter

This agreement is between HMRC and PCS – herein referred to as 'we'.

We issued a Joint Statement in December 2010, to provide overall guidance on how to use PaceSetter consistently and fairly, supporting adoption of its core principles across HMRC.

This agreement builds on the guiding principles outlined in the Joint Statement, providing more detailed advice on how a consistent and fair approach should be applied practically.

We agree that PaceSetter contains tools and techniques that, where applied correctly, should help people improve business productivity, quality and service to the customer. We want to improve the processes to help people deliver a quality public service - cutting unnecessary and time-consuming bureaucracy within working practices.

However, to do this effectively, we fully recognise that everyone should be involved. Managers must regularly seek the views of their people and talk to TUS at appropriate levels to develop an environment of mutual trust and support.

As outlined in the Joint Statement, we believe that giving people a voice in how work gets done, through timely and constructive discussion, will benefit our people, HMRC, and our customers. We also believe that when it is properly applied, with everyone helping shape it as it evolves, then PaceSetter provides us with a framework to build on the improvements already made.

For a breakdown of how PaceSetter helps HMRC and its people please refer to the Joint Statement.

What we need to do

The Joint Statement provides guidance on what we all need to do to apply PaceSetter principles in improving what we do. This Joint Agreement goes further – talking more practically about how PaceSetter should be applied. Specifically:

Recognise that long-lasting change does not happen overnight – it will take time

We recognise that long-lasting change will take time and would encourage everyone to also recognise this.

Whilst PaceSetter does help us look at our processes and find better ways of doing things - it relies on everyone getting involved. This is not simple, can be uncomfortable for some and will take time.

At a leadership, team and individual level, everyone plays a key role in creating an environment that is both realistic and open to new ideas. In doing this, everyone is supported by PaceSetter's guiding principles, Roadmap, tools and Practitioners.

PaceSetter is part of HMRC's long-term strategy and will help the department achieve its Vision and Strategic Objectives. And by 2013, 95% of HMRC should be using PaceSetter in their everyday work.

To achieve this, we need to:

Communicate effectively

We recognise that people respond constructively if they are actively involved in decisions and have the licence to influence how their work is done.

Using PaceSetter tools, such as problem solving, performance meetings and Performance Hubs/Boards should help stimulate conversations between the whole team. Staff and managers should openly listen to other people's perspectives in an open-minded way. Everyone's contribution should be valued, meaningfully considered and issues should be openly discussed in a constructive and respectful manner.

Make decisions based on data

PaceSetter helps us make decisions based on the most accurate and relevant data available.

The team needs to understand the reasons behind decisions, to contribute fully to the development of the team and its working practices and this should be supported by accurate, relevant and accessible data, made available to them.

Team meetings should also be supported by accurate and meaningful data that is visible and accessible to everyone who attends. This will help everyone contribute and assist a full and frank discussion about performance.

The appropriate information will depend on the nature of the work. Teams should consider what will help them and support meaningful discussion and open and constructive challenge.

Recognise that everyone is both allowed and encouraged to take an active part in discussions, and should be willing to consider new ways of doing things, building our personal skills and contributing through training and other means

PaceSetter encourages team performance discussion at all levels, creating a culture that is open to new approaches and ways of doing things. To achieve this, we need to:

Take part in team meetings/discussions

Using PaceSetter to improve performance relies on everyone taking part in regular team discussions about performance and developing working practices.

The majority of team meetings will be planned and at a frequency which suits the needs of both staff and managers.

All team meetings should involve open and frank discussions, within which staff and managers can discuss ideas and solutions that improve the team's business delivery. While it is reasonable to discuss matters that impact on team performance (including planned and unplanned absences), individual performance, sick absence,

etc, cannot be part of a team discussion. However, issues raised at the team meeting can inform ideas and discussion between a manager and the individual at a PDE session.

Use PaceSetter tools to discuss/track performance

Visual management tools (such as Performance Hubs and Boards) are used widely in PaceSetter teams to provide a focus for open and constructive conversations about team performance. Using accurate and timely data, they help teams identify issues, areas for action and celebrate successes.

Business areas need to consider the right frequency of reporting/team meetings to best inform performance discussions. This should include any differences between planned and actual performance (contained in outputs, targets or objective Key Performance Indicators KPIs).

Managers will discuss work processes with their teams in an open and constructive way where everyone's contribution is valued. The data and discussion at the team meeting will inform necessary actions and decisions which are transparent and based on accurate, relevant data.

We agree that in any workplace there must be a level of monitoring. But this must be proportionate and meaningful, supporting team performance improvement. The reporting frequency should be discussed with the staff, taking account of the nature of the work undertaken. There should be arrangements for staff to tell managers if they identify problems, to enable managers to support them in dealing with any immediate challenges.

Feedback on monitoring that has been carried out will be given in a positive and constructive way. Management interventions will be based on evidence e.g. quality indicators, and the team should help to identify how an identified issue should be addressed.

Team discussions will be informed by data from a range of sources. How frequently the data is captured will depend on the agreed rhythm of reporting. Staff should alert managers if they identify a problem prior to reporting, if it is likely to affect the productivity output.

In order to use the most relevant data, it is expected that businesses which have electronic tools in place to monitor performance, (eg MPPC and MIS) will use them.

Process changes

In line with the three principles of PaceSetter, every individual should follow an agreed process and suggest amendments for continuous improvement. Teams work towards meaningful problem solving within set parameters, national agreements and legislation. Possible changes to processes will be discussed in an open way between managers and those who do the work and will then follow the PaceSetter Standards process.

Use Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Standard Instructions

KPIs and SOPs should be developed with full and meaningful consultation with representatives of those doing the work to ensure that they are technically viable, realistic and achievable. Managers will distribute work fairly and realistically between team members in a way that respects individual skills and experience, in line with the Equality & Diversity Policy.

Raise concerns where we have them, through discussion with team leaders or, if needed, through established channels; respect colleagues and work together within teams and across HMRC as a whole

Everyone needs to behave in a way that helps people work together to create an open, honest and trusting environment. Individuals should feel that they can raise concerns and expect them to be dealt with appropriately. The expectation is that most issues can be resolved informally and we will work together to help achieve this.

Be respectful of the need for an effective work environment, keeping work areas clear and clutter-free

Staff and managers will conform to a clear desk policy in relation to Health & Safety and Data Protection guidelines.

Take time to understand the leadership behaviours and be prepared to challenge constructively at any level, if they are not happening consistently in practice, without fear of retribution

Everyone needs to work in accordance with the Leadership Behaviours. Unless this happens consistently, PaceSetter will not work effectively. All managers need to foster an environment where everyone can challenge and know that their views will be taken into consideration before decisions are made.

Ensure everyone is comprehensively trained in all aspects of the roles that they undertake to ensure they deliver the business to the best of our abilities

We recognise that the pace of change within the department presents major challenges to the skill sets of staff.

People will receive training in using PaceSetter tools and support to do their job effectively and develop transferable skills. This is to the advantage of both individuals and HMRC, as it allows for flexibility of delivery as well as career progression.

Opportunities arising from departmental-wide initiatives on skills and training will be identified and discussed with TUS.

All new managers will receive appropriate PaceSetter management training.

PDEs will refer to participation in PaceSetter and all staff are expected to actively contribute to continuous improvement.

Acknowledge that PaceSetter will operate within the parameters of existing HMRC policies such as on Equality, Diversity and Health & Safety

These principles, based on common sense, also sit alongside and support other national and local agreements regarding working matters. Where there are potential tensions, HMRC and TUS will engage in constructive dialogue in line with the HMRC Employee Relations Agreement, with the objective of agreeing a way forward.

All staff must comply with HMRC policies on Equality, Diversity and Health & Safety and managers must ensure that any issues raised are addressed appropriately.

For example, the positioning of Boards/Hubs and conduct of meetings must take account of these issues and no one should be compelled to stand at a team meeting.

We recognise that people achieve their best in an environment of mutual trust and support. We are committed to full and open dialogue on all matters to do with PaceSetter and with the interests of HMRC, keeping staff and customers firmly in mind. These principles, based on common sense, sit alongside and support other national and local agreements regarding working matters and remain subject to the established employee relations processes at the appropriate level.

PaceSetter will be subject to both negotiation and full and timely consultation at local and national level with TUS. Every effort will be made to resolve local difficulties and issues. Where this is not possible, the issue will be escalated to national TUS for resolution with senior management.

Appendix 7: PCS Motion to National Conference 2008 on Lean

The following motion was submitted to the National Conference of PCS in 2008 as Motion A74. It was carried by the Conference with the support of the National Executive Committee. The context of the motion is described in section 6:2:2:1.

“Conference notes with concern that, whilst the Government publicly has endorsed the recommendations of the Leitch review on the need to increase skills levels and has set up bodies to improve the skills of public sector workers, organisations across the civil service and the commercial sector continue to introduce work systems that fail to make effective use of existing skills and discourage workers from controlling their own work and thinking for themselves.

Despite the vast body of evidence which shows that fulfilling work and good job design results in workers being more motivated, committed and productive, the government continues to support systems such as “Lean” and apply them in such a way that effective service delivery is undermined rather than enhanced.

Conference welcomes the action taken by the union to raise awareness of such initiatives and to resist them. In particular we note:

- The report undertaken on behalf of PCS by Professor Gregor Gall, “Lean and Job Design”
- The debate with speakers from Vanguard Consulting and the Work Foundation on the theme of “Good Work or Lean and Mean?” at the Personnel Policy Forum in July 2007
- The inclusion of job design in the agenda to be developed for the Well-being discussions with the Cabinet Office
- The campaign conducted by the Revenue and Customs Group which resulted in a review of the application of “Lean” principles in HMRC.

Conference notes that delegates to the Personnel Policy Forum reported that the methods of “Lean” were being introduced across many organisations under different guises and that all activists should be alert to such proposals and initiatives.

Conference notes the potential threat to members’ conditions posed by “Lean” processing and recognises the need for a clear bargaining and campaigning agenda

in order to safeguard members' interests. We instruct the NEC to produce clear guidance to groups and national branches based on opposition to Lean processing without the following key safeguards:

- i) No individual output monitoring
- ii) No individual targets
- iii) Access to full training
- iv) A proper mix of work commensurate to grade
- v) No out of grade working
- vi) Defence of flexible working time arrangements
- vii) Defend rights of staff to take annual leave
- viii) Access to regular Display Screen Equipment breaks
- ix) Full consultation with PCS at all levels

Conference instructs the NEC to:

- Continue to publicise the findings on the Whitehall II studies and other evidence of the detrimental health impacts of poor job design.
- Lobby, campaign and negotiate at all levels to raise awareness of the counter-productive effects of such systems.
- Support action by Groups and National Branches to resist the introduction and extension of "Lean" systems.
- Join with other unions and supportive organisations to highlight the contribution that well-designed jobs and fulfilling, meaningful work make to the creation of a healthy, skilled and productive workforce and the wider social benefits that this brings."